

**Moving On after Getting Out: Support and Accountability for
Convicted Sex Offenders**

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The candidate confirms that the work submitted is his own, except where work which has formed part of jointly-authored publications has been included. The contribution of the candidate and the other authors to this work has been explicitly indicated below. The candidate confirms that appropriate credit has been given within the thesis where reference has been made to the work of others.

I am a joint author of the following report:

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Abstract

The reintegration of convicted sex offenders has become a major social and political issue. Current approaches by the criminal justice system have traditionally sought containment of risk over reintegrative aspects. Circles of Support and Accountability (CoSA) hereafter CoSA or 'Circles' is a voluntary organisation which seeks to support the safe reintegration of convicted sex offenders. This PhD thesis examines the role of CoSA in the reintegration of convicted sex offenders into the community.

CoSA is a voluntary initiative which uses 4-6 trained volunteers to work with a convicted sex offender in a 'Circle'. They provide support to the sex offender - or Core Member - by assisting with practical skills, advice and work to reduce stigma. Accountability is provided by the volunteers questioning and challenging the Core Member about thinking patterns or by passing information related to a risk of harm to the police or probation service.

In total, 30 Core Members were interviewed to examine their perceptions and experiences of participating in Circles of Support and Accountability as well as their experiences of living life as a convicted sex offender. Interviews were conducted using the appreciative inquiry approach and were supplemented with questionnaire data and administrative data from CoSA.

To better examine the role of CoSA this thesis focuses on how the volunteers work with Core Members to reduce stigmatisation, what temptations are experienced by Core Members and how they self-control. The thesis examines how webs of control are created by the police and probation services as well as CoSA and how they are experienced by Core Members. The role of these agencies is further explored through the lens of change, specifically how Core Members change and where they attribute the cause of change.

CoSA provided substantial aid to Core Members who were seeking to distance themselves from their conviction. The Circle was found to support Core Members to overcome some of their perceptions of stigma, assist and facilitate in providing a degree of control in Core Members lives and promote positive changes to support Core Members to achieve a greater distance from their offending lifestyle.

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Introduction

The supervision and management of convicted sex offenders in the community in England and Wales has never before been subject to such intense focus. Sexual offences are hardly a new phenomenon (Jackson, 2000; Copley, 2000, 2005; Thomas, 2005). What is new is the amount of attention and the prominence that sexual offending receives in contemporary news reports (Harrison et al, 2010). Where sexual offending was once depicted as being the preserve of the old man in the grubby raincoat who targeted children on street corners (Thomas, 2005), the start of the new millennium witnessed the rise of the predatory offender who was intelligent and smartly dressed, computer literate and capable of abducting and sexually abusing children before murdering their victim. Concerns about the grooming and child sexual abuse and exploitation of vulnerable teenage girls by predatory gangs also emerged in this decade (BBC, 2013). The latest decade has seen the rise of the celebrity predator who once used their celebrity status to gain access to and sexually abuse children at the peak of their powers in the 1980s. The allegations and convictions of several high-profile celebrities for a range of sexual offences has pushed the topic of sexual offending further into the spotlight (BBC, 2013a).

Despite these types of celebrity offending being extreme examples of sexual offending, media attention has increased public awareness of sexual offences and sex offenders. At the same time it has also increased public anxieties and the public hostility towards the sex offender in contemporary society has left the sex offender as a stigmatised and deeply demonised individual (Spencer, 2009). The sex offender has been described as the modern day 'folk devil' (Copley, 2000), their acts are described as 'monstrous' and 'depraved' and they are despised by all sections of society including prisoners who abuse them within the prison walls (Thomas, 2005), friends and family who reject and shun them on their return from custody

(Hackett et al, 2015), and society as a whole which fears and distances itself from such individuals (Kemshall, 2008; Evans and Cubellis, 2015).

This public anxiety and media campaigning has led to louder calls for action. Successive governments have responded to these calls by introducing longer and tougher sentences for sex offenders, greater supervision, registration requirements, and a range of civil preventative orders (Shute, 2004) to enable the police and probation to better manage and contain the convicted sex offender on his (or less-commonly her) return to the community. These measures are proposed on the grounds of protecting the public and potential victims from future harm. Despite the plethora of restrictions introduced by these policies, the fact remains that the majority of individuals who receive a conviction for a sexual offence will not be child abductors or rapists and will receive a short-term custodial sentence or a sentence to be served in the community (Ministry of Justice et al, 2013). Therefore, the vast majority of individuals will return to the community and be subject to an array of restrictions on their everyday activities (Thomas, 2011; Williams and Nash, 2014). The hostility and demonization of this group does little to aid their return to the community. McCartan (2007) and Hudson (2005) have both acknowledged that sex offenders do not live in a bubble: they are able to read the news stories and see the vilification of 'people like them'.

Moreover, the need for research on reintegrating convicted sex offenders has never been more necessary in the UK given the unprecedented attention this offending is receiving. Several high-profile celebrity convictions for sexual offences, for example, Adam Johnson, Stuart Hall, Rolf Harris, Max Clifford, Ian Watkins from the Lost Prophets and Fred 'the Weatherman' Talbot have increased the media's reporting at a national level. Beyond the celebrity convictions records from the Crime Survey for England and Wales show a 37 per cent increase in the number of sexual offences recorded by the police from July 2014 to July 2015, with the majority of this increase believed to be from a rise in current offences rather than historical offences (Office of National Statistics, 2015).

The increase in convictions of a sexual nature poses a number of problems to criminal justice professionals and sex offenders. Criminal justice professionals are faced with higher caseloads due to the rise in convictions for sexual offences but also longer periods of community supervision and management. Public hostility towards sex offenders and a lack of informal social controls to monitor sex offenders as families frequently distance themselves from sex offenders add to the difficulties in supervising and managing sex offenders. These can also lead to an increase in the assessments of the individuals risks of reoffending and can lead to a more containment approach to offender management.

In response to the growing problems posed by sex offenders who returned to the community, a new initiative using volunteers emerged from Canada. In 2000, representatives from a Canadian organisation called Circles of Support and Accountability (CoSA) visited London to an event hosted by the Quakers and the Home Office and spoke about the aims of CoSA to assist and reduce the hostility towards sex offenders, and simultaneously manage and monitor the risks this group poses. The meetings led to three pilot schemes being commissioned in England and Wales (Nellis, 2009). Since then CoSA has spread across England and Wales and there are now 14 established CoSA projects.

CoSA is a community-based response which uses 4-6 trained volunteers to support and challenge sex offenders, or Core Members in the terminology of CoSA (Cesaroni, 2001; Wilson et al, 2005). The main purpose of CoSA is to prevent further sexual offending and to have 'no more victims' (Circles UK, 2009, 2013).

Each Circle has one Core Member and between four and six volunteers. Meetings take place weekly and volunteers provide support to Core Members seeking to resettle in the community. This group is known as the 'Circle'. Each Circle is expected to last approximately 12 months but can

vary depending on the requirements of the Core Member (Armstrong et al, 2008; Hanvey et al, 2011).

Within meetings, the volunteers provide support to reduce social isolation and support the development of practical skills through assisting Core Members to find education and employment opportunities or finding independent accommodation (Quaker Peace and Social Witness, 2003; Hannem, 2013). The Circle also works with the Core Member to reduce the risks of reoffending, and assisting them in implementing any professionally agreed treatment plans (Hanvey et al, 2011). Volunteers continually challenge the Core Member about any cognitive distortions or changes in attitudes which may reflect a change in risk levels (Wilson et al, 2007a).

Each Circle is overseen by a project coordinator who manages the volunteers, and reports any relevant information back to the statutory agencies such as the police or probation services. Prior to the Circle commencing, this reporting channel is emphasised to Core Members who have to sign a document to agree to information being exchanged. This must be agreed by the Core Member before the Circle starts (Circles UK, 2009, 2013). The ability for the volunteers to pass information from the Circle to the police or probation service has been described as a unique aspect of CoSA and one which is viewed as very important in the Circle gaining 'kudos' with police and probation officers (Thomas et al, 2014).

CoSA is described as increasingly adopting a strengths-based approach to the rehabilitation of offenders (Carich et al, 2010; Hanvey and Höing, 2013) which seeks to work with the individual and develop their strengths to facilitate their reintegration (Ward and Stewart, 2003), rather than seeking to identify risk factors or deficits within the offender which require treatment, management or exclusion. This approach is complementary to the existing criminal justice practices but offers a more holistic view of sex offender reintegration as risks are managed and skills are developed (Hanvey and Höing, 2013).

This thesis is part of a wider project which was commissioned to ‘Assess the impact of Circles of Support and Accountability on the reintegration of those convicted of sexual offences into the community’ (Thomas et al, 2014).¹ The project was tasked to describe the role of CoSA and the Core Members who participate in CoSA, examine the motivations and experiences of Core Members who participate in CoSA and the volunteers who work in CoSA, and examine the working relationships which exist between CoSA and statutory agencies such as police and probation (For more see, Thomas et al, 2014).

The aim of the wider project which this PhD study emerged from was to ‘assess the extent to which CoSA Projects contribute towards the reintegration of adult sex offenders into the community.

The more specific objectives of the research were to:

- Examine the frontline practices of CoSA;
- Describe the cohort of Core Members who have completed or are currently in a Circle;
- Explore the experiences of Core Members;
- Identify the key components which are associated with re-integration in the community;
- Explore the background, motivation and experiences of volunteers;
- Investigate the links between the operation of CoSA and statutory provisions for sex offenders, such as Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA), probation and the police;
- Assess the relative importance of factors and services in the process of reintegration for sex offenders;
- Contribute towards the development of good practice’ (Thomas et al, 2014: 12).

¹ Parts of Chapter Two and Chapter Three of this thesis have already been published (see Thomas, Thompson and Karstedt, 2014 and Thompson, 2014).

This thesis focuses on how CoSA is perceived from the perspective of its clients – the sex offenders or Core Members. Previous research studies from Canada indicated that the work of Circles has a significant impact in reducing reoffending rates and facilitating the reintegration of Core Members. Wilson et al (2005, 2007a), for example, compared sex offenders who participated in CoSA and those who did not and reported a 70 per cent and 83 per cent reduction in sexual recidivism by those who participated in the Circle. Further research from evaluations in other jurisdictions has continued to report promising results (Duwe, 2013), although at the commencement of this research, no independent national evaluation of Core Members' experiences existed.

This research moves the focus away from questions of the effectiveness of Circles and its impact on levels of recidivism and looks instead at the experiences of Core Members. Rare access was given to talk to 30 people convicted of sexual offences, many of whom had completed custodial sentences and returned to the community. The thesis looked at their experiences of Circles, their perceptions of the volunteers who make up those Circles, the coordinators of the Circles and the work of the professionals in the form of the police and probation officers that the Circles are connected to. These 30 interviews constitute the bedrock of the thesis.

This thesis focused specifically on Core Members perceptions of the Circles of Support and Accountability process, how they viewed the effects of their participation in Circles of Support and Accountability. Like with the wider project, the overall aim of the PhD study was to examine Core Members' perceptions of how their participation in Circles of Support and Accountability affected their re-entry.

More specifically the objectives of the thesis were to question:

- What problems, if any, were identified by Core Members on re-entry and prior to joining a Circle?

- What strategies of compliance and control, if any, were adopted by Core Members following their conviction and in the community?
- How did Core Members perceive themselves to have changed since participating in Circles of Support and Accountability?
- How do Circles of Support and Accountability aid re-entry and which specific contributions to this process does it make?

To this purpose the following chapters are presented:

Chapter One focuses on the legal background, considering what constitutes a sexual offence and the responses of the criminal justice system to sexual offences and sex offenders. The chapter is divided into three parts. Part one - Sexual Offences and the Law - explores current sexual offences legislation in England and Wales to ascertain what constitutes a sexual offence, the variety of sexual activities which are illegal and the evolution of sexual offences legislation. The chapter also examines the key concept of consent and how consent is pivotal in differentiating between a lawful sexual activity and a sexual offence.

Part two of Chapter One examines the punishment and treatment of sex offenders and the punitive changes which have taken place over the last two-to-three decades for those convicted of sexual offences. The prison-based Sex Offender Treatment Programme is also examined. Part Three addresses the policy developments introduced over the last three decades which were designed to protect the public from sex offenders when they leave custody. In particular the chapter discusses the proliferation in the number of policies introduced specifically for sex offenders such as civil preventative orders (Shute, 2004) as well as the requirement for all convicted sex offenders to notify the police of their conviction when they return to the community. These developments are analysed and discussed with reference to Feeley and Simon's (1992, 1994) 'new penology' discourse, in which it is claimed that a new approach to criminal justice has been witnessed which focuses on managing offenders rather than addressing specific issues from a more individual perspective. These

discussions situate the current law and policy for sex offenders which is the environment CoSA – the focus of this study – works within.

Chapter Two introduces the concept of CoSA in more detail and examines its historical origins, its theoretical underpinnings and the results it has achieved measured by previous empirical research. The first part of the chapter describes the development of CoSA in Canada and England and Wales and examines whether or not the aims of CoSA projects in England and Wales differ from the Canadian model. The chapter then examines the resettlement approaches in England and Wales and discuss how risk-based and needs-based approaches have received a substantial amount of criticism in recent years for failing to look beyond the deficits within offenders. The chapter will then introduce the alternative approach - the strengths-based approach - to the resettlement of offenders which is more aligned to the practices of CoSA (Maruna and LeBel, 2002, 2009; Harvey and Höing, 2013). The chapter will finish with an examination and critique of the evidential support for the CoSA approach using empirical research from around the world.

Chapter Three contains the methodology used in the research detailing the fieldwork preparation and process of interviewing 30 Core Members in the community. The chapter discusses the research design, the substantial ethical issues raised the study interviewing of convicted sex offenders, as well as the methods of data collection and the results from the interviews with 30 Core Members. This chapter describes the rationale underpinning the use of semi-structured interviews inspired by the appreciative inquiry framework and what the benefits are of adopting this approach. Chapter Three also assesses the journey of the researcher, from making contact with gatekeepers, identifying potential problems which might have arisen during the study and how these were overcome, to collecting data and how these were analysed. The methodology also provides a description of the sample of the interview participants, including their demographics, details of their past offending and aspects of their time in the Circle.

The remaining four chapters present the findings from the analysis of interviews with the Core Members.

Chapter Four looks at Core Members' experiences of stigma as convicted sex offenders and begins by identifying the problems which Core Members experienced before starting their Circle. A range of stigmatising situations were identified, particularly the stigma associated with being a convicted sex offender and the isolation related to the loss of friends and family networks and the move to a 'new place', and the impact of criminal justice restrictions. The chapter also explores how Core Members start the Circle, how they perceive and experience the process of revealing their offences and stigmatised identities to the Circle volunteers and the reactions from the volunteers. The chapter examines the consequences of these stigmatising situations as well as the strategies Core Members use to manage their stigmatisation. The final part of the chapter explores whether CoSA are able to provide a stigma free environment as the model claims, and how Core Members perceive the Circle to have helped them manage their stigmatisation and isolation.

Chapter Five explores the ways in which sexual temptations are experienced by Core Members in the community and following their conviction and sentence. The chapter identifies a variety of temptations relating to sexual desires and sexual fantasies, through to temptations to breach their licence conditions SOPO or other restrictive orders. The chapter also examines how Core Members manage and navigate temptations in the community using self-control and questions how external controls such as the Circle or their learning from sex offender treatment programmes assist Core Members in resisting temptations.

The webs of control and compliance mechanisms that seek to control, 'contain' or influence Core Members behaviours are described in Chapter Six. Webs of control refer to the various agencies who work with convicted sex offenders to supervise and monitor their attitudes, behaviours and

actions in the community and encourage self-accountability. Three webs of control are focused on in this chapter. These include the webs established by the police, the probation service and those by Circles of Support and Accountability. The chapter examines how each of these webs of control operates and questions the extent to which they can control or alter Core Member behaviour. The chapter also examines how control, influences or promotes compliance with acceptable standards of sexual behaviour and with the law itself. The chapter uses Bottoms' (2001) concept of compliance to discuss the styles of compliance and the depth of compliance, and examples of non-compliance.

The final chapter examines how Core Members perceive they have changed. Chapter Seven focuses on the changes Core Members described in three distinct areas. These are changes to their thinking patterns, to their identity narratives and in their social networks. Core Members were encouraged to reflect on their life at the time of the interview and consider how things had changed. The concept of change agents was used to explore the causes of this change. Change agent is a term from the organisational development field (Armenakis et al, 1993), but is adapted to refer to changes which were the result of internal changes – 'self-change', or changes facilitated by external sources such as the Circle or criminal justice professionals - 'change by others'.

The conclusion draws together these chapters reflecting on the added value Core Members identified the Circle delivering and offers some policy implications for CoSA in light of these findings and recent developments in the supervision and management of offenders. While recognising that the research is based on self-perceptions of change by Core Members which is not the same as actual change, this thesis presents an innovative analysis of how Core Members perceive CoSA aids in the mechanisms of desistance. For the purposes of this study, mechanisms of desistance are the processes which encourage desistance. The reduction of stigma, improving self-control and transformations to identity, social networks and thinking patterns are the mechanisms of desistance examined in this thesis.

Chapter One: Sexual Offending – The Law, Punishment and Public Protection

Introduction

Legislation on sexual offending can be traced back to about 3000 BC and the ancient Egyptians (Bresler, 1988). Since then, sexual offending has remained on the legislative statute book through to the present day. Although the perceived dangerousness associated with such behaviour may have altered through the ages (Holmes and Soothill, 2007), in the last half century significant changes to what constitutes a sexual offence; perceptions of sexual offences; and attitudes to known or convicted sexual offenders and their subsequent treatment (Levenson et al, 2007a; Kitzinger, 2008) have shifted significantly. This chapter has three main aims. Firstly to identify what constitutes a sexual offence and examine the evolution and importance of certain aspects of sexual offences legislation in England and Wales; secondly to examine sentences and the treatment programmes for sex offenders while in custody; and finally to critically analyse policy developments for sex offenders since the 1990s.

Part One – Sexual Offences and the Law

What constitutes a sexual offence?

In broad terms sexual offending takes place when one of two criteria are met. One is when 'consent' to the sexual behaviour has not been given by one of the parties involved. The other is when a 'prohibited' relationship has taken place (Thomas, 2005). When behaviour of a sexual nature takes place and one of the parties involved has not consented to the behaviour, we are in the realms of sexual offending. This may be because as an adult, one party has specifically said they do not want to engage in the behaviour in question. Alternatively, an adult may lack the capacity to consent to such

behaviour, for example due to a diagnosed mental disorder or learning disability. Children are also said to lack the capacity to consent. The question of consent will be returned to later in this chapter.

Sexual offending also takes place when a given sexual relationship is described in law as 'prohibited'. An example of a 'prohibited' sexual act could include two consenting adults who are brother and sister or biologically related. In such instances, the presence of consent is irrelevant and the two adults are guilty of the prohibited offence of 'sex with an adult relative' or incest. Another way of categorising sexual offences is to consider them as 'contact' or 'non-contact' offences.

Contact Offences

Contact offences, as the name suggests requires physical contact by the perpetrator against a victim. The range of contact offences vary from rape with full penetration through to more 'limited' forms of contact but which result in a sexual assault. Contact offences are typically perceived as being the most serious sexual offences and have traditionally received the greater press coverage and generated the greater fears among society (Kitzinger, 2008).

One form of contact sexual offending that has been causing a great deal of concern in recent years has been that of 'child sexual exploitation' involving the sexual exploitation of children and young people under-18 (McAlinden, 2006a; Craven et al, 2007; CEOP, 2011). Victims are often described as being 'vulnerable' children who are actively targeted and are often reported to have been drawn into perceived consensual and caring relationships. Once trust is gained these relationships quickly evolve into more exploitative and sinister forms of prostitution underpinned by coercion, intimidation and violence (CEOP, 2011; Jay Report, 2014). At the time of writing, the most high profile example of child sexual exploitation uncovered has been witnessed in Rotherham, UK, where gangs of young men of Pakistani origin were found to have abused at least 1400 children in a 16 year period (Jay Report 2014).

Non-Contact Offences

Although non-contact sexual offences do not involve direct physical contact with a person, the harm of such behaviours can be extensive. The Sexual Offences Act 2003 lists a range of non-contact sexual offences including the possession, production or dissemination of child-pornography, preparatory offences² and grooming, indecent exposure and voyeurism. There is also some debate as to whether 'non-contact offences' are a precursor to sexual offences which involve direct contact with a victim (Jones and Wilson 2009).

Some of these offences had been established in previous legislation, however, in recent years, and especially with the rise of the internet the public awareness of the harms of non-contact sexual offences has increased (Yar, 2013; McAlister, 2014). In particular, greater awareness had led to concerns about the proliferation in access to indecent images of children, but has also created a change in terminology with this material no longer being viewed as 'child-pornography'. Instead this material is now widely accepted not to be pornography but has been redefined as images of child abuse (Clough, 2011).

The evolution of sexual offences legislation in England and Wales

At the most basic level a sexual offence today may be described as a crime covered in the Sexual Offences Act 2003. The Sexual Offences Act 2003 came into force in England and Wales on 1 May 2004 and contains numerous offences ranging from contact offences like rape; sexual assault; and child sexual abuse; to various non-contact offences including exposure or voyeurism. The Sexual Offences Act 2003 also includes the offence of possessing indecent images of a child.³ With the exception of rape, all

² Three preparatory offences are contained in s.61 – s.63,

³ This is a complicated issue as the 'possessor' of the image may not have engaged in any contact with the child; but as Clough (2011) acknowledged, the production of indecent images of

offences contained in the 2003 Act are gender-neutral using (A) and (B) rather than man and woman (Robinson, 2011; Monaghan, 2014). In other words they can be committed by both men and women, though the majority of reported sexual offending is by a man against a woman or child (Grubin, 1998; Craissati et al, 2002; Hollin et al., 2010a; Hall and Innes, 2010).

Although offences such as rape and child sexual abuse are often perceived as the most serious offences, it is important to acknowledge that there are over 70 offences contained in the Sexual Offences Act 2003 of varying degrees of seriousness.⁴ Whilst some of these offences have been criticised for lacking 'an overtly sexual act' (Cobley, 2005: 4), others have questioned the durability of what constitutes a sexual offence. For instance, the Sexual Offences Act 1967 decriminalised consensual homosexual acts between two men over 21 years of age and in private (Thomas, 2005). More recently, previously accepted beliefs and attitudes have become criminalised. For instance, the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994 removed the so-called 'marital immunity' defence available to a husband when accused of raping his wife. Thus the Act meant that a husband could be liable to be charged and convicted of the rape of his wife. In some countries such defences remain. Indeed in America, many states still include the 'marital immunity' defence for a husband accused of raping his wife (Temkin, 2000).

Although this study will not engage in detailed comparative analysis of sexual offences legislation given the primary focus is on the role of Circles of Support and Accountability (CoSA) in England and Wales, a brief comparison with other jurisdictions illustrates how sexual offences, like other crimes, are socially constructed (Holt et al, 2010). By this, sexual offences legislation replicates societal values which encompass the legal, moral and ethical values and technological developments, of any given epoch (Hollin et al., 2010a). As such, there is no one universal definition of a sexual offence (Cobley, 2000). But even with such a focus it is important to be aware of the

children for the purposes of sexual gratification is not child pornography but child abuse. Thus at some stage in the production of the image, abuse will have taken place and questions have arisen as to whether possession is to be viewed as a person being complicit.

⁴ See Part 1 of the Sexual Offences Act 2003 for a comprehensive list of offences.

extensive literature detailing the ramifications for victims of sexual assault and the impact on their families (Gelles and Cornell, 1997; Stern Review, 2010).⁵ With some recognition of the abstract criticisms of what constitutes a sexual offence in England and Wales, it is important to consider the evolution of sexual offences legislation to better understand/contextualise what has shaped definitions of sexual offences; the range of sexual offences; and society's changing attitudes to sexual offending over time.

The Sexual Offences Act 2003

While much of the Sexual Offences Act 2003 focuses on adult offenders committing offences against non-consenting adults, a significant focus of this research will be on adults who commit sexual offences against children. Whilst this is not the exclusive participant group, many of the Core Members in CoSA will have been convicted of offences against children. As such, whilst acknowledging the coverage of adult-victim offences covered in the Sexual Offences Act 2003, the chapter will also focus on offences committed against children.⁶

One of the most significant differences in the Sexual Offences Act 2003 compared to previous sexual offences legislation is the detail which has been provided in reference to sexual offences. A brief illustration will show how the offence of rape has been amended over the last eight centuries, beginning with the current sexual offences legislation. The offence of rape has been chosen because of its severity, but also to allow consistency in offences, as opposed to an offence like indecent assault which has morphed into six specific offences with the Sexual Offences Act 2003⁷ and is overlapped by several other offences. The Sexual Offences Act 2003 states rape to be committed by person A if:

⁵ See also victims charities like Rape Crisis who provide advice and assistance for victims of rape (see for example <http://www.rapecrisis.org.uk/>).

⁶ Acknowledgement needs to be made that sex offenders are not a homogenous group and may commit various offences, but most in Circles will be convicted of sexual offences against children.

⁷ The six specific offences are outlined in section two – four, and section five – eight of the Sexual Offences Act 2003.

- (a) he intentionally penetrates the vagina, anus or mouth of another person (B) with his penis,
- (b) B does not consent to the penetration, and
- (c) A does not reasonably believe that B consents.

In contrast, the earliest statutory rape law, the Statute of Westminster I of 1285, defined rape to have been committed when any man ravished a woman under the age of 12, with or without consent (Eidson, 1980; Ritscher, 2009). In 1576, the age of consent was lowered to 10, and the definition altered to read

'unlawful and carnal knowledge of any women above the age of ten against her will or of a female aged 10 or under with or against her will' (Ritscher, 2009: 8).

The Offences Against the Person Act 1861 continued to acknowledge the offence of rape, but gave no definition of rape, just that... (s. 48)

Whosoever shall be convicted of the crime of rape shall be guilty of felony, and being convicted thereof shall be liable, at the discretion of the court, to be kept in penal servitude for life or for any term not less than three years, or to be imprisoned for any term not exceeding two years, with or without hard labour.

Seeking to clarify the offence of rape, the Criminal Law (Amendment) Act 1885 extended the definition of rape from that in 1576 and stated 'that a man committed rape if he induced a married woman to have sexual intercourse with him by impersonating her husband' (Cobley, 2000: 5). Importantly, the 1885 Act also raised the age of consent to 16,⁸ the age at which it has remained since in England and Wales.

The following 90 years, even considering the passing of the Sexual Offences Act 1956 and the Sexual Offences Act 1967, is largely seen to be a period of stagnation in the development of sexual offences legislation (Home Office, 2002). Temkin (2000) offers an explanation to such stagnation claiming the law-makers of the time still appeared to be influenced by the notion of 'male

⁸ Amid fears of child prostitution in London (Jackson, 2000).

sexual privilege'. Therefore, not only did the omission of non-consensual anal intercourse preclude the offence of male rape, the continued acceptance of the marital immunity defence for a husband accused of a sexual offence against his wife illustrates Temkin's (2000) and many others frustration at the slow speed of development. The Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994 has since resolved the act of non-consensual anal intercourse and also rape in marriage which was made a statutory offence.

Some behaviours which were previously classified as offences have also been repealed by the Sexual Offences Act 2003 including the act of consensual buggery; while the Sexual Offences Act 2003 lists the most infrequent offence of bestiality as an offence in its own right for the first time (section 69). Previously this offence was linked with sodomy in the Offences Against the Person Act 1861, and was made illegal by the Obscene Publications Act 1959 as content likely to 'deprave and corrupt'.

As the above brief analysis of sexual offences legislation illustrates, the attitudes of law-makers to sexual offences has arguably been dominated by outdated or ill-informed attitudes. Card (2010) notes how skewed stereotypical notions of a male sexual offender and a female victim of sexual offences dominated both parliamentary discussions and the content of legislation relating to sexual offences for centuries, while others posit the narrow focus of sexual offending, requires a greater consideration of the historical status of women (Carrabine et al, 2009). Throughout history the position of women has not always been as prominent (though still not equal) as it is today.⁹

During the development of both marriage laws and rape laws, women were seen to be the property of either their father or husband, and not as individuals offended against. As a consequence, during this period the offence of rape was not perceived to be a personal crime against the woman, but rather of the 'theft of sexual property' (MacKinnon, 1989).

⁹ See for instance the Equality and Human Rights Commission for campaigns and reports (for example Grimshaw and Rubery, 2007).

By the 1950s, attitudes towards sexual offences changed still further, no doubt driven to some extent by the enfranchisement of women in 1918 and the liberalisation of women experienced during and after the Second World War (Glennerster, 2000). As the status and position of women has slowly evolved (Giddens, 2001), so sexual offences legislation has developed to legitimately view women as victims of a sexual offence. Change has, however, been slow. Entering the new millennium, the focus on sexual offences has been ratcheted up. Undoubtedly, this development was at least partly a result of the growing dominance of the New Labour political rhetoric of being tough on crime; but was also due to a decline in the number of sex offences being prosecuted at a time of increased reporting (Spalek, 2006). A growing criminal justice literature, as well as media documentaries allowed the public to witness the police treatment of victims of rape (Nicolson, 2000), perhaps most notably the television documentary series *Police* (1982), which showed three male police officers bullying and dismissing a female's allegations of rape as 'the biggest bollocks I've ever heard'.

The main aim of the 2003 Act was to strengthen and modernise the law on sexual offences, and it repealed almost all of the existing statute law in relation to sexual offences in England and Wales. Importantly, it provided for a more comprehensive list of offences against children than previously existed. The Sexual Offences Act 2003 also introduced six new offences to replace the broad and rather generic offence of sexual assault under section 14-16 of the Sexual Offences Act 1956. The six new offences ensured that non-consensual sexual activities which do not fall under the definition of rape would be viewed as serious offences in their own right, and not simply under the broad offence of 'indecent assault' (Padfield, 2010). Three of the new offences were adult-victim offences and were covered by sections two – four¹⁰ of the Sexual Offences Act 2003. The remaining three offences mirrored the adult based offences and related to sexual offences against a

¹⁰ 'Assault by Penetration' (s.2), 'Sexual Assault' (s.3) and 'Causing a person to engage in sexual activity' (s.4).

child under 13 years-old.¹¹ As with the adult victim, the intention remained for serious sexual offences to be specifically legislated against, rather than through the rather broad definition of 'indecent assault'.

The addition of these new offences not only broadened the offender to include the possibility of a female perpetrator and extended penetration of 'the victim' to be by any object or part of the accused's body, section two and section six of the Sexual Offences Act 2003 also created similar offences for a man who penetrates a woman or child with or without his penis (McAlhone and Huxley-Binns, 2010). Simester and Sullivan (2010) claim that such was the significance of the introduction of assault by penetration, that rape is now only made distinctive by the attention and labelling the offence receives.

The Sexual Offences Act 2003 also introduced offences which were committed using computers or other technologies in conjunction with the Protection of Children Act 1978. The offence of possessing indecent images of children¹² has been strengthened while 'grooming'¹³ children via the internet, with the intention of performing sexual activities, was also introduced (Hollin et al., 2010b). With a particular focus on the use of the internet, Yar (2006) notes how the Sexual Offences Act 2003 introduced laws to prohibit a child from being incited to engage in sexual activity online.

Thomas (2010) and Hollin et al., (2010b) note the Sexual Offences Act 2003 witnessed the development of anti-grooming laws which were aimed at preventing children being contacted in an online environment by adults. The concern was that children were being targeted by adults, posing as children and who would then attempt to build a relationship with the child, with the intention of meeting to engage in sexual activity. Yar (2006: 133) points out that as a result of the creation of such offences, 'no physical abuse need actually be attempted in order to secure a conviction, merely a perception

¹¹ These offences include 'Assault of a child under 13 by penetration' (s.6), 'Sexual assault of a child under 13' (s.7), 'Causing or inciting a child under 13 to engage in sexual activity' (s.8).

¹² section 1(c), Protection of Children Act 1978.

¹³ Grooming is defined in the Sexual Offences Act 2003 as where an adult plans to meet a child with the intention of committing a sexual offence. This can be facilitated by the internet or can be planned in an off-line setting.

that an individual *intended* to use a meeting set up via the Internet to engage in the sexual abuse of a minor'. In reality though, such are the evidential difficulties associated with such vague acts, it would be difficult to achieve a conviction. Moreover, as Bennion (2003) forecasted, should the 'suspect' conduct a meeting and carry out a sexual act, then a prosecution would be sought on those grounds rather than for the preparation to commit the offence.

The general extension of the definition outlining what constitutes a sexual offence can be witnessed through a more detailed review of sexual offences legislation. Along with a greater degree of coverage in sexual offences legislation, the focus on offences against children has also received a greater level of attention in the Sexual Offences Act 2003. Such attention is to some extent further complicated by the concept of childhood.

Childhood is not a fixed period but one shaped by societal factors/pressures such as wealth, technological advancement, as well as welfare advances (Brown, 2005). Whilst our current epoch is one dominated by fears of child sexual abuse and the abduction of children by sex offenders (Cowburn and Dominelli, 2001; Payne et al, 2010), it has not always been so (Jackson, 2000; Hollin et al, 2010b). That is not to claim that child sexual abuse did not occur, rather that the attention it received was well below our current high levels. Indeed, Hollin et al (2010b) state how sexual abuse of children is likely to have been prevalent for centuries prior to the publication of Tardieu's text on child sexual abuse in 1857. As society has developed, so have concerns about the abuse of children, and this concern emanates in the introduction firstly of a legal age of consent, and later, specific legislation outlawing sexual activities with children.

The concept of childhood was only recognised by Philippe Ariès (1962/1996) to have emerged in the seventeenth century, and so is itself a relatively new concept. Later, attitudes towards childhood and young people have been further shaped by the introduction of the Factory Act 1833 which outlawed

children under the age of nine from working¹⁴ and the Elementary Education Act 1880 which mandated children up to 10 be provided with free education.¹⁵

More recently the emergence of children as a consumer group in the 1960s and the development of leisure activities (Chatterton and Hollands, 2003; France, 2007) for children have clouded perceptions of childhood (Furlong and Cartmel, 2007). With such rapid developments in the social position of children, the concept of when childhood ends has been extensively debated with the age ranging from 10 years – the age of criminal responsibility in England and Wales; 16 years the age of sexual consent; 17 the age of obtaining a driving licence, 18 to purchase alcohol, or 25 when a person is able to claim adult income support (Muncie, 1999). However, the age of sexual consent has in the past been said to be arbitrary and socially constructed (Mawby, 1979).

Consent and the Sexual Offences Act 2003

The concept of consent is pivotal to differentiating between lawful sexual activities and sexual offences. To put it simply, lawful sexual activities involve consenting adults. However, in the Sexual Offences Act 2003 when one person does not consent, or is believed to be unable to consent, then a sexual offence occurs.

Prior to the Sexual Offences Act 2003, consent was set out in complex case law which provided little clear guidance as to the meaning of consent (Home Office, 2002). The Sexual Offences Act 2003 therefore represents a significant improvement on previous sexual offences legislation by attempting to define the concept of consent:

¹⁴ The 1833 Act also restricted the work of children between nine and 13 to a maximum of 9 hours; and 13-18 year olds working no more than 12 hours a day, while also ensuring children receive 2 hours schooling per day. By 1844, the Factory Act restricted those under 13 to work only six and a half hours a day. The Factory and Workshops Act 1878 banned children from under 10 from working.

¹⁵ In 1918, the school leaving age rose to 14 with the implementation of the Education Act. The current age of 16 did not occur until 1972 (Bochel et al, 2009).

- **section 74** of the Sexual Offences Act 2003 defines consent as when 'a person consents if he agrees by choice, and has the freedom and capacity to make that choice'.
- **section 75** of the Sexual Offences Act 2003 provides for the first time, a formal but non-exhaustive list of circumstances whereby consent is unlikely to be 'real' or 'true' consent. These include violence or the threat of violence by the perpetrator or a person known to the perpetrator; where the abused was unlawfully detained; or when the victim was unaware of the act during its commission. A disability may also prevent a person from giving true consent.
- **section 76** provides further, more definitive circumstances under which consent has not been given, for instance where the accused deceives the victim as to the purpose of the act or through impersonation.

This list is non-exhaustive and open to prevent it being too prescriptive on how consent should be sought and given (Home Office, 2002).

Perceptions of certain behaviour are also said to affect the validity of consent. Take for example, so-called 'date rape'. Croall (1998) claims that because of the likelihood of this happening on a 'night-out', date rape has been seen as deserving of less attention than 'real rape' because consent is likely to have been implied by a victim's actions. On a similar theme, Ormerod (2009) notes how voluntary intoxication makes the consideration of consent difficult. In the Sexual Offences Act 1956, a person intoxicated through drugs or alcohol was incapable of providing consent, however, in *Protecting the Public* (Home Office, 2002), a similar suggestion, of being incapacitated through drugs or alcohol, was rejected for fear of leading to 'mischievous accusations'.¹⁶ Although such perceptions may not play a formal part in the courtroom decision-making process, Finch and Munro (2005) found that such stereotypes, especially when introduced into the

¹⁶ This doubting or disbelieving of a victim is illustrative of societal perceptions of men and women, namely that the 'stories' of accusers (women) are often seen as just that, fictitious depictions resulting from a 'mistake' while under the influence of alcohol, or created to account for their regrettable actions (Ormerod, 2009).

judicial arena, develop a significant influence over the decision-making process of juries.

Consent and Children

In England and Wales the age of consent is 16 years (Sexual Offences Act 2003 s.9).¹⁷ Children below this age are deemed to lack the capacity to consent. While the age of consent is 16 in England and Wales, this does vary across Europe. Although the age of sexual consent for heterosexual acts has remained at 16 years old for over 100 years in England and Wales, at the beginning of the nineteenth century children as young as 10 were legally able to consent to heterosexual acts (Hollin et al., 2010b).¹⁸

Given the longevity of the current age of consent in England and Wales, specific child abuse offences have existed for many years now. The Offences Against the Person Act 1861, stated it to be an offence to defile a girl underage; to have carnal knowledge of a girl under ten and the same offence but for the ages 10-12. In more recent times, as with offences against adults, offences involving child sexual abuse have developed and as well as the offences of rape and indecent assault, specific sexual behaviour with a child under 13 has been made illegal (Childs and Dobson, 2008). While the age of consent remains 16, the Sexual Offences Act 2003 also provides that a child under the age of 13 was incapable of providing consent. In doing so, section five to section eight provide that no child under 13 can consent to sexual acts, and so if penetration occurs the perpetrator will legally have committed rape.

To some extent, the growing concern about the danger posed to children by persons deliberately seeking to attack children or engage them in sexual acts for gratification, as well as the need to overhaul pre-existing sexual offences legislation, led to the consideration of the introduction of section

¹⁷ This was originally set by the Criminal Law Amendment Act 1885.

¹⁸ In 2013, calls from barrister Barbara Hewson and Professor John Ashton, then President of the Faculty of Public Health for England, suggested the age of consent should be lowered to 13 and 15 years respectively (Hewson, 2013; Templeton 2013). However, these calls were flatly rejected.

five – section eight. This was also probably due to the prevailing trend that the defendant would be acquitted if he claimed to have reasonably believed that the complainant consented to the offence even though they were under the age of consent. As such, the offence committed would not be rape but instead a ‘lesser’ offence (Padfield, 2010).

To ensure that a distinction was made between ‘friendly’ or ‘experimenting’ children and ‘predatory strangers’, the Home Office proposed the introduction of new offences to enable better differentiation between consenting children and dangerous predatory adults (Home Office, 2002). To aid this differentiation, separate offences relating to consensual sex between two persons aged between 13 and 18, and acts committed between a child aged 13-16 and a person over 18 were developed.

In respect to the first scenario, one such offence proposed was ‘sexual activity against minors’ (Home Office, 2002). The idea was that where consenting teenagers engage in sexual acts, but are below 16, in certain instances the intervention of the criminal law may be inappropriate. Because the Sexual Offences Act 2003 does not contain a ‘comparable age differential provision’ (Clarkson, 2005) it is possible that in the case of two 12-year-old children who engage in a sexual act, the boy, even where he does not initiate the act, will commit the offence of rape.

Ashworth and Redmayne (2005) recognise such a predicament suggesting that such is the broadness of some definitions within the Sexual Offences Act 2003, there is a potential for some ‘unintended convictions’. Ashworth and Redmayne (2005) add that rather than relying on the government response to not prosecute children engaging in consensual sexual activity whilst below the age of consent, the law should be re-drafted so as to avoid such an interpretation; or provision should be included to decriminalise what has been referred to as the ‘normal and friendly acts’.

While the issue of consent is largely indisputable when an adult has sex with a child under 16 years, for persons aged over 16, or where one person is 15

and the other 17, establishing consent is essential in determining whether the sexual act is an expression of intimacy or a sexual assault.

Thus far, this chapter has briefly explored the evolution of sexual offences legislation in England and Wales including an analysis of the most recent sexual offences legislation for offences against children. Importantly the chapter has examined some of the developments in legislation which have been introduced to better protect children, through clarification on consent, via the introduction of specific offences against children under 13 and the addition of new offences involving technology. The chapter will now move on to firstly examine the punishment and treatment of sex offenders in prison before beginning to examine some of the policy developments which have come from recent sexual offender legislation.

Part Two – Punishment and Treatment of the Sex Offender

Punishment and Treatment

Following conviction for sexual offences, offenders will be sentenced to either a period of time to be spent in custody or a sentence served in the community. For those sentenced to custody,¹⁹ what is noticeable is that the period of time to be served has increased over the last 20-30 years. To some extent this lengthening of custodial sentences has been the result of penal politics and the need to appear 'tough on crime' rather than a specific threat posed. An additional driver has been the risk discourse surrounding sex offenders which has emerged in recent years. Illustrative of these shifts has been the extension of indeterminate sentences for those who are said to remain a risk to public safety should they be released after a determinate fixed-length sentence (Kemshall and McIvor, 2004). During the 1990s, there was a growing feeling in police/criminal justice agencies and government circles that 'dangerous' sex offenders who still posed a threat to the public were being released without supervision once their sentence ended

¹⁹ Which for sex offenders is a greater likelihood than other offenders.

(Thomas, 2005). Thus, proposals emerged espousing a new law be created for such offenders. The dilemma of the new proposal though, was sentencing would now move to the notoriously unpredictable realm of predictive sentencing (Hood et al, 2002; Hudson, 2003), whereby offenders would be sentenced not for things they necessarily had done, but for what they may do, or were at risk of doing (Thomas, 2005).

Home Secretary Jack Straw proposed 'new legal powers for the indeterminate but reviewable detention comparable to the American's civil commitment in February 1999' (Thomas, 2005). The proposal was for high risk sex offenders to be detained in custody until the risk they pose had diminished. This new approach, introduced under s.225 and s.227 of the Criminal Justice Act 2003, empowered courts to impose Imprisonment for Public Protection (IPP) sentences which were indeterminate and extended sentences on those convicted of serious offences including sexual offences and where there is a significant risk of future harm posed by the offender.²⁰ While offenders were given a minimum tariff to be served in custody, no date of release was provided, and thus IPP sentenced prisoners have no absolute right of release. As such, IPP sentences were to all intents and purposes, life sentences (Ashworth, 2010).

The IPP sentences however, received significant negative attention from numerous avenues (see for example Howard League, 2007). While some academics, reform groups and practitioners have contested the ethics and practicalities of such a sentence, especially the coverage of IPP eligible-sentences across 153 offences²¹ (Thomas, 2004a; Appleton, 2010), others have questioned the over-use of such sentences.

Shortly before the introduction of IPP sentences, Hilary Benn, the then Prisons Minister, was quoted as saying the effect of the sentence would be an additional 900 people in the prison population (Prison Reform Trust, 2007), though by April 2007, 2,547 IPP sentences had been imposed

²⁰ This is based on the offenders previous convictions and convicted offence(s).

²¹ See Schedule 15 of the Criminal Justice Act 2003 for a list of these offences.

(Howard League, 2007). By December 2009, this figure had increased to 6,034 offenders receiving an IPP sentence of which approximately 25 per cent were for sexual offences (Jacobsen and Hough, 2010).

Of greatest concern is the large number of offenders who received sentences of less than 24 months and have still not been released from their sentence. Jacobsen and Hough (2010) claimed there to be some 2,500 offenders sentenced before the introduction of the Criminal Justice and Immigration Act 2008,²² who are now beyond the minimum term of their tariff but remain in custody. Such a rise in IPP sentences created significant issues for rehabilitation and reform in the prison service, but also affected the availability of treatment for offenders. Not only did the costs incurred by having more people in prison rise, but the access to treatment grew longer as more people were required to attend programmes to demonstrate a reduction in risk (Howard League, 2007).

IPP sentenced offenders were required to prove to the Parole Board that the risk of harm they pose had sufficiently reduced. The number of IPP sentenced offenders without an adequate assessment or treatment structure in place meant they could not convince Parole Boards of their reduced risk. This led to several legal challenges been lodged by IPP sentenced offenders (Restall, 2011). Indeed in March 2011, the European Court of Human Rights accepted the case of *R (James and others) v Secretary of State for Justice* [2009] UKHL 22; [2009] 2 WLR 1149. In essence, the court believed the matter required closer scrutiny. IPPs were subsequently declared incompatible with the European Convention on Human Rights (*James, Wells and Lee v UK ECHR 340 (2012)*) and were subsequently repealed by Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act 2012 s123).

²² The Criminal Justice and Immigration Act 2008, in light of extremely short minimum IPP sentences, introduced provision to restrict IPPs only to be imposed where the sentenced would be at least 2 years in custody.

Sex Offender Treatment Programmes

As media and public attention has become more sharply focused on sexual crimes, so attention as to what should be done with sex offenders has grown. In particular attention fell on what happened post-conviction and while the offender was in prison. While the cognitive-behavioural therapy (CBT) driven Sex Offender Treatment Programme (SOTP) has become the treatment tool for convicted sex offenders within prison, sex offender treatment approaches in the 1960s were associated with behavioural therapy models which sought to 'suppress deviant arousal' through 'teaching' more appropriate interpersonal skills (Fisher and Beech, 2004). By the 1970s, psychoanalytical approaches emerged to understand sexual offending being legitimised by the offender through their distorted cognition, while also introducing the notion of victim empathy (Fisher and Beech, 2004; Robinson, 2011). By the mid-1980s and early-1990s a new approach – relapse prevention – emerged and combined the above approaches to encourage appropriate cognition and behaviour, while also introducing 'coping strategies'. This development came at a time when there was increasing pressure on the prison service to provide a treatment approach which would generate positive impacts (Scott and Codd, 2010). Thus the CBT approach developed by Finklehor in the SOTP has become the programme used by the Prison Service for treating sex offenders (Ireland and Worthington, 2008; Scott and Codd, 2010). Since its implementation in 1991 the SOTP has become the biggest treatment programme in the world with over 1000 men completing treatment each year (Beech and Fisher, 2004).

The UK Prison Service SOTP now has six separate programmes targeting different categories of sex offenders and ranging in length from 35 sessions for the booster programme²³ to 85 sessions for the Core Programme²⁴

²³ The Booster Programme is for offenders who have completed the Core Programme but may need help with treatment needs as they prepare for release (UNLOCK, 2010).

²⁴ The Core Programme is the main programme with the SOTP. The Core Programme is for offenders who accept responsibility for their actions and attempts to provide strategies to support the new attitudes which the sex offender has been encouraged to have (Ireland and Worthington, 2009).

(Scott and Codd, 2010).²⁵ Sessions will usually be held three times a week and consist of three staff and eight offenders. Within the programme there are five key issues which are aimed to be addressed. These aims are social skills; cognitive distortions; deficits in victim empathy; deviant arousal and relapse prevention skills.

While the SOTP has been extended and updated since 1991, some criticisms remain about its inclusion criteria. Indeed Scott and Codd (2010) note the voluntary status of the programme has raised serious concerns, claiming that for IPP sentenced-offenders this created a conflict as the Parole Board are almost certainly going to want the offender to have participated on the SOTP. Therefore if the offender wishes to be released, SOTP participation becomes mandatory. Despite the extension of the Adapted Programme for sex offenders with an IQ under 80, concern has focused on the ineligibility of certain offenders, namely those with low IQ scores, those with personality disorders or mental health issues. This exclusion, according to Scott and Codd (2010), results in some of the most serious sex offenders being unable to receive treatment.

Part Three: Public Protection in the Community

Policy Developments in Public Protection

In the 1970s, the sex offender was imagined as the 'dirty old man in a flasher mac' who hung around street corners (Thomas, 2005). Today concerns about who may commit sexual offences has focused on those in positions of power and responsibility, notably teachers, sports coaches, or most dangerous of all the predatory stranger (Carrabine et al, 2009; Yang 2010). Fisher and Beech (2004) amongst others (Grubin, 1998; Matravers,

²⁵ Additional programmes include the Rolling Programme designed for low-risk offender or those who have completed the Core Programme but have existing treatment needs; the Adapted Programme for those who have an IQ below 80 and for sex offenders where English is not their first language; the Extended Programme, for those who having completed the Core Programme remain high risk with unresolved treatment needs; and lastly is the Healthy Sexual Functioning Programme designed for those offenders requiring attention to address specific behaviours (Scott and Codd, 2010; Robinson, 2011; UNLOCK, 2010).

2003) dispute such misconceptions claiming recent estimates support the claim that nearly two-thirds of those who offend against children know but are not related to the victim (Kelly et al, 2005).

Other evidence suggests that sex offenders as a group, do not conform to any specific age, gender, race or socio-economic categories, but are a heterogeneous group of individuals from all walks of life (Ministry of Justice, 2010). Indeed, Fisher and Beech (2004) claim that sex offenders, in particular rapists, are not so dissimilar to the general prison population, and many are categorised as being from a low socio-economic status and have limited educational qualifications. As such, there are a variety of different depictions with regards to sex offenders, many of which are created by the media (Kitzinger, 2008; Anderson and Sample, 2008). The problem is that a distorted picture as to who sex offenders are unfolds. The image is one in which sex offenders are demonised, depicted as being the worst of the worst, and even more hated than murderers (Payne et al, 2010). One of the implications of a media depicted sex offender is that a substantial imbalance between perceived risk and actual risk is created. Far from all sex offenders being child molesters, paedophiles and rapists, a substantial proportion of offences committed are of a less serious nature²⁶ and many involve no physical contact – for example, exhibitionism or voyeurism. Both media and policy attention, however, focuses more on the minority of serious offenders than the majority of low-risk sex offenders.²⁷ As such, the sex offender has become the modern-day ‘folk-devil’ (Cobley, 2000) leading to increased media reporting and rising fears, and subsequently more policy (Fortney et al, 2007; CSOM, 2010).

As the above overview of sex offenders shows, it is only a very small minority of sex offenders who are classified as dangerous and/or predatory rapists or child abusers (Grubin, 1998; Ministry of Justice, 2010a). Despite

²⁶ Support for such claims can routinely be found witnessed through analysis of the MAPPAs Annual Reports (Ministry of Justice 2010a). Within the 2009/10 MAPPAs Annual Report, 94 per cent (32,965) of registered sex offenders MAPPAs eligible-offenders were categorised at level one, indicating the offender to be low or medium-risk requiring no additional agency co-operation.

²⁷ Just 0.3 per cent (118) of registered sex offenders were grouped as level three risk, requiring significant multi-agency cooperation at a senior level (Ministry of Justice, 2010a).

this, and in conjunction with media and public opinion, in recent years, there has been a considerable expansion in measures to control and manage sex offenders (Kemshall, 2008).

The Sex Offender Register

The 'sex offender register' is perhaps the most familiar mechanism available to assist in the management of sex offenders known to the British public. Despite its familiarity however, the Sex Offenders Act 1997 did not create a 'register' as such (Thomas, 2011). Rather the Sex Offenders Act 1997 created the concept of certain sex offenders being obligated to register as per the conditions outlined in Part Two of the Sexual Offences Act 2003. Nevertheless, the concept of a sex offender register does evoke strong feelings of a more secure community (Kemshall et al, 2010).

Talks to develop a UK style sex offender register equivalent to registers in the USA started in the mid-1990s (Matravers, 2003; Thomas 2005). Calls for a sex offender register were also aided by the growing political discourse surrounding crime in the lead up to the 1997 general election and the New Labour rhetoric of 'tough on crime, tough on the causes of crime'. Jones (2009) notes how much of the discourse has developed alongside the perceived need for government to minimise the risk of crime to the general public, especially surrounding personal crime involving physical or sexual harm. Illustrating the new political commitment to regulating and governing sexual offenders; Alun Michael, then Home Office Minister, was quoted as saying 'that this area of law was ripe for reform, but said that careful consideration was needed ... public protection from sex offenders was of the utmost importance' (Cobley, 2000: 23).

After their landslide election victory in 1997, New Labour sought to implement the reform of sexual offences legislation. One of the first pieces of legislation implemented was the Sex Offenders Act 1997.²⁸ The 1997 Act

²⁸ Although it had been passed by the former Conservative administration it fell to Labour to implement the Act.

came into force on 1st September 1997 and created the provision for those convicted of specified sexual offences to notify the police on release from prison; supervision or detention in the hospital (Thomas, 2010a).²⁹ The initial Sex Offenders Act 1997 was amended significantly in the Criminal Justice and Courts Services Act 2000, and in 2003, the Sex Offenders Act 1997 was repealed in full and replaced with the more comprehensive Sexual Offences Act 2003 (Thorp, 2003).

With hindsight, the 1997 Act could be seen as the benchmark of the new approach the government would take to sex offenders. One of the key purposes of the Sex Offenders Act 1997 and more recently the Sexual Offences Act 2003 was stated to be to enable the authorities to keep better track of known offenders, and with such measures, be better able to prevent further offending (Thomas, 2004a). As such, persons required to notify the police, were to do so within 14 days of release from prison or following conviction if sentenced to a community sentence. Offenders were required to provide to the police their name; a list of aliases used; a home address, as well as their date of birth (Sexual Offences Act, 2003). Persons covered by the notification requirements were also required to make the police aware of any change of address; new names; alternative spellings or listings of names; and the addresses which the person may have stayed at in the UK which is not already listed in previous notification requirements. Failure to comply with such requirements could lead to a person being liable to up to a level 5 fine (£5,000); imprisonment not exceeding six months, or both. Later, the 14 day time period was reduced to three days for initial notification and notification of subsequent changes.

Criticism of such measures have remained ever present, however. Not only do critics (Tewkesbury and Lees, 2006; Williams, 2008 (in the USA)) note the measures to be unduly intrusive to most sex offenders which provide little in terms of prevention, the lack of foresight to implement any mechanism for removal of the requirement to notify has left the policy

²⁹ see Schedule 1 of the Sex Offenders Act 1997 for the full list of the original offences; see the Sexual Offences Act 2003 for an up-to-date list.

subject to legal challenges.³⁰ In 2010, after two years of challenges, the UK Supreme Court ruled the current law to be incompatible with the European Convention on Human Rights because there was no mechanism available to offenders to be de-registered as risk reduces.

Reaction from the Prime Minister, David Cameron and the Home Secretary, Theresa May, to the ruling was comparable. Cameron described the Supreme Court ruling as ‘appalling’ and, vowed to do the ‘minimum necessary’ (Travis, 2011a), to make the notification requirements compatible (Whitehead, 2011). At the same time, Cameron vowed to close loopholes and tighten requirements for sex offenders still subject to notification requirements. Illustrative of the apparent need for tough rhetoric, Home Office Minister, James Brokenshire stated, appearing to miss the point of the ruling, that ‘sex offenders who continue to pose a risk will remain on the register and will do so for life if necessary’ (Home Office, 2012a).

On 16th February 2011, prefaced by the government’s disappointment with the ruling, without any external consultation, Theresa May announced the mechanism for ending indefinite registration had been produced. The solution was that after 15 years, registrants would be able to apply to appeal their registration (Thomas and Thompson, 2012). A decision on suitability would be made by the police, and if unsuccessful, applicants would be able to reapply in eight years, but there would be no review procedure; the House of Commons would not accept the absence of a review which was built into the final Remedial Order. The review is to a magistrate’s court (The Sexual Offences Act 2003 (Remedial) Order 2011; Travis, 2011b).

The ‘register’, then, has become the symbol of successive governments’ approach to sex offenders, namely a misdirected assumption that all sex offenders are the worst of the worst (Cesaroni, 2001), incurable and ever-dangerous and that simply identifying where they are will reduce their future crimes. Proposals to toughen-up the register, were announced at the same

³⁰ Most notable of these cases is *F and Thompson 2010 v Home Office* (R (on the application of F (by his litigation friend F)) and Thompson (FC) (Respondents) v. Secretary of State for the Home Department (Appellant) ([2010] UKSC 17)).

time as the de-registration mechanism, illustrating the punitive and emotive stance taken with sex offenders by the government. The consequences of such a stance are likely to be a growth in legal challenges as policies become ever-more intrusive and infringe due process and human rights, especially for those who are regarded as low-risk and compliant (Thomas, 2011).

The response to the UK Supreme Court ruling also illustrates how the government has become increasingly politically motivated as opposed to applying a modicum of objectivity, research and rationality to the decisions. Such responses have a secondary effect of de-individualising and de-humanising sex offenders (Garland, 2001; Spencer 2009). No longer is the sex offender a person seen as worthy of human rights, or even deemed to be worthy of a continued existence in some quarters (Payne et al, 2010). As a consequence it is claimed that sex offenders have become increasingly excluded and socially isolated, to the extent that they are perceived to have become a group of 'anonymous unknowns', stalking the streets searching for innocent women and children very much akin to Cohen's folk-devils (Cohen, 2002). Such a response is illustrative of the broader social attitudes to have taken place in the last three decades, namely what Heberton and Seddon (2009) have more recently noted to be a part of the shift to precautionary thinking.

Despite the various legal challenges³¹ the sex offender register has become a central feature of the UK's approach to managing sex offenders in the community (Thomas, 2011). While, the success of such methods is questionable, especially the extent to which the 'notification requirements' deter possible recidivists, the general consensus is to continue the expansion of such measures with constant calls for the 'register' of sex offenders to be publicised. Mindful of the risk of increasing an offender's social isolation and the possibility of 'Mob Law' as witnessed during the now infamous *News of the World* 'name-and-shame' campaign to 'out' known

³¹ Since 1999 a range of cases have reached the European Courts to arbitrate on Human Rights infringements. Notably cases include *Ibbotson v UK, 1999*; *Adamson v UK 1999* and *R (Forbes) v Secretary of State for the Home Department (2006)* (see also Thomas, 2011).

paedophiles in 2000³², the New Labour government resisted calls for details to be publicly available.

In 2008, however, the government announced it would pilot disclosing information to the public on a selective basis in four areas.³³ The Child Sex Offender Disclosure Scheme pilot was to have tight conditions on disclosure and would not be community-wide as in America (Chapman, 2008). The pilots were promoted as providing a more formal way of involving concerned family members in child safety. By allowing a formal avenue to the police to request checks be undertaken on a suspicious individual who has regular contact with their child, it was claimed the pilot would ascertain whether children would be protected from sex offenders (Directgov, 2008). Where checks found relevant information, so existed an assumption to disclose (Hickley, 2008).

An evaluation of the pilots was undertaken by Kemshall et al (2010) and stated that 315 requests for information had been submitted within the four pilot areas. Of the 159 requests reviewed by the evaluation, 21 disclosures were made, and 43 applications led to 'other child safeguarding actions' (Kemshall et al, 2010). The evaluation noted that while applicants were generally happy with the service, some reported continued anxiety as a result of non-disclosure, while many applicants suggested that retaining knowledge from a disclosure was difficult and the report alludes to potential issues arising in the future.

Following the reported success of the pilot scheme,³⁴ the scheme was extended nationwide. The disclosure schemes differ from America's Megan's Law³⁵ as the UK scheme remains restricted to parents fearful of

³² The subsequent actions led to sex offenders reportedly going underground and out-of-touch of the authorities managing them (Thomas, 2003); while innocent individuals were reportedly attacked for bearing a resemblance to an often blurry image (Allison, 2000). Most remarkable of all though, was the attack on a paediatrician (BBC, 2000) – as a result of what Williams (2008) described as 'linguistic confusion'.

³³ Peterborough; Southampton; across Warwickshire and Stockton in Cleveland.

³⁴ See Kemshall et al (2010) for an evaluation of the pilot scheme.

³⁵ Megan's Law (1996) requires all States in the US to have community notification systems which enable the public to access and disseminate information of registered persons (Levenson et al,

someone with regular unsupervised access to their children; the US policy is 'universal' but the UK policy is 'selective'. As in the pilot areas, police would be able to pass-on 'soft information' but also conviction information of other 'worrying behaviour' (Home Office, 2010).

Scepticism remains however, not only at the timing of the announcement of the pilot proposals; but also of the need for such a measure (Thomas, 2011). Indeed, as far back as 2000 Laville (2000) reported how Britain already had a solution to Megan's Law in place following the verdict in *Thorpe v the Chief Constable of North Wales Police ex. P Thorpe (1998)*. An ACPO spokesman said:

'it is obviously not as catchy a title as Sarah's Law but what it does is give police the authority to disclose information about sex offenders to anybody whenever they want to. This has been used quite regularly' (cited Laville, 2000).

The difference between *Thorpe* and Sarah's Law³⁶ is that the latter allows members of the public to approach the police, while the former is solely at the discretion and initiative of the police.

This was not the only dissenting voice to such measures. Others have also questioned the focus of increased notification requirements for registered sex offenders. In 2008, Donald Findlater from the Lucy Faithful Foundation publicly claimed the biggest risk to children is not from the registered sex offender who the police know and are managing. It is from the sex offender who is not registered and who no one knows about' (Hickley, 2008).

In summary, the sex offender notification or registration requirements introduced by the Sex Offenders Act 1997 and amended by the Criminal

2007b). Megan's Law developed from the Jacob Wetterling Act and was named after Megan Kanka, a 7 year old who was sexually assaulted and murdered by a convicted sex offender living in her street but unknown to her parents (Thomas, 2016).

³⁶ Sarah's Law was started following the News of the World newspaper following its name and shame campaign in the aftermath of the abduction, sexual assault and murder of Sarah Payne. As with Megan's Law, campaigns for Sarah's Law was named after the victim of a sexual assault and murder by a known sex offender. Sarah's Law was intended to be similar to Megan's Law in America and would make details of known sex offenders to be publicly available; as outlined above, however, it is more 'selective' than the US version (Thomas, 2016).

Justice Court Services Act 2000 and the Sexual Offences Act 2003 are arguably some of the most populist and emotive-driven policies for sex offenders. Significant concerns remain about the effectiveness of these notification requirements as evidenced by the number of legal challenges both past and present. Moreover, there has been no research to demonstrate the effectiveness of the register in reducing crime and improving public protection. The Child Sex Offender Disclosure Scheme also raises doubts over the security and safety of communities and sex offenders following a disclosure. Despite these concerns however, the claim by Thomas (2011) that the register has become a central tenet of policing and monitoring sex offenders in England and Wales, and the political posturing on the subject of sex offenders illustrates how the sex offender register, in all of its various forms, encapsulates broader trends in sex offender policy.

Penal populism, alongside arguments espousing precautionary logic and the new penological discourse of managed risk, are all clearly evident in a policy, which remains subject to the faintest cross-examination. Ewald (2002) notes the shift towards a politics of uncertainty has seen the emergence of precautionary logic to risk management and this uncertainty of risks has led to the introduction of far-reaching preventative measures to counteract unknown risks that lie in wait (Ewald, 2002; Arnoldussen, 2009). Ericson (2007) adds that this uncertainty of risk fuels suspicion and in turn allows for policies which “err on the side of caution” (Hebenton and Seddon, 2009; McSherry, 2014). For sex offenders, the only apparent safeguard to such a constant barrage of new measures is the European Court of Human Rights, which in itself is subject to significant government and public criticism for pandering to the ‘criminals’. Thus in an environment whereby politicians, media and public constantly call for ever-more stringent controls and forms of public protection, it is the sex offender register and the associated forms of risk assessment and management that will be the keystone from which reform emerges.

Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements

Perhaps one of the most significant new measures has been the introduction of Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA). MAPPA was introduced by section 67 and section 68 of the Criminal Justice and Court Services Act 2000 and formalised the systems of communication between criminal justice agencies. While there has been an extensive history of inter-agency communication on matters concerning public protection (Kemshall and Maguire 2001; Thomas, 2005; Kemshall, 2008), particularly between the police and probation services (Cobley, 2003), MAPPA made it a statutory responsibility for agencies to communicate where a certain offender was deemed to pose a high risk of harm and substantial likelihood of re-offending (Maguire and Kemshall, 2004). Initially the police and probation services in England and Wales were identified as the 'Responsible Authorities', but in 2003 this role was extended to the Prison Service. In doing so, the Chief Officer of Police along with the local Probation Board and the Prison Service for each area had legal responsibilities to provide arrangements for the management of sex offenders, and other offenders who posed a serious risk of harm to the public (Ministry of Justice, 2012). They also had a responsibility to evolve these arrangements accordingly and produce an annual report of such arrangements (Bryan and Doyle, 2003).

Within the MAPPA framework, three offender categories exist. Category One offenders are registered sex offenders who are subject to the notification requirements in the Sexual Offences Act 2003. Category Two are violent offenders who have been sentenced to a period of custody greater than 12 months and other sex offenders who are not required to notify the police, and Category Three consists of any other offenders who are deemed to pose a risk to the public and have a sexual or violent motivation to their offending (Nash, 2010). Offenders are then further categorised by the risk they pose (Ministry of Justice, 2010a).

There are three levels of risk management beginning with Level One 'ordinary agency management'. This group consists of offenders who are said to pose a low and medium risk of harm and are deemed suitable for

management without additional agency involvement, though information sharing and other agency involvement is not precluded (Kemshall, 2008). Level Two is referred to as Local inter-agency risk management, and involves the 'active' involvement of at least one agency. This may be because the offender has a greater risk of harm but may be the result of the need for specific resources to be allocated to the offender which the agency responsible for the offender cannot provide. Level Three is the highest level and is for the management of the 'critical few'.³⁷ Level Three offenders are those offenders who present the highest risk to public protection, and have a more complicated management plan, either because of the nature of the offender, or the attention their previous offences received in the media (Clift, 2010).

The formalised MAPPA procedures have produced a much more reliable system within which practitioners are able to communicate both inside and outside of their agency much more effectively, and many claim this has allowed for better public protection to be established (Bryan and Doyle, 2003). Despite this, some probation officers have noted how involvement by 'traditional-minded police officers' can still be problematic to deal with, seeing sex offenders in a similar vein to that of the tabloid press (Nash, 2014).

The MAPPA framework is also said to be problematic as the majority of sex offenders are identified as being of low risk of harm and of future offending after conviction and punishment and require only minimal involvement from additional agencies. In 2010 there were approximately 35,000 registered sex offenders, by 2014, this number had increased to 46,102 (Ministry of Justice, 2010a, 2014). Approximately 98 per cent of these registered sex offenders (45,250) are managed at the lowest level (Level One), requiring only 'ordinary management' (Ministry of Justice, 2010a). Conversely, only 55 (0.1%) registered sex offenders were managed at Level Three, part of the 'critical few', requiring Multi-Agency Public Protection Panels (MAPPPs)

³⁷ 'The critical few is an operational term and relates to very high risk offenders (as defined by OASys)' (Kemshall, 2008: 68). OASys is the Offender Assessment System and is used by Prison and probation services to assess risk.

involvement (Ministry of Justice, 2014), and where necessary, additional resources from all relevant agencies. In other words, the MAPPA workload illustrates that many sex offenders who are on supervision are perceived to be of low-risk of re-offending.

For the majority of sex offenders therefore, MAPPA has only a marginal impact on their levels of supervision and management, and therefore most will remain subject to supervision from, and notification obligations to, only one agency. For others however - the 'critical few' - MAPPA entails constant regulation of everyday activities and significant control over the continued liberty of an offender – for if MAPPA believe a breach may be about to occur, or feel risks are becoming too high, additional resources such as intensive surveillance may be implemented to prevent a breach and subsequently harm to a victim (Jones and Baker, 2009). Illustrative of the targeted nature of MAPPA, the Home Office, acknowledged how resources are relatively limited, warning that resources should be targeted towards these 'critical few' and risk management should follow the principle that 'cases should be managed at the lowest level consistent with providing a defensible risk management plan' (Home Office, 2004a: 34, para. 109 cited Kemshall, 2008: 69).

Further developments to MAPPA came, in December 2001 following the appointment of lay advisors to the MAPPA boards in an effort to provide a better 'oversight at a strategic level' (Hebenton and Thomas, 2004) and later through the Criminal Justice Act 2003. The Criminal Justice Act 2003 extended the role of 'Responsible Authority' to the Prison Service. It also recognised that many traditionally non-criminal justice agencies conducted roles with similar groups. Thus the Criminal Justice Act 2003 placed a duty on these non-criminal justice agencies, to cooperate with 'Responsible Authorities' in the risk assessment and management of certain offenders (Nash, 2010). Such agencies include health authorities, social services, housing associations, Youth Offending Teams and education authorities

(Clift, 2010).³⁸ It has been claimed that the inclusion of these additional 'duty to cooperate' agencies was the result of a series of damning reports and incidents which illustrated a lack of communication between various social and criminal justice agencies. A trend, which Nash (2010) points out affects all areas, even child protection issues, and has a problematic collaboration throughout history (Nash, 2010). Thus by drawing together various agencies, the belief was that risk assessment and management could be made more effective (Clift, 2010). Meanwhile, the appointment of lay advisors to MAPPA has been suggested (Hebenton and Thomas, 2004) to have been a concession to avoid the disclosure of sex offenders' names and addresses in a move akin to 'Sarah's Law'.

Such developments highlight how policies for sex offenders, have in recent years stuck strongly to the public protection approach to risk management (Kemshall, 2008). In other words, the current MAPPA structure is largely about risk prevention through controlling and managing offenders, rather than being a more 'offender-facing' or collaborative engagement between the individual offender and the statutory agencies. Such developments also indicate the extent to which crime, public and media pressure and political responses have been increasingly entwined (Newburn and Sparks 2004; Jewkes, 2011).

Violent and Sex Offender Register (ViSOR)

To further aid the communication between the responsible authorities, but also following the recommendations of the Bichard Inquiry (2004) commissioned following the murders of Jessica Chapman and Holly Wells, by Ian Huntley, proposals emerged to link-up all police intelligence systems centrally rather than remaining restricted to individual and regional police forces. The government commissioned the development of the Violent and Sex Offender Register (ViSOR). ViSOR is a computer-based system to assist the police and probation services to better assess and manage violent and sexual offenders. This system contains up-to-date details of convicted

³⁸ A more comprehensive list is outlined s.325(6) Criminal Justice Act 2003.

sex offenders, violent offenders sentenced to in excess of 12 months in custody, and most controversially, it contains details of those not convicted, but who are said to pose a risk of harm (Government News, 2005; Jones and Baker, 2009).

Costing £10 million, ViSOR holds information on each offender including any distinguishing features, known addresses as well as containing photographs of each offender (BBC, 2005). When first introduced in 2005, it was claimed the system would also standardise both data collection and sharing, thus reducing the amount of bureaucracy for police and probation officers (Government News, 2005).

Home Office minister, Fiona Mactaggart proclaimed ViSOR represented a 'step change in public protection' (BBC, 2005). As the prison service became responsible for contributing to MAPPA decisions, so access was expanded. The idea being that ViSOR would facilitate MAPPA through providing a central, searchable database through which the three responsible authorities have access to details of those subject to MAPPPs and be able to develop their strategies to manage those subject to MAPPA (Matthews, 2010). Harry Fletcher³⁹ reported that the new system would 'improve matters markedly' (BBC, 2005), however, shortly after implementation, problems regarding access to ViSOR by probation officers arose (Matthews, 2010). A Criminal Justice Joint Inspection report (2010) '*Restrictions and Rehabilitation: Getting the Right Mix*' claimed that structural issues within the system, particularly access allowed by probation staff to ViSOR was detrimental to public protection. Meanwhile data input issues have been found in inspections and have remained despite the introduction of National Standards for ViSOR (Criminal Justice Joint Inspection, 2010; NOMS 2013).

Despite all of the criticism of ViSOR and the potential issues regarding 'due process' of those not convicted but identified as at risk of offending, the consensus appears that ViSOR is a valuable asset but does need to be made more available to the probation service and data entry made more

³⁹, Assistant General Secretary at the National Association of Probation Officers,

consistent.⁴⁰ Thus, in essence, ViSOR created the 'register' thought to have developed through the notification requirements of the Sex Offenders Act 1997 and is proclaimed to have allowed probation officers in England and Wales to read details made by the police in Scotland thus improving public protection. There are said to be details of nearly 100,000 offenders on ViSOR⁴¹ and this raises issues about effective data protection as well as appropriate dynamic risk assessment, especially on the lowest risk sex offenders. That these offenders remain subject to MAPPA is indicative of what Feeley and Simon claim is the emergence of the new penology,⁴² and equally indicative of the 'knowledge economy', where the authorities, with sufficient information, will be able to reduce/prevent crime. The reality unfortunately is the opposite, whereby the authorities become swamped by paper work and information over-load leads to active crime reduction suffering.

Supervision in the Community

As the earlier examination of the sentencing trends of sex offenders illustrated, the Powers of Criminal Courts Act 2000 and the Criminal Justice Act 2003 have fundamentally changed sentencing policy for sex offenders in England and Wales. These Acts have also affected the supervision periods and licence conditions under which sex offenders must abide, to avoid being recalled to prison.⁴³

The idea that prisoners may be released from custody before the sentence ends is a concept dating back over a century (Hebenton and Thomas, 1996; Easton and Piper, 2008). However, for sex offenders or other dangerous

⁴⁰ See CJI (2010) section 4 for more information on some of these concerns.

⁴¹ See www.pito.org.uk

⁴² The new penology is said to reflect a new approach to offender rehabilitation and resettlement which advocates the use of actuarial assessments of an offenders risk to help identify risks and categorise offenders. These risks are identified and managed with greater resources given to manage higher risk offenders under a policy of public protection (Feeley and Simon, 1992, 1994). 'Old' penology techniques of rehabilitation and restoration are said to be displaced from criminal justice practice (Feeley and Simon, 1992, 1994; Pratt, 2000; Appleton, 2010). This will be discussed in the following section: 'Managing Sex Offenders: A New Penology'

⁴³ It should be noted here that sex offenders will have to wait longer, and are less likely to be released from prison than other offenders.

groups, such a system, especially when re-offending occurs, has been criticised as too lenient by the public and media voices (Wood and Francis, 2007; Mears et al, 2008). The Criminal Justice Act 1991 attempted to resolve this concern by re-shaping the perceptions of early-release by 'toughening-up' the discourse of early release. Now early-release was to be viewed not as a 'let-off' but as continued punishment in the community (Thomas, 2005).

Representative of the growing number of exclusionary policies being adopted for sex offenders, the Criminal Justice Act 1991 (section 44) also allowed for extended periods of post-custody supervision for those convicted of sexual offences following a probation officers Pre-Sentence Report (PSR) given to the judge. The Crime and Disorder Act 1998 extended section 44 by introducing 'extended supervision'. This placed the discretion to impose an extended sentence on the offender with the courts (Kemshall and McIvor, 2004). This extension in the form of supervision and the Powers of Criminal Courts Act 2000 empowers the courts, for the purposes of public protection, to impose a 10 year period of supervision on the offender. During this time, the offender will be on licence and subject to recall at any time (Cobley, 2003).

The Criminal Justice Act 2003 (section 227) introduced extended sentences. The introduction of these sentences followed the concerns of unsuitable release, but rather than restricting the individual to custody until the risk had lessened, the extended sentence allows for a period of supervision to be imposed of up to eight years for sex offenders and five years for violent offenders. Heberton and Seddon (2009: 348) describe how perhaps somewhat inevitably and predictably (PRT, 2007) this practice has extended beyond its initial proposed use, and the net-widening process was accepted under the precautionary principle of doing 'whatever is necessary to prevent future uncertain dangers'. Heberton and Seddon (2009: 348) add, the courts have with increased frequency also started to 'err on the safe side' when faced with uncertainty about an offenders perceived future risk. In doing so

extended sentences could be witnessed as growing evidence of the spread of the precautionary principle overtaking just deserts based approaches.

Alongside the extension of periods of custody and time spent on supervision after release from custody, the rigour of licence conditions has been extended. The Ministry of Justice (2011a) described licence conditions as a method of protecting the public, preventing re-offending and securing the re-integration of offenders through abiding with certain conditions while in the community and under probation supervision. Guidelines state these conditions must not be punitive, but proportionate to prevent harm or re-offending and reasonable and necessary – partly to assist in compliance from offenders (Ministry of Justice, 2011a). However, there is a widely held belief that this is not the case (Thomas, 2005; Whitehead, 2010), and in fact these conditions have become ever more stringently controlled by the police and probation services in the name of ‘offender management’.⁴⁴

As an illustration of the extension of licence conditions, an offender sentenced before 4th April 2005 to a period of between 12 months and four years, or a sentence of over four years would only be on licence until the three-quarter point of their sentence. Whereas someone who was sentenced after 4th April 2005 to 12 months or more will remain on licence for the full length of their sentence.⁴⁵ For those sex offenders who received an IPP, licence conditions will be in force for a minimum period of 10 years before allowing the offender to apply to the Parole Board to have their licence considered for termination. Significantly, Ashworth (2007) has acknowledged that the Parole Board were generally reluctant to discharge IPP offenders from their licence.

For an offender convicted and sentenced to a specified or determinate period in custody, and released on licence there are six standard conditions.⁴⁶ These include a requirement to maintain contact with their

⁴⁴ Heberton and Thomas (1996) warned of such a development in ‘Tracking’ Sex Offenders in 1996.

⁴⁵ For more information on this change over see <http://www.offendersfamilieshelpline.org; www.prisoneradvice.org>

⁴⁶ For life-sentenced offenders there are seven standard conditions.

supervising officer; allow the probation officer access to the premise where the offender resides; to reside in a premise which has been approved by the probation officer. Offenders are also required to ensure any changes of address, even for an overnight stay are passed to the probation officer. Licence conditions also restrict offenders from engaging in any work until approved by the probation officer and from leaving the UK, except with permission from the probation officer. The final condition is that offenders released on licence must behave appropriately and desist from activities which may undermine the supervision process (Ministry of Justice, 2011a).

For IPP or life sentence offenders, an additional condition is placed on their licence, that they must not place the community's or their own safety at risk (Strickland, 2015). Offenders may also be subject to further conditions being imposed upon them such as participation in drug testing. Additional generic conditions which can be added to a licence include contact requirements; restrictions on partaking in certain activities, for instance computer usage or accessing the internet; but also prohibited contact requirements which effectively 'ban' the offender from contacting named persons without authorisation from the probation officer (Ministry of Justice, 2011a).⁴⁷

Licence conditions, especially when 'additional conditions' are attached and along with the extended custodial sentences and supervision periods, place a series of exclusionary restrictions on the everyday activities of sex offenders. Restrictions may also be placed on sex offenders to prevent them communicating with other sex offenders while placed in a hostel/approved premises. The development of MAPPA and the extension of supervision and licence conditions reflect what some scholars have referred to as a new penology, or growing preoccupation with risk and risk management.

⁴⁷ Alongside the restrictive conditions, there are also a range of positive obligations such as attendance on an SOTP in the community; meetings with a psychologist or anger management sessions; and accommodation at a hostel (particularly in instances where the offender may not be able to return home). However, the true extent to which these are positive obligations is debated, given coercion by a probation officer, or perception of the need to attend courses to prove their rehabilitated state (Hanson, 2009).

Home Detention Curfew

The special measures faced by sex offenders can be witnessed further through the exclusion of sex offenders from the Home Detention Curfew scheme (HDC).⁴⁸ The HDC scheme, introduced in January 1999 allows the early release of offenders serving a period of custody of between three months and four years. Sex offenders were initially eligible for 60 day early release, following recommendations by the Director General of the Prison Service (Thomas, 2005). However, following amendments made in the Criminal Justice and Court Services Act 2000, the HDC was revoked and no longer made available for any offender subject to the notification requirements as per Part 2 of the Sexual Offences Act 2003 (Cobley, 2003). HDC have now been extended to other offenders from 60 days early release to 90 days early release.

Residency Restrictions

As well as being ineligible for Home Detention Curfew, sex offenders are also likely to face numerous offence specific restrictions such as restrictions on using a computer on the internet; or from entering parks or school grounds. Along with these developments, and to some extent mirroring the general exclusionary trend towards sex offenders witnessed in America, the UK has also provided for the ability to prohibit sex offenders from relocating to specific areas while on licence. Whilst not enrolled as widely as in the US, restrictions on where a sex offender resides have developed in recent years, with former Home Secretary, John Reid, attempting to restrict sex offenders from residing in approved premises located near to schools (BBC, 2006).

Residency restrictions have become a problematic measure in the US with Davey (2006) reporting how attempts to keep 'sexual predators' away from children through the use of residency restrictions has led to many cities becoming no-go areas for convicted sex offenders. As such, residency

⁴⁸ HDC provides for low-risk and short-term prisoners to be released earlier into the community to serve out the remainder of their sentence, but to be electronically monitored (Ministry of Justice, 2011b; Thomas, 2005). Between January 2000 and March 2006 there were 63,384 released under HDC (Ministry of Justice, 2011b).

restrictions have inadvertently led to sex offenders congregating at "motels in the sticks" (Davey, 2006) or more worryingly many have become homeless (Hebenton and Seddon, 2009). Subsequently, some authorities have acknowledged a spike in the number of 'missing' sex offenders since the introduction of 'residency restriction' statutes (Davey, 2006). Thus these measures, justified on the grounds of public protection, have potentially introduced greater risk to the public through a lack of effective supervision and management. The implication therefore, is that while punitive responses may initially result in significant public support, when the reality of unmonitored sex offenders and other dangerous offender groups is realised, so calls for greater controls emerge. Davey (2006) claims this very trend occurred with residency restrictions in America.

Electronic Monitoring

Following some negative reports and inconclusive evidence, calls for the widespread use of electronic monitoring of sex offenders through satellite-tracking emerged. Although electronic monitoring in the form of 'radio-frequency'⁴⁹ has existed for many years now,⁵⁰ much discussion at the turn of the millennium focused on the introduction of GPS or satellite-tracking of offenders (Paterson, 2008). Satellite-tracking of sex offenders, allows for the movement of sex offenders to be monitored either in 'real-time' or analysed at a later point, usually at least once in 24 hours, differing from the more established radio-frequency forms of monitoring (Hucklesby, 2008)

⁴⁹ Electronic monitoring used radio-frequency technology relies on the offender wearing a bracelet-type device (tags), around the ankle. The 'tag' transmits a signal to a receiver in the offender's property which is connected to a telephone-line. If this signal is lost and the offender is supposed to be at home the monitoring company will be notified as a breach may have occurred. Equally if a signal is received while the offender is supposed to be at work or attending treatment, the relevant authorities would be contacted. However, RF technology is not able to trace the offender to a specific location once the signal is lost (Hucklesby, 2008; Button et al, 2009; DeMichele et al, 2008).

⁵⁰ Electronic monitoring, or the theory behind surveillance technologies was designed by Harvard Professor Ralph Schwitzgebel in the 1960s, though no practical application was found (Button et al, 2009). Throughout the mid-1980s and 1990s the use of technology to monitor offenders was still 'fitful' (Nellis, 2005), but by the turn of the millennium, electronic monitoring had emerged to the extent that in America, an estimated 100,000 offenders were 'tagged' each day (Nellis, 2005).

Electronic monitoring using satellite-tracking does appear to be moving closer to becoming adopted, but has yet to become enforceable. Instead, sex offenders are monitored using electronic monitoring in the form of curfews, for instance to restrict an offender's movement during school opening and closing times. While not as invasive as satellite-tracking, electronically monitored curfews may be viewed as an appropriate tool to regulate an offender's movements in the technological age, but is also indicative of a 'hands-off' approach to managing sex offenders. Kemshall (2008) refers to these developments as part of a wider "community protection approach" or ideology which advocates measures to ensure public protection through a variety of draconian and intrusive measures such as surveillance, monitoring, restrictions to movement and activities and shifts in the rights of victims and witnesses (at the expense of the offender). Within this model proportionality succumbs to fears of future harm which can lead to extended periods of incarceration.

The emergence of the Civil Order

The Sexual Offences Act 2003 also represented a shift in government strategy to regulating sex offenders through the introduction of a series of civil orders which if breached, would result in a criminal conviction. The Sexual Offences Act 2003 created the Notification Order (section 97 – section 103) which applies to offences which have taken place outside of the jurisdiction of the UK, but the perpetrator remains a risk; the Sexual Offences Prevention Order (SOPO) (section 104 – section 113) which effectively replaced Sex Offender Orders (introduced in 1998), and can be applied to anyone with a history of sexual offences and is deemed to pose a risk to members of the public. The Sexual Offences Act 2003 also created the Foreign Travel Order, (section 114 – section 122) aimed to prevent travel outside of the UK, or to specified countries; and the Risk of Sexual Harm Order (section 123 – section 129), which was introduced amid fears of known sex offenders using the internet to 'groom' children. These orders, it is claimed (Thomas, 2005), have become increasingly used tools in the protection of children from sex offenders. All these orders were available during the time of the current PhD research. They were consolidated and

replaced by new Sexual Risk Orders and Sexual Harm Prevention Orders that became available from 8th March 2015 through the Anti-Social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014 (Thomas and Thompson, 2013). Whilst successive governments have been at pains to point out the orders are not an additional punishment, given the restrictions these orders can impose, this has been questioned (Kemshall, 2008).

Following the trend of policies thus far, and the uncomfortable fit these policies have with due process and human rights (Bottoms, 1977; Easton and Piper, 2008), Zedner (2004: 239) claims these measures have been readily accepted by the public because of the fears associated with sex offenders and innocent children. It is claimed this fear of sex offenders has created a 'natural target of classification, containment and exclusion', as they have become gradually more and more removed from 'normal' society. Ashworth and Redmayne (2005) also recognise the problems of such an approach, insinuating that such measures could be seen as a deliberate attempt to circumvent the protections of the Human Rights Act 1998. Ashworth and Redmayne (2005) continue, claiming that as with ASBOs (Anti-Social Behaviour Orders), the government has prompted RSHOs (Risk of Sexual Harm Orders) and SOPOs (Sexual Offence Protection Orders) as a non-criminal sanction for those who may commit unacceptable behaviour. However, should the recipient be found to breach the civil order, the punishment is criminal. In essence, Ashworth and Redmayne (2005: 14) argue that 'the Government has been able to by-pass the protections for criminal charges and to open up a way of dealing with crimes ... that avoids the safeguards'. The argument is that individuals should be prosecuted and convicted with criminal procedures if the evidence exists.

Managing Sex Offenders: A New Penology?

Analysis of these policy developments highlights a number of fascinating trends, namely that policies for sex offenders have become increasingly restrictive, unwavering and hands-off. What makes such developments perhaps all the more surprising is that as recently as the 1970s penal

welfarism and the rehabilitative ethos of the probation service dominated (Garland, 2001; Lewis, 2005). By the late 1970s and early 1980s, however, the rehabilitative orthodoxy which had prevailed for nearly a century, had been replaced with the 'just deserts' approach. Shortly afterwards, and with the move to the right continuing, reformers began to push, not for 'just deserts' but for sentencing policy grounded in 'deterrence, predictive restraint and incapacitation' (Garland, 2001: 61). Such was the collapse, Garland (2001) claimed that to show support for penal welfarism, was to associate with an outdated and failed model. Kemshall (2008) adds that a consequence of the decline in rehabilitation was mirrored by the emergence of a condemnation of treatment especially for sex offenders and other demonised, vilified or monstrous groups. Thus what had occurred in just a few years, was the spectacular collapse of a system of justice which had prevailed for nearly a century and rapid replacement of three approaches – rehabilitation, just deserts and deterrence – in less than two decades. By the mid-1990s, having abandoned the 'just deserts' approach, criminal justice policy began to be driven by populist driven approaches espousing incapacitation and deterrence, alongside the emergence of fears of risky behaviours and the management of such risk.

Feeley and Simon (1992) claim that this new approach to criminal justice policy can be understood as part of the new penology discourse which has emerged in the last three-four decades. For Feeley and Simon (1992, 1994), the new penology is characterised by its focus on risk and managerialism, but also, and interlinked is a process of de-individualisation of offenders with the replacement of dangerous groups, or what Feeley and Simon (1992: 449) refer to as a process of 'actuarial consideration of aggregates'. Feeley and Simon (1992) claim that not only has this led to an over-reliance on imprisonment, the focus on risk management has seen the development of an arsenal of preventative and exclusionary measures, which exemplify the changing direction to the punishment and treatment of offenders in the criminal justice system. Within this framework, Feeley and Simon (1992: 455) state the 'new penology is neither about punishing nor rehabilitating individuals. It is about identifying and managing unruly groups', and

ultimately, perhaps in realisation of the endemic nature of criminality and deviancy, the aim is no longer to stop crime but to make it tolerable. As a result, policies like the sex offender register and MAPPA are called for to assist criminal justice agencies in the 'battle' to control law and order (Ayling et al, 2009). However, this 'shopping list' of requirements from the criminal justice agencies has led to politicians resorting to increasing the restrictions on the excluded, marginalised and deserving 'dangerous' despite inconclusive evidence to the effectiveness of such measures (Nellis, 2005; Thomas 2011).

The implications of the move to the managed and de-individualised new penology are many, though of particular importance are the consequences on the reintegration of offenders who have completed their custodial sentence, but also, for the practitioners charged with 'rehabilitation' and managing such offenders. For it is argued that the continual ostracisation and 'othering' processes inflicted upon sex offenders by government policy combined with the new penology curtailing the ability of criminal justice agents to effectively deal with controversial and sometimes 'high-risk' or dangerous individuals, by the removal of professional judgement and independence of probation agents, has resulted in growing a social isolation among sex offenders living in the community.

Despite such claims however, Appleton (2010) amongst others has questioned the extent to which new penology has infiltrated criminal justice. Although the new penology model implies regulation and control to be the new aims of the managerialist criminal justice system, Appleton (2010) found that help and intervention from criminal justice professionals to convicted individuals to support and assist in their reintegration can and does still occur. Moreover, interviewed probation officers determinedly noted addressing the specific welfare needs and obstacles to the process of desistance⁵¹ from crime and a criminal lifestyle as a priority of their work.

⁵¹ Desistance refers to the cessation of offending or a criminal lifestyle (Maruna, 2001). The study of desistance focuses on the factors which influence someone to stop offending and how. There are two schools of thought about the process of desistance (Farrall and Calverley, 2006). One is that desistance is a process or journey away from crime, the second is that desistance occurs as

Thus, despite the numerous concerns outlining the collapse of the rehabilitative ideal in favour of firstly 'just deserts' and more recently a process of risk management, within the probation service at least, it appears its 'transformative optimism' to successfully treat offenders has not been fully surrendered by those 'on-the-ground'. Supporting such findings, Kemshall (2008) claims that whilst the community protection model has undoubtedly been propelled forwards in recent years, tensions remain between health and justice approaches to dangerousness and high-risk offenders. Some members of the judiciary, like with mental health practitioners, have been reported to resist the direction of the 'public protection' mandate to produce highly structured and non-discretionary sentences (Kemshall, 2008). Equally criminal justice practitioners who routinely work with offenders in the community are said to engage in a process of either 'endorsing' or 'firewalling' particular policies depending on whether they personally agree or disagree with the ethos or the purposes of new policy. This may occur, for instance, when practitioners prioritise 'rehabilitation over risk management', and in doing so, the new penology discourse identified by Feeley and Simon (1992) may be evident to a less extent in practice than at the policy-making level. Appleton (2010) concludes that contemporary probation paints a contradictory picture whereby official discourse demands of risk management and due diligence, clashes with a traditional probationary model of hands-on, welfare and individual-based concerns. Moreover, many probation officers retained the view that professional judgements rather than actuarial judgements assisted by management tools, were the essential tool for increasing the likelihood of identifying possible recidivism.

a one-off event – usually prompted by a significant event (Cusson and Pinsonneault, 1986). Factors which promote desistance include: finding religion, maturation, self-motivation, the role of significant others, developing a relationship, gaining employment or 'burn out' (Laub et al, 1998; Farrall, 2002; Sampson and Laub, 2004; Laws and Ward, 2011). This will be discussed in more detail throughout the thesis.

Conclusion

This chapter has detailed the framework within which sexual offences are located. It has examined the most recent UK sexual offences legislation to provide an awareness of what constitutes a sexual offence, but gone beyond this to explore the historical background which has aided the formation of current sexual offences legislation. The Sexual Offences Act 2003 has had a profound legal impact, not only by drawing together a vast range of sexual offences legislation into one more coherent Act, and introducing basic guidelines to establish the extent to which sexual acts are consensual, but it has also illustrated significant advances in British society. Since the Sexual Offences Act 1956, the previous basis of sexual offences legislation, society has shifted, women have a greater role and respect in society; there has been an acknowledgement of this advance, and in turn an awareness at least, of the impacts of the male-dominated power relations prevalent in British society.

While critics to the Sexual Offences Act 2003 do exist, the Act does meet its intended objectives and has modernised and strengthened the legal framework for the conviction of sexual offenders in England and Wales. However, the Sexual Offences Act 2003, and other pieces of legislation introduced under the New Labour government have also led to significant policy developments for such a small proportion of offenders.⁵² For much of the general public, the media and politicians, these policies are 'long-overdue'; essential in preventing further harms to the public, especially vulnerable groups such as 'innocent' women and children; and vital in assisting the criminal justice agencies in assessing, monitoring and controlling those perceived to be the most dangerous (Kitzinger, 2008). For others however, many of these policies appear to also include a punitive, repressive and exclusionary dimension, the implications of which are endless (Thomas, 2011).

⁵² This is especially evident when considering that just 1 per cent of recorded crime relates to sexual crimes (Osborne et al, 2011).

Thus, increasingly what appears to be emerging from sex offender policies is a process of dehumanisation (Garland, 2001; Spencer 2009) whereby the aim is to manage as effectively as possible the 'thing' or the 'other' – in this case the sex offender. As such mentalities have emerged, the reformative policies have declined in the frequency of the implementation. The consequence of such a trend, especially given the arsenal of measures and restrictions being imposed is that sex offenders are perhaps progressively going to become more 'at risk' as stress builds up (Mercado et al, 2008). Notwithstanding the obvious human rights' implications and impacts on successful desistance which are affected by such policies, an additional impact of this approach is that sex offenders risk becoming more and more socially isolated. Reducing social isolation is said to be a key aspect of desistance (Ward, 2002), yet because of the severity of offences and societal responses, many – though not all – sex offenders face becoming socially isolated. In combination with the restrictive nature of policies for sex offenders, social isolation can be exacerbated and the risk of re-offending increased.

The government rhetoric of the last 20 years has certainly endorsed a more punitive and managed response to sex offenders, but the 'on-the-ground' reports suggest the extent to which the new penology has fundamentally changed practices and removed any semblance of rehabilitation is less conclusive, certainly in the context of probation (Appleton, 2010). Moreover, the traditional probation officer role, even if it is now underpinned by a calculation of risk and management, is still apparent. Furthermore, developments in the voluntary sector also clearly exemplify some of the more inclusionary measures for working with sex offenders in the community, such as *Stop It Now*⁵³ and Circles of Support and Accountability (Wilson et al, 2002; McAlinden, 2006; Kemshall, 2008). Having now established the legal and policy contexts surrounding the reintegration and management of sex offenders in the community, the next chapter will endeavour to further explore such developments in the voluntary sector, in

⁵³ See for example - <http://www.stopitnow.org.uk/>

particular, the evolution of Circles of Support and Accountability in England and Wales.

The importance of such developments to this thesis therefore, are that it is within this framework that CoSA as a voluntary sector initiative have emerged with their aims of providing 'social capital' and befriending sex offenders who are at greatest risk of re-offending and most socially isolated. More importantly, given the aims of this thesis to examine the effectiveness of CoSA in reintegrating sex offenders, an understanding of the legal context and restrictive policies that many sex offenders are released into the community under, is essential in situating the value-added by Circles.

Chapter Two: Circles of Support and Accountability – History, Theory and Practice

Introduction

This chapter carries on from Chapter One to consider one unique intervention in the lives of people convicted for sexual offending and which is the focus of the rest of this thesis. The intervention is called Circles of Support and Accountability (CoSA). CoSA involves the voluntary sector and the use of volunteers to work with people to help them resettle in the community following periods of imprisonment for having committed sexual offences. The intervention is referred to as forming Circles of Support and Accountability (CoSA) around the former offender to provide assistance and a social grouping to assist the process of reintegration back into society. It is a recognition of the isolation and continuing stigma that these people can experience at this time in their lives. The chapter examines the origins of CoSA in Canada and its spread across the world; it looks at the theoretical underpinnings of this work by volunteers and the evidence that we have on the effectiveness of the Circles formed.

Introducing Circles of Support and Accountability

Circles of Support and Accountability (CoSA) have been described as an innovative, community-based response, (Cesaroni, 2001; Wilson et al, 2007b) which uses volunteers to support and challenge sex offenders referred to as Core Members in the terminology of CoSA. Most Core Members participating in CoSA have been released from custody and are trying to resettle in the community (Wilson et al, 2007a; Nellis, 2009; Hanvey and Höing, 2013). The main purpose of CoSA is to prevent further sexual

offending and to have 'no more victims' (Circles UK, 2009⁵⁴, 2013). The approach seeks to achieve both support and accountability functions by working with sex offenders to reduce the risks of reoffending through the promotion and use of inclusive measures which will facilitate more effective integration (Hanvey et al, 2011; Circles UK, 2013).

The Mechanics of a Circle

The mechanics of a Circle are relatively easy to follow. Within each Circle there is one Core Member and usually between four and six volunteers (Armstrong et al, 2008). This group is known as the 'Circle'. In using the term Core Member, the Circle neatly avoids the use of the word 'sex offender'.

This Circle of Core Members and volunteers meet once a week and are organised and overseen by their formal coordinator who has responsibility for the management of the Circle. The coordinator also provide a link to statutory agencies such as the police and probation service and the coordinator also has responsibility for the risk assessment of Core Members, the recruitment of future Core Members and passing relevant information between the Circle and statutory agencies (Armstrong et al, 2008; Thomas et al, 2014). As such the coordinator plays a pivotal role in the flow of information about the Core Member, into and beyond the Circle (Thomas et al, 2014).

When the Circle starts, it is classed as being in Phase one. Phase one usually lasts 12 months but it can be shorter (Wilson et al, 2010). During this phase Circle meetings are structured and minutes taken by the volunteers and passed on to the coordinator to review discussions during the meeting. Where necessary, these minutes will also be passed on to any relevant statutory agency for further investigation (Wilson et al, 2010). Phase two denotes the end of the formal meetings between a Core Member and the volunteers though informal contact may continue with volunteers speaking to

⁵⁴ In 2013, Circles UK produced an updated version of the Code of Practice. This updated document contains much of the same core principles of CoSA in England and Wales and the 2013 supersedes the 2009 document.

the Core Members on the telephone or meeting quarterly for a coffee. Findings from Thomas et al (2014) indicate the presence of a third phase in some CoSA projects. Phase Three is an informal phase of CoSA and its use is limited to a small number of projects and refers to the contact between the Core Member and the coordinator when phase two had ended.

As stated meetings are initially on a weekly basis, but when volunteers and the coordinator agree that the Core Member's risks of reoffending are reducing, and coping strategies have been established (usually after three – six months), meetings may be reduced to fortnightly or monthly (Hanvey et al, 2011). At this stage volunteers and Core Members may begin participating in more practical and social activities that move beyond the physical location of the Circle to enhance Core Members reintegration (Wilson et al, 2010).

Within meetings volunteers are said to provide support in finding independent accommodation (Quaker Peace and Social Witness, 2003; Hannem, 2013) and in reducing social isolation through aiding the Core Member to gain, for example, education and employment opportunities or skills, and in building adult-appropriate relationships (Haslewood-Pócsik et al, 2008). Volunteers also work with the Core Member to reduce the risks of reoffending, and assisting them in implementing any professionally agreed treatment plans (Hanvey et al, 2011; Hanvey and Höing, 2013). Throughout the duration of the Circle volunteers are encouraged to continually challenge the offender and be aware of any changes in attitudes or the development of new relationships and friendships (Quaker Peace and Social Witness, 2003; Wilson et al, 2005). This may be done by the Circle volunteers discussing their concerns with the Core Member and listening to their explanations. Equally, concerns may remain and volunteers may report behavioural concerns to the coordinator who may subsequently pass on the information to the relevant agencies responsible for public safety (Haslewood-Pócsik et al, 2008; Circles UK, 2013).

In an attempt to reduce mistrust between the volunteers and the Core Member surrounding the disclosure of potentially risky behaviours to statutory agencies by volunteers this function is one which is stressed to all participants prior to commencing a Circle. Indeed, such is its importance Core Members sign a 'contract' stating they agree to this before the Circle starts (Hanvey et al, 2011; Thomas et al, 2014). Wilson et al (2010) claim that despite both parties knowing this information may culminate in recall to prison or an increase in licensing conditions, evidence suggests Core Members continue to share and disclose information to their Circle (Bates et al, 2012).

This discussion of the mechanics of a Circle identifies some of the complexities of the initiative and the apparently conflicting aims and objectives of the approach. This apparent conflict between the 'support' and 'accountability' functions of CoSA will be examined throughout the chapter and is returned to throughout the thesis. The discussion that follows is also intended to highlight how Circles began in Canada, its emergence in England and Wales, how Circles practice may be affected by perceptions volunteers bring to the Circle, what training volunteers receive, and how the public perceptions of sex offenders culminates in a model which can emphasise both risk management and support and guidance, though perhaps to different degrees at different periods of time.

The emergence of CoSA in Canada

In 1986, Canada enacted legislation (Cesaroni, 2001; Hannem and Petrunik, 2004) which enabled some prisoners to be detained in custody for the whole length of their sentence. Traditionally offenders would have been released at two-thirds of the way through their sentence, at which time they would be released into the community. This policy of detaining serious and high-risk offenders for more of their sentence has become an increasing trend across Western criminal justice systems (Pratt, 2000; Cesaroni, 2001; Garland, 2001), and was driven to a large extent by public calls for offenders to serve the full-length of sentence (Roberts and Hough, 2005). While such a policy

minimises short-term risks posed by offenders (Cesaroni, 2001), the opportunity for offenders to reintegrate into a community while under the supervision of a probation officer is reduced (Hannem and Petrunik, 2004; Wilson et al, 2007a). Following the implementation of 'full-length sentence policies' offenders would now have to serve their entire sentence in prison if they were deemed to pose a high-risk of reoffending and causing serious harm (Cesaroni, 2001; Hannem, 2013).

The first Circles of Support

It was in this context that the first 'Circle of Support' was formed in 1994.⁵⁵ The Circle was formed as a specific response to an imminent threat. A notorious high-risk repeat sex offender was about to be released into the community, but had reached the end of his custodial sentence or Warrant Expiry Date (Wilson et al, 2005). As a result the sex offender, Charlie Taylor, would be released into the community without any supervision or support (Cesaroni, 2001; Nellis, 2009), nor would he face any licence conditions restricting his movement, associations or activities – other than those all citizens experience (Wilson et al, 2008). Amid growing concern from prison staff that Taylor would reoffend, and a growing level of media attention on his release, a local Mennonite minister in Ontario (Reverend Harry Nigh), was contacted by prison officials.

Despite his reservations of the man⁵⁶, Reverend Nigh agreed to assist Taylor and the concerned prison staff. A Circle of volunteers was formed around Taylor and set about finding him some accommodation, encouraging him to socialise with them and also promised to provide daily contact for him (Hannem and Petrunik, 2004; Wilson et al, 2007, 2008). Four months later, another Circle was established in similar circumstances to those experienced by Charlie Taylor. This time, Reverend Hugh Kirkegaard was

⁵⁵ 'Circles of Support' was the term used by the first Circles developed in Canada. The addition of the word 'accountability' and the term CoSA emerged as the initiative spread to other parts of Canada, as part of a process of increasing its appeal and credibility to practitioners (Petrunik, 2007).

⁵⁶ From previous contact with Charlie Taylor while running a treatment programme in prison (Wilson et al, 2005).

approached and agreed to help form a Circle around another prolific sex offender with 36 previous convictions (Hannem and Petrunik, 2004; Wilson et al, 2008). Thus, a support network was established for the offender to be released into, which was outside of the remit of the state, but in which some degree of monitoring and accountability would occur (Wilson et al, 2008).

As such, the Canadian model of CoSA is described as being of organic development, emerging as a spontaneous community response to a specific problem (Wilson et al, 2010). In 1996, and with no recorded reconvictions from the people worked with, the Mennonite Central Committee of Ontario secured a grant to expand their scheme across Canada (Wilson et al, 2008). Both recipients of the Circle have since died (2005 and 2007 respectively), but neither was reconvicted of another sexual offence (Wilson et al, 2008) after they began their Circle.

A form of Restorative Justice?

From the outset, this 'classical'⁵⁷ model of CoSA (Petrunik, 2007) was informed by the principles of mutual responsibility and equal importance, things key to the restorative justice initiative (Hanvey et al, 2011). As such, the CoSA concept is said to have followed in the traditions of previous Canadian responses by developing new approaches to criminal justice which seek to balance rights and risks of offenders (Hudson, 2003) and became strongly associated with the restorative justice concept (Nellis, 2009; Hannem, 2013).

Restorative justice deals with offenders through the participation of all affected parties (Zehr, 2002). As such, restorative justice often involves both offenders and victims, together with criminal justice professionals and communities coming together in an attempt to repair the harm done to an individual or community and facilitate reintegration (Larson-Sawin and Zehr,

⁵⁷ The 'classical' model refers to the 'bottom-up' approach to CoSAs development with a strong ethos in there being 'no more victims' and also that 'no one is disposable' (Petrunik, 2007; Hannem, 2013).

2007; Schiff, 2007; van Camp, 2014). While the offending act may be condemned, restorative justice advocates claim the priority should be to meet the victim's and community's needs; and ensure the offender is fully aware of the impact of their actions on others (Johnstone and van Ness, 2007). In applying such a framework, advocates argue restorative justice to be more demanding than traditional punishment, but also that the forgiveness offenders receive through participation in restorative justice helps to facilitate their reintegration (Johnstone, 2002). Unlike 'traditional' or 'pure' restorative justice attempts, CoSA seeks mediation between the offender and the wider community rather than the direct victim (Hannem, 2013). From a restorative justice perspective, CoSA allow sex offenders who would previously be left with no contact on return to the community, to instead be befriended and offered support and assistance (Hoing et al, 2014, 2015a).

Petrunik (2007) describes how even some of the original CoSA projects in Canada have altered their early restorative justice roots and engaged in more risk management measures. Following an incident where a Core Member who had been recalled to prison for breaching his license conditions, and was murdered whilst in prison, the particular CoSA project involved undertook an intensive review of their policies. The review found that following the Core Member's breach, he contacted his Circle volunteers to inform them of the breach. The volunteers had convened an emergency meeting, where they were divided over what action to take. Some of the volunteers felt that the relationship which they had established with the Core Member had resulted in him not reoffending and informing them of his breach. Others however, felt that the breach of licence conditions should have been reported to the Core Member's parole officer (Petrunik, 2007).

One of the volunteers independently contacted the parole officer suggesting the accountability element of the Circle had been overlooked. The Core Member was subsequently charged for breaching his licence conditions and recalled to prison. During this detention however, the Core Member's identity

had been disclosed to his fellow prisoners, and was subsequently killed by his cellmate (Petrunik, 2007).

The retrospective intensive review undertaken by the CoSA project responsible found that 'if accountability and risk management were not to receive as much emphasis as support and offender reintegration the local CoSA initiative itself could be placed in jeopardy' (Petrunik, 2007: 28). As a result Petrunik (2007: 28) suggests that the focus of CoSA in this project shifted much more towards 'the prioritising of a risk management model over an[*sic*] charismatic moral-redemptive model'. This example illustrates how CoSA projects have been required to re-consider their practices in order to provide some assistance to Core Members, but also ensure that statutory agents continue to provide referrals and assistance. As such, while the very first 'Circle of Support' may have been developed in a largely restorative justice framework, as the initiative has spread, and the scheme become more recognised, so the practices which underpin its service delivery become more formalised to ensure credibility amongst its partners (Petrunik, 2007; Wilson and McWhinnie, 2010).

The emergence of CoSA in England and Wales

In England and Wales, the concept of CoSA was first brought to the attention of the Home Office by the Quakers (Edgar and Drewery, 2006; Nellis, 2009). Following discussions with officials from the Home Office, the Quakers, various probation officials, representatives from voluntary organisations, and staff and volunteers from the Canadian CoSA projects, met in London to discuss the prospect of using CoSA in England and Wales. Amid lots of enthusiasm, but very little empirical evidence, the Home Office commissioned three pilots to begin in 2002 (Nellis, 2009).⁵⁸

⁵⁸ It has since been suggested that the CoSA initiative sat well with the government's community responsibility and civil engagement agenda, and thus received a more welcoming response (Carich et al, 2010).

The three pilot schemes were to be in two regional areas of Thames Valley and Hampshire and the third scheme was not based in a particular geographical area and was managed by the Lucy Faithful Foundation (Hanvey et al, 2011).⁵⁹ The Lucy Faithful Foundation provided Circles to sex offenders who had left their residential sex offender treatment programme at Wolvercote Clinic to return to the community (Hanvey et al, 2011). While some difficulties were experienced by the Lucy Faithful Foundation in gaining police and probation support in each area they 'parachuted' into (Hanvey et al, 2011) by the time funding had ended, nine Circles had been set up by the Lucy Faithful Foundation (Nellis, 2009).

The Hampshire project experienced difficulties from the outset and was deemed to be a failure in only establishing one Circle in two years (Hanvey et al, 2011). Much of these problems stemmed from the coordinator having lots of experience managing volunteers but not having the experience of working with high-risk sex offenders and so did not gain the level of referrals from criminal justice agencies. One argument subsequently put forward is the coordinator did not have sufficient kudos in the eyes of criminal justice professionals to work with high-risk sex offenders (Hanvey et al, 2011), so despite the potential merits of the project and the coordinator experience at managing volunteers, the project never achieved the level of success as the Lucy Faithfull or Thames Valley pilots.

The Thames Valley project was hailed as a success running 15 Circles without any recorded reconvictions for further sexual offences (Nellis, 2009). Following the relative success of the pilot studies and also promising results from evaluations from the newly merged Hampshire Thames Valley CoSA project (HTV), Wilson et al (2008: 33) note there to have been a plethora of agencies seeking the implementation of CoSA in their regions 'as a means of strengthening public protection'.⁶⁰

⁵⁹ The Lucy Faithfull Foundation (LFF) is a national charity which is dedicated to reducing the risk of sexual abuse among children (see <http://lucyfaithfull.org/> for more information).

⁶⁰ In 2012, following continued expansion in Kent and South-East England HTV Circles was renamed Circles South East.

A further development came to the CoSA initiative in England and Wales, with the launch of Circles UK in 2008. Circles UK was set up by the Quakers to provide a centralised and independent organisation to promote and continue the oversight of CoSA in England and Wales (Nellis, 2009). While Circles UK continues to receive much of its funding from the Home Office (Nellis, 2009), it is an independent charity and the umbrella organisation representing projects wishing to deliver CoSA in England and Wales (Hanvey et al, 2011). In this role Circles UK has six key objectives. These are:

1. 'to ensure the development and delivery of CoSA through the provision and co-ordination of information, advice, training and development support' (Hanvey et al. 2011: 29);
2. to ensure consistent standards of practice through continued development of training and through auditing reviews of regional Circles projects;
3. to assess the delivery of CoSA,
4. to disseminate up-to-date research evidence applicable in the delivery of Circles to all accredited projects (Hanvey et al, 2011; Circles UK, 2013),
5. deal with media inquiries about Circles projects; and
6. manage funding channels and develop public awareness of the scheme; ensure project sustainability; and develop and maintain the profile of Circles activity with strategic partners at local and national levels (Wilson et al, 2010; Hanvey et al, 2011; Circles UK 2013).

In 2009 Circles UK also published a Code of Practice which all accredited projects must follow. The Code of Practice identified six key values of CoSA. This has been retained in the updated version of the Code of Practice and the six values are:

1. 'safety' (no more victims);
2. 'responsibility' (holding offenders to account);
3. 'inclusiveness' (risk management through inclusionary measures);
4. 'community involvement' (recognising the importance of community involvement);
5. 'growth and learning' (supporting and challenging offenders leads to better behaviour and better lives); and
6. 'individuality and respect' (treating individuals with humanity) (Circles UK, 2013).

Alongside these six values, the Code of Practice outlines the operating principles of CoSA. The Code of Practice states that joint working with relevant agencies; voluntary participation by Core Members; and an acknowledgment that a sexual offence has occurred by the Core Members and the harm caused by the offence are required and seen as essential to the successful operation of a Circle (Circles UK, 2013). Furthermore, the

Code of Practice states that CoSA projects should seek to promote openness and honesty; maintain a consistent delivery of Circles to enable growth, learning and development take place; and to ensure all those involved in delivering a Circle are trained in accordance with Circles UK. The final essential principle identified is that CoSA projects should provide data to enable continuous evaluation and ensure service delivery of Circles is informed by current best practice (Circles UK, 2013).

The Code of Practice displays a clear shift in the operation of CoSA in England and Wales compared to the Canadian model of working. This may be indicative of the process of 'routinisation' described by Petrunik (2007), or perhaps as a result of the 'top-down' relationship which regional CoSA projects in England and Wales have with criminal justice organisations (Hannem, 2013). Illustrative of this shift, the most recent Circles UK Code of Practice (2013: 1) states as its mission that:

'Circles UK seeks greater public protection by working towards a substantial reduction in sexual offending by providing a range of services to local Circles of Support and Accountability Projects. Further, it aims to develop greater public understanding of community approaches to public protection'.

The operational delivery section of the Code of Practice, for example, includes a requirement that regional projects are able to demonstrate effective service delivery and have systems in place to maintain public protection and risk management (Circles UK, 2013). The Code of Practice states that this standard must be demonstrated by the project coordinator ensuring communication between the regional project and any partnership agencies is effective; but also evidenced by the regional coordinator(s) conducting a Needs-Resources profile for each Core Member prior to the start of the Circle (a document which is shared with the Core Member and relevant professionals). Coordinators are also expected to routinely attend MAPPA meetings which further highlights the close relationship that regional CoSA projects are encouraged to develop with statutory agencies in England and Wales.

The Code of Practice states explicitly that 'public protection is the Circle projects first priority' (Circles UK, 2013: 15) and that coordinators must

undertake risk assessments of the venues where Circles will take place and of the Core Members of aggression and violence levels. The Code of Practice arguably mentions very little about how 'support' occurs in a Circle and the document is dominated by the public protection/accountability functions of Circles.

The Code of Practice outlines the theoretical framework developed by Saunders and Wilson (2003), which underpins the work of CoSA. This framework consists of three components, Support, Monitor and Maintenance. The Code of Practice describes how these three components target specific areas which have been identified as contributing to reoffending (such as emotional loneliness and social isolation). Saunders and Wilson (2003) say that by addressing these three principles the Circle is able to reduce the Core Members risk of reoffending. This framework therefore is a reference point for all Circles to ensure their work remains focused but is also inextricably tied to risk management and public protection functions rather than the inclusivity of the classic Canadian model (Quaker Peace and Social Witness, 2003; Circles UK, 2013).

Pathways to Desistance

The first part of this chapter has described the emergence of CoSA in Canada, discussed the restorative justice claims for the initiative and charted the changes following its importation into England and Wales. Part Two will examine the two theoretical models of offender rehabilitation which influence CoSA service delivery in England and Wales - the Risk-Needs-Responsivity (RNR) model and the Good Lives Model (GLM). Before such an examination however, the chapter will discuss some of the barriers to reintegration by sex offenders and draw on findings from the desistance literature to identify the process of desistance as well as factors associated with reintegration.

The Process of Desistance

Over the last decade approaches to the management and rehabilitation of offenders have undergone significant changes in light of findings from the desistance literature. Desistance is defined as the process of refraining from or stopping crime or a criminal lifestyle (Maruna, 2001; Harris, 2014) and has focused on the process of how individuals cease offending (Maruna, 2001; Farrall and Calverley, 2006), the factors associated with desistance (Laws and Ward, 2011; Farrall, 2002; Sampson and Laub, 2003) as well as the barriers to this process of reducing and stopping criminal behaviours.

There are two camps or schools of thoughts as to how desistance occurs (Farrall and Calverley, 2006). The first is that desistance is an event, usually a singular event and occurs because of a significant episode or event. Cusson and Pinsonneault (1986) are the strongest advocates of this approach following their research with serious violent offenders in Canada. Their research with 17 ex-robbers found 'shock', fear of injury or death; fear of arrest or prison; and a growing anxiety experienced through aging, to be factors which caused a re-evaluation of their criminal behaviour among offenders.

The second, and more dominant school of thought on how desistance occurs, is that desistance is a process or journey, rather than being an event (Laub et al, 1998; Maruna, 2001, 2004; Farrall, 2002; Göbbels et al, 2012). Laws and Ward (2011) note this process is characterised by a series of peaks and troughs (Laub et al, 1998) whereby the offender may relapse and be subsequently re-tried by the criminal justice system (Maruna, 2001; Sampson and Laub, 2003; Willis et al, 2010). Indeed, several more relapses may occur before offenders finally cease offending (Willis et al, 2010). Farrington (1986 cited Maruna, 2001) thus claims that the journey to desistance is often a long one, with academic studies requiring at least 5years, and preferably 10 years of follow-ups to ascertain whether 'true' desistance has taken place.

Factors associated with desistance

Having outlined the differing approaches used to describe the cessation of offending, the chapter will now explore the various factors said to be associated with desistance. Factors include offenders developing strong social attachments through, for example employment and job stability (Laub and Sampson, 1993); entering into a marriage or a significant relationship (Cusson and Pinsonneault, 1986); becoming a parent (Leibrich, 1993 cited Maruna, 2001); moving away from a deviant or delinquent peer group; or being ashamed of past behaviours (Farrall, 2004). Other factors having included aging; education; military service; prison; spirituality; fear of assault, injury or death; and sickness and physical incapacitation (Laws and Ward, 2011; Sampson and Laub, 2003). More recently cognitive transformation (Maruna, 2001), and hope and optimism (Weaver and Barry, 2014; Farmer et al, 2015), have gained in significance as affecting desistance pathways. Indeed, Weaver and Barry state 'hope, perhaps that things can and will be different, can enhance both motivation and perceptions of personal agency, which, generally manifests as both the capacity and opportunity to exert choice and control over one's life' (Weaver and Barry, 2014: 154-5).

Barriers to sex offender desistance

The applicability of desistance findings to sex offenders has been questioned however. In particular, the focus of a significant relationship or marriage, or having stable employment may be stated to be factors strongly associated with providing general offenders with a pathway towards desistance, such is the stigma and control exerted over sex offenders, it is unlikely they will be in a position to gain stable and satisfactory employment and enter into a relationship, let alone a significant relationship or marriage (McAlinden, 2006; Laws and Ward, 2011; Mills and Grimshaw, 2012). Moreover, many of the measures introduced to manage convicted sex offenders in the community would appear to hinder attempts at and opportunities for a sex offender to desist (Willis et al, 2010; Harris, 2014). Weaver and Barry (2014) add that public protection policies send out

messages that sex offenders are marginalised and unworthy of full reintegration. This is despite a growing research literature that reveals that many of the factors of desistance reduces sexual recidivism (Willis et al, 2010). A further concern is that in the face of a continuum of barriers or obstacles for sex offenders seeking to desist, hope and optimism can diminish (Weaver and Barry, 2014).

Sex Offender Desistance

Until recently, little research on desistance pathways for sex offenders had been conducted. Indeed, as recently as 2015, de Vries Robbe et al (2015: 30) state 'the desistance literature is very sparse in relation to sexual offending'. Initial reviews of the demographics of sex offenders would cast some doubt on the relevance of general desistance factors to sex offenders. For instance, the limited information which is available about sex offenders suggests that many may have previously had a long term relationship, perhaps even family and employment but still committed a sexual offence (Harris, 2014). Indeed, in some cases, it may be that the offending was facilitated by having access to a family member or through employment (Hanvey et al, 2011).

In the last five years however, the amount of studies exploring the specific desistance pathways for sex offenders has increased. One of the first studies to examine desistance pathways of sex offenders was undertaken by Kruttschnitt et al (2000) who studied 556 sex offenders on probation. The results suggested that sex offenders held similar desistance pathways to the generic desistance literature, with a particular decrease in recidivism among those with stable employment histories and especially those who had received treatment. More recent research by Willis et al (2010) and Laws and Ward (2011) reiterated how desistance pathways for sex offenders are mostly the same as for 'normal' offenders, but such are the additional level of measures for sex offenders, this group experienced greater barriers to desistance (Lussier and Gress, 2014).

In 2012, Farmer et al (2012) published findings from a study of 10 sex offenders. The key finding was that sex offenders who were suspected of being active (N= 5) in their offending had less agency, greater feelings of isolation and pessimistic views of treatment. 'Desisters' (N= 5) by contrast, were much more positive, held a better personal identity and could see the value of treatment. These findings were endorsed and added to by Harris (2014) in her study of 21 sex offenders. In her sample, three individuals were categorised as natural desisters⁶¹, with the remaining 18 on a continuum of cognitive transformations 'who emphasized the powerful impact of treatment in their recovery' (Harris, 2014: 1564). An omission was found however, in the narratives of sex offenders. Harris reported that 'narratives were ... replete with negative themes of informal social control' (Harris, 2014: 1573). Despite this, sex offenders identified a range of pathways to work towards abstinence from offending.

A final development to the pathways to desistance from sex offenders is contributed through the preliminary findings of Farmer et al (2015). This research involved 32 sex offenders and found that for many the prompt to change came following their arrest and subsequent treatment programmes which they regarded as having assisted in them in maintaining desistance. "Desisters" were also regarded as displaying stronger attachments to societal goals or values, and the development of positive messages of their future life was an important distinguishing factor between desisters and those defined as non-desisting (Farmer et al, 2015).

Exploring the theories behind CoSA

The first part of this chapter has described the emergence of CoSA in Canada, discussed the restorative justice claims for the initiative and charted the changes following its importation into England and Wales. The chapter will now examine the two theoretical models of offender rehabilitation which

⁶¹ Natural desisters refers to those who cease or abstain from crime without the support of formal or informal control structures (Laws and Ward, 2011; Harris, 2014)

influence CoSA service delivery in England and Wales - the Risk-Needs-Responsivity (RNR) model and the Good Lives Model (GLM).

The management and containment of convicted sex offenders evidenced in so many criminal justice policies focuses on a restriction of opportunities and freedoms. Alongside this strategy, however, there have been attempts to effect 'changes' in the behaviour of sex offenders and their 'treatment' to try and help reduce re-offending. Broadly speaking two theoretical approaches are identified - a 'deficits based' approach and a 'strengths-based' approach. In broad terms the deficits based approach looks at the attributes which cause offending and seeks to eliminate or compensate for these attributes, whilst the strengths-based approach tries to build on the positive attributes in order to take people forward and away from further offending behaviour.

The Risk-Needs-Responsivity (RNR) model and Risk Management approaches to rehabilitation – a 'deficit based approach'.

Deficits-based or risk management approaches to offender rehabilitation state that if a person has identifiable deficits then there is a risk of re-offending and that risk has to be managed (Kemshall et al, 2005; Kemshall, 2008). The primary goal of the risk management approach to offender rehabilitation centres on the reduction of harm by offenders and the enhancement of public safety by addressing those risk factors associated with their offending behaviour (Carich et al, 2010). By accurately identifying risks or 'deficits' within offenders, and treating these deficits, the risk management approach states that reoffending rates will be reduced (Andrews and Bonta, 2006; Carich et al, 2010). Perhaps the most widely used risk management approach to offender rehabilitation is the Risks-Needs and Responsivity or RNR model.

The RNR model emerged in the early 1980s in response to the publication of Robert Martinson's analysis of criminal justice programmes, which reported that 'nothing works'. Martinson (1974) reviewed existing research evidence as to the effectiveness of treatment programmes with offenders and reported that very few programmes had a significant impact on reducing the likelihood

of reoffending (Martinson, 1974). However, literature on “what works” with high risk offenders indicated that more intensive and structured interventions were most suitable (Taxman et al, 2006). It was in this context that the RNR model developed with the quest to identify and develop the most effective treatment programmes for offenders (Bonta and Andrews, 2007).

The model was formalized in 1990 and since then has become ‘widely regarded as the premier model for guiding offender assessment and treatment’ (Andrews et al, 2011: 735). Although various modifications have taken place to the model, to strengthen risk assessment accuracy and incorporate more offender populations (Ward et al, 2007a), the three core principles of the RNR model remain the same. These are the principles of Risk, Needs and Responsivity (Andrews et al, 2011).

Bonta and Andrews (2007) describe how these three key principles seek to address offender rehabilitation. First, the principle of ‘Risk’ asserts that criminal behaviours can be accurately predicted using the correct assessment tools (Hanson et al, 2009) and resources should be targeted towards the highest risk offenders (Andrews and Bonta, 2006; Bonta and Andrews, 2007). While proponents of the RNR approach note that human beings are too complex for 100 per cent accuracy in the measurement tools, actuarial methods are significantly more effective than relying on a clinician’s professional judgment (Andrews et al, 2011). Such concerns are strongly defended by proponents of the model, with Andrews et al (2011) stating that the calls for a less actuarial, structured form of risk assessment amounts to a system which is not an advancement in service delivery by a step-back in time to less effective measures of risk assessment based on professional judgement.

The second principle, ‘Needs’, asserts the necessity of interventions to target criminogenic needs or other deficit factors specifically related to the offenders risk of reoffending, in the design and delivery of those interventions to offenders (Bonta and Andrews, 2007). Criminogenic needs include sexual deviancy; pro-criminal attitudes; and anti-social personality

patterns, to name but a few (Andrews and Bonta; 2006; Mann et al, 2010). The RNR approach argues that in tackling criminogenic needs, offenders pro-criminal attitudes can be adjusted so that they develop pro-social attitudes, which in turn is claimed will reduce criminal behaviours and increase pro-social behaviours (Bonta and Andrews (2007). This very focus on targeting the deficits within the offender is one of the central criticisms levied at the RNR model. It is argued that in focusing on criminogenic needs at the expense of other factors associated with offending results in further stigma and loneliness for offenders (Ward et al, 2006). Bonta and Andrews (2007), however, argue that in addressing non-criminogenic needs such as low self-esteem, at the expense of criminogenic needs such as pro-criminal behaviours, treatment programmes run the risk of producing 'confident criminals'. Indeed, Andrews et al (2011) have suggested this to be a glaring omission from the GLM and one which has only recently been fixed.

The third and final principle of the RNR approach is *Responsivity*. The idea is that treatment programmes must match the design and delivery of an intervention to the offender's mode of learning and abilities (Andrews and Bonta, 2006). In tailoring the programme to the offender's abilities, motivation for engagement is said to increase as well as the effectiveness of the intervention being delivered. Despite this, the application of the RNR model has received criticism for favouring a one-size-fits-all approach to treatment (Ward and Maruna, 2007). Advocates of the RNR model however, respond that many of these criticisms levelled at the RNR model have been answered in earlier work (Andrews et al, 2011).

In line with the findings from the 'what works' movement, Bonta and Andrews (2007) claim that for treatment programmes to be most effective they must follow six key principles. These principles are that programmes should be cognitive-behavioural in foundation; structured to achieve the aims of the session; delivered by trained and qualified staff who are themselves supervised; maintain programme integrity by following the content of the programme; be manual-based; and undertaken in institutions amenable to change (Andrews et al, 2011).

The benefits of adopting a more RNR focused approach has been acknowledged in the literature and as Robinson (2011) states, this has enabled practitioners to target resources and interventions to better manage risk, as well as develop more defensible practice. Over the last decade however, there has been a growing dissent to the focus of the RNR model and implications for offender management.

Ward and colleagues (2002, 2004, 2007b, 2008) have provided some of the most rigorous opposition to the RNR model and the risk management approach to offender rehabilitation. They have argued that the model's adherence to structured, manual-based programme delivery amounts to a 'one-size-fits-all' approach to rehabilitation. This, in turn, can result in a lower motivation by the staff delivering the programme, but also from offenders participating in it (Ward and Maruna, 2007). In contrast one of the successes of the GLM model acknowledged by Andrews et al (2011) is the GLMs success in providing a greater level of motivation among practitioners (for more on GLM see below).

Another of the criticisms made of the RNR model is that the focus on criminogenic needs at the expense of other factors associated with offending results in further stigma and loneliness for offenders (Ward and Brown, 2004). Other criticisms of the RNR model include it paying insufficient attention to the role of human agency and neglecting human nature (Ward et al, 2007b); it fails to account for the role of motivated offenders in successful rehabilitation and its theoretical foundations are unclear (Ward and Maruna, 2007). Advocates of the RNR model suggest that many of the criticisms levied at the model are already covered in the theory.

The Good Lives Model – a 'strengths-based approach'

The significance of such developments is that in recent years Circles of Support and Accountability have increasingly been aligned with the strengths-based approaches, and in particular the Good Lives Model of offender rehabilitation (Wilson et al 2010; Bates et al 2012; Hanvey and

Höing, 2013). Strengths-based approaches developed in response to the growing dissatisfaction of the dominant deficits approaches, and the emergence of positive psychology (Laws 2000). Strengths-based approaches attempts to move the focus away from risk factors and 'negatives' and seeks to build on an offenders 'strengths' (Ward and Maruna, 2007). Once positive traits have been identified, interventions should be tailored to these strengths and thus aid the desistance process and reintegration (Blanchette and Taylor, 2009). Strengths-based interventions are also designed to be as inclusive as possible in order to counteract the 'othering' experienced by sex offenders (Maruna and LeBel, 2009; White and Graham, 2010).

The Good Lives Model (GLM) is one such strengths-based approach. The Good Lives Model claims to build on the foundations of the Risk-Need-Responsivity model (RNR) (Ward and Maruna, 2007; Andrews et al, 2011). Rather than placing an emphasis on treating or correcting 'deficit' risk factors, the GLM holds the belief that recidivism can be reduced by equipping offenders with the strengths or 'tools to live more fulfilling lives' (Ward and Brown, 2004: 244).

The core presumption of the GLM is that all human beings, including those who have offended, have aspirations to seek out and consume what Ward (2002) labels 'primary human goods'. Ward and Maruna (2007) define primary human goods as being the activities which individuals seek which are beneficial to their welfare. The eight primary human goods are Creativity; Excellence in Work and Play; Inner Peace; Spirituality; Healthy Living; Self-Management; Love, Friendship and Intimacy; and Knowledge (Ward, 2002).

According to the GLM, where offenders lack the necessary skills or capabilities to acquire more primary human goods then criminality may result. For the GLM, this failure to achieve primary human goods through legitimate avenues results in further unhappiness for offenders, and is likely to result in offenders seeking to, or requiring the need to gain more primary human goods quicker than they would had they achieved them legitimately

(Yates and Ward, 2008). This inability to satisfy their primary human goods also prevents offenders from participating in behaviour which will provide a more pro-social or better lives (Ward and Stewart, 2003; Ward and Gannon, 2006). Thus the GLM seeks to increase the skills offenders have which will provide offenders with the opportunities and resources to enable them to lead a 'socially acceptable and personally meaningful life' (Ward et al, 2012: 95).

Findings from the desistance and resettlement literature provides some empirical support for the claims advanced in the GLM. Numerous research studies conducted over the last decade have demonstrated the range of problems which offenders experience when attempting to resettle into the community following a conviction for a criminal offence (Social Exclusion Unit, 2002; Lewis et al. 2003; Crow 2006; Hucklesby and Hagley-Dickinson, 2007). The Home Office (2004) published the *Reducing Re-offending National Action Plan* which was intended to address some of the problems experienced by short-term prisoners returning to the community. The Action Plan called for a greater number of statutory organisation to become involved in the resettlement of prisons and identified nine distinct pathways, The pathways included: 'Accommodation'; 'Education, Training and Employment'; 'Mental and Physical health'; 'Drugs and alcohol'; 'Finance, Benefit and Debt'; 'Children and Families of Offenders'; 'Attitudes, Thinking and Behaviour'; 'Public Protection'; and 'Prolific Offenders' (Maguire, 2007).

For sex offenders, just like non-sexual offenders, many of these resettlement pathways also require attention (O'Donnell et al, 2008), however given the low self-esteem among many sex offenders, together with the community hostility and community protection restrictions imposed following their conviction, the practice of progressing along these pathways is described as 'presenting a daunting challenge' for sex offenders (Brogden and Harkin, 2000; Maguire and Nolan, 2007). As such it is stated that sex offenders and other serious or high-risk offenders will experience different resettlement experiences to most short-term prisoners (Brown et al, 2007).

For instance, because of the risk of harm posed by some sex offenders, they are one of the few offender populations who have release from prison planned in detail (Maguire and Nolan, 2007; Appleton, 2010). Although securing accommodation immediately after conviction of release from custody will be planned for most sex offenders, research indicates that the transition from approved premises to 'independent' accommodation can be particularly problematic for sex offenders (Brown et al, 2007). Not only are many housing providers reluctant to house sex offenders or high-risk offenders, but a lack of supervision following this transition may raise concerns for probation staff (Mills and Grimshaw, 2012). The community response to finding that a sex offender has been located in their community can cause the greatest fears for some sex offenders. Violent community responses can also exaggerate the difficulties of resettling sex offenders in the community for those responsible for supervising sex offenders in the community (Brogden and Harkin, 2000; Burchfield and Mingus, 2008; Russell et al, 2013).

In addition to difficulties serious offenders experience in relation to progressing along resettlement pathways, the heterogeneity of sex offenders complicates the effective reintegration of sex offenders (Brown et al, 2007). Some sex offenders will receive convictions as children, while others will have exceeded the age of retirement and may be suffering various health complaints. Levels of contact with family or friends, and the quality of these relationships vary significantly among sex offenders, as do the levels of restrictions which may be imposed (Brogden and Harkin, 2000; Lieb et al, 2011; Harris, 2014). As Hudson (2005) found in her research; many offenders experienced significant fears of their sexual offending identity being exposed as they returned to the community. This fear of exposure not only affected their behaviour and attitudes, but also impacted on their interactions with others (Brogden and Harkin, 2000; Brown et al, 2007). Mills and Grimshaw (2012) also noted how the fears sex offenders anticipated on release often resulted in them finding prison a less daunting prospect. Thus, sex offenders participating in CoSA will likely have experienced a range of

emotions; fears; and social isolation prior to even being considered for a Circle (Appleton, 2010; Russell et al, 2013; Mills and Grimshaw, 2012).

Discussion of the RNR model and GLM in relation to CoSA and the resettlement of sex offenders

CoSA does not adopt one pure theoretical model to ground its work, but draws on a range of approaches. Hannem and Petrunik (2004) state that coordinators and senior managers need to carefully consider the influence of reintegration and risk management concerns. If CoSA is to place too much emphasis on reintegrating the sex offenders, risk factors or behavioural changes may be missed. Equally, too much attention to managing risk factors and preventing relapse without assisting Core Members to develop the necessary practical or social skills may actually exacerbate the likelihood of reoffending by Core Members (Hannem and Petrunik, 2004). CoSA therefore needs to maintain a balance between its support and accountability functions if it is to provide 'a unique alternative to punitive and incapacitating approaches' (Hannem and Petrunik, 2004: 101).

Hannem (2013) contends that Canadian Circles continue to adopt neither purely risk management nor strengths-based approaches, but in fact provide a convergence point for the two approaches. Petrunik (2007) suggests that at this convergence point, there are overlaps with the principles of the risk management (RNR) approach to offender rehabilitation and the practice of CoSA (Petrunik 2007). Equally, however, a number of tenets of the GLM can also be witnessed in the aims of Circles (Wilson et al, 2008; Hanvey and Höing, 2013), for instance the ability of the Circle volunteers to address specific resettlement issues an offender might have; or simply to provide some level of socialisation (Wilson et al, 2008).

The extent to which CoSA in England and Wales successfully balances these two paradigms is unclear. The reasons for this is that at different stages the primacy of one approach appears to overshadow the other. For instance, while CoSA claims to provide assistance and guidance to sex offenders, this is done against a backdrop of internal and external risk

management procedures. This is evident not only through the development alongside the emerging MAPPAs, but also through its increasing use of current probation officers who have been seconded to co-ordinate regional Circle projects by Probation Trusts (Hanvey et al, 2011).

The implementation of risk assessment measures such as the Dynamic Risk Review (DRR)⁶², the encouragement of greater cooperation with criminal justice agencies and the general trend of what Petrunik (2007) describes as routinisation and rationalisation, illustrates how CoSA, an initiative based in restorative justice roots is affected by the New Penology framework (Feeley and Simon, 1992). These also demonstrate the tensions between the risk management or ‘accountability’ functions of CoSA, and the strengths-based or ‘support’ functions which operate in a constant state of flux. The inference for CoSA is that the guiding principles of the Circle of Support and Accountability may be re-worked to be one of Circles of Accountability and Support (Hannem, 2013). The implication being that the closer alliance of the Circles model in England and Wales to criminal justice agencies shifts the theoretical model of CoSA to one framed in the risk management RNR approach that predominates. Hannem (2013) suggests that such a divergence from the classical Circles model could have ramifications for the transferability of CoSA research results given the shift in guiding principles between early Canadian Circles and contemporary Circles in England and Wales. A point which will be discussed in Part Three.

The extent to which CoSA actually lie within a model of actuarial risk assessment techniques and the management of offenders remains debateable however. Although CoSA projects use trained and qualified staff to risk assess and deliver interventions, the interventions by the Circle volunteers in meetings appear to be fluid to the changing needs of Core Members (Hannem 2013). Therefore, CoSA appear to adopt both risk

⁶² The Dynamic Risk Review is a document created by Circles UK to better assess changes in core member risk. The document is based on the Structured Assessment of Risk and Need (SARN – see HM Prison Service, 2005) and consists of 19 questions which are focused on assessing 15 dynamic risk factors within four domains. The four domains are ‘Sexual Interests’; ‘Offence Related Behaviours’; ‘Relationships’; and ‘Self-Management’ (Langford and Bates, 2008)

management (RNR) and strengths-based (GLM) approaches to offender rehabilitation in a more informal way and with greater and lesser priorities depending on volunteer perceptions of their role and of the risks posed.

One possible explanation for this is the backdrop of criminal justice support that each Core Member receives alongside various other interventions they receive (e.g. hostel; benefits; treatment programmes etc.). Equally however, it may be the mentality of the individual volunteers who determine the extent to which CoSA provide support and accountability simultaneously or if one approach has primacy. For instance, where volunteers have no direct experience of working in criminal justice their awareness, understanding and acceptance of risk management practices is likely to be less than those criminal justice agents whose role and decision-making routinely incorporate such thinking. As such while the Circles UK Code of Practice may state that public protection is the first priority of each Circle, volunteers – who ultimately operate CoSA on-the-ground – may well be using their skills and experiences to support Core Members and develop relationships rather than actively engage in clear risk management decisions. Currently however, the research evidence remains inconclusive on the extent individual Circles adopt risk management or supportive roles.

Evidence of the Effectiveness of CoSA

Part Three of this chapter considers the research and evaluations that have already been completed on Circles of Support and Accountability in various parts of the world. It looks at existing studies from Canada, England and Wales, the United States of America as well as the Netherlands. The chapter will begin by assessing some of the findings from Canada as this is where some of the earliest research emerged.

In general terms the responses to the CoSA initiative have been favourable, and McAlinden (2009, 2010a) has commented on the promising results emerging from various Circles projects in Canada and England and Wales. Kirkwood and Richley (2008) and Kemshall and Wood (2007) have

supported the CoSA initiative in England and Wales, with Kemshall and Wood (2007) recommending the CoSA strategy (amongst others) be expanded. Kirkwood and Richley (2008: 236) also added their support for the initiative in Scotland claiming that Circles complement 'established risk management procedures' and provide a positive experience for 'suitable' members of the community to assist in the reintegration of offenders. Further support has come from Silverman and Wilson (2002) who suggested that CoSA were at least as effective as more traditional risk-based approaches to managing sex offenders on release from a public protection perspective, but that offenders 'enjoyment of citizenship' (Hudson, 2003: 220) increased as a result of their participation in a Circle.

Research from Canada

Much of the research and evaluations on CoSA in Canada has focused on the Ontario CoSA project. Indeed, with the exception of the National Replication study (Wilson et al, 2009) all of the Canadian research findings discussed below are based on the Ontario Project. One of the earliest empirical studies to examine the CoSA initiative was conducted by Carla Cesaroni (2001). Cesaroni interviewed 12 Core Members who were in a Circle or whose Circle had recently ended. The research sought to examine Core Members experiences of the reintegrative process, difficulties in reintegration and the Circles role in the reintegrative process. It also examined the composition of the Circle; the Core Members motivations for joining and how they felt the Circle had provided support for them particularly in times of crisis (Cesaroni 2001).

One-third of Core Members reported that they had initially joined the Circle to avoid harassment from the police; one-third joined because they had no other support mechanisms in place; and the final third of participants saw the Circle as their last resort. Ten of the 12 Core Members interviewed felt that the Circle had aided them by offering practical and or emotional support. The other two Core Members felt that the Circle had been crucial in helping them to socialise appropriately (i.e. adult appropriate relationships). When asked about the role of the Circle in providing support, half of the Core Members

felt that without their Circle they would have re-offended, while a further three said their Circle had stopped them returning to drugs or alcohol. Thus the Circles provided some positive outcomes for three-quarters of the offenders. When asked about the involvement of the state in CoSA service delivery, respondents reported that they would be less willing to participate in such a Circles initiative (Cesaroni, 2001).

There are some issues in this research however. For instance, the findings that one-third of Core Members joined CoSA to avoid harassment from the police raises questions about the extent to which CoSA is providing both support and accountability functions. It could be argued that these Core Members were some of the higher risk offenders and used CoSA as a means to try and reduce the level of police surveillance on them. Such a motive may be an indicator that the sex offenders in question were preparing to reoffend. With such motivations, it could also be argued that the 'failure' rates of CoSA would be expected to be greater as Circle volunteers provided the statutory sector with details of possibly risky behaviours. An interesting comparison, which unfortunately is not presented in the paper, would be to compare the degree of overlap between the one-third who reported joining to avoid harassment and the one-quarter who felt the Circle did not provide any positive outcomes.

In 2005, one of the largest and 'most rigorous evaluations of CoSA' (Richards, 2010: 20) was undertaken. The research, also conducted in Canada, by Wilson and colleagues (2005), evaluated a Circles project in south-central Ontario. The evaluation had two elements: the first was to collect qualitative data on experiences of CoSA from Core Members, criminal justice professionals and volunteers, and ask the wider community about CoSA. The second part was a recidivism study with a matched sample of 60 Core Members and convicted sex offenders.

The first element of the study interviewed a number of stakeholders involved in Circles, including Core Members; volunteers; and criminal justice

professionals, to examine their experiences of CoSA. The wider community were also surveyed to garner perceptions of the work of CoSA and its operation in their community. The study produced positive results for the Circles model from all stakeholder groups, with two-thirds of Core Members reporting they would probably have reoffended if not for the Circle (Wilson et al, 2005). When asked how they felt the Circle has assisted them to reintegrate, 90 per cent reported their Circle to have lessened the difficulty. The same research also stated that three-quarters of criminal justice professionals would support an expansion of the initiative, albeit with some amendments to CoSA guidelines and operations (Wilson et al, 2005).

The second element of the study was an evaluation to compare recidivism data of 60 sex offenders who had received intervention from CoSA and 60 who had not, in order to attempt to better examine the influence of CoSA on recidivism. The study reported that the sample was matched on their risk levels, the time and location of release, and the treatment interventions they had received. Recidivism was defined as being when a sex offender had been charged with, or convicted of a new sexual offence, or had breached an order of the court. Despite the Core Member group having a slightly higher risk-level than the comparison group, the results from the study showed that Core Members who had received a Circle had a 70 per cent reduction in sexual recidivism with an average follow-up period of 4.5 years. Where recidivism did occur among Core Members, the new offences were of a less serious nature than those committed by offenders who did not receive a Circle (Wilson et al, 2005). The results from these early evaluations undoubtedly influenced the development of the CoSA initiative across other jurisdictions and the expansion of CoSA in the UK. However, as the earlier discussion about the transfer of policies between jurisdictions illustrated, transferring the results from between countries can be problematic. The implications of this will be discussed shortly.

In 2007 Wilson and colleagues conducted a national replication study of the 2005 recidivism evaluation using data from projects across Canada. The sample this time consisted of 47 sex offenders who had received a Circle

and 47 matched sex offenders who had not received a Circle and again, the two groups were matched according to their risk levels, the time and location of release, and the treatment interventions they had received. This study again reported positive results which suggest that CoSA interventions can significantly reduce reoffending amongst sex offenders. The study reported an 83 per cent reduction in sexual recidivism and a 72 per cent reduction in all types of recidivism with a 34 month follow-up. As with the 2005 study, recidivism was defined as being when a sex offender had been charged with, or convicted of a new sexual offence, or had breached an order of the court (Wilson et al, 2005). Although the national replication study has a shorter follow-up period than the 2005 study, the results are still viewed as containing positive support for the Circles initiative (see also Wilson et al, 2010).

Issues do arise surrounding the validity of these Canadian results and more generally of their applicability to CoSA in England and Wales. Some of these concerns will now be explored in more detail. Numerous commentators, for example, have cautioned against the premature acceptance of positive results from other jurisdictions without adequate contextualisation (Jones and Newburn, 2002; Raynor and Vanstone, 2002). The same caution is required when interpreting the results from Canada on the benefits of CoSA, and assuming transferability to CoSA interventions in England and Wales. Although the establishment of CoSA projects in England and Wales has been highly influenced by the work in Canada, there are some notable differences at an operational level.

Volunteers in Canadian Circles, for example, meet with Core Members each day, whereas in England and Wales, contact with volunteers is once a week (McAlinden, 2006; Wilson et al, 2010). Other key differences are that Canadian Circles were developed with strong religious affiliations (Wilson et al, 2005) and undertook work inside the prison (Hudson, 2005), neither of which are particular features of the operation in England and Wales. Canadian Circles also have limited involvement from statutory bodies,

whereas in England and Wales projects often have a strong association with the probation service (Nellis, 2009; Hanvey et al, 2011).

These differing styles of development could lead to changes in the demographics of sex offenders who are willing to participate in a Circle as Cesaroni (2001) found, but could also significantly affect the extent to which CoSA adopts a strengths-based paradigm or has a 'strengths-based veneer' to a largely risk-based grounding. Acknowledging the differing origins, McAlinden (2010a) states that because of the strong association with statutory criminal justice agencies, CoSA in England and Wales may well have been more influenced by the risk management (RNR) model so familiar to criminal justice agencies rather than the Canadian model with its organic roots in faith communities (Nellis, 2009; McAlinden, 2010).

Overall the Canadian model with its strong restorative justice traditions; organic rather than systemic development; and its focus on supporting reintegration over offender management may result in incompatible comparisons (Hannem, 2013). McAlinden (2010: 170) also acknowledges this point suggesting that Canadian Circles offer 'an enhanced and potentially more effective means of meeting offenders resettlement needs'. Consequently, while there is some evidence from Canada that Circles 'work' and reduce the risk of re-offending (e.g. Wilson et al, 2007), the differences in the operation of CoSA and the conflicts between the philosophies between Canadian Circles and Circles in England and Wales may mean that the applicability and transfer of these findings cannot be fully applied in England and Wales. This will be discussed at the end of the chapter.

Research from England and Wales

Until recently no research comparable to the Canadian reconviction studies had been undertaken in England and Wales. Instead research had taken a more qualitative approach (Wilson et al, 2010). Similarly to the Canadian research, most of the research on CoSA in England and Wales has focused on one project – Hampshire and Thames Valley (HTV). Two of the first studies conducted in England and Wales focused on the development and

progress of the two pilot projects of Hampshire Circles and Thames Valley Circles (Quaker Peace and Social Witness, 2003; 2005). The research sought to portray the experiences of Core Members, volunteers and criminal justice professionals and their participation in, or attitudes towards the use of CoSA in these areas. As in Canada, the early results showed widespread approval of the initiative and praised its transformative effects.

Like with much of the future research in England and Wales the data collected were from qualitative interviews with various participants of the initiative (Wilson et al, 2010). However, much of this research has lacked an independence among the researchers and lacked an academic rigor to the methodology. As such early outputs were often descriptive accounts of an emerging initiative, shedding light on the experiences of participants and the evolution of the model in England and Wales.

In 2007, a further evaluation of HTV Circles was undertaken. The research, conducted by Bates et al (2007) evaluated 16 Circles established between 2002 and 2006. This research used case files held by HTV Circles on each of the 16 Core Members to identify problematic behaviours exhibited by Core Members. The results from the self-evaluation showed that while no Core Member was reconvicted of a sexual offence, nine Core Members displayed behaviours which were described as problematic and which had been reported to statutory authorities by the Circle (Bates et al, 2007). Subsequently, four of the nine Core Members were recalled to prison for breach of parole licence conditions, while the remaining five Core Members remained in their Circle⁶³. It should be noted that statutory agencies were aware of some of these problematic behaviours in some instances (Bates et al, 2007; Wilson et al, 2010). Unlike the Canadian studies, the authors commented that the recall to prison of four Core Members was regarded as a success of the Circles in achieving their public protection responsibilities. Equally, the continued contact with three of the four Core Members was said to clearly represent the ability of Circles to provide support and

⁶³ No information is available on whether these Circles restarted.

accountability functions simultaneously (Bates et al, 2007; Wilson et al, 2010).

In 2011, Bates and colleagues conducted another evaluation of the HTV Circles. The study used data over a seven year period (2002-2009) to examine case files on 60 sex offenders who participated in Circles. The study used demographic data on each Core Member, and 'outcome data'⁶⁴ to identify whether Circles had addressed any criminogenic factors the Core Member had and how this had been achieved. The study also sought to examine Core Members progression along the seven pathways identified by OASys and Circles role in this progression. The level of risk posed by Core Members who participated in the Circles varied across all risk levels, with 16 identified as low risk, 17 medium risk and 22 assessed as being high or very high risk. The majority of Core Members had been convicted of contact sexual offences (85%), and most had received some formal treatment (SOTP) prior to joining the Circle (95%) (Bates et al, 2012).

The 2011 HTV study reported that 75 per cent of the Circles had completed the objectives of their Circle⁶⁵ and therefore the Circle was deemed to have resulted in positive outcomes for the offender. One Core Member had been reconvicted for a sexual offence (downloading images of child abuse) but given his previous offences involved a prolonged period of abuse of a female child, the reconviction for a non-contact sexual offence might represent some success on behalf of the Circle. A further seven Core Members were recalled to prison (5) or received a Sexual Offences Prevention Order (2) while in the Circle (Bates et al, 2012).

A development noted by Bates et al (2012) from their previous research was that seven Core Members in the 2011 study withdrew prior to the completion of their Circle. Explanations for this withdrawal were not clear, but the

⁶⁴ Outcome data refer to whether the Core Member had been reconvicted or recalled to prison; as well as any positive developments the Core Member had made. This information was obtained through the authors access to OASys (Bates et al, 2012).

⁶⁵ Objectives of the Circle are often intangible factors, though examples might include encouraging the Core Member to engage in adult appropriate relationships; develop Core Members self-esteem; and provide support in becoming involved in the community (Bates et al, 2012).

authors suggest that in some cases there was evidence of progress made by the Core Member in addressing dynamic risk factors. The study also reported that the review of data suggested that the Core Members emotional well-being had improved in 70 per cent of Circles; 61 per cent of Core Members had begun to display pro-social attitudes and behaviours; while 50 per cent felt supported in seeking employment from their Circle (Bates et al, 2012).

In 2012, Circles South East (formerly HTV Circles) published a report charting their first 10 years in operation. This was the first attempt to compare reconviction data of Core Members and non-Circle participants. The first part of the report contained the views of various stakeholders including Core Members; a volunteer; other intervention providers and the transcription of a brief interview with a Circle conducted by a project coordinator. In a similar vein to other HTV evaluations, the report portrays CoSA to be an effective and efficient approach to supporting and managing sex offenders. However, the perspective of Core Members; a funder and to some extent from the volunteer, depict CoSA as working alongside criminal justice interventions but with a distinct and different approach. These perspectives fail to provide clear indications of the processes in CoSA which aid Core Members in a way that other interventions cannot. Another issue with the validity of these perspectives is the lack of information on how the respondents were selected, or details of the focus of the questioning used to generate such findings.

The second part of the 10 year report was an attempt by Circles South East at a comparison of the outcomes of CoSA and non-CoSA participants. The report compares the data of 71 sex offenders who received a Circle in HTV, with data of 71 sex offenders who had applied for a Circle but did not receive one. The study reviewed reconviction data from both groups by accessing the PNC data (which would show re-arrest or reconviction). The authors state that while the study is not strictly a randomised control experiment, it provides the first UK comparison of Circles participants and non-Circles participants.

Core Members deemed eligible for inclusion in this comparison study must have been in a Circle for at least 90 days. The 90-day period was applied in line with other research on CoSA as it was felt Core Members would not have benefitted from the Circle prior to the 90-day period (Circles South East, 2012). Apart from the 90-day period, no other details are provided on the selection criteria for the inclusion of Core Members to this research. Of the 71 Core Members who had been involved in CoSA for more than 90 days, all were subject to MAPPAs, with 55 per cent being assessed as requiring Level Two attention (Circles South East, 2012).⁶⁶ 80 per cent of the CoSA group had previous convictions for contact sexual offences with 85 per cent of this group having committed their offences against children, while one of the CoSA participants was not convicted of a sexual offence but was in a Circle. The report also notes that 12 of the 71 Circles included in the study were still active (Circles South East, 2012).

The control group sample was taken from 149 unsuccessful referrals which HTV had retained since 2005. Circles South East (2012) notes that many of this group were not suitable to be compared with the group of sex offenders who received a Circle. Reasons individuals were not deemed to be suitable for a Circle included sex offenders still being in prison when the referral was made, and the sex offender displayed a lack of motivation to the coordinator (Circles South East, 2012). At the Circles South East conference, it was also stated that some of those referred also posed too high a risk of reoffending. (Bates et al, 2012) The report states that the control group was narrowed to 71 though no criteria or rationale are included in the report for this reduction. As such, like other research on CoSA in England and Wales the report lacks a necessary degree of methodological detail or academic rigor to validate many of the report findings. The report does however, state that as far as records could ascertain this group consisted of those who would be suitable for a Circle but had withdrawn prior to the Circle commenced. Such a

⁶⁶ Level Two MAPPAs requirements involve the active supervision by more than one agency of the offender because of their risk of harm or where the offender has specific needs which require co-operation across agencies.

statement however, still raises concerns about the role of motivation and desistance.

In an attempt to produce a method of comparing the risk levels of the two groups, the study devised a system of measurement, according to the Risk Matrix 2000 (RM2000) risk scores of each offender. Those assessed as being low-risk were assigned one point; a medium-risk according to the RM2000 scored two; high risk scored three and a very high risk score was assigned four points. The results show that of the 71 Core Members who participated in CoSA; 19 were identified as low risk; 25 medium-risk; 17 high-risk; and five very high risk, with three scoring zero as their RM2000 score was not known. The CoSA group received a total score of 148. The same method was used to calculate the overall risk of the control group. A score of 124 was reached, consisting of 10 low-risk; 29 medium-risk; 12 high-risk and five very high-risk. An additional 15 sex offenders in the control group received no score however. This was because three were not able to be traced on the PNC, while the risk level of 11 sex offenders was not known. Such a high number of omissions in the data create problems for the comparison of risk. For instance, it could be argued that if the majority of control group whose risk was not known were assessed as being medium or high-risk then the control group could have a higher overall risk score than the CoSA group. While it may be that with all the risk scores available, the CoSA group are calculated as having a higher risk score, such methodological problems are endemic in much of the existing CoSA research and significantly undermines the validity of any research findings made in such reports.

Other issues with the Circles South East (2012) study include some issues already identified in other research, including the relatively short follow-up periods (52months for CoSA group and 55months for the control group) in comparison to other research on sex offender recidivism which recommends 10-year follow-up periods. The HTV research also provides inadequate details of the control sample to ensure validity in the results when compared

to the Core Member group – for example no details on the average age; sentence served or offence categories were provided for the control group.

Despite these omissions and limitations the report continues by comparing the reconviction records of the two groups. Nineteen of the CoSA group were reconvicted during or after their Circle. One contact-sexual reconviction occurred, though this was an offence committed prior to the commencement of the Circle. Six Core Members were recalled; two breached their existing Sexual Offences Prevention Order (SOPO); while one Core Member received a SOPO. Three Core Members were convicted for failing to comply with their sex offender notification requirements; and three were reconvicted for a non-contact sexual offence and a further three reconvicted for a non-sexual offence. Meanwhile, there were 20 reconvictions among the control group. Seven sex offenders had committed a new violent offence; there were two non-violent offences; six offenders failed to comply with the requirements of their sex offender registration and two sex offenders were reconvicted for non-contact sexual offences. Unlike the CoSA group, however, three of the control group received a new conviction for offences committed following the submission of their application for a Circle.

It could be argued that through the Core Members' participation in a Circle, the detection of pro-criminal or risky behaviours which predicated the committal of a contact sexual offence increased and subsequently led to their recall. Equally, the higher categories of offences committed by the control group during the follow-up period raises concerns as to the eligibility criteria used for CoSA participants. Given that there were no reconvictions for sexual or violent offences among the CoSA participants (except one historical) but 10 reconvictions among the control group, perhaps it could be argued that HTV Circles were in fact selecting the 'good bets' or lower risk offenders. Arguably it may be the case that because CoSA is a resource-intensive initiative regional projects coordinators prioritise motivated offenders who are less risky but have specific social needs which require attention to facilitate their reintegration.

In 2014 three evaluations were completed and published on CoSA in the United Kingdom. One of these was the report from which this thesis emerged, one was a review of four Circles in Fife, Scotland (Armstrong and Wills, 2014) and the final evaluation was completed by Kieran McCartan and colleagues. This last evaluation involved a case file review of 32 Core Members from two of the original CoSA pilot Projects. The two CoSA Projects were Hampshire and Thames Valley (HTV Circles) and Circles run by the Lucy Faithfull Foundation. The review of case files was from the period April 2008 to March 2010 (McCartan et al, 2014). A substantial amount of the records collected by the projects was found to be incomplete. Despite this, the findings of the report were that CoSA supported risk management through proactive monitoring and was not duplicating the work of statutory agencies. Support to aid Core Members efforts at reducing social isolation and to support compliance were provided by both CoSA Projects. The report was favourably disposed toward Circles and stated that CoSA generally complements statutory support services (McCartan et al, 2014). The report also acknowledged comments made in this review of existing research that there remains a lack of long-term independent evaluations of CoSA impact on recidivism in the UK or the rest of the world.

Research from the rest of the World

In 2012, a further addition to the evidence base of CoSA emerged with data published on the Minnesota CoSA (MnCoSA) project in the USA. The Minnesota Department of Correction (MnDoC) initiated plans for a CoSA project in early 2007, and the project began operating in 2008. Like with CoSA models in Canada and England and Wales, MnCoSA lasts 12 months and consists of one Core Member and four-six trained volunteers in each Circle (Duwe, 2013). However, there are also differences between MnCoSA and the CoSA models in Canada and England and Wales. For instance, like with CoSA in England and Wales the development of the MnCoSA project was closely aligned with the statutory sector. However, unlike the Circles projects in England and Wales, Circles projects in Minnesota begin contact with offenders four weeks prior to their release from custody (Duwe, 2013).

An additional difference between the Minnesota project and those in England and Wales is the role of MnDoC (Duwe, 2013). As with Circles UK, MnDoc not only provides oversight of the Circles, but as part of its role it is responsible for the evaluation of the project. Therefore the research from Minnesota provides a unique set of findings. The research uses a randomised control trial to evaluate whether the Circles have decreased rates of recidivism among a group of 62 Level 2 sex offenders⁶⁷ who had volunteered to participate in a Circle. Because of the management provided by MnDoC, between 2008-2011 31 Level 2 sex offenders were released from prison and randomly assigned to join a Circle, while 31 offenders were randomly assigned to a control group. Duwe (2013) also reports that aside from prior sexual convictions the two groups displayed no statistical differences⁶⁸.

The results of the study show that the reconviction rate for offenders who participated in a Circle was nearly half that of the control group (25%/45%). However, Duwe (2013) was quick to dismiss the significance of such results given the low follow-up rates and the relatively low reporting and recidivism rates among sexual offences and offenders. While it could be argued that these results indicate CoSA to be an effective contributory factor to reducing risky behaviours through support and accountability, without clear evidence of how the Circle provides these mechanisms the results must be read in isolation.

The author is more positive of the results of the evaluation which state that participation 'significantly reduced the hazard ratio for three of the five recidivism measures' (Duwe, 2013: 157). The three measures include 'rearrest', 'revocation' and 'reincarceration'. The two other recidivism measures 'reconviction' and 'resentenced' were large but did not meet statistical significance. Such results suggest that the Circles are able to provide a supportive element to the Core Member, despite the partnership

⁶⁷ Level 2 offenders are those offenders assessed as posing a moderate risk to the public (Duwe, 2013)

⁶⁸ Those who participated in a Circle were significantly more likely to have a greater number of prior convictions for sexual offences.

with statutory partners. Duwe (2013) adds that the findings from MnCoSA are consistent with the findings produced in Canada and England and Wales that Circles can reduce recidivism rates and can address both support and accountability functions. Moreover, the author claims that these findings support the concept that CoSA is a relatively flexible model of offender intervention and is flexible to application in different jurisdictions (Duwe, 2013). Echoing claims made earlier in this chapter, while the CoSA initiative does align to some extent with the principles of the GLM, there appears to be a broad range of theoretical models at work involved from both risk-management and strengths-based approaches to offender rehabilitation. There are also contributions from control theories⁶⁹, social learning approaches⁷⁰ and restorative theories, all combining to provide offenders with the opportunities and incentives to desist from sexual crime (Duwe, 2013).

Despite these concerns, the first randomised control experiment undertaken on CoSA suggests that 'MnCoSA is an effective program[sic] for sex offenders' (Duwe, 2013: 160) and are on the whole consistent with the results reported above. Duwe (2013) states that the results from MnCoSA 'suggests that CoSA can be effective within the United States, but also that it is a relatively flexible model that can withstand adaptation in another milieu' (Duwe, 2013: 160), even though the extent to which it directly reduces recidivism will require longer follow-up periods.

The final research to be examined originates from the Netherlands, conducted by Mechtild Höing and colleagues (Höing et al, 2013, 2014,

⁶⁹ 'Control theories' take an opposite view to many criminological explanations for crime by explaining that crime would occur naturally if individuals were left to their own devices. Prevention therefore requires 'controlling forces' to restrain an individual from committing crime (Vold et al, 2002: 177). Gottfredson and Hirschi (1990: 89) state that those with high self-control are 'substantially less likely at all periods of life to engage in criminal acts'. In contrast, those with low self-control will be highly likely to commit crime. Low self-control is said to be due to the poor supervision or lack of punishments for deviant acts during childhood and the disapproval of loved ones or significant others being the most important factors in determining high or low self-control (Haywood and Morrison, 2013).

⁷⁰ Social learning theories hold at their core, the belief that criminal behaviour is a learned response. This learning is through interactions and observations of social and non-social situations and criminal behaviour is learned from messages which are favourable to crime and delinquency (Vold et al, 2002; Haywood and Morrison, 2013).

2015a, 2015b). This research uses quantitative and qualitative data gained from interviews with Core Members, volunteers and 'professionals'. In particular work early this year (Höing et al, 2015a) examines the process of desistance of Core Members participating in CoSA and exploring the contribution of CoSA to this process.

Data were collected from 17 Core Members on three occasions during the period of the Circle: at the start, after six months and after 12 months. Risk levels of Core Members varied but the majority (N= 12) were either medium or high risk (N= 6). At the six month point, interviewees felt that the Circle had helped them to varying levels. Some noted changes to thinking patterns and gaining greater self-confidence. The source of change was cited as the input of volunteers who gave different perspectives and from criminal justice interventions. Positive changes continued at the 12 month stage. Although three Core Members were unavailable for interview, the authors noted positive changes to Core Members social skills and thinking patterns as being most prominent. Core Members again credited the Circles as the source for these changes.

Feasibility Studies

As the CoSA initiative has spread a number of feasibility studies have also been undertaken in the UK (Armstrong et al, 2008; Haslewood-Pócsik et al, 2008), Ireland (Clarke, 2011) and Australia (Richards, 2010). In each of the studies, the authors recommended the adoption of CoSA in their jurisdiction or a piloting of the initiative. With the exception of Clarke (2011) all three studies involved a small number of interviews with Core Members and or volunteers and stakeholders to examine motivations for joining a Circle and experiences of joining the Circle; the operation of the Circles; and their impressions of the Circle.

While the majority of these feasibility studies found similar results for sex offenders, motivations for joining the Circle and their impressions of the Circle, the attitudes of the volunteers to their role in the Circle varied across the studies. Haslewood-Pócsik et al (2008) in their evaluation of Circles

operating in Manchester, noted that while volunteers were able to challenge the Core Member, and did so, most saw their role to be a supporter of the Core Member and to assist them to develop adult appropriate relationships or gain employment. Armstrong et al (2008) in their interviews with volunteers at the HTV Circles project, in contrast, noted how the volunteers saw their role to ultimately be the prevention of harm and saw the disclosure of information about a perceived increase in the risks posed by a Core Member as a priority.

Despite the broad agreement of all the feasibility studies to either pilot or adopt the CoSA model, there are several differences and issues with the studies. Firstly, only some of the studies interviewed participants of the Circles (Armstrong et al, 2008; Haslewood-Pócsik et al, 2008; Richards, 2010;) and the number of interviews were generally small in each case. The studies were also considering applying different models to those adopted in England and Wales; but also were being considered for implementation in different jurisdictions which might affect the transferability of findings (Hudson and Lowe, 2009). As such, the generalisability of these results needs to be considered. However, given the very limited qualitative research on CoSA, these studies provide some useful information on CoSA practice and experiences of those involved in Circles.

Conclusion

Much of the literature looked at in this chapter aligns the CoSA initiative to a strengths-based approach to reintegrating offenders, but such are the pressures upon this initiative to manage and control a dangerous group of offenders, the extent to which these positive-based measures can be applied remains unclear. This chapter highlights the dual role of CoSA and the pressures placed on the Circles to adopt more traditional, risk-based measures to maintain public protection, whilst also seeking to be inclusive in dealing with the offender's needs. From the theoretical analysis, this dual role of providing support and accountability would appear to place CoSA in a

difficult position, and it is likely to result in constant navigation between risk-based and strengths-based approaches.

Although the implementation of CoSA in England and Wales is different to that in Canada, recent research from Minnesota supports the transferability of the model across jurisdictions and the Canadian research in particular supports the notion that the concept is able to reduce the risks of reoffending (Wilson et al, 2005; 2009), while also providing a better quality of life for Core Members (Wilson et al, 2007; see also Höing et al, 2014, 2015a). Questions do, however, remain about the experiences of Core Members to such interventions. Should the CoSA concept be adapted to serve merely as a policing mechanism or intelligence-gathering tool, its effectiveness in the applicability of research will be significantly restricted (Hudson, 2005; Hannem, 2013)

Throughout this chapter only a handful of sources can be drawn upon to understand the experiences of sex offenders to the statutory provisions imposed on them and even less to the experiences of sex offenders to the CoSA initiative. In the last year, there has been an increase in the amount of publication from around the world though many involve small numbers of Core Members. Hudson states that whilst a great deal of attention is being given to sex offenders and their treatment, very little time has been given to understanding their experiences (Hudson, 2005). This thesis attempts to add to this knowledge.

Chapter Three: Methodology

Introduction

This chapter describes the strategy used throughout this research to explore the attitudes and experiences of Core Members who have participated or are still involved with CoSA. All interviews were conducted using the appreciative inquiry approach which is described in detail below. The chapter will outline sample criteria and issues related to access, the aims and objectives of this study, the design of the research and the various ethical issues related to a study of this kind. The chapter will also describe the analytical approach utilised before describing the characteristics of the sample.

This PhD thesis was linked to a wider research project undertaken at the University of Leeds. The data collected here were also available to the wider research project (Thomas et al, 2014). However all 'offender' data were collected by myself. In total, 30 semi-structured interviews were conducted with convicted sex offenders or Core Members from across England and Wales. These Core Members were recruited from nine regional CoSA projects including: *Circles East*, *Circles North East*, *Circles South West*, *Cumbria Circles*, *Greater Manchester Circles*, *Leicestershire and Rutland Circles*, *Lucy Faithfull Foundation Circles*, *North Wales Circles*, and *Yorkshire and Humberside Circles of Support and Accountability*.

All of the Core Members who were interviewed were currently in a Circle or had recently finished their Circle. Short questionnaires collected demographic data, and administrative data containing details of each Core Members previous interventions were requested from each of the CoSA projects to supplement the interview data. Ethical approval for the research was gained from the University of Leeds Research Ethics Committee.

Sampling

To be considered for inclusion in the research, Core Members were required to have participated in a Circle for a period of approximately six months or more; be aged over 18 years; and have a good understanding of English. The decision to only include those Core Members who had participated for approximately six months was to allow a broader range of experiences for the Core Members to comment on and provide a more complete perspective of the Circle process.

The recruitment of Core Members was also governed by an ethical and professional awareness of the harms of over-researching potential participants. These concerns exempted Circles South East from participating in this study given the focus which this project has been subject to in previous research (Quaker Peace and Social Witness, 2003, 2005, 2008; Bates et al, 2007, 2012; Circles South East, 2012) though the remaining nine active CoSA projects were contacted. To that end, approximately 40 Core Members or half of the Core Member population participating in CoSA at the time of the research were deemed eligible for inclusion in the research.

Access

Gaining access to undertake primary research prohibits many potential research projects from even starting (Lofland and Lofland, 1984; Bryman, 2008), and accessing sex offenders in the community has been reported to be even more difficult as many sex offenders do not want their offending identity to be revealed (Hudson, 2005; Burchfield and Mingus, 2008; Harris, 2014). From its original inception, this research project had the support of the former Chief Executive of *Circles UK*, Stephen Harvey, and its Board of Trustees. This support allowed for an access point through which potential participants were identified to the researcher. Details of regional CoSA projects were provided by *Circles UK*. More importantly this support enabled

me to access the regional CoSA project coordinators who provided exceptional help, guidance and assistance throughout this research.

Preparation for interviews began as early as May 2011 with introductory telephone calls to regional CoSA project coordinators. In some cases, face-to-face meetings followed. Throughout the study I also attended some of the *Circles UK* Research and Evaluation meetings, attended a volunteer training course and attended regional project meetings. In addition I attended a number of *Circles UK* events including project coordinator forums, National Conferences and strategy meetings.

These meetings provided invaluable insight into the operation of *Circles UK*, regional projects and provided links to the regional CoSA project coordinators. The calls and meetings also enabled me to explain the aims of my research to project coordinators, gain advice from experienced practitioners and negotiate access at a time of increased workloads for project coordinators (Noaks and Wincup, 2004). These prior introductions also facilitated smoother access to Core Members as project coordinators were made aware of the inclusion criteria for Core Members to be invited.

Maintaining a good relationship with regional CoSA project coordinators was vital as potential participants were identified, approached and invited to participate in the research by regional CoSA project coordinators and were the gatekeepers to Core Members. Gatekeepers have previously been acknowledged to have exerted pressure on individuals to participate in research or by 'blocking' access to certain individuals or groups (Emmel et al, 2007; Liamputtong, 2007).

Core Members were accessed via regional project coordinators. Regional project coordinators received a copy of the Information Sheet which was to be passed to Core Members and contained details of the research. Project coordinators were also briefed on the aims of the research and the importance of Core Members not being encouraged or coerced into participating in the research. Core Members were also to be provided with

an Information Sheet at this stage. This approach was adopted due to the geographical-spread of interviewees and the limited finances preventing travel to these interviewees on two separate occasions. This approach was deemed to be most beneficial to the Core Members and the research as it provides some familiarity for the Core Members in the shape of the regional project coordinator.

Four Core Members were contacted directly by myself after they had consented to their details being forwarded by the regional CoSA project coordinator. I contacted each Core Member initially by telephone to introduce the research and invite the Core Member to participate. All Core Members were given at least a one week cooling off period between invitation and being interviewed to ensure that they had adequate time to decide on whether to participate or not. Those Core Members who agreed to participate in the research then chose a preferred date for the interview. Core Members also received a mobile telephone number for myself which they could use to ask any questions about the research following recruitment and prior to the interview, or after the interview. The contact details of my primary supervisor were also provided. In order to ensure potential participants had not been unduly influenced to participate in the research, prior to interview all participants were reminded that participation was voluntary; that the research was independent of *Circles UK* and the regional CoSA projects, and told of my affiliation to the University of Leeds.

Approached and Realised

A total of 42 Core Members were identified and approached to be interviewed by regional project coordinators. Seven Core Members declined to participate in the research outright; two Core Members were identified but not invited as they had been recalled to prison or it was anticipated that they would be convicted for a new offence at an imminent court date. Three Core Members were unable to attend the interview due to illness, two of these Core Members were described by regional project coordinators as having pre-existing stress and anxiety issues. This gave a 71 per cent successful completion rate on interviews and an 83 per cent successful response rate

(which includes the five Core Members who had initially agreed but who were not interviewed). Participation in this research was voluntary.

Research Design

Aims and Objectives

The aim of the wider project which this PhD study emerged from was to 'assess the extent to which CoSA Projects contribute towards the reintegration of adult sex offenders into the community'.

The more specific objectives of the research were to:

- Examine the frontline practices of CoSA;
- Describe the cohort of Core Members who have completed or are currently in a Circle;
- Explore the experiences of Core Members;
- Identify the key components which are associated with re-integration in the community;
- Explore the background, motivation and experiences of volunteers;
- Investigate the links between the operation of CoSA and statutory provisions for sex offenders, such as Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA), probation and the police;
- Assess the relative importance of factors and services in the process of reintegration for sex offenders;
- Contribute towards the development of good practice.

This thesis focused specifically on Core Members' perceptions of the Circles of Support and Accountability process, how they viewed the effects of their participation in Circles of Support and Accountability. Like with the wider project, the overall aim of the PhD study was to examine Core Members' perceptions of how their participation in Circles of Support and Accountability affected their re-entry.

More specifically the objectives of the thesis were to question:

- What problems, if any, were identified by Core Members on re-entry and prior to joining a Circle?
- What strategies of compliance and control, if any, were adopted by Core Members following their conviction and in the community?
- How did Core Members perceived themselves to have changed since participating in Circles of Support and Accountability?
- How do Circles of Support and Accountability aid in re-entry and which specific contribution to this process does it make?

In order to satisfy the aims and objectives of this PhD project a mixed method approach was selected. As the main aim of this research was to assess the extent to which CoSA contributes towards the reintegration of released sex offenders in the community in England and Wales it was important to explore the experiences and perspectives of Core Members who had participated in CoSA and other interventions, as well as their reintegration and their aspirations for their future life. The use of semi-structured interviews was selected as the most suitable tool to achieve the aims and objectives of the research because the interviewer is able to ensure that the responses are relevant to the research questions, while enabling follow-up questions to be asked and phenomena to be better explored (Crow and Semmens, 2008; King and Wincup, 2008; Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009). A questionnaire was administered at the end of each interview and was devised to collect important data about each participating Core Member's basic demographics; details about their CoSA experiences; and past interventions. Quantitative data collected by the regional CoSA projects which detailed offender background, offence history and treatment programmes received, were also analysed to assist in sample description. This is referred to as administrative data.

Interviewing Sex Offenders

The use of semi-structured interviews as the primary method of data collection with Core Members was not without problems. Previous research

studies involving sex offenders highlighted the many difficulties associated with access and retention of this group (Kaplan et al, 1990; Allnock, 2009). Burchfield and Mingus (2008) reported that achieving a response rate of less than 15 per cent is not unusual when working with sex offenders, with some survey research gaining just 2.4 per cent successful responses (Vandiver and Walker, 2002). Indeed, Waldram (2007: 963) was warned the likelihood of eliciting any information from sex offenders in prison was very low:

When I first developed the idea of working with sexual offenders in prison, I was told by various individuals 'in the know' that these inmates would never talk to me.

Reviewing previous research on interviewing sex offenders also highlighted potential problems because of the social isolation, marginalisation, and low levels of self-esteem that sex offenders experience (McAlinden, 2006, 2008, 2010). Given the current status of sex offenders in contemporary society to be the modern-day folk devil (Cobley, 2000; Spencer, 2009) it is understandable many sex offenders will not be overly enthusiastic about identifying themselves to others. Waldram succinctly highlights the difficulties securing participants stating:

These are men for whom suspicion and caution are a mantra. In prison, whether in protective custody or general population, they struggle for survival, usually anonymously (Waldram, 2007: 964).

The interview itself also poses problems for researchers seeking to collect data. In particular there is a high potential for manipulation by sex offenders – which has been described as essential for their offending to take place. Waldram (2007) perhaps summarises this perception most candidly, stating how many prison staff who work with sex offenders see them as ‘masterful liars’. This is confirmed by Blagden and Pemberton (2010) who note how some sex offenders will deny the event occurred, while others will distort the sequence of events leading up to the offence, the extent to which offences were planned, or culpability for the offences. Others have raised the possibility that researchers inadvertently collude with sex offenders when the sex offender is discussing deviant sexual fantasies, misogynistic attitudes and low victim empathy skills and the researcher does not challenge these views (Garrison, 1992; Polaschek and Gannon, 2004; Cowburn, 2006; Hearn et al, 2007).

Appreciative Inquiry: An innovative methodology

A potentially more fundamental problem within social science research, and indeed other disciplines, has been a tendency for researchers to commence research by searching for, and identifying, a problem or issue and then seeking to develop a solution. This means research focuses on ridding society of its 'unappreciated', 'troublesome' or 'immoral' behaviours. Research which begins from this perspective has been described as being problem-orientated or correctionalist in its focus (Matza, 1969). For Matza, this correctionalist approach creates interference in our abilities to understand what we originally sought to inquire into and, more importantly, only permits the accumulation of surface facts regarding a particular phenomenon and criticism of related enterprises. Given the nature of this research and the psychological and emotional wellbeing of the participants in this study, such an approach raised some practical and ethical dilemmas and thus an alternative approach was sought.

Some years earlier, Matza (1969) advocated an alternative approach to these correctionalist or problem-oriented approaches through the inclusion of appreciation and empathy. By seeking to include the concepts of appreciation and empathy into research, Matza was one of the first people in criminology to use the appreciative approach. Through the inclusion of appreciation and empathy, a sharp contrast is provided between correctionalist approaches and a deeper approach to research in the form of the appreciative approach. As such, the appreciative approach allows researchers greater engagement with social patterns and more nuanced human behaviours, enabling a greater understanding of individuals, meaning, and their place in society (Matza, 1969).

The appreciative approach has expanded since its inception and the most significant expansion came in the field of organisational change in the 1980s and the work of Cooperrider (Cooperrider and Srivastva, 1987). Liebling et al (1999) note how Cooperrider's model of appreciative inquiry seeks to extend

Matza's original appreciative approach, by encouraging individuals to reflect on their best or most positive experiences. This focus on the 'unconditional positive question' (Ludema et al, 2000) not only shapes the direction of the interview and the relationship between interviewee and interviewer, but also shapes the wider process of inquiry (Bushe, 2011). This more positive reimagining and refocusing allows research to begin by allowing participants to express their most memorable positive experiences, rather than seeking to confirm or defend against pre-supposed criticisms or weaknesses as problem-oriented research often does (Liebling et al, 1999; Ludema, 2002; Michael, 2005).

As well as the focus on the 'positive' or 'best' moments, one of the central concepts of appreciative inquiry was its potential to be 'generative' or 'transformative'. Bushe (2007) states that in recent years, as the interest in appreciative inquiry has intensified, so the principle of 'generativity' has diminished. Indeed, Bushe (2007) argues that simply refocusing on the positive is unlikely to achieve much. Instead, appreciative inquiry and its use of positive questioning must be tied in to the use of 'generative questions' with positive questions being a mechanism to generate new knowledge, thinking and ultimately a better future (Bushe, 2007). In essence then, appreciative inquiry focuses on the strengths and positives within an organisation or set of policies, and seeks to encourage and enhance it (Carter, 2006; Robinson et al, 2013), by asking participants to reflect on what might be (Cooperrider, 1990; Liebling et al, 1999). Through this process of examining what might be, or the identification of what is missing and what interviewees want more of, appreciative inquiry provides not only a valuable means of exploring experiences, but also in generating the potential for change.

No 'blueprint' or guide to doing appreciative inquiry was made by the creators, instead they focused on developing and innovating the principles underpinning the approach (Cooperrider and Whitney, 1999). As the practice has become more 'fashionable', however, one model above others has emerged as the most common method of applying appreciative inquiry into

research: the 4-D cycle (Bushe, 2007; for more on 4-D see below). At the core of the appreciative inquiry cycle is the choice of the affirmative topic (Cooperrider and Whitney, 1999). The importance of affirmative topics lies in the foundations underpinning appreciative inquiry, namely that knowledge and 'organisation destiny'⁷¹ are intricately woven, and from this relationship the 'seeds of change' become implicit from the very first question. Thus affirmative topics are important to the use of appreciative inquiry as their selection influences and shapes the focus of the study and thus the data collected.

Surrounding the affirmative topics, and as a mechanism for the exploration and innovation of these affirmative topics, is the 4-D cycle. The 4 stages of the cycle are: *Discovery*, *Dreaming*, *Design* and *Destiny*. The first stage in this cycle begins with *Discovery*. Where appreciative inquiry is used to its fullest, the initial stage of the interview, *Discovery*, would identify the best moments or practices. Cooperrider and Whitney (1999) state that it is important at this stage to use positive questions. This positive focus begins the process of planting the 'seeds for change' as hope in the organisation develops. *Dreaming* - This stage uses the stories and insights from the *Discovery* stage and Cooperrider and Whitney (1999) state a 'convergence zone' is created whereby future visions can be interwoven with actual experiences (Cooperrider and Whitney, 1999). The third stage, labelled *Design*, encourages participants to provide more concrete ideas for the future (Cooperrider and Sekerka, 2006; Bushe, 2011). The fourth stage, *Destiny*, seeks to develop strategies to incorporate and sustain these ideals. Cooperrider and Sekerka (2006) state that as participants become more involved in this process, the momentum for change, together with long term sustainability, can increase. Cooperrider and Whitney (1999) add that in the initial part of *Destiny* the change appears more successful where 'solutions' or outcomes are not neatly presented but free for self-organisation.

⁷¹ Organisation destiny is a term used by original AI advocates (Cooperrider and Whitney, 1999) and refers to the process of incorporating ideas on how to improve the organisation (or individual) with strategies or solutions to bring about change. This is discussed in more detail below.

Despite the overt-focus on the positive questions used at the *Discovery* stage, appreciative inquiry does not seek to deny the existence of problems. Indeed, such an attitude would be likely to have very damaging effects on the quality of research (bias) and the value of the data collected, but also for participants. Bushe (2007: 5) for instance, states that not providing a space for the negatives or attempting to ignore the negatives can 'turn people off'. Instead, it is recommended that negative responses be reframed by the interviewer and the interviewee encouraged to *Dream* and *Design* 'what could be' and 'what should be' and thus encourage generativity (Bushe, 2007). Liebling et al (1999) have argued that such an approach produces alternative perspectives or 'other realities' in the search for 'truth'. Thus rather than searching to prove a particular problem as typical research does, appreciative inquiry facilitates the uncovering of a wider and deeper understanding of the problems organisations and individuals experience (Liebling et al, 1999; Ludema, 2002; Cooperrider and Sekerka, 2006).

Given the potential problems which could be encountered in researching a difficult participant group, in particular the propensity for sex offenders to be negative-focused, depressed and socially isolated, as well as having personal characteristics including collusion and deceit, the adoption of positive questions was an attractive alternative. It was also a realistic option given its successful implementation in other studies (Liebling et al, 1999; Cowburn and Lavis, 2013; Robinson et al, 2013) and would help to minimise feelings of negativity related to their offending, whilst also promoting individual wellbeing. Opportunities for collusion and deceit would also be reduced by the focus of the interview beginning with best experiences rather than a focus on past actions (Liebling et al, 2001; Michael, 2005; Liebling, 2014).

One of the distinctive features of appreciative inquiry is its affinity to the theoretical underpinnings of strengths-based approaches and CoSA. On the face of it, the affinity between appreciative inquiry and CoSA is unclear given their very different origins. However, the initial link is the positive focus which both models claim to use in their approach to achieve a greater purpose. At

its simplest level, this is evidenced in appreciative inquiry through the use of positive questioning as a mechanism for discovering, inspiring and inducing transformative changes, while CoSA has adopted strengths-based approaches which also have a positive starting point. A deeper examination of these approaches reveals further similarities in the theoretical underpinnings of appreciative inquiry and CoSA. Although emerging at different times - appreciative inquiry in the late-1980s and strengths-based approaches in the late-1990s - both approaches rejected the traditional mainstream thinking. For both appreciative inquiry and strengths-based approaches, the rejection was founded on the prevalence of negative-orientated approaches which sought to find fault and be backward focused (Cooperrider and Whitney, 1999; Ward and Maruna, 2007).

Cooperrider and Whitney (1999) state problem-solving methodologies to be 'out of sync' with the realities of contemporary living which in turn has led to 'fire-fighting' or reactive responses being proposed rather than encouraging the greater understanding of knowledge. Of greater concern for Cooperrider though, was the damage of this approach to human development and progression, of the emergence of 'visionless voices' (Cooperrider and Whitney, 1999: 22). Similar concerns are also cited by advocates of strengths-based approaches who rejected the damaging consequences of 'othering', stigmatisation and restrictions which were furthered by traditional risk-based approaches (Maruna, 2001; Laws and Ward, 2011).

Therefore, the close examination of appreciative inquiry and the theoretical underpinnings of the CoSA model reveals a common focus or affinity with the promotion of positive experiences and future 'success' (Robinson et al, 2013). As a result of the affinity to the promotion of positive experiences and future 'success' (Robinson et al, 2013), it was felt that appreciative inquiry would also offer a research approach which is equivalent to what the CoSA initiative also aims to achieve and thus may in itself be unconsciously familiar to participants.⁷²

⁷² For a more in-depth discussion of the application of an appreciative inquiry framework to interviews sex offenders see Thompson (2014).

The Interviewing Process

The day before the interview, those Core Members contacted by myself were contacted via SMS message to confirm they were still willing to participate in the research and positive messages were received by all. On the day of the interview, most Core Members arrived at the venue with the project coordinator or a volunteer, while those Core Members who were contacted directly by the research team arrived on their own.

Interviews took place at a variety of locations including charity organisation buildings, the meeting room of a hotel, probation offices, and Quaker meeting houses. All venues were suggested by the regional project coordinator.

Before the interview commenced, the Information Sheet was presented to Core Members and it was offered to be read out by the interviewer. Core Members were also asked for permission to record the interviews. Core Members received £20 in high street vouchers to cover travel costs. It is normal practice to use such payments in criminal justice research in order to cover travel expenses, to acknowledge the impact of research on participants' time and to increase the likelihood of participation by offenders within research projects (Appleton, 2010; Harris, 2014). Vouchers were given to Core Members prior to the interviews.

Interviews took place between February 2013 and June 2013 with the majority of the interviews having been completed over a seven week period from the beginning of February 2013. The first four interviews were planned as pilot interviews to ensure that the interview schedule was fit for purpose for use with Core Members. Arranging the final two interviews took longer than anticipated because Core Members had not been available or ill, and one Core Member who had been identified, was subsequently recalled to prison prior to the interview. The remaining interviews were undertaken in May 2013 and June 2013. Training was given by one of my supervisors,

Professor Birgit Völlm, who is an expert in interviewing with this group given her professional background as a forensic psychiatrist.

Interviews were initially expected to last approximately 1 hour – 1 hour 30 minutes, though most lasted far longer with the average length being 2 hours 24 minutes. The shortest interview lasted 1 hour 35 minutes and the longest interview lasted 3 hours 40 minutes (see Table 3.1).

Table 3.1: Interview Length for Core Members

Interview Length	Number (N)
1 hour – 1 hour 30 minutes	0
1 hour 30 – 2 hours	8
2 hours – 2 hours 30 minutes	8
2 hours 30 – 3 hours	9
3 hours – 3 hours 30 minutes	3
Over 3 hours 30 minutes	2

None of the Core Members who participated in the interviews requested that their data be withdrawn and many Core Members thanked me for allowing them to have a voice.

Data Analysis

The recordings of all 30 interviews with Core Members were transcribed. During transcription all recordings were stripped of any identifiers and held securely within the University of Leeds premises (Israel, 2004; Flick, 2009). Questionnaire data were also stripped of identifiers while the administrative data were anonymised by each CoSA project prior to being passed to the research team. Interviews were initially transcribed verbatim, and significant pauses and actions were noted (Harris, 2014), however, due to the excessive use of pauses used by Core Members many of these pauses were removed as were ‘erm’, ‘ya know’, ‘like’ and such fillers. Following

transcription, Core Members were randomly assigned a typical English name such as *Jack* or *Christopher* in place of their actual name.⁷³

Anonymised transcripts were then loaded into the NVivo software tool (Version 10) to assist in analysis⁷⁴. Some preliminary themes were identified during the interviews and new themes emerged as the interviews were analysed. Analysis typically focused on Core Members post-release experiences, in particular in CoSA, however, such was the frequency of recollections to the past that some attention was directed to what Core Members “had left behind” (Troy).

This research used a mixture of inductive and deductive approaches to data analysis, but was primarily inductive in style. Maxfield and Babie (2011) argue that a combination of inductive and deductive reasoning can enable a greater level of understanding to be achieved. This decision was also influenced by the acknowledgement that literature reviews, previous research findings and subsequent personal opinions can undoubtedly, and subconsciously, play a role in determining the direction of research (Braun and Clarke, 2006). As Matthews and Ross state, I am not ‘atheoretical’ and therefore, I, like:

all social researchers, students, leading academics, government officers and independent consultants come to their research with a certain amount of theoretical, cultural and disciplinary baggage as well as other suitcases full of very creditable values, beliefs and desires to change the world (Matthews and Ross, 2010: 37).

The influence of some theoretically driven analysis cannot therefore be discounted but will be acknowledged where I am aware of it.

The adoption of an appreciative inquiry framework was intended to focus Core Members on their specific experiences and minimise the formation of pre-existing expectations of themes to emerge. Themes which were anticipated to have emerged from the data included over-inflated optimism

⁷³ Pseudonyms were also used in place of the real names of the volunteers when a volunteer’s name was mentioned during an interview.

⁷⁴ The use of computer programs such as NVivo have previously been criticised for alienating the data from the researcher in this case (Seidel and Kelle, 1995). In this case, however, the process of collecting and transcribing interviews combined with recourse to notes made in a research diary ensured a real engagement with the data and the participants.

by Core Members towards the value of CoSA, frustrations of certain criminal justice interventions such as the sex offender register and licence conditions, as well as high levels of social isolation. The strategy to allow Core Members to focus on their specific experiences appears to have had some success as a number of other themes consistently emerged throughout the interviews. Transcripts revealed that all 30 Core Members frequently spoke of experiencing high levels of stigmatisation and extensive difficulties living life as a convicted sex offender, and they reported numerous and extensive barriers to re-entry. Core Members also spoke of the prevalence of temptations, and discussed some of the strategies to manage these (or gave instances where they succumbed to these). Many Core Members also spoke of seeking out an offence-free life and therefore attitudes to compliance and control, as well as processes of change were explored with success stories as well as 'failures' being evidenced. The 'bottom up' emergence of these themes bear little resemblance to the anticipated themes and this is consistent with Braun and Clarke's (2006) findings. These inductive themes have become the central focus of this thesis.

Ethics

In recent years there has been an increasing focus on the ethical dilemmas surrounding socially sensitive research. Sieber and Stanley (1988: 49) define sensitive research as 'studies in which there are potential social consequences or implications, either directly for the participants in the research or for the class of individuals represented by the research'. The present research topic is socially sensitive because of the potential threat it poses to those Core Members who agree to share their experiences about CoSA interventions. Participants will be asked to discuss their experiences with CoSA, experiences of the criminal justice system and factors related to their risk of reoffending. As such, a number of ethical issues arise. However, as Sieber and Stanley (1988) argue some of the most pressing issues in society are 'socially sensitive', though failing to research these issues is as much a neglect of responsibility as is ignoring the ethical concerns.

To ensure that the research achieved high ethical standards, the research sought to adhere to the Code of Ethics of the British Society of Criminology (2006) and the European Union Code of Ethics for Socio-Economic Research (Dench et al, 2004) at all times. These codes advocate responsible research, and therefore efforts were taken to ensure participants were not pressured into answering questions or agreeing to participate in the research (Bulmer, 2008; Blagden and Pemberton, 2010). In line with Sieber (1982; 1992), the main issues of concern are: informed consent; confidentiality; the reduction of harm; and the use of data.

Obtaining informed consent

In adherence with the University of Leeds Code of Practice and the British Society of Criminology Code of Ethics (2006), it was essential that all potential research participants fully understood the aims and objectives of the research study, as well as their role in it, prior to consenting to participation. Consent was assumed to be an on-going issue and the responsibility for consent was tailored accordingly (Sieber, 1993; Bryman, 2008; Bulmer, 2008). In order to ensure that informed consent was given by interviewees, all potential participants were contacted by their regional CoSA project coordinators and given information about the research project and given a copy of the Information Sheet.

The Information Sheet given to Core Members requested their participation in the research and explained the purpose of the research, their role in it and the reason for their selection (Flick, 2009). Participants were also informed of the confidentiality arrangements which applied to any data generated, how the data would be used, and the researcher's organisational affiliation, including University contact details in case any potential participants want to ask questions prior to the interview (Israel, 2004; Noaks and Wincup, 2004; see also *Appendix One*).

After this initial contact, potential participants were given a 'cooling-off' period to allow them to consider their decision and to ensure Core Members understood the commitment they were making without feeling pressured into

participating in the study (Blagden and Pemberton, 2010). All participants who remained willing to participate were reminded of the purpose of the research, their role and how their data would be used at the start of the interview.

The need to avoid harm and distress through research is essential to improve the validity of the research (Sieber, 1992), but also to allow the possibility of further research in the field (Israel, 2004). As such the Information Sheet made clear participants' could withdraw consent at any time prior the researcher undertaking analysis of the interviews. None of the Core Members made such a request but any data collected on the participant would have been erased had a Core Member withdrawn (British Society of Criminology, Code of Ethics, 2006). Once informed consent was ensured, all interviewees were required to sign two copies of a paper based consent form (see *Appendix Two*). One copy was retained by the participant and the other was held by myself at the University of Leeds. Signed copies of the Information Sheet which were retained by myself were secured in a locked cabinet on the University of Leeds premises.

Permission to voice record interviews was sought from all participants in the Information Sheet. Some researchers have noted participants to be reluctant to agree to recorded interviews due to fear of information being used against them (Holt and Pamment, 2011), however, the request to record interviews was agreed by all Core Members without any questions. Core Members also confirmed their agreement by ticking a box on the Consent Form. Receiving permission to record the interview enabled me to 'stand-back' and listen to their views more fully (Champion, 2006). Recording the interview also assisted in ensuring that the meaning of the data were more accurately captured. To secure the recordings, files were transferred onto the University system from the digital recorder and then erased from the digital recorder (David and Sutton, 2011).

Confidentiality

A particular issue in research with offenders, especially in relation to socially sensitive research (Lee and Renzetti, 1993) relates to the extent to which participants are offered confidentiality (Sieber, 1992; Israel, 2004). While criminological research and research involving offenders more generally has held a non-disclosure stance regarding confidentiality (Noaks and Wincup, 2004), and the potential future harms which may be disclosed (Cowburn, 2010). This study did not offer 'absolute confidentiality', but instead offered 'limited confidentiality' (Cowburn, 2002; King and Liebling, 2008). Prior to the interviews Core Members were told that any information which they disclosed relating to planned self-harm or serious harm to others would not be regarded as confidential. This decision was influenced by Scully's argument that the 'protection of the endangered person takes precedence over the rights of the informant' (Scully 1990: 23). In line with Scully's (1990) precedence of protection of 'endangered persons', this research sought to ensure all data were confidential except where a disclosure of serious harm was made by an interviewee.

Some Core Members made disclosures of some concern. Disclosures of concern differs from disclosures of serious harm as the content contained disturbing information about sexual attractions, was non-specific and more importantly was known by those managing the Core Member. For instance, Core Members revealed to having deviant sexual fantasies, but did not refer to a specific victim, or they held aspirations for a future life in counties with a reputation for targeted child abuse. In all instances, these disclosures were known to the regional project coordinators as they were raised by coordinators prior to, or after the interviews with the relevant Core Members. Had regional project coordinators not raised these matters and a disclosure of serious harm was made advice would have been sought from the supervisory team as soon as it was safe to do so.

The Reduction of Harm

Efforts to reduce harm did not just relate to the participants, but also involved a consideration of my own safety.

Possible harm to participants

To avoid causing unnecessary stress, embarrassment or shame this research did not actively seek details of past offences or offending in the course of interviews. Some Core Members did still make disclosures and reveal their offending history and efforts were made to monitor Core Members for the duration of the interview to ensure they did not become depressed or apprehensive having made this disclosure.

An additional consideration is that, because CoSA works with 'desisting' offenders, it was important to be aware that participants may have felt uncomfortable about the topics of the interview, or became distressed or upset when talking about their previous offending or treatment by the criminal justice system. For these reasons it was important that interviews were conducted carefully and sensitively. I sought to ask basic questions at the beginning of the interview to help the interviewees becoming more relaxed. On the occasions where Core Members appeared upset a pause in the interview was always suggested. None of the Core Members requested to stop the interview or have a break (except for refreshments or a toilet break). To further minimise possible harm, arrangements were made with the Chief Executive of *Circles UK* for Core Members to be able to speak with the project coordinator or volunteers following my interview. Projects were seen as being an appropriate first step to provide this support given their knowledge of the research and experience working with the Core Member.

Possible harm to the researcher

It was also important to consider and minimise the risk of harm to myself as a result of conducting interviews (Lee and Renzetti, 1993). To achieve this, a number of measures were adopted. A shared project email was set up in the first instance and telephone calls were directed to a University telephone

number or project mobile phone which only I had access to. Such measures were put in place to avoid any participants becoming inappropriate but also to assist with the safety of the researcher (Blagden and Pemberton, 2010).

The interview process itself also required consideration. Firstly, the location for interviews were arranged by regional project coordinators and efforts were made to restrict venues to office space within the CoSA project; or at the same premises used for the Circle meeting (Davies, 2000). Where this was not possible, the location of the interview was somewhere which the project coordinator deemed safe for both interviewer and interviewee. While interviews were taking place, I took simple safety measures such as dressing appropriately, sitting close to the door and keeping all personal belongings to a minimum and in a bag close-by (Coles et al, 2010). During the interview I sought to minimise any appearance of collusion with, or acceptance of any previous offending. Various suggestions as to how to avoid this are given throughout the literature (Garrison, 1992; Coles et al, 2010), including not smiling too quickly after receiving a response to a difficult question or by minimising the perceived harms of the offence through using terms like 'only once' or 'just downloading images' (as opposed to contact offences, which would be seen as a more severe offence) (Hearn et al, 2007).

As a further safety precaution I also carried a mobile phone at all times when conducting an interview and it was agreed that if I felt threatened at any time during an interview I would leave the room. As an additional measure, prior to each interview, I contacted my supervisor or a CoSA coordinator by phone, informing them of the location of the interview, and on completion of the interview, confirmed the interview was finished and I had left the participant.

Given the nature of the research topic, and the potential for disclosures of child abuse and sexual offences to be revealed during the interview, it was important I had a strong support network in place should an interviewee reveal upsetting or disturbing aspects of a Core Members previous offending

(Dickson-Swift et al, 2008; Coles et al, 2010). This included family, friends, colleagues and my supervisors. Details of the University of Leeds Counselling Service were also obtained (Blagden and Pemberton, 2010).

Data Use and Storage

As the consent forms collected by the research team contained personal details (names), storing data safely and securely was essential (Sieber and Stanley, 1988). All paper-based consent-forms were stored in a locked cabinet inside a restricted access area within University of Leeds premises (see Hearn et al, 2007). Identifiers had been removed from transcripts before printing these were held in a separate locked cabinet as an extra security precaution. Electronic or digital data were stored in a secure and restricted area on the University of Leeds computer system. This included recordings of interviews and the administrative data received from CoSA projects.

Sample Characteristics

In order to provide some context to the distribution of Core Members interviewed, questionnaire data and administrative data have been used to describe the sample. All Core Members interviewed in this research were male.⁷⁵ The ages of Core Members ranged from 18 years to 65 years, with the average age of Core Members being 43.3 years. This is similar to results recently found by McCartan et al (2014) who found that most Core Members in their sample were 40-49. Table 3.2 provides a more detailed breakdown of the age of Core Members who were interviewed in this study.

At the time of the interviews over one-third of those interviewed had participated in a Circle for over 12 months (see Table 3.3).

⁷⁵ There was one Circle for a female Core Member planned in one of the projects but this was only in the early preparation stages and would not have met the criteria for inclusion for approximately 6 months.

Table 3.2: Age of Core Members (Five year intervals)

Age	Frequency (N)
18-23	13.3% (4)
24-29	3.3% (1)
30-35	6.6% (2)
36-41	26.6% (8)
42-47	6.6% (2)
48-53	20% (6)
54-59	6.6% (2)
60-65	16.6% (5)

Table 3.3: Length of time in CoSA

Length of Time	Number
0-5 months	4
6-8 months	6
9-12 months	5
12+ months	11
Ended	4

At the time that the interviews were conducted, three Core Members had not participated in CoSA for over six months and three Core Members had finished with CoSA, but all six were still interviewed. The decision to include these six Core Members was carefully considered. Of the three Core Members who had participated in CoSA for less than six months at the time of interview, all three had been involved for over 5 months and therefore were close enough to the 'approximately six month' inclusion criteria. This figure is also well in excess of the minimum three-month involvement recommended by other researchers in this field who have undertaken a significant amount of the existing research on CoSA (Bates et al, 2014). The three Core Members who were interviewed after their Circle had formally ended were also included as two of the Core Members had finished within a month of the interview and the third remained in contact with the coordinator so all had clear recollections of their time in their Circle.

Half of the sample (N= 15) Core Members had two or more index offences listed in the administrative data. The most frequent index offence was Sexual Assault Child Female for which 14 Core Members had been convicted. Two Core Members had been convicted of Rape of an Adult Female and three Core Members had committed Rape of a Child Female. Nine Core Members had received a Community Order, while 18 had

received a custodial sentence. Of those who served a custodial sentence, most received a sentence of 4-5 years.

As McCartan et al (2014) and Clarke et al (2015) found in their case file reviews, some administrative data held by the CoSA projects were incomplete. Gaining a complete picture on past interventions was difficult to assess due to recording methods in the administrative data. However, using the administrative data and interview data it was established that a total of 17 Core Members had participated and/or completed a prison-based Sex Offender Treatment Programme and 16 had participated and/or completed a community-based Sex Offender Treatment Programme. Of the 30 Core Members in this study, only four had not completed a Sex Offender Treatment Programme though most had received counselling or another intervention programme.

The recording of past interventions and risk levels was more difficult to determine due to a lack of data attributed to Core Members and inputted within the administrative data. Risk levels were taken from OASys and from RM2000⁷⁶. As Table 3.4 shows, RM2000 assessments found most Core Members were assessed as being either High-Risk (N= 9) or Medium-Risk (N= 8). Risk levels were unknown for seven Core Members⁷⁷.

Table 3.4: Risk Assessment Scores on Risk Matrix 2000

Risk Level	Frequency (N)
Very High	6.66% (2)
High	30% (9)
Medium	26.6% (8)
Low	13.3% (4)
Unknown	23.3% (7)

⁷⁶ Risk Matrix 2000 is a static risk assessment tool primarily used by the police. OASys – the Offender Assessment System is used by the Prison Service and probation to assess the risks and needs of offenders.

⁷⁷ The RM2000 scores were unknown for 7 of the Core Members because the data were not properly recorded or available to the coordinator. This inaccuracy in data input has been acknowledged in other studies (McCartan et al, 2014; Thomas et al, 2014; Clarke et al, 2015).

OASys assessments varied depending on the focus. For instance, when risk of harm to children was assessed, 14 Core Members were assessed as posing a Very High-Risk (N= 2) or High-Risk (N= 12), and five posed a Medium-Risk. The risk was unknown for nine Core Members (see Table 3.5). The overall risk of harm Core Members posed to the General Public was assessed as being lower than the risks they posed to children with only three Core Members assessed as posing a High-Risk of harm and one being a Medium-Risk. 16 Core Members were assessed as Low-Risk while the risk was unknown for 10 Core Members (See Table 3.6).

Table 3.5: OASys Risk of Harm – Children

Risk Level	Frequency (N)
Very High	6.66% (2)
High	40% (12)
Medium	16.66% (5)
Low	6.66% (2)
Unknown	30% (9)

Table 3.6: OASys Risk of Harm – General Public

Risk Level	Frequency (N)
Very High	0
High	10% (3)
Medium	3.3% (1)
Low	53.3% (16)
Unknown	33.3% (10)

Also of note from administrative data were that over two-thirds of referrals came from probation (N= 23); 17 Core Members were subjected to SOPOs and 13 were subject to licence conditions at the point of referral to CoSA.

Chapter Four: Stigma and Isolation

Introduction

Since the *News of the World* newspaper's 'name and shame' campaign in the summer of 2000 that resulted in demonstrations and vigilantism across England and Wales, the anger and hostility directed towards those convicted of sexual offences has been a permanent feature of life for them (Thomas, 2005). The consequences of this intense media, public and political condemnation is that sexual offenders represent one of the most stigmatised groups in society (Garland, 2001). Revealing stigmatised identities results in a number of consequences for the convicted sex offender whether this stigma is real or perceived. This chapter is divided into three parts. The first part will examine some of the problems of stigma and isolation which Core Members encounter, the second part will assess the ways they cope with this and the third part will examine the role of Circles of Support and Accountability (CoSA) in assisting Core Members to overcome some of the stigmatisation and isolation they experience.

To assist in this examination Goffman's framework of stigma will be adopted. Goffman defines stigma as a process through which an individual becomes disqualified from gaining full acceptance in his or her community due to some form of deeply discrediting characteristic. This characteristic can be something which is visible to others - a discrediting stigma - or one which is hidden but would damage one's social identity - a discreditable stigma (Goffman, 1963). Sex offenders typically have a discreditable stigma, however, their stigma may be revealed either through media reporting, disclosures made by the convicted sex offender, or through them being known in the area. The consequences of a sex offender's stigmatised identity being revealed include the individual facing social rejection, violence, mental health issues, as well as concerns about an increase in the risks of reoffending posed by someone who is so isolated. As such, stigmatisation is

one of the most pertinent social issues in contemporary times (Garland, 2001).

The first part of this chapter discusses the range of stigmatising situations which Core Members experienced. Stigmatising situations include the reactions they receive from family and friendship networks; concerns about discovery by strangers and the role of the media. Acts of violence were also frequently raised by Core Members and these stigmatising situations will be discussed in more detail later in the chapter. The chapter will also discuss Core Members experiences of returning to the community as a convicted sex offender and the effects of criminal justice restrictions as a source of stigma. The distinction between Core Members perceptions of stigma and the reality of their stigma will also be explored.

The second part of the chapter will examine the reactions to these stigmatising situations and the coping strategies or stigma management techniques which Core Members use. Four stigma management techniques were routinely used by Core Members prior to their participation in CoSA. These stigma management techniques are labelled as 'Passing', 'Passive Self-Isolation', 'Active Preventive Withdrawal' and 'Denial'. These will be discussed in more detail further in the chapter.

The final part of the chapter will explore how Core Members feel CoSA has helped them to overcome some of the issues surrounding their stigmatisation and isolation. Here the focus will be on the value of Circle meetings and activities with the volunteers, the formation of trusting relationships with volunteers, and the importance of the virtual Circle through the use of mobile phones. A further two stigma management techniques were identified as being used by Core Members since they participated in CoSA. These stigma management techniques are referred to as 'Preventative Telling' and 'Transcendence'.

In conclusion the chapter finds that Core Members struggled to cope with the levels of stigma and isolation which was associated with a conviction for

a sexual offence and the strategies they used prior to CoSA failed to enable them to overcome many of these problems. Following their participation in CoSA many of the Core Members spoke much more positively about being able to manage the levels of stigma and the reduction in stigma had enabled them to envision a better life.

Stigma and Isolation

The concept of stigmatising and excluding individuals was developed by Goffman in his classic work '*Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identities*'. According to Goffman (1963) stigma is used to signify disgrace of a particular behaviour or set of behaviours in order to discredit individuals. A stigmatised person is someone who possesses 'an attribute that makes him different from others ... and of a less desirable kind – in the extreme, a person who is quite thoroughly bad, or dangerous or weak' (Goffman, 1963: 11-12). This stigma reduces the individual to being cast as not quite human or as Goffman states 'from a whole and usual person to be [a] tainted, discounted one' (Goffman, 1963: 12). At the same time stigmatised persons begin to be denied essential life opportunities such as housing, employment and other basic needs. LeBel (2012) amongst others (Maruna, 2001; Sampson and Laub, 2004) acknowledge that the stigmatisation of those labelled as 'criminal' results in the alteration of personal identities and importantly the distancing of networks of support which in turn increases the chances of repeating deviant behaviour (Becker, 1963; Cohen, 1985; Reiner, 2007). When speaking about the effects of stigmatisation, Goffman focused on experiences of lower-level or 'general' offenders rather than offending groups with more violent or high-risk offences.

While a criminal conviction and its subsequent stigmatising effects does not immediately discount persons from gaining some form of paid employment, access to education, housing and pro-social networks, opportunities significantly decrease as a result of being stigmatised as an offender (Uggen 2003). So powerful is the stigmatisation, that the offering of second chances becomes limited to those with an offender label (Womer, 2011), and makes

the task of exiting a 'deviant career' more difficult (Uggen, 2003). Petersilia (2003: 19) adds 'a criminal conviction – no matter how trivial or how long ago it occurred – scars one for life' (see also Jacobs 2015).

As the range of behaviours which cause societal concern shifts over time, so the situations which cause stigma change. Sexual abuse has always generated concern but over the last three decades sexual offending has been increasingly and vociferously described as an 'abhorrent', 'pernicious' and 'evil' form of offending, and has subsequently become firmly fixed within the crosshairs of societal indignation and hostility (Hudson, 2005; Thomas, 2005). Illustrating this, Sampson (1994: x) states that those convicted of sexual offences are 'hated and despised more than almost any other offender'. They are perhaps uniquely located in this group with terrorists and murderers (Simon, 1998; Garland, 2001). Indeed, an article in the Guardian stated 'there are very few groups of people you can respectably hate any more. Paedophiles are the very thing' (Aitkenhead, 1998).

Edwards and Hensley (2001) claim that being convicted of a sexual offence brings with it greater level of stigmatisation than is experienced by other offender groups and this has powerful effects. While there is only limited information on what sex offenders in England and Wales think about their opportunities to return to the community post-conviction, research from America suggests that many convicted sex offenders face harsh stigmatising effects irrespective of their index offence⁷⁸ (Tewksbury and Lees, 2006). Burchfield and Mingus (2008) claim this stigma could have long-term damaging effects on convicted sex offenders after they return to life in the community. Not only do sex offenders experience isolation, they also face alienation for their offences in a way most other offenders do not. In addition, there are fears of violence and a loss of a privacy. The culmination of the ferocity of the stigmatisation directed towards sexual offending and sex offenders is that many convicted sex offenders become extremely isolated and lose social bonds to society.

⁷⁸ Index Offence refers to the offence for which the individual was convicted.

As a result of the prolonged period in which stigmatisation has been directed towards sex offenders, the terms 'paedophile' and 'sex offender' have become interchangeable. This is despite the very different offences covered within these two terms, as well as the variations in the severity of the initial offence and the subsequent risk of future harm (Evans and Cubellis, 2015; Furst and Evans, 2014).

Discrediting and Discreditable Attributes

Both discrediting and discreditable stigmas are socially constructed, however, the visibility of a physical disability (a discrediting stigma) typically generates more immediate reactions from members of society. Conversely, discreditable stigmas are typically less visible and harder to detect therefore reactions to a discreditable stigma tend to be less immediate. For this reason sex offenders are defined as holding a discreditable stigma as the record of their offending is hidden from the general public. In some instances the stigma may never be discreditable or hidden due to the high level of media coverage the individual receives, for example where the sex offender is a celebrity.

While on the face of it those with hidden or 'discreditable' stigmas may be assumed to experience less difficulties than those with visible or discredited stigmatised identities due to the lack of visible signs or attributes to highlight their stigma, Pachankis claims the possession of a hidden or discreditable stigma creates unique problems. Most notable of these is that posed by the threat of this concealed identity being discovered (Pachankis, 2007). Revealing a discreditable stigma may lead to more intense and hostile reactions, especially where people feel they have been deceived. Equally discreditable stigmas may become visible where the stigmatised individual is known to people who are aware of the stigma (i.e. where people close to the stigmatised person know of the behaviour which causes the stigma). Discovery of a concealed identity may also occur through the individual being 'found out'. Discovery of such a deeply discreditable stigma was certainly a prominent fear across interviews with Core Members in this

research. When one of the Core Members, Dennis, was asked what his greatest fears were he immediately replied:

Being outed! ... This is one of the reasons why people go underground or run from everything rather than facing it (Dennis)

Individuals with hidden identities must also make decisions about who they should disclose to (Goffman, 1963). Goffman states that those who are 'discreditable' face most difficulties in managing who to disclose to, and in what way they should make a disclosure or as Goffman states it is the dilemma of 'to display or not to display; to tell or not to tell; to let on or not to let on; to lie or not to lie; and in each case, to whom, how, when, and where' (Goffman, 1963: 57). This dilemma is not unique to sex offenders and such challenges have been acknowledged among numerous stigmatised groups such as people with HIV status (Chesney and Smith, 1999) those with mental illnesses (Quinn et al, 2004) and those from a working-class background (Granfield, 1991). Although such disclosure decisions are routine and occur regularly for some groups (Pachankis, 2007) the hostility surrounding sexual offending means that the decision about whether to disclose poses a difficult dilemma for those with a discreditable stigma. There are numerous examples throughout the interviews which highlight the dilemmas faced by Core Members about who to disclose to and when.

Stigmatising Situations

A number of prominent and recurring stigmatising situations were identified from the interviews with Core Members. The most frequent and important stigmatising situations included negative reactions from family and friendship networks, fears and realities of the discovery of their stigmatised identity by strangers, the role of the media enflaming hostilities, acts of violence, their return to the community, and criminal justice restrictions and making disclosures.

Some of these stigmatising situations emerged at the point of Core Members offences being discovered, by for example, friends and family. Other

stigmatising situations occurred following their return to the community as a convicted sex offender. Typically this was when Core Members experienced situations such as fear of their stigma being discovered, negative media reporting and also acts of violence. All of these stigmatising situations continued throughout some Core Members' participation in CoSA.

Reactions from family and friendship networks

The first stigmatising situation which all Core Members made reference to was changes in their relationships with friends and family. In particular, Core Members referred to the anxiety they had about how their family and friends would react upon their arrest and following their conviction. In a small number of cases (N= 6) a complete disintegration of previously strong social bonds occurred following their conviction for a sexual offence. Such a collapse was described by Christopher who stated after his conviction and release from prison:

I didn't have any family to have any relationships with cos my family actually dumped me and told me to have no contact with them again ... I had 4 brothers, a sister, my mum was alive and none of them wanted to know (Christopher)

Most (N= 24) Core Members maintained a level of contact with family and friends though these relationships varied dramatically. Nine Core Members reported the continuation of relationships which were strained and had been strained prior to their conviction, eight reported to having some contact with family members but that these relationships had deteriorated since their conviction, while seven reported maintaining strong ties to friends and family (albeit usually only certain members of family or friends). The reaction from friends and family members is important because it can lead the stigmatised person to become 'suspicious, depressed, hostile, anxious, and bewildered' (Goffman, 1963: 24), a feature which all Core Members reported experiencing at some point following the revelation of their offending.

Among the majority of Core Members, the consequence of this stigma was an acknowledgement of the gap in their lives since their offending and as a

result of the loss of friends and family. The stigma of being a convicted sex offender added to their feelings of social isolation:

As a sex offender I don't often feel wanted or a part of society (Ruben)

Once you've been in prison, you lose all contacts, well most people do, and I didn't want anything to do with anyone in prison on the outside anyway, so you are starting from scratch, your whole network of people (Dennis)

Despite their stigma being invisible to most, all 30 Core Members reported feeling a change or distancing from their community and described feeling they had been shunned or excluded from their communities and old friendship groups. Both Matthew and Ashley give clear accounts of this distancing in relationships following their convictions, stating:

I had a lot of friends you know, my best man at my wedding, but gradually [after release from prison] I saw less and less of them (Matthew)

My Mum and Dad chose not to speak to me but my Nan has a little bit, but she was reluctant about it (Ashley)

Discovery in other spaces and media influences

For some Core Members a greater fear than the loss or decline of positive relationships with family and friends was the fear of discovery by strangers. Despite the hidden nature of a criminal conviction compared to physical disabilities, receiving a conviction for a sexual offence still brings with it a great deal of stigma and Core Members spoke of being affected in several ways. In particular Core Members were apprehensive about being 'outed' as a convicted sex offender and the judgements people would then make:

I thought they would think that I was a dirty bastard, and being judgemental towards me (Eddie)

It's like if they find out your one of them it's like shit! (Richard)

The apprehension of being discovered was far more prevalent than the reality of them being discovered. All Core Members spoke of being apprehensive of how the public would react to their sex offender identity

being discovered. For some Core Members, apprehension of discovery by strangers emerged following their experiences of reactions by their family and friends. The reactions of family and friends made Core Members question the extent to which they could ever be positively received by strangers in the future. Bill summarised the concerns of many Core Members perceiving that discovery of his conviction by 'strangers' would result in a life of isolation:

You expect women to be like 'you know he's a sex offender, we don't want anything to do with him type of thing' and there is that fear that that's gonna be that barrier that you are going to have to face (Bill)

Such thoughts were often premised on their belief that further social isolation would also occur as any new social networks which had been established would again disintegrate on discovery of the 'real' or stigmatised identity. For Dennis, this emerged following travel abroad where he met a couple in their fifties who he spent some time with and felt he had made friends with. Upon returning to the UK, Dennis sent an email to the couple hoping to continue his emerging friendship, but after receiving no reply Dennis presumed (rightly or wrongly) that they had found out about his sexual offending convictions and subsequently rejected his offer of friendship:

I never got a response back, and I'm just wondering if he's just gone on the internet, looked up my name and [makes pop-up sound] and not replied (Dennis)

For other Core Members, the apprehension of discovery by the wider community emerged from their beliefs that the general public hated sex offenders and would lead to violent confrontations. Matthew and Phil made several references to the repercussions of their identity being revealed; both had returned to the same area that they lived in prior to their offences and described being convinced that they would face reprisals:

I thought she was going to raise holy-hell ... and she knows where I live I'll get bricks through the window and nasty letters scrolled on the door, but nothing's happened! So that was the kind of fear there (Matthew)

Any kind of sex abuse; that is public enemy number one! Any time you mention that in the newspapers that gets the pitchforks and lynch mobs out (Phil)

As such, Core Members frequently reported avoiding many social situations which may bring them into contact with 'strangers'.

Entwined in many of the anxieties expressed by Core Members is the role of the media; this was described by Core Members in two distinctive ways. Firstly, Core Members felt that the media's obsession with sexual offending and the attention concentrated on high risk sex offenders, was deliberately written in a sensational or a demonising way so as to induced and fuel an undue fear towards all sex offenders. Second, the reporting of their specific convictions intensified the level of individual stigmatisation.

The media was blamed for dictating the concentration on serious sexual offending and for fuelling the hostility towards sexual offending and sex offenders through its reporting. In most instances Core Members felt the media coverage of sex offenders was misleading and highly stigmatising. Core Members felt the media portrayal of sexual offences was such that all sex offenders were by definition 'paedophiles', 'rapists' or 'child abductors' despite evidence to the contrary (Hudson, 2005; McCartan 2007). The homogeneity of sex offenders as high-risk predators, absent of any significant or meaningful variation in their original offences or future risk of reoffending (Evans and Cubellis, 2015) was something strongly evidenced by many Core Members with Henry and Phil stating:

So all of a sudden when you get arrested and you are being charged and convicted as a sex offender, then all of a sudden you are Jimmy Savile mark2 and fucking hell your head is really screwed up then cos you are thinking am I really that bad, I am a paedophile (Henry)

The fact is once the public find out you are on that register, they [the public] don't care how you ended up on it, they [the public] are just 'oo he's a sex offender let's lynch the bastard' you know that kind of attitude (Phil)

A consequence of this style of reporting was that Core Members became even more sceptical and cynical as to how the public perceived sex

offenders; research in the USA found the same findings (Uggen, 2003; Tewksbury and Lees, 2006). Ruben opined that the public views him and all sex offenders alike:

We are not even scum, that's an insult to scum you know ... all the media relies on is all the bad boys and so... you know the Jimmy Saville's the repeat offenders, and that's what people think (Ruben)

Notwithstanding the overly simplistic cause-effect relationship between media reporting and public perceptions of sex offenders proclaimed by Core Members, most still believed much of the public's knowledge about sexual offending came from the media and was therefore simultaneously inaccurate and detrimental to their reintegration:

The media do tend to totally get things out there [to the public] and it's amazing how much media affects public opinion you know ... which is very curious because they [the media] have no idea what goes on ... they have no idea of processes and stuff like that, they [the media] are just like [sex offenders] are 'evil' and people believe it (Fred)

This general demonization of sex offenders through the media was not the only mechanism for stigmatisation to be experienced by Core Members. Stigmatisation was intensified when Core Members received specific coverage of their personal offences. Approximately half of the Core Members acknowledged having their conviction reported by the local newspapers which alerted the community to their new status:

When I got sentenced it was in the paper, on the radio and everywhere, yes there wasn't any hiding it! (Bill)

One Core Member, Dennis, also claimed to have received national coverage. As well as being designed to censure, embarrass and exclude sex offenders, the coverage in newspapers caused Core Members to be on a heightened state of alert in the months after their press attention. For Gordon, not only was his conviction published but he said there were several inaccuracies in the reporting (subsequently acknowledged by the CoSA

coordinator) which he felt powerless to respond to as this would draw even more attention to him:

My case was in the paper and it got a bit of bad press, it ... wasn't exactly true. They'd put these extra bits in, but you know there isn't a lot that you can actually do cos if you'd have disputed what they said they would re-run it again and so the people who missed it that time then you would be capturing a larger audience which you don't actually want because it has a stigma attached to being a sex offender, cos it's still like 'pervert' and all that (Gordon)

Some efforts were sought to minimise the effect of this with Bob, for example, changing his name prior to conviction. Bob stated how he previously had a distinctive name which would have easily identified him in forthcoming newspaper reports. Prior to his conviction however, he had changed his name to something a bit more "general" and this was the name used in newspaper reports. Thus Bob felt he avoided some of the stigma and this had also diverted potential stigma away from his family. In other instances misprints of Core Members' names relieved Core Members of some of the stigma:

I was lucky cos when it was in the newspaper they spelt my name wrong so when you Google my name how it IS spelt then nothing comes up, but if you spell it how they did then it comes up with a picture of me. That was the local paper (Joe)

Violence - Anticipated and Real

For a small number of Core Members, the culmination of the stigma they experienced was violence. In most cases this was perceived rather than actual, though both were detrimental to the reintegration. In most cases Core Members were fearful that if their concealed identity were to be revealed they may be subject to verbal or violent attacks because of their stigma (Hudson, 2005; Pachankis, 2007). The rejection by members of their family and friendship networks, combined with the media attention directed towards sexual offending, especially since late-2012 and the publication of mass allegations of sexual abuse by Jimmy Savile, has undoubtedly shaped Core Member thinking. Indeed, many Core Members claimed the public would not accept that they should be allowed to return to the community having been

convicted of sexual offences and feared for their safety should their stigma be discovered:

If people ... find out that I am a sex offender then they could turn and batter us all over cos people don't like sex offenders, so if they get the chance they will batter 'em all over (Richard).

If people did find out about me I would probably be burnt out and treated like a witch or something from the 1600s you know (Eddie).

Violence toward sex offenders in prison has been well documented (see e.g. Sparks et al 1996). The threat of violence towards sex offenders while in prison was acknowledged by the majority (N= 11) of Core Members who received a custodial sentence (N= 18). While most only received threats, four Core Members suffered actual physical attacks. For instance, Maurice and Anthony both described being the target of a number of incidents while in prison. The most serious of these involved matches being thrown into Maurice's cell. The lack of protection from prison officers in the face of these attacks was also seen as a form of violence:

I got a load of matches chucked in my bed, and I told one of the screws and he said I should have been in it! (Maurice)

The [prison] officers could be alright, but others told other inmates what we'd done to start trouble (Anthony)

In the community, acts of violence were less common but some Core Members described violence being used against them or other sex offenders as a result of their stigma. For Stephen, the use of violence was not directed towards him but was inflicted upon another sex offender participating on the same sex offender treatment programme he was attending. Stephen described how during the treatment programme with eight other sex offenders, the programme facilitator informed them that:

one of 'em had had a 'mishap' and got beaten up by people who had recognised him... We just couldn't get past it cos it was what we feared, being recognised (Stephen)

Alan, also experienced a violent response. This occurred unexpectedly while he was in the town centre. Alan described being approached by a woman who knew of his convictions and used violence against him:

She spat at me and said if you ever do anything with my kids I'll sort you out. Then she punched me off me feet (Alan)

The return to the community – ‘home’ or ‘new’

All 30 Core Members reported a sense of anxiety about their return to the community, however several differences emerged between those who were returning ‘home’ and those who had moved to a ‘new’ place. Most of the Core Members reported returning ‘home’ (N= 17), the remainder (N= 13) reported moving to a ‘new’ place. For the purposes of this study ‘home’ is used to describe the actual home the Core Member lived in at the time of their conviction or the town/city which they lived in pre-conviction. Return to a ‘new’ place is used to describe Core Members who have moved away from the area they lived, worked and had social connections in to an area which is unfamiliar to them.

For those Core Members that returned to a ‘new’ place, the concerns about being recognised were significantly lower than those who returned to their ‘home’ place, however their isolation and fear of being discovered could be greater. Depending on where Core Members relocated after their conviction affected how they experienced stigma and as such how they could manage the stigma.

In line with findings from the general desistance literature (Sampson and Laub, 2003, 2004), and from a growing literature on desistance pathways for sex offenders (Willis et al, 2010; Laws and Ward, 2011; Farmer et al, 2015), those Core Members who returned home and retained the support of some family and social networks were better able to reintegrate and overcome barriers over the longer term. In the first instance, however, the shame felt by Core Members returning to a familiar place induced greater anxiety because of their offending behaviour, having been identified, and the damage it caused to their families meant the first few months were especially difficult. Similar findings were recalled by participants in Harris’ (2014) study of the desistance pathways of 21 sex offenders. Richard

explained his feelings of shame and letting down those people closest to him which had caused him to isolate himself:

It got to the point that I couldn't be arsed to do anything and I literally blank everyone and locked myself in my flat for two weeks. Only going out to get my dole money, sign on, get my shopping (Richard).

For Bill, the feelings of stigma and isolation were even greater as he had responsibilities and chores to do for family members which required him to complete daily tasks in his local community. For Bill therefore, there was no option to hide away as Richard did as he needed to leave the house on a daily basis, but did so with the fear of being pointed at or identified or accused of further sexual offences in the street. As such Bill's strategy when leaving his house would be to put his head down and walk from point A to point B as quickly as possible:

From one house to another, it would be straight there, you know don't look around, just look at the pavement and ignore anything that might be happening (Bill)

In time these Core Members did report more established links to specific family members and some friends who they remained in contact with. These links were described as being important in helping them to feel more comfortable in the community and being less burdened by their feelings of stigma. Such findings are echoed from research on the wider sex offender population and their experience of re-entry which highlights the significance of strong social networks to smoothing the reintegration process (Harris, 2014; Lussier and Gress, 2014). In particular, the development of pro-social support networks which also act as informal social controls are increasingly recognised as being factors which aid desistance (Willis et al, 2010; Harris, 2014; Farmer et al, 2015).

The down-side to returning 'home' however, was that the local community were more likely to have known about their offending and therefore Core Members would not be so easily able to conceal their stigmatised identity. Alan described a turbulent family relationship existing with his mother and

brother which provided an element of protection but could also exacerbate stigma. Alan had particular difficulties with his return home as he was known by lots of people in the area. Alan reported that there was plenty of gossip about him (the source of which was sometimes his brother), and this gossip could be discussed in his presence:

[I'd hear] gossip in bus stations, shops and cafe's around town where people were saying 'o we hope he's changed you know, we hope he's not gonna go back again' (Alan)

A return 'home' was not always a way of reducing stigma however. For the Core Members who returned home and reported very limited or no contact with family or friends, returning to the community was difficult as they faced constant reminders of what they had lost (i.e. would attend the pub with their friends or church where married etc...). They were also the group who were those most isolated and trapped by their identity and conviction. This was irrespective of their offence(s).

I didn't exist, I was totally isolated and cut off. I couldn't raise my head to look anyone in the eye (Fred)

Core Members who had returned home to nothing also reported having more frequent experiences of 'real' stigma than those who returned home to some family, or those who moved to a new place.

In contrast to Core Members who returned home, Core Members who moved to a new place often reported higher levels of anxiety about their return to the community, not knowing where they would live, not knowing where the town or city was in relation to family and having no ability to gain any information on the 'new place' prior to their arrival. The distinctive feature of this move to a new place was that the stigma was not immediately visible to 'strangers'. As such the potential for being verbally or physically attacked was less of a fear compared to the experiences of Core Members who returned home, Core Members who returned to a new place spoke more about being more openly able to go for walks in town as a 'stranger' rather than being tied to their convicted sex offender identity as Joe realised:

Cos not being from this area originally it was nice, cos I know nobody here and nobody knew me (Joe)

Although Core Members who moved to a new place were often better able to leave the bedroom in the hostel or shared house and re-enter society in the first instance, this re-entry was very much a 'literal' or 'physical' re-entry. A consequence of their relative anonymity was that in the new place Core Members had a distinct lack of any social contacts. One reason for this was that in some cases the location that Core Members were relocated to was only announced to the Core Member at very short notice and left them with little time to find out more about the area. The result was that most Core Members who relocated to a 'new' place were extremely isolated and lacked any genuine attachments within the community:

I didn't know nobody here, my mother has died and there is only me step father who I phone once a fortnight, so I didn't really have a strong support group if you know what I mean (Eddie)

I don't really have friends, the only friends I've got are on this course I've just started on (Jack)

When I came out I didn't know anybody (James)

Despite the relative anonymity presented by moving to a 'new' place and the lack of social contacts, Core Members who moved to a new place displayed greater concerns about what may happen to them if their stigmatised identity would be revealed, and how the public may react. One explanation for such concerns was that they had no-one to look out for them or protect them like other sex offenders or other offenders had. Christopher was most succinct in this claim, stating:

Even though a lot of the guys I was in prison [with] had done far worse, [they] still were having their family (Christopher)

In the longer term this lack of social networks combined with a fear of reintegrating meant that Core Members who moved to a new place faced the toughest struggles to develop any pro-social networks to participate in. This was further complicated by these Core Members wanting to develop new networks but their failure to achieve this was internalised as a sign of social rejection because of their stigma (despite the stigma not being discovered).

In summary, returns either to 'home' or a 'new' place offer Core Members the opportunity to make positive pro-social progress. However, neither return was particularly smooth with all Core Members reporting some degree of uncertainty about returning to the community and being subject to verbal or physical attacks; feeling isolated and excluded by family or old social networks, and sometimes both.

The contrast between a return 'home' or to a new place seems to be best illustrated by the following diagram:

	Visibility of Stigma		Social Network		Opportunities		Negatives
New Place	Hidden - helps to manage stigma		None Limited opportunities to develop		No overt stigma Low chance of discovery		Fear and discovery
Old Place	Higher chance of being known Potential for extreme stigma		Potential for protection by family Open to rejection and exclusion		Family support and protection from stigma		Rejection by family and friends Forever a convicted sex offender

Criminal justice restrictions and status degradation ceremonies

The criminal justice system imposes certain types of restrictions for convicted sex offenders which can also enhance stigma. These include abiding by any Parole supervision requirements, the requirement to notify the police of any changes in their circumstances, colloquially known as signing the sex offender register, abiding by any other restrictive order (e.g. Sexual Offences Prevention Order (SOPO)), possible restrictions on contact with children and being required to make voluntary or forced disclosures to prospective employers or partners.

Prior to conducting the interviews and questionnaires with Core Members, it was anticipated that one of the recurring problems Core Members experienced as convicted sex offenders was the degree of supervision, monitoring and restrictions they would be subjected to. This was influenced in no small part by the proliferation in the use of exclusionary and restrictive policies introduced for the purposes of public protection in recent years (Feeley and Simon, 1992, 1994; Garland, 2000, 2001; Lieb et al 2011). While most Core Members did acknowledge the extent to which such conditions affected their freedoms, this was less intrusive than the new penology literature would indicate. However, Core Members did speak of the stigmatisation of these restrictions and the causes of this stigma will be discussed below.

Echoing the findings from Hudson (2005), the requirement to annually 'sign' the sex offender register at the police station caused some Core Members (N= 7) a great deal of anxiety and concern. Core Members often stated the shame and humiliation of being required to sign the register as a concept to be minimal compared to the actual procedure for signing the register.

In the early days of the register (1997-2001) those required to notify their details could do so by post, email or going into any police station. Since 2001⁷⁹ convicted sex offenders have been required to attend a designated or 'prescribed' police station to sign the register in person. This removal of the right to use email when everyone else was moving over to email could be seen as the deliberate construction of a 'status degradation ceremony' (see below).

In practice the requirement to 'sign' the sex offender register still required Core Members to enter the police station and approach the front desk to verbally request, sometimes in close proximity to others, to 'sign' the sex offender register. Some Core Members felt this process was deliberately public in order to further punish or humiliate. Bruce spoke quite extensively

⁷⁹ Sexual Offences Act 2003 (Notification Requirements) (Prescribed Police Stations) Regulations 2001 SI no. 1788

about this notion of the requirements and other restrictions imposed on sex offenders being a form of secondary punishment stating:

When do you think that you've punished someone enough? You've sentenced them, you've taken away their liberty, you've given them this label which makes them so paranoid to talk to people and be around people and then you monitor them and it's not just are you still at this address, what jobs are you doing, it's your bank details, your passport, who are you in a relationship with ... you know when do you stop punishing somebody (Bruce)

It should be noted that the 'register' is formally a measure of public protection and not a form of punishment; that is not to say it is not experienced as a 'punishment' by those who are required to notify.

Consequently Core Members developed their own strategies to avoid any additional publicity. Sometimes this involved Core Members going to the police station several weeks prior to the date they were required to sign the register, often early in the morning and only entering the police station when it was empty. Others used pre-written notes which they slid under the counter for the staff to read:

I write it down 'I've come to sign the sex offenders register' and have all my details on it and pass it under [the counter] (Troy)

These methods were not always infallible however, as some police staff would be less considerate of the Core Member's desire for anonymity, with one Core Member reporting how the staff would sometimes return the registration form back to the Core Member in such a way that the 'SEX OFFENDER' text is potentially visible to others in the reception area, as Core Member Eddie disclosed.

Other restrictions and conditions Core Members were subject to, created some problems for those seeking to establish social links. The impact of conditions and restrictions was also seen as a barrier to any future personal relationships and some Core Members were concerned about the attention which conditions and restrictions could generate. Some Core Members actively sought to avoid encounters that might lead to disclosing their offending past to any individuals who they sought to form a friendship with by isolating themselves or "by being aloof" (Brian).

This did not just affect new friendships though. At the behest of his PPU officer, one Core Member had to make a full disclosure to some family members who were unaware of the offences prior to a planned family holiday. There are undoubtedly situations when disclosures are necessary and appropriate to prevent further victimisation, Phil, the Core Member, described how he felt these conditions were used by his PPU officers as a tool to shame him to his family:

Being bastards they [the police] decided that they would use part of my SOPO⁸⁰ to force my sister [to be] disclosed too (Phil)

Access to children was also affected by restrictions and conditions. While some were prohibited from having unsupervised access with their own children or being in the same property (Bill, Simon), others felt the ambiguity of conditions, especially the wording about access to children as set out in their SOPOs which restricted them from reintegrating or rebuilding contacts with family (Alan, Bob). The potential consequences of breaching their conditions led these Core Members to make excuses for not attending family events in which children may be present because their conviction was not known by other attendees.

Despite all the stigma which affected them because of the conditions they were subject to, most Core Members spoke positively of their relationship with their Police Public Protection (PPU) officer, remarking how subtle these officers were while making visits and were grateful for this as they felt it could easily exacerbate the stigma Core Members experienced if officers were to be 'heavy-footed'. Eddie described a stark contrast to other police work:

I've not had no kicking my door down and telling me to freeze or anything like that. When the police come out its just PPU and they are in civvy clothes and I know who they are now (Eddie)

⁸⁰ Sexual Offences Prevention Order

The Core Members' experience of signing the register and some of the actions of individual police officers together with broader legislative consequences can arguably produce the scenarios which enable 'status degradation ceremonies' to successfully occur. 'Status degradation ceremonies' refer to instances where an individual's identity has been denounced or 'spoiled', and subsequently they gain a new 'negative' identity following this. Thus their place and status in society are publicly lowered and ultimately the denounced person is excluded from their community (Garfinkel, 1956).

For degradation ceremonies to be most effective, certain criteria are needed to successfully denounce the status of an individual. The behaviour for which an individual is to be denounced should be cast as being out of the ordinary. The individual must be shown to have a preference for unacceptable types of behaviour and their identity is tied to this preference. Furthermore, Garfinkel states any denunciation should be made by a person publicly known or holding a position which verifies their knowledge or experience and who is seen as and being a participating member of 'normal' society. Degradation ceremonies work best where it is done by the court and its officers who are 'professional degraders' objective or distant to the denounced. Degradation ceremonies also require any breaches of 'acceptable' norms to be clearly identified and supported by witnesses who are objectively separate to the denouncer. To complete the process the denounced must be 'ritually separated' from their status in society – in effect cast as an outsider and 'strange' – in other words excluded.

Employment as a stigmatising situation

The consequences of seeking any form of legitimate employment with a criminal record have been variously documented (Farrall, 2004; Uggen et al, 2005; Thomas, 2007; Evans and Cubellis, 2015), though seeking to gain employment when the conviction is for a sexual offence is acknowledged to be even more difficult (Brown et al, 2007). The irony is however, that according to Kruttschnitt et al (2000) stable employment and sex offender treatment are the only factors associated with reducing reoffending.

As with all ex-offenders, Core Members reported difficulties in gaining employment. The challenge of disclosing their conviction was enough to limit some Core Members (N= 4) to search only those positions which did not require a disclosure. This meant many did not even attempt to apply for certain jobs because they believed they would not even progress beyond the initial paper short-listing. These Core Members felt that making such a disclosure, even on paper, would only 'out' their identity as a convicted sex offender. Richard was one who had particularly vivid perceptions of the consequences which would come from him disclosing his offences:

I was ... worrying about what crap they [would] spread about me – cos people have done that to me before, and then it'll get back to my home town and then I will have a target on my back and I'll get jumped or something (Richard)

A minority of Core Members (N= 6) felt the requirement to make a written acknowledgement of their conviction on a job application form was specifically intended to further punish the Core Member comparable with the 'status degradation ceremony' procedures involved in signing the sex offender register. These Core Members felt this was specifically to highlight the stigma to the employer and thus exclude the Core Member from participating in a core societal function rather than being a safeguarding measure either for themselves or potential victims.

Disclosures were not always considered a barrier or as a purely stigmatising situation however, and making a disclosure to an employer was commonly seen as a necessary requirement which would enable Core Members to begin regaining a 'normal' life. Core Members did not deny the difficulties of making a disclosure but they perceived the shame of disclosing to be off-set by the potential rewards which employment could bring. Sixteen of the Core Members were identified as holding this view. Some of this group had (James, Bob, Bill and Gordon [amongst others]) submitted numerous applications and had made disclosures to their potential employers during an interview and received a more positive response than anticipated:

As I've said I have been very lucky in that every person that I have disclosed to up to now has reacted in a very positive way (James)

and even when not raised at an interview disclosures could still be positive:

My superiors, my boss's boss and the HR manager called me in one day to say that they had been made aware of it but that they were happy with my performance in work and had no reason to think that it would affect my employment (Bob)

James, Bob and Gordon all received offers of work following their disclosure – although James' was unpaid voluntary work. Bill made a disclosure but after reporting a positive interview the position was cancelled as the company underwent reorganisation. Even though these Core Members had a fairly positive view of their disclosure, they each reported being anxious of the reactions of those they were disclosing to and wary that they may receive a negative reaction. Despite the positive experience of some Core Members in making a disclosure, the majority of Core Members felt their lack of success in gaining employment was the result of employer prejudices and employers not understanding the risks they posed (i.e. they believed all sex offenders are high risk) or because employers were not prepared to risk reputational damage by employing a convicted sex offender. Troy identified this early in his searches for a job and recalled how:

There are one or two out there that, especially the nature of the offence, will think 'ooo no definitely not having him' (Troy)

For some this led to a sense of despair and helplessness overcoming their lives prompting a more isolated existence to 'protect' themselves from being further disappointed. Not all Core Members adopted such an approach, however, Dennis, reported having gained some employment without telling his employer of his conviction and nor were his police or probation officers reportedly aware of this:

Even though it is not working with any kids or anything, but I am a bit dubious about the police finding out and going to tell the auctioneer ... I [also] tried to keep that job a secret because it was a back-hander job. So that's two reasons why I kept it aside really. Well definitely the other reason, that I didn't want it to get back to the police (Dennis)

Core Members and the Management of Stigma and Isolation

Core Members experienced a number of negative effects of stigma and isolation whether their identity had been discovered or not. Where their stigmatised identity had been revealed it was most commonly where their offending was known by people in the community, through media coverage at the time of the trial, or they were outed by others.

The ultimate culmination of the discovery of their stigma was direct physical attack as Alan described (see above). This reaction was uncommon with Core Members more likely to report being shunned, rejected or occasionally being subjected to verbal insults rather than physical attack. For those who were not attacked, the most damaging stigma was self-imposed and concentrated on Core Members' fears of what could happen rather than what had happened. For the Core Members who maintained their hidden identity, the stigma was entirely self-imposed but this isolation and lack of social engagement led to concerns about what would happen to them should their identity be revealed and following their deceit over members of the community.

A prevailing narrative from Core Members was that their experience of stigma had led to a growing level of isolation in their lives. In some instances this was 'community-led' and was the result of direct rejection of them by strangers. Norman experienced a form of community-led stigmatisation while out shopping, when he described seeing two people staring at him and after hearing their conversation Norman believed they knew he had convictions for sexual offences:

Like I was in a second-hand shop looking at video games and I was just merrily looking at DVDs and games and I hear somebody say quite clearly 'I am sure that's him' (Norman)

For others, this was the result of being rejected by family and friends, either because of the nature of the offences (intra-familial) or a repulsion of the Core Member's behaviour. The latter example applied to Matthew who stated:

Since [my son] found out I was in jail and what it was for, he called me brother and in so many words told me brother 'I never want to speak to him [Core Member] again' (Matthew)

A more positive finding from these interviews, however, was that despite the sometimes debilitating effects of stigma on Core Members lives, many Core Members acknowledged that this was often the result of perceived and self-inflicted stigmatisation rather than 'real' or enacted stigma that they received from others (LeBel, 2012). As such, while reintegration may be a concerning and potentially stressful process, Core Members did not receive the degree of open rejection which they anticipated. This is evidenced by only one Core Member being subject to a physical assault despite all reporting concerns their stigma would lead to some form of vigilante action; as Bill expressed it:

You always have that fear of vigilante lynch-mob wanting to put you on the nearest lamppost as a decoration for Christmas (Bill)

Stigma Management Techniques

In an attempt to begin living life as a convicted sex offender with all of its associated stigma, degradation and isolation, a number of stigma management techniques were identified as being adopted by Core Members. Stigma management techniques refer to the broad strategies which Core Members devised or which they resorted to in an attempt to manage or avoid the effects of stigma. Four stigma management techniques were utilised prior to the Core Member working with CoSA. These include 'Passing', 'Passive Self-Isolation', 'Active Preventative Withdrawal' and 'Denial'. These will be examined below. Two further two stigma management techniques were identified as being used by Core Members following participation in CoSA. These two stigma management techniques are discussed later in the chapter.

None of the Core Members indicated that they utilised only one strategy for any stigmatising situation. Instead Core Members employed a number of stigma management techniques. Some (N= 10) indicated having a preferred

technique which they appeared to use more frequently than any other; others (N= 15) sought to utilise different stigma management techniques according to the stigmatising situation. In a small number of cases (N= 5) Core Members did not appear to have any clear strategies and – in their words - were struggling to cope with stigma and were simply ‘surviving’ or ‘existing’ rather than living.

Passing

Passing was the most frequently used stigma management technique with all 30 Core Members indicating they had used this technique at some point following their arrest or conviction. Passing was identified as being the most used technique by those with a preference for a particular stigma management technique with nine Core Members identified as having passing as their preferred stigma management technique.

Passing involves the stigmatised person attempting to avoid disclosing their stigmatised status in order to pass as a ‘normal’ non-stigmatised person. For many of the Core Members the anxiety about returning to the community – to a ‘new’ place or ‘home’ – with the stigma and the conviction of being a sex offender still hanging over their heads led to the adoption of a passing strategy:

I felt like I had this sign above my head. There is a certain five letter N word that they used especially in prison for guys like me – nonce. And I felt like anyone who looked at me would see this sign and think (Troy)

Alan was also aware of the need to attempt to pass himself off as a non-stigmatised person, despite returning home to an area where he was widely known. Alan’s attempts at passing did not appear to be very successful but he claimed that prior to his return to the community:

I made a cover story up about me working away if they said anything (Alan)

Where successful, Core Members are able to pass as a non-stigmatised person to other non-stigmatised persons. In doing so, Core Members seek

to avoid potential reprisals from members of the community. Passing may also be used by stigmatised persons to protect themselves from further shame or from being only viewed as the degraded or stigmatised identity (Winnick and Bodkin, 2008; Furst and Evans, 2014). This is hardly surprising as sex offenders are not going to openly announce they are convicted sex offenders the first time they meet people – especially given the stigma, shame and hostility towards this type of crime. As such concealing the negative part of their identity (wherever possible) is inevitable when they are speaking to people who do not know/need to know about their offences.

Passing is not an easy technique to adopt, however, with Furst and Evans (2014: 8) claiming ‘this strategy may involve lying to hide one’s stigma, concealing features that may reveal one’s stigma, or avoiding situations in which stigma could become known to others’ (Furst and Evans, 2014: 8). For that reason Goffman (1963: 109) describes how those who seek to manage stigma through passing ‘must necessarily pay a great psychological price, a very high level of anxiety, in living a life that can be collapsed at any moment’.

Although passing may require the Core Member to lie excessively in order to conceal their stigmatised identity, a more frequent strategy used by Core Members who ‘passed’ was to not mention their past and thereby not reveal they had committed sexual offences. This was a tactic Maurice used. For Maurice, his punishment was his custodial sentence, revealing details to others was therefore something which was not necessary:

They [the public] don’t need to know about what I did, it’s none of their business (Maurice)

One explanation for the use of passing which has not been acknowledged in great depth elsewhere in the literature (for an exception see Furst and Evans, 2014) is that Core Members often reported using the passing technique ‘naturally’. By this, most Core Members spoke of facing times in their post-conviction life where they felt they had no-one to talk to. When they did speak to someone not directly related to their offence, that person

had little or no reason to suspect they were in fact a convicted sex offender. Thus passing was used 'naturally'. Ryan used 'natural' passing, something which he said he had always done:

I think I have always been that way even as a child, so ... I used to be very nervous about telling anybody anything about myself and telling them what's gone on in my life (Ryan)

A small number of Core Members (Ashley, Maurice, Richard) referred to having avoided talking about their offences in any detail even during Circle meetings and thus their version of passing was more akin to denial. The reason these Core Members are not categorised as deniers however, is that they acknowledged the key features of their offences during the interview and did so without seeking to minimise the impact of them. Rather they were remorseful or perhaps ashamed of what they had done and sought to distance themselves from their past actions in any future conversations. For Richard, this reluctance to discuss his offences has continued, and he still finds it difficult to discuss his offences even in a one-to-one treatment setting:

I still clam up on it now with the [treatment team] who I am speaking to [about his offences] (Richard)

Such findings echo other research (Maruna, 2001; Appleton, 2010) which has suggested this distancing from past crimes is a process of reshaping identities and reducing the stigma associated with being an offender (Wakefield, 2006). Farmer et al (2015: 327) have described this process of distancing or separating the present self from a stigmatised past as a 'protective cognition' that can ultimately aid in the process of desistance (Digard, 2014).

The result is that for many of the Core Members in my sample, the stigma that they experienced led to them making significant changes to their lives which affected the extent to which they participated in society. As such it could be argued that social exclusion is the active dynamic within stigmatisation of sex offenders. In other words, because of the stigma which sex offenders experienced, they deliberately chose not to engage in ways that they may otherwise have done and their identity was not open to such

hostility. This was especially the case for Core Members who returned home, but was also witnessed among those who moved to a 'new' place.

Passive self-isolation

Passive self-isolation defines those Core Members who have become isolated after being rejected by family and friends. These Core Members did not resist or object to their rejection and subsequent isolation, nor did they indicate that they had made any meaningful attempts to form any new social connections. Indeed, Core Members who passively self-isolated themselves also sought to limit future social networking or interactions to the bare minimum (i.e. collecting 'benefits'/food shopping). This technique was adopted by over two-thirds of Core Members with seven categorised as having adopting this technique as a sole or preferred way to manage stigma.

In adopting this approach, Core Members ultimately sought to limit their social interactions in order to minimise or at least better manage encounters in which their stigmatised identity might be revealed. Core Members who spoke of using this technique did so for a variety of reasons including fear of attack, (either verbally or physically); due to their perception of themselves and associated shame of what they had done and also for some Core Members, passive self-isolation was the natural development as they had been rejected by previous friends and family and lacked the confidence to develop new social networks:

I like to keep myself at the back, not in the forefront you know what I mean. I don't like to be centre of attention (Eddie)

I was quite a lonely person and didn't have owt to do with anybody, I didn't speak to me family that often and I just kept meself to meself (Ryan)

For Fred, this situation became so restrictive to his everyday living he explained:

When I first went on probation and I got my flat from the council, I used to draw all the curtains and stay in at home and lock meself in and lock me self away from the world (Fred)

Despite its widespread use by Core Members, the limitations of passive self-isolation were acknowledged by some not only as a potential risk factor but also in restricting an important method to begin the process of restarting their life. So low were the confidence levels and self-esteem of some of them that even though they acknowledged the potential benefits of attempting to gain a new pro-social network they did not feel capable of doing so.

Active Preventative Withdrawal

Active preventative withdrawal has not been identified elsewhere and may be a specific strategy adopted by Core Members and convicted sex offenders. Active preventative withdrawal refers to those Core Members who are able to recognise how they may be perceived by others as a result of their conviction. These Core Members make a decision to minimise any subsequent negative reactions by distancing themselves from their social networks. Unlike Core Members who used passive self-isolation, those using active preventative withdrawal display much greater levels of awareness of the stigma and hostility directed to those with a sex offender label. This technique can also be used protectively by Core Members and convicted sex offenders to minimise any further exclusion and ostracism which could come from their stigmatised identity being discovered. In doing so, Core Members maintained some internal dignity and self-esteem in being able to decide and control who knows about their offending identity. Additionally these Core Members display a significant self-drive as they made an active choice to avoid the pain of rejection by rejecting or distancing themselves from others.

Such an approach is based on perceptions rather than fact and so Core Members could be losing important social contacts that could assist them. Equally, active preventative withdrawal may also be used to avoid the shame of having to face those closest to them now they have a degraded and highly stigmatised identity – what Goffman refers to as courtesy stigma. Goffman coined the term courtesy stigma to refer to the process whereby families and social networks reject the stigmatised individual in an attempt to

avoid being stigmatised themselves (Goffman, 1963; Hackett et al, 2015; Evans and Cubellis, 2015).

Three Core Members were identified as having used active preventative withdrawal. Max was a Core Member who used active preventative withdrawal amongst other techniques. Max described how the motivation for adopting active preventative withdrawal was to limit the harms which his stigma would cause to his family, especially his young son. Max had become divorced following his conviction and lost contact with his son after Social Services deemed Max to pose a risk to his child. Unlike other Core Members who had lost contact with children, Max stated that he had made the decision to not make any attempts to contact his son until he reaches 18 so his son is not affected by his dad being known as a convicted sex offender.

Personally I think that Social Services don't really do children much good so for me to have any involvement in [son's] life would involve [Social Services] ... so I withdrew ... it's a decision which has been a heart breaking one (Max)

For Simon, this technique involved him leaving his job and withdrawing from most family occasions – however, he does remain at home living with his parents although this appeared to be due to a mixture of necessity and Simon needing to help look after his elderly parents. This arrangement was not without problems however. Simon described his relationship with his mother as being amicable, though he stated his relationship with his father as being tense and difficult:

He [father] says things like pervert and things like that ... I am not in the room but he talks rather loudly to [his friends] about me and it is rather hurtful (Simon)

Carl has also engaged in active preventative withdrawal and withdrew from his college courses and from most of his former friends. As with Simon, Carl did not fully withdraw and sever all ties. Carl still lives at home and indicated having a generally positive relationship with his parents (though there were some reported difficulties with his mother). Carl's friendships were complex

and appeared to be in constant flux but Carl spoke of taking the initiative to cut ties with some of his friends stating:

*The friends I did have ... I've not spoken to them in a long time
(Carl)*

For both Simon and Carl their active preventative withdrawal was partial. Both retained some social networks, and to an extent would have been forbidden from engaging in family events or their college courses because of the conditions imposed on them post-conviction. Both, did however, indicate they had made active decisions to cut ties with the people known to them in a bid to start 'afresh' and be 'free' from the invisible stigma of being known to people around them. In both cases, Simon and Carl also made this 'cut' prior to being completely rejected by those around them (except immediate family – although Carl did acknowledge how some of his friends had severed ties with him). For Carl, active preventative withdrawal enabled him to “successfully” start afresh without all of the baggage of a stigmatised network. Carl added this fresh start has the potential to flourish as he hopes to start a degree at university:

I've just made new friends when I went to college ... I just feel like life is improving a lot, mainly because I feel like I am progressing towards university (Carl)

For Henry, active preventative withdrawal was described as being the only option. Henry said this was partially to enable him a period of realisation to come to terms with his offending behaviour, though partly this was in an attempt to avoid some of the stigma which would be encountered from those around him and those in the community. Henry's active preventative withdrawal involved a break from employment, breaking ties with most friends, but more significantly there was a substantial change in his outlook on life. Henry was a self-proclaimed life-long gambler who claimed to have let taking big risks dominate his life. This risk taking was linked to his offending. Following his conviction and subsequent participation on a community-based sex offender treatment programme and a process of realisation, Henry ceased going to casinos where he would gamble and from where his offending originated. Henry said of this change:

I don't miss it ... I have a lot of that meaning back in my life now and so I don't want to lose it this time (Henry)

Active preventative withdrawal is an attempt by Core Members to maintain some control over their decision-making abilities and potentially a way of legitimising their isolation to themselves. For Simon, active preventative withdrawal has resulted in no forward progress but for Henry and Carl, their controlled-removal and self-empowerment has enabled them to overcome some of the stigma from others (if not self-stigma) and over time they have begun to re-enter society with a hidden stigma within their existing community.

Denial

A final stigma management technique to emerge was that of denial. Denial involves the individual disagreeing with the set of events which lead to their conviction and reframing their offence as simply a mistake, a one-off, or a less serious offence (Evans and Cubellis, 2015). None of the Core Members stated they were not guilty of their offences, but this could also be part of a denial narrative. In doing so, the individual is able to reject the label society has imposed. In total 11 Core Members were identified as using denial to manage their stigma.

Dennis was one such Core Member. Throughout his interview he gave some indication that he denied the offence he was convicted of and sought to downplay the seriousness of his behaviour. Dennis revealed he had employed this technique in the Circle and with others outside of the Circle as well. As such he was not only seeking to conceal his stigmatised identity but was also denying the application of the sex offender label to himself. This denial was perhaps most evident when Dennis professed to having recently started work but had done so without informing the authorities or his Circle as described above.

Summary of stigma management techniques

Even with Core Members utilising these three stigma management techniques they often made very little progress in overcoming stigma and in reintegrating into the community (whether 'new' or 'old'). In general all Core Members indicated they lacked the confidence and self-esteem to go out on their own, and those who moved to a 'new' place were especially worried in case they were "spotted" and their stigmatised identity revealed. The fear of being attacked was also a concern irrespective of where Core Members relocated. In many cases the apprehension created by the stigma was as socially paralysing as their lived experiences of how society responded to them.

This self-stigmatisation was a recurring theme among Core Members who perceived they were not deserving of going out; doing good or nice things; being around normal people; as well as having general feelings of inferiority or undeservedness. The consequences were that Core Members withdrew from most social interactions, making them more socially isolated and in doing so began the self-fulfilling prophecy which led to them believing their conviction had made them undeserving and unwelcome members of society. This all occurred despite many Core Members having not had the reprisals they anticipated and despite some having a desire to seek redemption and reacceptance. The opportunity to participate in CoSA, while met with a great deal of trepidation and anxiety, was equally viewed as an opportunity to escape the trough of despair which many Core Members described themselves as being in.

CoSA, Stigma and Isolation

One of the key features of CoSA is its ability to provide a non-stigmatising environment to Core Members. The principle of inclusivity is at the heart of the CoSA model and is one of the six core values of the Circles approach

(Circles UK Code of Practice, 2013).⁸¹ The ethos of inclusion and civil renewal have also been frequently stated elsewhere in the literature as underpinning the work of CoSA (QPSW, 2003; Wilson et al, 2007a, 2008, 2009; Armstrong and Willis, 2014). In the context of CoSA, inclusiveness involves promoting the use of inclusionary measures to manage a Core Members risk rather than exclusionary practices (Circles UK Code of Practice, 2013). Circles UK recognise the importance of addressing the stigma and isolation experienced by Core Members stating 'social isolation and emotional loneliness are key factors in increasing the risk of recidivism' (Circles UK Code of Practice, 2013: 4). Duwe (2013: 145) goes further claiming CoSA 'helps mitigate the adverse effects of rejection, loneliness and social isolation'.

The relationship between social isolation and risk of reoffending remains unclear (Armstrong et al 2008). Some studies have shown loneliness to be a significant risk factor (Hanson et al, 2007) but Mann et al (2010) found no causal effect between loneliness and reoffending although they do acknowledge more research is required to better understand this area. Thus, the role of CoSA in reducing the effects of stigma and subsequently some of the feelings of social isolation expressed by Core Members, may be more significant than the current research literature indicates.

Core Members experiences of CoSA, Stigma and Isolation

One of the recurring messages from Core Members was that CoSA succeeded in providing a non-stigmatising environment to Core Members. Core Members spoke of how this was both unexpected given their offending and subsequent public reactions and especially pleasant given the levels of isolation which they were experiencing post-conviction and post custodial sentence. The frequent perception by Core Members was that the CoSA process and the volunteers were accessible at a time when Core Members needed support to overcome some of the isolation (McCartan et al, 2014;

⁸¹ The six core values are Safety, Responsibility, Inclusiveness, Community Involvement, Growth and Learning and Individuality and Respect (Circles UK, 2013)

Thomas et al, 2014). Bill and Troy epitomised the message given by most of the Core Members about their volunteers, stating:

The fact that people actually want to spend time and talk to you is one of the things, I mean it sounds just a simple thing that they turn up to have a coffee (Bill)

These were 'real' people ... I thought well actually there are people that give a damn (Troy)

The first Circle meeting and 'Disclosure'

The first meeting was vividly remembered by almost all Core Members. For most Core Members they had been waiting for the Circle to start for a minimum of 6-8 weeks though some waited far longer and they were apprehensive. The first meeting provides the first opportunity for the Core Member and the volunteers to meet. This meeting also involves a disclosure of the Core Members' offences. The purpose of the disclosure in the first meeting has several functions. First it is a mechanism for volunteers to receive details of the offence(s) from Core Members. This enables volunteers to hear about the Core Members offences and see their reaction to it. Through this, Core Members also see the volunteers' reaction to their disclosure. A second reason is that the disclosure also plays an important role in the establishment of the trust and a future relationship between Core Member and volunteers. The disclosure meeting has also been described by some Core Members as getting the "elephant out of the room" (Bob) as Bob and Troy stated:

Everyone knows why they are there, it's because of my past (Bob)

Every day I wish that it wasn't needed, but it's because of me [that it is] (Troy)

Many of the Core Members spoke of the first meeting with CoSA to be nerve-racking and fearful. Core Members spoke of their concerns about meeting new people and that these people would know about their offending history. Core Members were also acutely aware of their own requirements to make a disclosure about their offence to these people. Joe was perhaps

most explicit in his feelings ahead of his disclosure to the Circle volunteers claiming:

I was shiteing myself to put it bluntly. I was petrified because it was four new people that I had never met in my life and it was like what are they gonna think of me. You know, are they gonna hate me, are they gonna like me, my blood pressure was through the roof and my heart was racing (Joe)

For Fred the disclosure of his offences to the Circle volunteers was too difficult. Instead of giving a verbal account, he hand-wrote the details of his offences and his thought-processes at the time. This was passed around to each of the volunteers for them to read.

Despite the anxiety many felt prior to the disclosure, Core Members implied that the disclosure of their offences acted as a form of a 'rite of passage' and allowed them to begin to move forward. For instance Joe felt a weight had been lifted of his shoulders following the disclosure, while Bruce described how the first meeting allowed him to

realise that life goes on, that there are people out there that will judge you and there are people out there that will accept what you've done, that you've made a mistake you've done ya time, you've paid for your crime and its time to move on (Bruce)

As Core Members progressed in the Circle, all felt the environment became more relaxed and many spoke of the Circle becoming a space in which they felt free from the weight of their stigma. This allowed some Core Members to begin to come to terms with their label as a convicted sex offender, and for others, especially those who had only recently received their conviction or returned to the community following their custodial sentence, the Circle provided a space where they could begin a self-assessment of what they had done and the consequences to themselves and others. This time period to understand and discuss their behaviour also enabled Core Members to come to better manage their stigmatised identity. That the volunteers were aware of their past stigmatised identity and had not disclosed this, made many of the Core Members more relaxed and able to speak with the

volunteers about their previous life without fear of being attacked or subjected to verbal abuse.

They aren't allowed to tell anyone about me outside of this room ... so I could tell them stuff (Anthony)

To me the Circle was like having people there that were my friends but that weren't at the same time ... who help me get over certain problems in life and they didn't tell anyone else about stuff (Richard)

In doing so, Core Members suggested this process allowed them to move forward and out of the intense despair and isolation pre-CoSA and to being optimistic that, over time, they could develop acceptable age-appropriate social networks. James particularly valued the input of his Circle in facilitating opportunities to reduce isolation and quash some of his fears of being attacked stating:

The Circle ... just opens up so many more avenues that when I walked out of that prison gate weren't there, and that's the thing I am most grateful for with the Circles to be honest (James)

The ability of the Circle to provide a level of hope and optimism that Core Members could move forward in their lives and eventually experience less stigma and begin to imagine a new life is recognised as an important process in “moving on” and working towards desistance (Maruna, 2001; Farmer et al, 2015). Thus CoSA acts as a mechanism of desistance through the reduction of stigma in the Circle, strategies to avoid stigmatising situations and messages of hope to Core Members that with time, and among the “right people”, experiences of stigma can significantly reduce.

Meetings, Activities and Virtual Circles

A lot of changes Core Members reported in their perceptions and experiences of stigma and isolation were accounted for by their participation in the Circle meetings. Core Members felt the meetings provided the groundwork and foundations to begin to establish a relationship between themselves and the volunteers. In the first instance, the weekly meetings provided the opportunity for the Core Members and volunteers to discuss the offences and ‘get the elephant out of the room’.

In addition, many Core Members spoke of the meetings providing them with the non-stigmatising environment that enabled them to begin to envisage a new way of life without constantly self-stigmatising. This safe environment enabled Core Members and volunteers to be open with each other, but also comfortable in each other's presence:

I realised I didn't have to sit there and talk about things they wanted and I could just be relaxed and meet up and talk about everyday things (Bob)

I enjoy coming to meet the people that I meet (Ryan)

The routine of weekly meetings served to display a pathway out of stigma and isolation as volunteers returned each week and did so without prejudice. In doing so, Core Members stated they would look forward to the Circle meeting as it would 'get them out of the house' and they could be around 'normal' people (Bruce). This is in stark contrast to how many reported feeling prior to the Circle, with some Core Members refusing to leave the house except for the bare essentials or to even open the curtains (Fred).

Meetings with the volunteers served a further purpose for Core Members, with many praising the Circle for allowing them to speak with volunteers about things which they could not do anywhere else. Sometimes this was to offload or vent about the frustrations in their lives:

Like if I've been arguing with me mum they tell me to just get away and then go back in a bit and it works really (Anthony)

For Bill the Circle meetings provided an additional function and became a second-conscience where he could seek advice and run ideas past the volunteers. Sometimes this involved discussing private matters which could not be discussed with anyone else:

I can talk to my Circle about [starting a new relationship], I couldn't necessarily say it to the wife that I have separated from ... not very tactful, I can't really talk about it with my mum or my sister cos it's a little bit awkward ... even talking to [friend] It would be awkward for him having to put up with me listening (Bill)

Providing a safe environment so that Core Members are temporarily freed from some of their stigma is not the only function of the Circle meetings however. Circle meetings also promote other changes, for instance with a reduced perception of stigma, some Core Members had sought to make changes in their lives and seek to regain a non-offending status, albeit within the restrictions of their offending past. For some Core Members the contact with and acceptance from volunteers in the meetings was seen as central to their decisions to actively seek wider acceptance and eventually redemption from the wider community.

Activities acted as another important pathway out of isolation to overcome feelings of stigma for Core Members. Activities involved Core Members going away from the formal meeting to museums, art galleries, coffee shops, supermarkets, libraries, open-days to local colleges and assisting with job interviews. Activities between volunteers and Core Members only occurred as the relationship in the Circle become stronger and more established. For Core Members the opportunity to participate in activities outside of the formal meetings was seen as a 'fun' part of CoSA, but the purpose was also to demonstrate and facilitate additional pathways away from the isolation reported prior to starting CoSA. Core Members spoke most enthusiastically about visits to restaurants or fast-food outlets for birthdays:

It was my birthday, and it was the first meeting we had outside, we decided we'd go for a coffee ... they turned up with a cake, birthday cards and turned up singing happy birthday to me in the middle of Starbucks and everybody else joined in! (Ronnie)

As well as being 'fun' and providing Core Members with new experiences which they had not always been able to participate in previously the activities provided real-life environments among 'normal' people. In doing so, the Circle was able to help show Core Members that people would not 'stop and stare' at them (Bob). The activities were also to encourage them to overcome their reluctance to re-engage. For instance Bill spoke of his apprehension of going to a supermarket because of his perception that everyone would look at him.

Being somewhere public made me nervous, so you know as a Circle we would tend go somewhere to have a coffee, you know to Asda or Sainsbury's cafe and things like that to actually face some of the things I was less sure of (Bill)

Activities were not always chosen by the volunteers to help Core Members overcome their anxieties. Many Core Members reported some ownership over the process of choosing activities and would be responsible for making the bookings or planning parts of the trip. Not only did Core Members report such tasks to be fulfilling a sense of pride about themselves which they had lost post-conviction, but the activities also reinforced that Core Members did not have to remain isolated forever. Such tasks were often used to facilitate Core Member engagement with others, and thus presented a further pathway from isolation. Responsibilities provided by the use of activities also demonstrated to Core Members that with some support and precautions they would be able to regularly participate in these activities when the Circle ends. Indeed, following such activities, James and Matthew have both, with the support of the Circle and their police and probation officers, become members of organisations which their Circle had introduced them too. For James, his membership of a local pool and snooker club which he joined after a trip to the same club with his volunteers has led him to encouraging some of his new friends to also join so he can have a new social network:

Now I've got my membership and I am trying to persuade my two other friends to sign up so that they can come with me to meet new people (James)

Another feature of the Circle process which reaffirmed Core Members new found inclusiveness was the use of the telephone. When each Circle begins the Core Member is usually given a *Pay-As-You-Go* mobile phone to enable the volunteers and Core Members to contact each other at short notice to confirm and rearrange meetings or in an emergency.⁸² The use of the mobile phone was found to be more extensive than expected and many Core Members suggested the phone was a big feature in helping them feel less

⁸² Regional projects operate differently and some projects do not share phone numbers between Core Members and volunteers

isolated. Core Members reported having low social contact and the use of the phone provided a form of virtual communication and support, especially on a weekend or when they were alone. This access to contact someone outside of the weekly Circle meetings was seen by many Core Members as a show of trust which they had not received since their arrest. In doing so, the phone provides a pathway from the virtual isolation they experienced. Many Core Members stated that they had not needed to contact the volunteers but valued the ability to contact someone if the needed to.

I've never had to phone Circles but it's nice knowing you've got someone to call if you need to, want to. So that was a good part of it (Eddie)

There is also the text messaging as well because they are always at the end of the phone, and they text me to make sure I am ok (James)

Other Core Members used the phone as a means of maintaining informal contact between meetings. This was not always Core Member-led though, and frequently Core Members reported that the volunteers would initiate the contact with them:

Normally on a Sunday Gail will text me asking how the weekend's been and Anne is away this weekend but normally she would be in touch asking how things are and make sure everyone's meeting up and that sort of thing you know (Max)

if I was having a bad week I would get a phone call 'how's it going mate?' or 'I've just popped outside to call and see how you are, are you alright cos I know you've had a bad week' (Ruben)

In contemporary western society the act of sending and receiving a text message or phone call is a relatively mundane activity for most people, but for Core Members the value of receiving some contact from the volunteer was high and was beneficial in reinforcing their acceptance – at least in some quarters. In doing so, the sending of a text message not only reduced isolation but also sowed the seeds for Core Members to begin (or continue) thinking about a more pro-social future where they could pursue and engage in “normal things like normal people” (Gordon).

Stigma Management Post-CoSA

Participation in CoSA resulted in some Core Members developing new stigma management techniques. Two new approaches were identified as being utilised by Core Members. The most common of these was Preventative Telling.

Preventative Telling

For Core Members, preventative telling involves making a voluntary disclosure of their offences to selected persons thus revealing their stigmatised identity (Goffman, 1963). In doing so, individuals radically transform their situation and so transform themselves from being discreditable to discredited as they no-longer hide the secret stigma. While this can lead to the person being shunned and rejected, it can equally lead to a degree of openness and the creation of the small group which Goffman mentioned as acting as a possible protective Circle.

The ultimate aim of such an approach is that Core Members will receive a more sympathetic reception and hopefully acceptance or at least 'lessened ... derision' (Furst and Evans, 2014: 2) by being upfront and honest about their past behaviour (Winnick and Bodkin, 2008). Evans and Cubellis (2015) suggested preventative telling can also be used to educate non-stigmatised individuals about their stigma and in doing so the stigmatised person could be made more acceptable over time. The individuals who are disclosed to are typically people who the stigmatised individual views as a "significant other" or a safe person and someone who will understand the risk the Core Member is taking in making such a disclosure and will not tell others of their stigmatised identity (Goffman, 1963). By making the disclosure in a very matter of fact way Goffman suggests that the non-stigmatised persons can be said to be trapped or prevented from showing their true feelings.

Except for disclosures to criminal justice professionals who were already aware of their conviction, very few reports of preventative telling were given during the interviews. Where this did occur it was usually after the Core

Members had started in the Circle. Here, preventative telling was usually first done in the Circle by Core Members and then taken to the 'outside'. For instance, Eddie, Ronnie, Henry and Gordon all practiced the preventative telling in the early Circle meetings through the disclosure of their offences and then practiced this just prior to their external preventative telling.

In most cases the preventative telling was done as Core Members sought employment but in Ronnie's case this was as he sought to rebuild his family relationship. Ronnie stated that following his conviction he lost contact with his children but they had since tried to contact him. After receiving this request Ronnie sought the advice of his Circle volunteers as to how to approach these meetings and what he should say. Ronnie explained that his children had been told certain 'facts' about his offences from their mother and wanted to hear their father's side. When meeting his children Ronnie said he sought to be honest with his answers as the Circle encouraged him to be and in the case of his son:

He knew that a lot of what he had been force-fed or told while I was in prison was a general mish-mash of lies, and ... I admitted certain things about the offence and what I had done. And he accepted that and didn't blame me ... My daughter, she's still working through a few things ... but she's accepted the facts and that I've admitted to what I did (Ronnie)

Transcendence

The other stigma management technique to be identified as having occurred among Core Members since their participation in CoSA is Transcendence. Transcendence involves Core Members making a declaration or promise to have changed and be better behaved in the future. Transcendence typically follows preventative telling as it also involves revealing a Core Members stigmatised identity. A common feature with Transcendence is that it occurred internally within Core Members as well as in declarations to volunteers, criminal justice professionals and family members. While a number of Core Members (N= 19) made statements that they are now a changed person and will be "good" in the future, few indicated that they had made such statements outside of their Circle, our interview or in police and

probation meetings. Nine Core Members made declarations to have changed beyond these meetings and stated they wanted to work towards a new life.

Typically these statements of change were made to family members or significant others. These declarations typically involved a greater risk of rejection, but also required a high level of evidence to support their claims to be a changed person. Where transcendence is successful, Core Members are relieved of their stigma to a select group of people they have a relationship with. This relationship can then begin to develop beyond the stigma or with awareness of the stigma making the bonds stronger. Ronnie explained how he made a declaration to have changed to his children after he had re-established his relationship with them, and the Circle had assisted Ronnie to be open in making this declaration:

[I did] it face-to-face, particularly with my daughter, that way she could look at my eyes and tell if I was telling the truth or not ... I told them what sort of work I'd done in terms of reoffending programmes, and what I was doing now ... and they've both sort of accepted that, my son in particular and he is very supportive. [CoSA] gave me the incentive and the boost to do it (Ronnie)

Thus it could be argued Transcendence is not only a stigma management technique but something which enables Core Members to reaffirm pro-social messages. Core Members with the strongest Transcendence technique had undertaken the SOTP and the Circle.

The value of the CoSA role

Stigma and isolation is something all Core Members spoke about to varying levels of severity and with a range of outcomes. Prior to joining CoSA many of the Core Members in this study had difficulties in separating the stigma of being a convicted sex offender from the rest of their identity and seeing themselves as a good person (Hudson, 2005). For some the stigma they experienced was particularly debilitating and involved three forms – self, perceived and real (LeBel, 2012).

A consequence of the stigma experienced by Core Members is that they began to believe themselves to be universally discreditable, non-tolerated and generally seen as a sub-human species (Spencer, 2009). For most Core Members this resulted in low self-esteem, self-confidence and an inability to react and respond to the stigma and isolation they were experiencing. As such prior to the Circle many reported withdrawing socially as well as mentally (i.e. they made a deliberate choice to not participate anymore and had that mind-set). Many Core Members who adopted this strategy reported suffering a further decline in their self-confidence and self-esteem. Circles was seen as a real positive opportunity at that point in their lives.

Once Core Members joined CoSA they reported the Circle provided a safe and supportive environment where they could begin to feel accepted and more of an equal. For those Core Members who were seeking to develop pro-social behaviours, the Circle was seen as an opportunity to have this modelled. Often the changes Core Members referred to were small things. For example Fred spoke of opening the curtains in his flat, while for Gordon it was having confidence to leave his home while his neighbours were in the street. Some of the Core Members recognised that these small steps were the start to something which they could seek independently of the Circle in the future. Core Members acknowledged however, that despite the efforts of the Circle volunteers, there remains a significant hostility towards sex offenders and this will create continuing barriers as they seek to reintegrate.

It would appear intuitive to assume that CoSA does have a positive effect in overcoming some of the stigma and isolation experienced by Core Members however, what Core Members say and feel does not necessarily translate into pro-social action or 'successful' desistance. However, given 'the place' sex offenders described themselves as being in prior to CoSA, the catalyst for change, ought, at the very least to be attributed to CoSA. The efforts of CoSA are further complicated by the unclear links which are said to exist in the relationship between a reduction in stigma and isolation and a reduction in the risk of reoffending (Mann et al, 2010).

Conclusion

Access to Core Members has provided an insight into the lives of convicted sex offenders from the beginning of the process of being apprehended by the authorities, their trial, throughout their sentence and during their return to the community. This has allowed this chapter to explore how the hostile media representations and divided societal reactions about sex offenders are experienced.

Key findings from the chapter are that a range of stigmatising situations were experienced by Core Members. Stigmatising situations include: being rejected by family and friends, being discovered by strangers, media representations, and being subject to violence in the community. The return to the community, criminal justice restrictions and employment were also experienced as stigmatising situations for Core Members. On the whole, Core Members apprehension of harm resulting from these stigmatising situations was far greater than the reality and these stigmatising situations rarely led to any physical attacks. The lack of physical harm however, does not disguise the considerable and often debilitating mental and social effects of perceived stigma or resulting isolation.

Almost all Core Members struggled to manage these stigmatising situations on their own, though Core Members who returned 'home' and had some level of family support were best placed to manage the stigma – or at least feel more protected from the effects of the stigma. For Core Members who moved to a 'new' place, the relative anonymity which the 'new' place provided them by no-one knowing them allowed Core Members to have greater freedoms to leave the hostel or their room. This level of anonymity, however, also presented its own barrier to stigma management as the new place often stalled the development of pro-social networks and Core Members soon reported fears of their identity being discovered. The group who struggled with stigma most however were the Core Members who returned 'home' without the support of family. For these Core Members the pains were doubled. Not only did they suffer stigma from being known in

their home town but they suffered significant isolation as they lacked the confidence to move forward. For the vast majority of Core Members these stigma management techniques led to greater levels of isolation and feelings of rejection which then caused concern to those responsible for their management.

Some attempts to manage their experiences of stigma were identified as being used by Core Members prior to their participation in CoSA, even though their success was limited. Of the four stigma management techniques, 'passing' was the most frequent stigma management technique used. Passing was adopted by all 30 Core Members at some point after their conviction and it entailed the Core Member omitting or passing over the undesirable stigma in their life. While this technique navigated the need for Core Members to disclose their offending it did little to reduce the stigma or its associated isolation. Passive self-isolation was even less effective in reducing levels of stigma and isolation among Core Members, with these Core Members not resisting their social rejection and simply retreating into isolation. Unlike passive self-isolation, the three Core Members who used active preventative withdrawal did not want to experience further rejection and sought to maintain some control in their lives by pre-emptively rejecting the rejecters. Although active preventative withdrawal also involved increased isolation, these Core Members did feel a reduced perception of stigma for some time. The final stigma management technique used by Core Members prior to participating in CoSA was denial. Only one Core Member used this stigma management technique consistently. Despite some similarities with 'passing', 'denial' involves specific denial of events or labels rather than seeking to conceal a stigmatised identity.

The final key result to have been identified by the chapter is the role of CoSA and the volunteers in reducing stigma and isolation. Despite initial uncertainty among some Core Members as to the purpose and values of CoSA all spoke highly of the process. The recurring message from the Core Members was that CoSA had enabled them to begin getting back to a "normal" life. The weekly meetings provided Core Members with the non-

stigmatising environment while the genuine nature of the volunteers illustrated there were possibilities for them to be welcomed back by pro-social networks in due time. The activities were also seen as a way of breaking out of the isolation which they felt following their conviction. A particularly important feature of CoSA, was the use of a telephone to communicate with volunteers outside of the Circle meetings. This not only provided a virtual link to overcome isolation, it also promoted Core Members pro-social behaviour by Core Members being entrusted to use the phone responsibly.

In summary then, Core Members were in a difficult transition following their conviction and sentence. For many, this led to a period of apprehension of being stigmatised by others which caused a retreat in their social interactions. Many of the coping strategies Core Members used to overcome this stigma and isolation received limited success and it was not until their participation in CoSA that Core Members reported some noticeable differences. Often this would not happen immediately nor would the changes be large, but they were seen by Core Members as part of a longer-term journey away from stigma and isolation.

Chapter Five: Temptations and Self-Control

Introduction

Sexual activity and the attractions of people towards other people are accepted as basic drivers in society. Mostly that drive is held by human beings within accepted social structures, boundaries and legal limits. The convicted and sentenced sex offender has transgressed those limits and as a result is now subject to the various forms of post custody supervision to ensure they do not relapse and transgress again. This chapter is concerned with the temptations experienced by Core Members following conviction and sentence and the self-control that they can maintain alongside external controls, and the degree to which these controls create resistance to perceived and experienced temptations.

The chapter begins by defining what a temptation is and how the distinction between legal sexual temptations and illegal sexual temptation can be extremely fine. The chapter identifies between legal but morally inappropriate temptations and illegal sexual temptations, and discusses how these are experienced by Core Members. The chapter also explores other temptations experienced by Core Members including temptations to use illegal drugs or alcohol which have been identified as a dis-inhibitor to their previous offending, or the temptation to breach the restrictions in their licence conditions or SOPO. The chapter uses Core Members reactions and responses to these temptations to assess how self-control strategies are utilised and the effectiveness of these strategies in enabling Core Members to resist temptations. Self-control is achieved by various techniques of 'avoidance' as a strategy to minimise the opportunities for temptations. Avoidance may be pre-planned and rehearsed or it might be unplanned and more spontaneous. Either way it takes the individual away from the tempting situation to what they may perceive as a 'safe' area.

Not all temptations were resisted and the chapter will explore the nature of irresistible temptations and the consequences of succumbing to temptations. The final part of the chapter assesses how Core Members enhance self-control strategies with their learning from sex offender treatment programmes and their participation in CoSA. Self-control may be complemented by external controls in the form of supervision or management provided by statutory authorities for the sex offender. This can be done by supervisory conditions or orders appropriately called 'restrictive orders' made by the courts. The Circle of Support and Accountability is yet another form of external control and assistance to the sex offender to help them manage temptations in a socially acceptable way.

What is meant by a temptation?

The term 'temptation' is used because the focus of study relates specifically to Core Members perspectives and perceptions of situations which they identified as temptations. Temptations therefore provide a subjective lens through which the sexual urges or desires of Core Members can be explored. While criminal justice professionals define such temptations as 'risky behaviours', this chapter concentrates on the subjective side of risk – 'temptations'.

At its broadest, temptations are defined as desires 'to do something wrong or unwise' (oxforddictionaries.com). For the purposes of this discussion however, a temptation is referred to as being a thought process that directs itself to a certain object of desire. There is great diversity in the temptations which human beings experience and some of these temptations will be legal while others will be illegal. Legal temptations may include objects of desire such as the consumption of unhealthy foods and alcohol, consumption of material goods through shopping, or the urge to smoke cigarettes (Ent et al, 2015). By contrast, illegal temptations may include thoughts and desire to use a Class-A drug or the temptation to steal or hit somebody. Illegal temptations may also involve a sexual desire which if acted upon would

result in a criminal offence. As such, illegal temptations have an illegal behaviour at their core.

The distinction between legal and illegal temptations does not change when the object of desire is sexual. One of the most impulsive of all temptations however is the desire for sex (Lewis, 2013). It is part of the human condition and we are pre-loaded with a strong instinct to feel attracted to and desire sexual activity (Regan and Berscheid, 1999). As Galliot and Baumeister (2007: 173) state 'human beings are sexual creatures by nature' and sexual acts are essential for continued survival of the human species thus 'we' have strong sexual desires. Given such strong desires controlling urges to legal and illegal sexual objects of desire requires self-control and abstinence (Knoch and Fehr, 2007).

Despite the evolutionary importance of sexual reproduction to human beings, there has been a relative dearth of research on sexual desires or temptations within the academic literature (DiMarco, 2003). Informal controls to temptations can be witnessed through religious scriptures which encourage their followers to abstain from acting on their urges or being unfaithful as it will be a sin. Regan and Berscheid (1999) point out how scriptures purport sexual acts outside of marriage to symbolise 'drag[ging] weak persons into hell or push[ing] them over the edge into insanity' (Regan and Berscheid, 1999: 3).

In contemporary society, however, sexual innuendos and depictions of sexual acts glorifying sexual relationships are countless. Advertisements for products such as perfumes, clothes and holidays are specifically designed to sell such products through the promotion of promiscuity and sexual desirability (Reichert et al, 1999; Reichert, 2002). Regan and Berscheid (1999) also note the highly sexualised nature of society creates additional temptations. They suggest this is not only witnessed through "lad's mags" encouraging sexual conquests by men, but also reiterated in women's magazines promoting promiscuity; sex tips; and active sex lives. Regan and Berscheid (1999: vii) suggest such are the plethora of messages, there is an

‘almost obsessive fascination with which the media and reading public approach the topic of sexual desire’.

Sexual temptations are not homogenous however, and the range of sexual urges varies significantly among individuals (DiMarco, 2003). Some seek heterosexual intercourse, some seek sexual intercourse with a member of the same sex. Others may desire sex with members of both sexes, to have multiple sexual partners, or to have sex with two people at the same time (George, 1999; Roseneil, 2000). Where such thoughts lead to consensual heterosexual acts, such desires are legally and morally acceptable. The capacity of human beings to successfully suppress many of these impulses or urges and refrain from acting upon temptations is seen as one of the hallmarks of civilised life (Knoch and Fehr, 2007). There are, however, boundaries to acceptable sexual activity. Some retain a view that heterosexual monogamy is the only acceptable sexual activity and all other sexual activity is taboo. Others have greater tolerances and far less sexual behaviours are perceived of as being taboo. Despite this more liberal attitude, taboos can still exist and breaching these boundaries can be viewed by some as being repulsive or abnormal (i.e. homosexuality, fetishes), but they can also be criminalised (i.e. incest or non-consensual sex) (Ward et al, 2006; Knoch and Fehr, 2007; Nordgren and Chou, 2011; Ent et al, 2015).

Despite the extensive use of sexualised images in advertising, the expression of sexual thoughts in public can, in certain social settings be regarded as socially undesirable and ultimately lead to social isolation (Gailliot and Baumeister, 2007). In the UK and many developed countries in the World sexual misbehaviours resulting from deviant sexual thoughts, for instance, sexual activity with a child, non-consensual sex with an adult, the possession of indecent images of children, or urges to expose one’s self can result in a criminal conviction. While many people succeed in suppressing, managing or controlling their desires to pursue illegal or immoral sexual temptations, sex offenders breach socially accepted behaviours, and legal boundaries to fulfil their desires (Laws and Ward, 2011; Lewis, 2013).

The boundary between illegal and legal sexual temptations can be extremely fine at times. Legal sexual temptations are any behaviours which are not outlined in law, for example a desire to have consensual sex with adult or to view adult pornography. By contrast, illegal sexual temptations refer to objects of desire which have an illegal activity at the core. Illegal sexual temptations might include a desire or opportunity to have sex with children, the urge or fantasy to use coercion or force during sexual activity, the creation and possession of child pornography or acts of exposure. These behaviours, if acted on would result in a sexual offence.

The distinction between illegal and legal temptations is complicated however, because temptations or “thoughts” are not in of themselves, illegal or prosecutable. The situation surrounding legal and illegal sexual temptations is further complicated because certain objects of desire are regarded as being precursors to illegal behaviours or were related to the Core Members original offending. Examples of temptations being precursors include the individual holding deviant sexual fantasies, manipulative intentions and the consumption of dis-inhibitors like drugs or alcohol. As a result of the association with past offending or links to future offending, these temptations raise suspicions and increase attention from statutory supervisory authorities and are therefore discouraged by criminal justice practitioners.

Experiences of Temptations

Temptations were identified in one of two ways. Either Core Members reported during the interview to self-identifying a temptation as it arose and either reacting to this or using a strategy to overcome it (N= 12). More frequently, however, Core Members disclosed their reaction to a temptation after they had acted on it. Fifteen Core Members made statements of their reactions. A small minority of Core Members (N= 3) did not reveal any instances of encountering temptations or their reactions to such situations. The forms temptations took varied among Core Members. This chapter

focuses particularly on sexual temptations, temptations related to a Core Members offending (such as the use of alcohol) or examples of instances where Core Members were tempted to breach the conditions of their Licence or restrictive orders such as a SOPO. The frequency of temptations also varied among Core Members, with some describing constant temptations and other reporting isolated situations.

As already alluded to, certain sexual acts are forbidden by law. Acting out these prohibited behaviours can therefore result in a criminal conviction. In this chapter, instances of Core Members being tempted to (and then) engaging in such behaviour while in the Circle is referred to as 'illegal sexual temptations'. Accounts of such desires arose infrequently (N= 3) in the interviews. This should not be unexpected given the consequences which the Core Member would face by making such a disclosure. The reminder that the interviewer had an obligation to disclose any accounts of serious risks of harm made by interviewees may have also minimised such accounts. Where such disclosures occurred, Core Members had already been convicted and sentenced for such acts and thus Core Members would face no further sanctions. Where illegal temptations were identified, it was typically introduced by Core Members to illustrate their efforts and successes in managing these temptations.

As well as examining objects of desire which have an illegal activity at the core, the chapter also examines legal but 'morally inappropriate temptations'. Such temptations are legal but the object of desire was inappropriate – either focusing on vulnerable women and those supervising them. In most cases the focus of these temptations was 'legal' as they frequently involved adults over the age of consent but were inappropriate because of who the attraction was directed towards. In some cases, morally inappropriate temptations involved potentially deviant sexual fantasies whereby Core Members revealed a continued attraction to their victims. Unless acted upon, these events remain legal, though are of particular concern to professionals responsible for supervision and management of convicted sex offenders given the links to risk of reoffending (Mann et al,

2010). Not only do some of these temptations involve 'deviant sexual fantasies' which are a known factor related to reoffending, but such temptations also highlight other risk factors such as sexual preoccupation, offence supportive attitudes, emotional congruence with children and impulsivity (Mann et al, 2010). Given the concerns related to risks of reoffending, the development of self-control strategies is important.

The 'temptation to use dis-inhibitors' was also identified by some Core Members. In most cases this involved the excess consumption of alcohol, though some Core Members stated to having used, or be using, illegal drugs. The use of dis-inhibitors like drugs and alcohol are also associated with increasing the risk of the reoffending due to a lessening of self-controls (Whitaker et al, 2008).

The final category of temptations identified by Core Members involved 'prohibited behaviours'. Restrictions on acceptable sexual activity exists both legally and socially. For those convicted of sexual offences, restrictions can be imposed to limit other aspects of behaviours. These restrictions are not direct restrictions on sexual activity, but are imposed with the intention of restricting opportunities for future offending. In the UK, restrictions typically come in the form of licence conditions and SOPOs⁸³. These conditions have the effect of converting seemingly mundane activities into potential catalysts for future offending. For example sex offenders may be restricted from entering certain shops, such as *Mothercare* which sells clothing for children, may have restricted access to the internet, or may have restricted access to children under 16. Because of the range of restrictions which may be imposed, these restrictive orders or conditions can pose temptations to breach. Sixteen Core Members indicated that they had been tempted to engage in 'routine' or 'everyday' activities such as, seeing friends or family who may have contact with children despite their orders requiring them to not have contact with children (either supervised or unsupervised). Thus 'routine' situations or behaviours are substantially more complex for those

⁸³ SOPOs were replaced by Sexual Risk Orders (SRO) and Sexual Harm Prevention Orders (SHPOs) on 8th March 2015.

with a conviction for a sexual offence and associated restrictive orders and conditions.

Illegal sexual temptations

Illegal sexual temptations were the most infrequent of all temptations expressed by Core Members. Only three of the 30 Core Members made reference to such behaviours. Each of these Core Members had previous convictions for sexual activity with a child, and reported maintaining a sexual interest in children. The level of interest varied among these three Core Members. The periods when Core Members acted upon these temptations also varied. For instance, Alan, a Core Member with offences against children stated that he 'still' finds himself staring at young children in the park. Alan gave no indication to having acted upon his urges towards young children since his last sentence. As well as revealing a sexual interest in children, Alan also claimed to have committed a further offence while in the Circle. Alan reported that he inappropriately touched a women while on a bus:

I touched the inner part of this Chinese girl's thigh and I touched her breasts as well, and I told them this as well. But they said no you didn't you're just saying it (Alan)

His claim was rejected by the police who found no evidence of whether this occurred or not, though the account provided by Alan, combined with his continued attraction to children, raises concerns about his levels of self-control and sexual preoccupation.

Ruben also stated he had difficulties managing his sexual urges towards young children. Ruben's convictions included numerous contact offences against male and female children. He reported two separate incidents which manifested itself in illegal sexual temptations. The first incident involved Ruben developing an obsession with a female child in a church group he attended, and he recalled asking the child to sit on his knee and tickling her. Ruben received an informal warning from the police and probation services but he indicated this would have been more severe except there was insufficient evidence for the police to proceed. In the second situation,

Ruben admitted to having accessed indecent images of children on a computer. He explained his 'default' sexual attraction was towards children and this was made stronger by his discomfort with and rejection by adults, and therefore accessing indecent images of children was described as 'comforting' at this time in his life:

Do you know the Charlie Brown character – Linus – with the comfort blanket, masturbation was my comfort blanket! It was the thing I went to when I struggled and when I was stressed. It was my release. And because I struggled with people, I masturbated over people younger (Ruben)

Unlike Alan's temptations, the incidents Ruben described occurred some years ago and at the time of the interview Ruben claimed to have become better able to manage his temptations following the support of those responsible for supervising and monitoring him, as well as the Circle volunteers and other voluntary interventions.

Ryan also held temptations which had an illegal sexual core. Ryan disclosed some of the most deviant sexual fantasies among the sample. During the interview, he revealed that he felt aroused when masturbating into a child's nappy. Prior to the interview with Ryan, the CoSA coordinator expressed that Ryan held some extreme deviant sexual fantasies involving children. These extreme deviant sexual fantasies were then identified by Ryan during the interview. He described having had a sexual attraction to children for several years and this led to the use of a nappy while masturbating. Ryan stated how the use of a nappy arose:

When I have had bad spells ... I'm using nappies or what not for sex or things (Ryan)

The dangerousness of Ryan's actions were reinforced in further discussions with the coordinator of his Circle some months after the interview. During these conversations it was disclosed that shortly after his interview, Ryan was arrested following an accusation by the police that he had continued to engage in these deviant sexual fantasies and was preparing to act out his fantasy of having sex with a child. This was proven by Ryan's kidnap, torture

and disposal of the pet from a family unknown to him. This was deemed to be a preparatory attempt before Ryan would attempt the same with a child. Ryan's deviant sexual fantasies arguably strengthened his cognitive distortions and reduced his self-control strategies, thus legitimising his temptations.⁸⁴ In time and without appropriate interventions Ryan's deviant sexual fantasies escalated into a criminal offence which could have culminated in an extremely serious sexual offence and possibly murder. Salter (1988) acknowledges the relationship between deviant sexual fantasies and further offending, claiming sexually deviant fantasies can become 'releasers' or mechanisms through which deviant sexual behaviours can be distorted or neutralised to lower resistance, before ultimately being acted on.

Morally inappropriate temptations

Core Members also made reference to legal but inappropriate sexual temptations. These are referred to in the thesis as morally inappropriate temptations. Morally inappropriate temptations typically involved Core Members objects of desire focusing on vulnerable women or women who were responsible for their supervision and management. In some cases, these included potentially deviant sexual fantasies⁸⁵ whereby Core Members revealed a continued attraction to their victims, however, the intensity and frequency of these temptations was reported by Core Members as declining. Despite the legal nature of most of these temptations, some concerns were cautious that morally inappropriate fantasies could still lead to reoffending. For instance, Ruben stated the dangers or continued morally inappropriate or deviant sexual fantasies could be precursors to further sexual offending:

It's so easy to B-S [bullshit] yourself sometimes, like you tell yourself 'it's ok, nobody knows' or 'it's ok, because it's all in your head' you know you are [whispers:] masturbating about things in your head that you shouldn't be, 'but its ok cos you aren't hurting anybody'. So you are telling yourself all these things and justifying

⁸⁴ Cognitive distortions refer to the attitudes or belief systems which are used by individuals to minimise or justify the subsequent deviant or immoral behaviour (Blumenthal et al, 1999).

⁸⁵ These are "potential" deviant sexual fantasies as the age of the "potential victim" or sexual partner was not explicitly clear, but these Core Members had previous convictions against children.

your actions that aren't helpful and you are building up the lies you are telling yourself and then suddenly bumpf you offend! (Ruben)

Examples of morally inappropriate or socially undesirable temptations were disclosed by a number of Core Members. Norman and Joe made reference to their continued attraction to young women or girls. Norman and Joe were less clear about who they were attracted to but both intimated having an attraction to teenage girls and young women. For Norman, a man in his fifties who received a conviction for the possession of indecent images of children, this attraction to children and young women created continual temptations. He described approaching lots of young women he met on the street, in cafes and even in probation offices when he had supervision meetings. The majority of the women Norman described appeared to be vulnerable due to possible mental health problems or a drug dependency. On one occasion, in the first months of his Circle, he reported seeing a 20 year old female in the street who was described as being potentially vulnerable and stated he followed her home and "Put a note through her door asking her out" (Norman).

The lack of control Norman had over his impulses, especially his targeting of vulnerable women was of particular concern to the police and probation officer's responsible for managing him. Their concerns about Norman's risk of reoffending were heightened following a meeting with him and his probation officer in a coffee shop:

I went for coffee once with [PPU officer], which seems a bit of a funny thing to do, but [PPU officer] said that I want to go for a coffee with you just to see how you react and [PPU officer] said I was all over the place and couldn't take [my] eyes off the kids (Norman)

Joe, a Core Member in his forties, also had a conviction relating to children and described undesirable temptations that were also the subject of concern from criminal justice practitioners. Joe, was convicted of sexual assault against a female child under 16 and continued to state he had feelings for, and was attracted to, his victim after his release from prison. Joe stated:

I didn't have a lot of empathy for my victims cos like I said I still cared for her. I said I would still take her back tomorrow (Joe)

More recently, Joe stated he had realised the harm he caused to his victim and has started to move toward fantasies involving young women

I've admitted that I still have a very high sex drive, but I won't go out to commit a sex offence against a kid to fulfil my sexual needs ... you know I'd rather go masturbate than go out and attack someone or find somebody vulnerable and chat them up ... my thinking has totally changed

One final sexual temptation which some Core Members revealed during their interviews was their attraction to one or more of their Circle volunteers. At least six of the Core Members revealed they had held attractions to volunteers.

The one I had the crush on, Abi (Joe)

Emily: hottie. She still is a hottie! But we've got a thing for brunettes, me and my wife (Core Member ⁸⁶)

These are legal temptations because the volunteers are adults and age-appropriate attractions should be seen as forward progress. Indeed, the majority of the Core Members who openly revealed an attraction to one of their volunteers had convictions against children and therefore a new attraction to young adult women could be construed as a positive step in their move away from offending attitudes. The problem however, is that Core Members are supposed to be developing appropriate boundaries as well as addressing risky behaviours. While the interviewees did not reveal whether such attractions had been fantasised about sexually, such temptations represent a grey area in the discussions of legal and immoral temptations. Moreover, the working relationship between volunteer and Core Member is seen as sacrosanct and such attractions could be a further illustration of the lack of boundaries which Core Members exhibited in their original offending.

⁸⁶ No name is attributed to this quote due to the content and sensitive nature of the material

Temptations and the use of dis-inhibitors

The temptation to use dis-inhibitors such as illegal drugs or alcohol also emerged during interviews. Some of these temptations were identified by Core Members prior to being acted upon. On other occasions, Core Members admitted to having uncontrolled addictions.

Numerous studies have identified the positive correlation between substance misuse and reoffending (Hanson and Harris 2000; Craig et al, 2006; Whitaker et al, 2008). Not only does the misuse of substances present an increased risk of reoffending (Mann et al, 2010) but the use of alcohol has also been identified as a mechanism sex offenders use to distance their responsibility from their offending (Salter, 1988). Temptations of alcohol and illegal drugs therefore present a number of challenges for those responsible for managing Core Members, and Core Members themselves.

Five Core Members reported having misused drugs or alcohol in the months immediately prior to their offending. While all five claimed that drugs or alcohol had played a factor in their offending, they accepted this was not the sole reason for offending. Since their conviction, three Core Members admitted to continuing to ab/use alcohol despite the contribution this had to their offending. Alan, Max and Simon acknowledged how alcohol was a risk factor in their offending and claimed to be more aware of this risk. All three explained that drinking was a coping mechanism for other problems in their lives. Both spoke of wanting to be less reliant on alcohol but their efforts were largely unsuccessful. Max described not being an alcoholic but stated he would occasionally “fall off the wagon” sometimes for days at a time:

that's the way I am and that's the way I will always be, I don't think I will change (Max)

Henry and Troy also acknowledged drug and/or alcohol abuse had also been a factor in their offending and both admitted to being ‘heavy drinkers’ at the time of their offending. Since their conviction however, both Troy and Henry stated they now understood the role alcohol played in their initial offending and therefore had made efforts to stop drinking altogether. Henry

epitomised their concerns suggesting it would be the start of a 'slippery slope' towards risky behaviours and potentially reoffending.

Prohibited behaviours

Prohibited behaviours refer to the temptations to participate in behaviours which are in contravention or breach of the Core Members licence conditions or SOPOs. Due to the scope of restrictions which can be applied to sex offenders some of these behaviours in themselves are not illegal or restricted for the majority of people. Following conviction for a sexual offence, and on return to the community, most offenders will be subject to licence conditions and a SOPO. A SOPO is a civil order which can be applied under the Sexual Offences Act 2003 (s. 104) 'where the court is satisfied that it is necessary to make an order for the purpose of protecting the public or any particular member of the public from serious sexual harm from the defendant'. Restrictions or prohibitions contained in a SOPO are akin to personalised criminal laws as the SOPO allows for the drafting to be individually tailored to reduce the risks posed by the offender (Shute, 2004; Lieb et al, 2011). These conditions are drafted by the local police responsible for managing the offender, or the prosecutor in the case and then authorised in a Magistrates Court. The consequences of breaching SOPOs are as severe as many criminal offences, with the maximum sentence being five years imprisonment. The 'licence' gives specific instructions on what individuals must not do, but also the conditions or behaviours which they must follow. Core Members reported being subject to curfews restricting their movement during certain hours, notably school opening/closing times; restrictions on using mobile phones or cameras, restrictions on computer or internet usage; being required to report any new relationships to supervising officers, and to not enter a certain area or go to a certain place.

As the above demonstrates, the array of restrictions which can be imposed by licence conditions and SOPOs mean that 'normal' behaviours can be restricted. What emerges therefore is the accidental creation of temptations to routine or 'normal' activities. Moreover, this increases the number of

temptations which may be experienced by convicted and sentenced sex offenders on return to the community. Because prohibited behaviours are activities which many would define as 'normal', they can occur at any time. For instance, Simon, a Core Member who committed internet offences which involved the grooming of young boys had restrictions on contact with children which subsequently affected his daily activities noting:

I can't be in the house when my niece comes over I gotta leave cos of my SOPO ... I have had to go out because she was coming over. I have had to get a bus and just go out around [city] for the day while she is over (Simon)

Opportunities to get away with breaching prohibited behaviours therefore appeared greater and had crossed the minds of some Core Members. Bill had two children when he was convicted of internet based offences. He lived close to his children and ex-wife and described an amicable relationship. Since his conviction however, he is not allowed contact with his children unless he is supervised. Bill spoke of some of these conditions being so simple that they could unintentionally be breached. Bill stated he did not want to lose contact with his family and thus made conscious efforts to protect himself. This did cause some frustration and difficulties to the daily routine of himself, his ex-wife and their children stating he was no longer able to help his wife out by looking after their children:

I've got restrictions on being able to spend time with my own kids ... it's the simple thing that I couldn't put my son in the car to drive the five minutes to the tip to put rubbish in the tip and then drive back and you know it's such a simple thing but I can't do it ... so I couldn't give my wife the five minutes peace from two kids growing up together bickering (Bill)

Restrictions also affected Core Members access to computers and the internet. In most cases Core Members subject to these restrictions had committed their offences on the Internet. They stated to having restriction on the use of computers or being on the internet unsupervised.

At the moment I'm not allowed on the computer (Matthew)

Currently I am not allowed on any internet forums, chatrooms or social network sites like Facebook etc (Carl)

Troy also had conditions within his SOPO that denied him access to a computer without supervision. Troy was particularly resentful of his ban given his offending was a contact offence and did not involve the use of a computer or the internet. Troy was further angered when he found out that some sex offenders on the community-based sex offender treatment programmes had committed online sexual offences but were still allowed to use a computer.

Curfew hours were less frequently cited as problematic by Core Members. Most of the Core Members who were released from custody stated that they expected to be 'on licence', living in a hostel, and being subject to a curfew for a certain time period. The severity of curfews did lead to early resentment of their conditions however. The terms of Christopher's curfew required that he would have to return to the hostel every three hours. Moreover, Christopher described the duration of his curfew was beyond that of most other sex offenders in the hostel:

*I came out [of prison] and expected to be on this [curfew] cos most sex offenders came out on these [curfews] but they normally only last a couple or few months then come off but mine didn't
(Christopher)*

For Christopher, the severity of his curfew increased the likelihood of him breaching the curfew but also led to a feeling of being singled-out unfairly, which then made him contemplate breaching his order as a sign of defiance.

This discussion has sought to demonstrate that the normality of some prohibited behaviours can create the temptation for Core Members to overstep their restrictions. A consequence of prohibiting these behaviours is that some Core Members began to struggle to manage their sexual temptation as considerable effort was directed towards managing restricted 'normal' activities.

Self-Control Strategies for Managing Temptations

In order to better understand why some Core Members are able to resist temptations and others succumb, the chapter will now explore the two self-control strategies Core Members utilised in their attempt to resist temptations. The most frequently used strategy was avoidance of temptations. Avoidance took two forms, first Core Members planned for temptations emerging, others reacted to temptations through avoidance. A small number stated they did not have a specific strategy but were instead relying on their self-confidence to resist temptations. The use of these two approaches will be examined to assess the effectiveness of Core Members to resist or control themselves when temptations arise.

Avoidance as a strategy

As alluded to above, the strategy of avoidance was the most commonly used self-control by Core Members. Avoidance can be a positive approach to resist temptations as the urge to succumb to temptations is far less likely if they are not continuously arising (Ent et al, 2015). Ent et al (2015) go on to claim avoidance is an act of self-control, and the choice to avoid situations displays a greater level of self-control as it involves utilising advanced thinking, anticipation and also awareness of self (in order to be aware of one's own temptations and impulses). Hofmann et al (2012) echo these findings suggesting avoidance to a temptation is preferable to relying on self-control at the last minute. Thus, 'by avoiding temptations, one can save oneself the presumably greater expenditure of willpower' (Ent et al, 2015: 13).

A total of 21 Core Members were identified as using the avoidance strategy to resist deviant sexual desires or other temptations in their lives. Some Core Members said they had practiced their avoidance strategies prior to leaving the house through role plays; these are referred to as pre-planned avoidance. Others were able to identify possible temptations as they arose in their day-to-day activities and Core Members sought to resist these through avoidance techniques. These are referred to as unplanned avoiders.

Pre-planned avoidance

Avoidance through self-confinement was one of the first strategies adopted by Core Members to resist temptations on their return to the community. Self-imposed confinement was used firstly as a method of protection from the abuse or attacks which they anticipated but then Core Members realised this strategy also limited their exposure to possible temptations and thus they preferred to stay within the safety of their own home. Brian described his house as being like Fort Knox as there were numerous locks on the door which meant it took him forever to answer the door. This was clearly to stop people coming in, but Brian also said this level of security also made him think about why he is going out and what risks might arise. He said that the fear of being spotted and then attacked was especially high and so he stayed in the house:

In the back of my mind I just think one day if somebody see's me and knows me [and then] finds out where I live I know that if they tried to break-in, it will take them ages, but it aint worth it so I stay in (Brian)

Self-confinement and avoidance was particularly noticeable among those Core Members who had served a period of imprisonment. This was a strategy they had adopted from their time in prison. Many of the Core Members who went to prison were often isolated from the main prison population in specialist sex-offender wings at some point in their sentence and reported feeling safer while in this environment. On release from prison they were often re-located to a hostel, mainly with other sex offenders and 'druggies'.

Self-confinement intuitively appears an easy strategy to adopt, however, this was not always the case. The hostel environment was described as particularly unpleasant by almost all the Core Members who were required to stay. Core Members spoke of having easy access to drugs, but also the potential for confrontations at the slightest incident. As such Core Members referred to needing to "escape the confines of the hostel" (Max) because

they were surrounded by 'druggies' and other offenders:

In the hostel there were quite a lot of drug users in there who I think have been in and out of prison again numerous times (Ruben)

Currently I'm living in a hostel with about 20 other weirdos. Basically it's like the opening night of the Paralympics, it really is! But hopefully I'm moving out of there soon (Max)

As Max's quote shows, he felt he was superior to many of the residents in the hostel and described having a number of confrontations. For most Core Members, however, their stay in the hostel created a dilemma. On the one hand, Core Members identified the temptations associated with being in the hostel such as access to drugs and stolen property. They were also aware of the consequences which would result if they succumbed. On the other hand, Core Members described being concerned – or unable – to resist temptations which could occur from everyday social situations. The problem this posed was that their strategy of self-confined avoidance could not be maintained. If Core Members were to remain in the hostel they may succumb to temptations to use drugs or be subject to assaults or verbal abuse. If they left the hostel the array of prohibited behaviours which they were subject to created a number of temptations, and by being in the community they felt they risked their stigmatised identity being discovered. Even self-imposed social isolation in the community was difficult due to the restrictions on public spaces such as parks.

Self-confinement was also evident among Core Members who received a community sentence. This transition from self-imposed isolation to some form of social engagement was often difficult, as the fears Core Members had about being in particular places meant they restricted themselves from partaking in many activities. The following examples are illustrations of pre-planned techniques of avoidance. These involve Core Members identifying specific temptations and devising strategies to resist them via avoidance. For instance, Gordon stated he was scared to go near parks for fear of what people would think. He then spoke of how this was considered a risky behaviour to him and his strategy was therefore to avoid going to areas where children may be playing in a park

My offence was to do with teenage girls, so my initial risk areas would be parks where these sort of people would be... [they were the] areas that probably in my early days I still considered risky (Gordon)

Brian was another Core Member to use avoidance as a strategy to resist temptation. Brian's offences involved children and subsequently he had restrictions on his contact with children. During the interview he rehearsed his strategy of avoiding contact with a young child stating:

Automatically I'd just say 'I'm sorry I can't stop, I've got an appointment somewhere' cos I've had kids coming up to me asking me for the time ... I [didn't have an appointment] but I would say that to prevent 'em from talking to me (Brian)

It was this grey area between the private (self-imposed isolation) and the public (with its potentially risky opportunities and unwanted temptations) that Circles of Support and Accountability could slot into to assist the Core Members.

Unplanned avoidance

Not all avoidance techniques could be planned. For instance, James recalled visiting a friend from the hostel at the friend's house. As part of James' licence conditions he was not allowed to have contact with children under 16. Unexpectedly, a child was brought into the house by another friend of the man. James stated his only reaction to such a situation was to leave the house immediately as he could avoid getting into trouble by just leaving.

Matthew also claimed to having adopted a strategy of avoidance in light of unforeseen encounters. When meeting friends in the library, who did not know about his convictions or his restrictions on accessing the internet, Matthew was told about the ability to find information on the internet. Despite Matthew, stating he was proficient in the use of a computer during the interview, he pretended he did not know how to use a computer and asked his friend to show him how to use the computer. In doing so Matthew

avoided breaching his conditions and avoided having to disclose his conviction, while also being able to access the internet:

I've been on [the internet] before with [library friend] and I had to pretend I didn't know how to go on a computer and [library friend] showed me how to go on then and we spent about one hour on there [the internet] (Matthew)

Fred also acknowledged the use of avoidance strategies following some unanticipated verbal abuse directed towards him by teenagers in the street. Fred recalled how he was walking along the street when he had a 'Kodak moment' (Fred). Fred's 'Kodak moment' was that a teenage girl shouted to Fred to turn around as she was dropping her trousers:

Two 15-16 year old females walk past, and one of them as she walks past drops her trousers and [then] they shout 'Oi you', wanting me to turn around, and I'm thinking I'm not sure what I am going to see when I turn around and how big the flash [of the camera] is going to be. People try to manipulate a situation to try and gain a response from people (Fred).

This unanticipated incident caused Fred to develop a planned avoidance strategy as he temporarily avoided the area in place of another part of town shortly after his 'Kodak moment'. Fred's health began to deteriorate and the close proximity of this area became appealing once more. Before returning to the area Fred claimed to have developed an additional strategy of avoidance which involved the use of an mp3 player and headphones. Fred stated the music drowned out most of the conversations allowing him to get out of his flat again. The success of this strategy was mixed. Although Fred felt more comfortable returning to the area, he was still subject to verbal abuse, and claimed on one occasion to have been in the same area as the flashing incident when he heard a group of people shouting he was a 'paedo' in the street. Fred stated that because he had his headphones on he pretended not to hear and carried on walking:

I got my mp3 on happily playing away and one of them says well he won't be doing anything else when I've finished with him, course he was using bad language and stuff but I don't swear but I can still hear what they were saying (Fred).

Self-confidence as a strategy

The final self-control strategy cited as being used to manage and resist temptations relied on the Core Members self-confidence. A small number of Core Members (N= 6) spoke of being confident in being able to identify tempting situations and to resist these situations. The four youngest Core Members in the sample all said they were confident in resisting temptations in the future. Only two of the 6 Core Members who were aged over 25 admitted being confident in resisting temptations without having a clear strategy. When asked to identify possible temptations and risky situations and to explain what strategies they could utilise none of these Core Members could give anything more than a vague reply such as:

I just won't do it (Carl)

I tend to be able to block it out (Anthony)

The down side of self-proclaimed confidence to resist temptations is that research from other fields indicates this strategy results in a higher proportion of impulsive behaviours. For instance, Nordgren et al (2009) conducted research which assessed impulse controls to visceral impulses such as food, drugs and sex. Nordgren and colleagues found that those who stated having greater self-confidence to resist or control impulses would overexpose themselves to temptations. In the context of Core Members this reliance on self-confidence to resist temptations increases the potential for Core Members to succumb and engage in risky behaviours. Moreover, a perceived self-confidence may also lead Core Members to believe they are not at risk of being affected by temptations and be unprepared when the temptation arises (Soames Job, 1990). Confidence that they will be able to resist temptations could also be undermined when Core Members are faced with lots of temptations at the same time or when they are surprised by a temptation because are unable to resist.

Irresistible temptations

While some Core Members were able to identify temptations and adopt strategies to resist them others were less successful and succumbed to their temptations. One-third of the sample (N= 10) cited instances in which they had succumbed to temptations at some point after their conviction. Those who succumbed can be categorised into two groups. The first group committed acts or offences which breached the restrictions of their licence or SOPO despite having identified this situation to be a temptation. Five Core Members were categorised in this group. The second group of Core Members also succumbed to temptations which are precursors to their past offending or which constitute risky behaviours. These Core Members stated they were aware of the risks posed by the temptation but did not attempt to resist. The distinction between these groups is that the second group's temptations did not lead to a breach of their licence conditions or SOPOs. This category also had five Core Members.

Temptations causing a breach of conditions

Stephen was the only Core Member to be convicted after succumbing to a temptation. Stephen's behaviour occurred prior to him joining a Circle, but following his first conviction. Prior to joining Circles Stephen reported that he had a lifestyle of unhealthy and risky sexual activity with men and women as well as routinely accessing extreme adult pornographic images on the internet. Stephen had received a conviction for an undisclosed (during the interview) sexual offence. After this conviction he admitted to becoming tempted to view indecent images of children after a friend introduced him to such images. Stephen stated that this type of image became 'interesting' to him and he succumbed to his temptation, collecting over 1000 images before being arrested. Stephen described little self-control or regulation of his behaviour during this time and "sank" into viewing these images:

I'd got in with a bad crowd – which I did. I didn't get started on me own, my friend showed me a picture and it was a simple picture of the Simpsons, Bart having sex with Lisa and I'd never heard the word incest before they [his friends] mentioned it [the word incest]. I

just went home and searched it on the internet and just looked!
(Stephen)

Stephen was subsequently charged and convicted on possession of images of child sexual abuse and shortly after this conviction he was offered the opportunity to begin CoSA. Since the start of his Circle, he claims to have changed and developed better techniques to resist temptations. One strategy to safeguard himself, and therefore victims, which Stephen developed in the Circle were 'pseudo-conditions'. What Stephen was referring to here was a list of rules which he created with the assistance of the Circle to help ensure that he did not breach the real restrictions of his SOPO. This relied on Stephen being honest with himself and helped maintain his boundaries to acceptable behaviour:

That's another thing that CoSA has helped me with, I've got me SOPO rules but I have my rules on top of that. So if I break one of my rules I know I won't be breaking one of the SOPO rules but I am border lining one (Stephen)

Ruben confessed to having succumbed to his temptations when he accessed indecent images of children on a computer or mobile phone. Ruben was in a Circle at the time he accessed these images and had been in the community for some time. Unlike Stephen, Ruben reported his behaviour, first to the Circle and then to the police. He was arrested and subsequently bailed, however, the police could not find any evidence of indecent images of children on Ruben's phone and the charges were dropped.

DT: So were you convicted?

No they couldn't find anything on the computer, er phone I think it was (Ruben)

Ruben claimed this incident and the response from CoSA and criminal justice agencies provided the 'wake-up call' he needed and has sought to establish better self-control with the assistance of CoSA. Ruben described his volunteers helping him to improve his self-control in a variety of ways. In particular Ruben spoke about a technique he referred to as 'instant replays'. Ruben said instant replays would take a specific situation that had happened

to him and “analyse it like you see on the football” (Ruben) and is a technique which he continues to use:

After an event [the volunteers] got me to draw a picture of the situation, just stick men and then we'd write down what my feelings were. That really helped me to think about what I was feeling at that point. Then we'd move it on a little bit further and I could talk about how I was feeling [afterwards] (Ruben)

The remaining three Core Members all succumbed to temptations and were also arrested but not charged. Matthew particularly struggled to achieve self-control and resist the variety of temptations he experienced following his release from prison. His most serious incident occurred after he joined the local library. Matthew explained that his SOPO banned him from using a computer but he used one in the library. After about 30 minutes on the computer the police arrived and arrested Matthew. First Matthew claimed he thought he could use the computer because it was in a public place before stating his probation officer had said he could use a computer during a meeting. The arresting police officer rejected Matthew's explanation stating:

[PPU officer] said your SOPO says no and that overrules anything on your licence and so they took us off to the police station. I had to stay overnight [in police custody] ... they took me off to the magistrates Court (Matthew)

Matthew explained that it was only an eleventh hour intervention from the probation service and the court that stopped his prosecution. Despite reporting good signs of progress in some aspects of his reintegration, Matthew revealed a series of risky situations which were of concern to those monitoring him.

Alan's behaviour and lack of self-control led to a number of problems with the police and probation services. Alan acknowledged to having engaged in 'dubious' behaviours on several occasions such as advertising a concert for children in his window. Alan was eventually arrested following a party at a house where children were present. The presence of children meant Alan was in breach of his SOPO as he was not allowed to be in a property while children were present. In this instance, Alan claimed to have not expected the child to be present, but the breach represents his last chance:

It was being in a dwelling where there was a person under 16 ... but this person [child under 16] come back so because the police were aware of my mistakes ... so now I've got to behave (Alan)

Temptations for risky behaviours

Not all temptations resulted in a breach of licence conditions or SOPOs. The second category contained Core Members who identified past or current behaviours which they acknowledged to be precursors to offending or which were “backward focused” behaviours. Bob described his failure to resist sending text messages to his wife as “backward focused” because he felt it detracted from his positive progress after his offence. Bob acknowledged he was trying to rebuild the relationship with his parents and his daughter and had taken steps to “make her [daughter] proud of me again” (Bob). By his own admission however, Bob “slipped” when making contact with his ex-wife via a text message.

I sent a stupid message to my ex-wife, and I shouldn't have done that (Bob)

Bob's actions were “foolish” rather than malicious but was evidence to him that he still did not have full self-control.

Succumbing to alcohol is another example of behaviours which Core Members gave that does not immediately lead to a breach of licence conditions or a SOPO. Alcohol was described as being used by a number of Core Members when they were stressed. The use of alcohol can be a precursor to offending due to the lowering of inhibitions which occurs when consuming alcohol. Various studies have acknowledged this relationship with the results inferring that alcohol promotes behaviours which a person would not normally do. This may involve making drunken phone calls to ex-partners or swimming in a canal or river while drunk (BBC, 2015). In the case of sex offenders, individuals who have already breached social norms and criminal laws and have experienced social rejection, the dis-inhibiting efforts of alcohol could facilitate further sexual offences. Max and Ashley both described the use of drugs and alcohol to reduce the feelings of “bleakness and stress” in their lives (Ashley). Max was clearly aware of the

links between alcohol consumption and a lowering of inhibitions, claiming alcohol had facilitated his offending. Max also described “drinking to oblivion” in times of stress. Despite his admissions and knowledge of the relationship between his stress causing him to drink and the role alcohol has in lowering his inhibitions, Max continues to drink excessively and thus risks succumbing to one of his illegal sexual temptations again.

Learning from CoSA and sex offender treatment programmes

One of the most important interventions and sources of knowledge about managing temptations came from their participation on a sex offender treatment programme within prison or in the community. More than three-quarters of the Core Members interviewed had completed some form of sex offender treatment programme. Although many Core Members reported to having doubts about the relevance of such programmes or stated to having initially dismissed the need to participate on these courses, subsequent attendance reversed their opinions:

My argument was ‘why will this course work when the last one didn’t?’ ‘but it did work!’ (Troy)

You know they say that group work doesn’t work, but it does work. You’ve got to want to stop ... the only time it doesn’t work is if the person doesn’t want to stop (Eddie)

Despite initial doubts and difficulties during the programme, Core Members described the programmes as being extremely useful and helpful in them being more aware of the consequences of their actions. The majority expressed some level of gratitude for the course in developing and enhancing their thinking skills, but also provoking them to change their behaviour.

The programme taught me stuff I didn’t know before (Matthew)

I did the SOTP rolling course on the inside and that was useful ... the SOTP kind of pin points some of the risks that you know on their own might not actually lead you to offence but together they make the risk that you may reoffend a possibility (Bill)

I found that [SOTP] extremely helpful because I have got an analytical mind and so the going back bit is what is more challenging and difficult for me. The going forwards process is immensely helpful because as soon as you starting thinking things then you can go straight forward to if I carry on with this then this is what's going to happen (Phil)

To some Core Members the longevity of the skills developed on the programmes was clear as they recalled using some of the techniques in the community.

I've got at home now, just say a child goes into my mind, I say to myself now why has that gone into my mind for, and I've got these likkle cards what we made ... what would happen to you if you did it again, the circumstances, what you lose and the victims long and short term effects of what it will do to them. And I have all of them on cards (Brian)

For many however, the real breakthrough with using these programmes came once they had started in the Circle. Not only did the Circle assist Core Members to prepare material each week for the programmes, they also referred to the value of doing activities with Circle volunteers such as trips to cafes or museums as enabling them to routinely practice some of the techniques learnt in the programmes

CoSA helps you to actually move forward with actually doing what you now know ... and making sure that you have got a hobby for instance was one of the things for me (Bill)

The result was that the programmes helped Core Members to understand the causes and triggers of their offending, as well as identified strategies to manage risks in the future. Subsequent participation in the Circle enabled Core Members to practice these strategies with a safety net of the Circle who were able to praise good behaviour as well as advise and make suggestions where behaviours could be improved:

You've got to challenge and be challenged to break down those old values and beliefs so that's why the programme is important but obviously very challenging and full-on (Henry)

Conclusions

The chapter demonstrates the variety of temptations which Core Members - or convicted sex offenders experience following their return to the community. This discussion illustrates how a range of seemingly normal or everyday behaviours can become temptations because of the level of restrictions which are imposed on some Core Members. The result is that the person with convictions for sexual offences has to navigate themselves through all the 'normal' situations of temptation that everyone else has to navigate through. The difference for the 'ex'-sex offender is that there is an expectation on them to stay away from these situations if there is a risk of inappropriate or criminal behaviour which would be likely to add to their criminal career. A consequence is that the reintegration of Core Members is being hindered. Equally, however, restrictions do not guarantee prevention of illegal sexual temptations or morally inappropriate temptations which can lead to an increase in the risks of harm presented by convicted sex offenders.

To reduce these risks self-control is encouraged to protect Core Members from further sanctions but also to minimise further offending. Three self-control techniques were adopted by the Core Members in this study with varied success. Avoidance through self-confinement was the most effective of these in preventing reoffending but this strategy could also lead to isolation but also enable deviant sexual fantasies to flourish as they receive no objections or dissenting voices to their use of deviant sexual fantasies. Avoidance could also assist Core Members to enable self-control even within unexpected situations.

A less effective strategy of self-control was to rely on self-confidence. Core Members who did this displayed the least preparation or awareness of what temptations may affect them or how to respond. Given the potential harms their offending causes, the inability to identify, resist and self-control or manage temptations represents a significant problem to society and criminal justice professionals.

Some Core Members reflected that self-control strategies had been enhanced following their participation on the community-based sex offender treatment programme as this encouraged a new way of thinking about temptations. The addition of CoSA to practice their sex offender treatment programme work was the breakthrough moment in establishing stronger self-control strategies for many though.

Within these discussions what emerges is the balance that has to be maintained between the sex offender being too withdrawn and isolated to avoid all 'risky situations' and on the other hand being too much a part of society where boundaries and limits may be tested too much by the presence of multiple 'risky situations'. Circles of Support and Accountability are one intervention that could move into this grey area and enable the Core Member to better move between the personal and the public in an acceptable way.

Chapter Six: Webs of Control and Compliance

Introduction

The control of certain groups of offenders has always been a focus on criminal justice agencies in some form or other. In recent years this has led to a rhetoric of 'public protection' (Home Office, 1990). This public protection discourse has increased the size and scope of control well beyond the criminal justice system. Public protection now routinely takes a multi-agency approach from the probation service, the police, Social Services as well as other agencies, to contain offenders but which also offers appropriate assistance to those at risk of offending or re-offending.

While supervision of sex offenders was always a part of the role of the probation service, following the creation of the Sex Offender Register in 1997 the police also began to develop a role managing sex offenders (Thomas, 2005). Following the establishment of the Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA) in 2000, the police and probation services have a statutory duty to manage and supervise sex offenders. The Prison Service joined them as a 'responsible authorities' and these three criminal justice agencies are supported by a range of agencies who have a 'duty to cooperate' should their cooperation be requested. These include local authority Housing and Social Services Departments (now known as Children's Departments), health authorities, and education authorities. The duty to cooperate is contained in the Criminal Justice Act 2003 (s. 325).

This chapter examines two of these responsible authorities – the police and probation services – and how webs of control are established in their workings with Core Members. The chapter also examines the role of Circles of Support and Accountability in establishing webs of control with Core Members. As a voluntary organisation CoSA has no duty to assist the

'responsible authorities' but has built upon a long history of voluntary help to the criminal justice system.

The chapter introduces the concept of a 'web of control', before exploring how the webs of control of the police, probation and CoSA operate and affect, alter or control Core Member behaviour. The chapter then introduces the concept of compliance using Bottoms' (2001) framework and examines how these webs of control influence or promote compliance by Core Members.

Webs of Control

Webs of control refer to the various agencies who work with convicted sex offenders to monitor their attitudes, behaviours and actions in the community to encourage accountability. Within these webs, control occurs on a spectrum of heavy control through to soft control and self-control. These webs of control are made up of agencies that vary in size and in the influence they have over holding the individual to account. The focus of this chapter is on the webs of control established by the police, the probation service and CoSA over Core Members.

Webs of control are established in different ways depending on the agency that provides a web of control and the aims of the particular organisation. Criminal justice practitioners establish their webs of control in two ways. The first results from their statutory responsibilities, the second follows the efforts of criminal justice practitioners to build relationships with Core Members to assist them but also to contribute to stronger control and management. Core Members were aware of these two processes but favoured webs of control developed through the building of relationships by criminal justice professionals.

The first webs of control experienced by Core Members were determined by the statutory responsibilities which the police and probation services had to protect the public under the Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements

(MAPPA). The Criminal Justice Act 2003 requires the police, probation and Prison Services to act as Responsible Authorities to assess and manage the risks posed by violent and sexual offenders and to manage these appropriately. The Criminal Justice Act 2003 s325 supplemented the earlier Courts Services and Criminal Justice Act 2000 s67-8 and placed:

a duty on the "responsibility authority" (the chief officer of police, the local probation board for each area and the Prison Service) to establish and keep under review arrangements for assessing and managing the risks posed by "relevant sexual and violent offenders" or other offenders who may cause serious harm to the public (see subsection (2)).

This statutory responsibility has led to a very top down imposition of supervision, management and control which as the subsequent discussion will show was criticised, resented and/or feared by many Core Members.

Webs of control could also be created by criminal justice practitioners establishing a dialogue between themselves and Core Members. This second form of establishing a web of control was described by Core Members as more passive and respectful even though they recognised that it was still 'control'. It was not always possible for the professionals to establish a web of control in this way however. Some Core Members reported conflict with criminal justice professionals tasked with supervising and managing them in the community caused by opposing personalities or differences of opinions about perceptions of risk:

One time I got a phone call from them, they asked if I was in, I said yes and then heard knock on the door. So I asked 'em once why they did that and their exact words were 'so you don't hide any children in the wardrobes'. And I said get out! I kicked 'em out. I said 'if that's your attitude you can get out now' (Troy)

I ended up with a probation officer that to me was always jumping down my throat, that I had to be there every single week dead on the dot and you know wanted to know why, when, where, what you know... (Christopher)

A small minority described previously adopting an uncooperative attitude to working with criminal justice professionals:

To be honest I hate the police (Anthony)

I had two [probation officers] before and I really didn't wanna work with them cos they seemed like clowns. You know they didn't seem

to know what they were doing, they weren't very supportive and I kind of didn't wanna know! I didn't go to appointments on time, I messed them about cos I couldn't see the point in going to someat when I didn't want to be there other than the fact that I had too (Ryan)

In such instances, the criminal justice professionals relied on their statutory powers to maintain the web of control. This led to a much heavier form of control being experienced by Core Members from the criminal justice system. This heavier form of control also led to a (further) deterioration in the trust of criminal justice professionals by Core Members which reduced the chances of a more passive and respectful working relationship or web of control. Without trust, Core Members resisted efforts by criminal justice professionals to establish webs of control.

CoSA was an 'optional extra' to the webs of control established following the Core Members return to the community. CoSA represents an optional extra because the Core Members were under no obligation to join CoSA and could leave at any time. Despite CoSA having no statutory powers, and some Core Members describing a disconnect from CoSA as a web of control because of its outwardly supportive work, numerous accounts emerged where Core Members had been 'controlled' by Circle volunteers. This control function of CoSA was previously discussed in the theoretical underpinnings of CoSA (see Chapter Two) which highlights the tension at the heart of CoSA. Despite these tensions sometimes being noticed by Core Members, webs of control by CoSA were established in three ways.

Firstly webs of control emerged from the actions of volunteers in creating a safe environment for Core Members, being respectful to Core Members and facilitating a trusting relationship between volunteers and Core Members. This trust allowed volunteers to use their natural authority to engage in the passing of advice, suggestions and through the building of relationships between the Core Member and a volunteer or volunteers.

The second way CoSA established a web of control was related to the openness and trust which volunteers created. This openness and the

establishing of trusting relationships facilitated volunteers to engage in informal controls such as reprimanding Core Members over misbehaviours and to act as a web of control despite no legal authority to do so. This, and previous research has identified this reprimanding or challenging of Core Members to be a form of control acknowledged by Core Members and is evidence of the accountability functions of CoSA (Hanvey et al, 2011; Thomas et al, 2014). This control or changing of Core Member behaviour was also identified as something which volunteers very much perceived to be a key part of their role in the Circle (Thomas et al, 2014).

The final web of control established by CoSA emerges from the close associations CoSA have with criminal justice professionals, this web of control was softer than those from the police and probation service but was heavier than either of the other webs of control which CoSA established. This chapter will examine these tensions in more detail below and examine how CoSA established a web of control shortly.

Control by Criminal Justice Agencies

All 30 Core Members were subject to significant supervisory and management restrictions. If these restrictions were breached, Core Members may receive further sentences in the form of harsher restrictions and/or a further period of supervision; breach could even result in them being recalled to prison. All Core Members were supervised and monitored in the community by the police and/or probation services. Twenty-five of the Core Members were jointly monitored by both the police and probation services, while five were only supervised by either the police or probation service. As such, all 30 Core Members described in varying detail a rigid web of control underpinned by a legal enforcement. Such sentiments were expressed by Bill who stated:

You know PPU know who you are, you know they know where you live ..., and having a phone call from them saying 'Merry Christmas' isn't quite the same thing [laughs] (Bill)

Despite the legal powers which criminal justice agencies held, some Core Members described the webs of control being enhanced by the creation of working relationships with their criminal justice professionals. As already mentioned, the creation of trusting relationships is important to achieve a greater level of consensus and compliance, thus effectively more compliance.

Core Members were asked to describe their relationships with their police and probation officers during the interviews. Initial perceptions by Core Members were that they anticipated receiving a negative reaction from their police officer and being more sympathetically received by their probation officer. These views of the police were often influenced by their treatment by the police during their arrest and from rumours within the prison. Some Core Members acknowledged their relationships with criminal justice professionals had altered following their participation with CoSA. Others claimed to continue to dislike the police but had a good relationship with their PPU officer. Others actively resisted engagement with their PPU officer but had a strong relationship with probation. None of the Core Members stated to disliking both PPU and probation officers.

The police

When Core Members first returned to the community as a convicted sex offender they anticipated and received a strong control message from the police:

They just see a high risk guy on their doorstep ... when they come out to you the first time they kind of stamp their authority and it does get your back up a bit (James)

Some expected a degree of hostility believing their PPU officer would treat them in the same manner as 'regular police officers'. For others it was the rumours they heard while in prison namely that the police will be monitoring their movements 24 hours a day that caused scepticism about the relationship:

The heavy-footed boot of the law will keep you in line (Phil)

In prison ... all I heard was that PPU are gonna be watching you 24/7 (James)

These rumours led to some early resentment by Core Members to their PPU officer and conflicts in the working relationship.

Gradually Core Members felt the pressure from the police decline and reported that their working relationships improved slightly. The pace of change increased significantly once the Core Members had started in CoSA. James felt that his participation in CoSA, served to humanise him to the police officer:

[It's got better] over time as they've learnt more about me and don't just rely on what's on my file (James)

Troy and Matthew, along with at least 10 other Core Members, spoke positively about their relationship with their PPU officer, commenting on their low-key presence when making home visits and their supportive mentality:

PPU have got no issues. I literally tell them everything (Troy)

We have a very good relationship going there now ... it's brilliant, it's gotten better and better (Matthew)

The police officer comes to see me every three months, it used to be every month, but its three now and I can speak to him if there are any problems (Jack)

The benefits of these improved working relationships were apparent for both Core Members and criminal justice professionals. Core Members described how they felt far more comfortable seeking the advice of their police officer about activities, but also described being more open to discussing sexual thoughts with their police officer if the need arose. Subsequently the police would receive more up-to-date information about the Core Member and through their improved relationships could control Core Members with a greater level of consent (Nash, 2014; Thomas et al, 2014).

The probation service

Control by the probation service was less visible. Despite Core Members anticipating their probation officer to be more sympathetic than their police officer, evidence of the ability of the probation service to establish a web of control was mixed. Approximately half of the Core Members spoke very

highly of probation and of having probation officers who were supportive of their reintegration:

My PO [probation officer] trusts me now and she said I'm lowering your risk, and then we discussed it at the Circle meeting (Matthew)

I mean police and probation did more for me than my family cos they [family] don't give a shit (Norman)

My Offender Manager I really like [them] and [they're] really good (Henry)

Not all shared this view though, a significant minority of Core Members alleged probation officers were disorganised and inattentive. Core Members described meetings not running to time and being made to wait in waiting rooms with other offenders or feeling rushed to say everything was ok so the probation officer could move to their next client:

My visits [to probation] were literally 5 minutes, even in the early days when I was on weekly visits (Troy)

At probation you go down and do the work and that, and like if I have an appointment at 4pm then I could still be waiting at 4.30 or 4.45 and it just does my head in all the waiting (Anthony)

You know there would be some times when I turned up at probation and I'd think well I'm here just to say that I am in the area. You know you'd get 'How are you?' but you never really got the impression that they were listening to what you were actually saying so it became 'Fine', 'Yea great', 'See you next week' (Bill)

The consequence of this disorganisation is that Core Members reported poorer relationships with probation and the probation service was perceived as being less prominent and less effective as a web of control for some Core Members. Even where the Circle had tried to improve these relationships by reiterating the importance of developing good relationships, Core Members who had a negative view of their probation officer or probation experience maintained this perspective. It is, therefore, a less important web of control to Core Members despite its legal powers and statutory responsibilities.

Circles of Support and Accountability

The final web of control to be discussed involves that established by CoSA. The concept of control has been something which CoSA has not traditionally been associated with. It's restorative justice origins and 'organic' development in Canada undoubtedly shaped the image as a more supportive intervention (Wilson et al, 2010). The emergence of CoSA in England and Wales was more systemic however, and its development alongside MAPPA appears to have influenced its alignment as an initiative which has a clear accountability role as well as being supportive. This is supported by the mission statement for Circles projects which is:

'to reduce substantially the risk of future sexual abuse by assisting those who are committed to not re-offending in safely integrating back into the community and leading responsible, productive and accountable lives'
(Circles UK, 2013: 4)

The importance of the accountability function of CoSA is also emphasised when funding applications are submitted. Recent findings from Thomas et al (2014) have reinforced the idea that CoSA has a controlling role with regional CoSA project coordinators, criminal justice practitioners and senior managers as well as volunteers all indicating some levels of control. Moreover, findings from the previous chapter examining temptations also demonstrate how CoSA can influence Core Member behaviour thus acting as a measure of control.

Having established the various functions of CoSA which enable the model to create webs of control, the chapter will now examine the three distinct forms through which webs of control are established by CoSA. The first utilises support and advice which volunteers provide to Core Members and is a passive web of control. The second occurs through the accountability functions of the Circle which encourages volunteers to challenge Core Members. At times these methods can operate together, at other times only one is utilised. Both forms of control emerge from the work volunteers put in at the start of the Circle to allow Core Members to feel the Circle provides a safe and open environment where they will not be judged. The third web of control emerges from the close association of CoSA to the criminal justice system.

Passive Control

The creation of an open and trusting relationship is critical for CoSA as they have no legal authority comparable to police or probation officers. Without the legal powers, CoSA volunteers are left to create a 'personal authority' through their own personal standing with the Core Member. Core Members described how this involves volunteers being accepting of the Core Member, but not of their offences; being respectful and maintaining a degree of confidentiality as to the Core Members stigma; and, by the label attached by many of the Core Members, that the volunteers were simply "good people".

Almost all Core Members described the creation of an open and trusting relationship as being something which occurred very quickly. In some cases the "feel" of the Circle was right even before they had had the first meeting. Christopher and Anthony admitted to being scared about meeting five strangers and having to describe their past offences, but had heard good things about CoSA and "knew" it would help them because it was "done by good people" (Anthony):

They were there to help me and work with me, it eased me a lot and made me relax and enjoy it (Christopher)

They are just good outgoing people and you know that you can absolutely trust them (Anthony)

Richard described trusting his volunteers after just the second meeting. He described prior to his first meeting that he was especially fearful of the volunteers disclosing his identity and him being attacked. When he returned the following week, he told his volunteers about his fears and was told:

why would we do that, we are here to help you (Richard).

Even where Core Members had reservations about the role of CoSA or the disclosure, after meeting the volunteers for a couple of weeks their fears reduced and Core Members described how the volunteers were generally good people who created a relaxing environment. A frequent message from Core Members was that the volunteers gave them a second chance when many others would not. The treatment and non-judgemental attitudes of

volunteers towards Core Members was also generally agreed to be beyond what Core Members expected.

This early creation of trust and openness prompted Core Members to cooperate with the volunteers during Circle meetings. Bruce recalled having strong reservations about the make-up of his Circle at the first meeting. He described all four volunteers as “young girls” and thought it was a test. Later in the interview Bruce declared his first opinions about the volunteers were wrong and stated that the “young women” had become a vital part of his week. He said that he now looks forward to meeting the volunteers and they always offer good advice:

I've been able to open up to them. Because the maturity that they are showing, they're not judgemental to me, they are very understanding and they also let me air my views (Bruce)

This relaxed environment is important for the volunteers as well as it enables an informal level of control where volunteers can glean insights on the Core Members attitudes or listen for possible risky behaviours in their weekly activities. As meetings developed, the role of CoSA expanded for many Core Members. CoSA became an arena to air problems, seek advice and develop strategies relating to risk factors, deviant sexual fantasies or their isolation:

It was important that I felt that I had somebody that I could go to, even if it was the slightest little bit of support, just have somebody listen to you across a table is a big thing (Bruce)

The value of CoSA You might say they are not doing anything, but they are. They are giving support, passing guidance (Ronnie)

Often in the absence of any other networks, strong relationships soon formed between Core Members and the volunteers and in time CoSA began to have a greater influence on Core Members behaviour. Jack spoke of the ‘treatment’ role his Circle volunteers played. Jack, who had a long history of sexual offences over many years and had undertaken the community-based sex offender treatment programme during CoSA reported having deep discussions about his offending attitudes with the volunteers and the volunteers supporting him through this process. Jack stated:

'I am being re-educated, cos I've grown up with some really weird belief systems, and what life is all about, and how I view women ... so I am learning a lot of stuff by listening to the other group members (Jack)

As meetings progressed Core Members indicated the advice of the Circle was having a greater influence on their behaviours. Gordon had been in his Circle for approximately six months at the time of the interview and gave CoSA a lot of credit for the changes he has made in his lifestyle:

I have a trust and strong bond with me Core Members [Gordon meant volunteers], and if anything is bothering me that I want to just run by them, then I just run it by them and ask them their opinion and their advice (Gordon)

A particular value to Gordon was the help CoSA gave him in developing strategies to resist temptations and sexual urges. In doing so CoSA was starting to influence and alter Gordon's thinking patterns and aligning them with the teachings of the community-based sex offender treatment programme he was attending:

The Circle actually helps you and reinforces why you should go on and make a better life out of things, and with their help and support I can envision that (Gordon)

CoSA and Accountability

Circles also provided more direct influence over Core Members through its accountability functions. Core Members recalled various instances in which the volunteers challenged cognitive distortions or when risky behaviours or pro-offending attitudes were revealed. Joe, a Core Member who had not started a community-based sex offender treatment programme prior to the Circle, acknowledged his low levels of victim empathy during a Circle meeting and stated he continued to sexualise his victim who was a child. During his meetings with the Circle he declared routinely fantasising about his victim while serving his prison sentence and was immediately challenged about the appropriateness of such fantasies by one of his volunteers:

I still had feelings for my victims ... we would just talk about me masturbating over me victim ... {Sarah, a volunteer} was like that's

not right you shouldn't have feelings for your victim and things like that... they would ask if that was her as a teenager and I would say yea cos I don't know what she is like now. So they would challenge me like that (Joe)

Through participating in CoSA and being subject to direct questioning of cognitive distortions, Joe felt his Circle had encouraged him to accept his convictions and to improve his empathy towards his victim. Joe said the Circle were particularly effective in helping him accept his behaviours and to understand the harm of his behaviours by openly discussing his offences and not shying away:

I was like I didn't do that, but they were like you did, and every week they would say I did and would reiterate that I was convicted of it, you got jailed for it. Then over time I said I suppose I did do it. And that gave me the confidence to talk about my own offences. Cos when I got out of prison I was like ... yea I got convicted of it but I didn't do it (Joe)

Thus the accountability techniques employed by the volunteers, who had become trusted and respected by Joe, contributed to him changing his attitudes.

Ruben also spoke of being frequently challenged at the start of his Circle often coming into conflict with one of his volunteers in particular. Over time, Ruben realised that the volunteer was trying to help him to keep safe but he was still hostile to these comments when first given. Ruben was not alone in being resistant to the advice of the Circle volunteers, however many of the Core Members reported the supportive aspects of CoSA stimulated a (re)birth to the internalisation of widely accepted social norms and values, and the benefits from accepting these, while challenging pro-offending or cognitively distorted attitudes.

CoSA as a quasi-statutory web of control

Despite CoSA having no formal powers to recall or arrest a Core Member as a probation or police officer can, some Core Members indicated a quasi-statutory role held by CoSA which acted as a form of control. Some Core Members, for example, acknowledged that minutes of Circle meetings are provided to criminal justice agencies and this reinforced the message that

CoSA was working closely with criminal justice agencies. Some Core Members also noted the project coordinator was a probation officer or ex-probation officer, or had identified volunteers as being serving or retired criminal justice professionals. The attendance of criminal justice professionals at quarterly review meetings further justified their views that CoSA was an integral part of a wider web of control.

The accountability functions of CoSA mean that minutes are taken at each meeting with the Core Member and are reported back to the project coordinator. These arrangements enable any information which may be related to risky behaviours or which seems out of character for the Core Member to be communicated to criminal justice professionals. While this does not result in the Circle having any legal powers, several Core Members inferred these disclosure arrangements had led them to alter behaviours to avoid “getting into trouble” (Ruben) from police or probation officers because they knew the Circle would pass the information on. This ‘direct line’ of communication to statutory agencies therefore provides CoSA with a greater degree of authority than lay members of the public have. Eddie epitomised this relationship stating:

They weren't really authority. I mean don't get me wrong if they had any real concerns they would have told (Eddie)

This association to the criminal justice system did influence decisions about Core Members behaviour in the Circle, but it could also lead to Core Members not disclosing potentially risky behaviours as it would be passed to the police or probation service. Throughout the interview with Dennis, he revealed a number of instances where he had withheld things from his Circle, including getting a part-time job and buying a car:

I had to be careful about telling them a job I got, it's only a part-time [role] job I got but (Dennis)

I have avoided telling them about one or two things, one of them was that I bought a caravan and a car to take my mum out (Dennis)

There was some uncertainty among a small number of Core Members as to the limits of this information exchange although most were clear. Ronnie and Stephen, echoing many other Core Members stated:

It's all reported on a minute's sheet and before the CM leaves they sign it if they agree with it or adjustments are made, and then it's passed to the project coordinator. So it's open in that sense, so no-one is writing messages behind your back (Ronnie)

Every conversation that we've had in Circles, probation and [the CoSA coordinator] know about. So there are no secrets (Stephen)

This relationship between CoSA and criminal justice agencies rested uneasily among some Core Members who saw a conflict between the supportive messages they had received about CoSA and its proximity to the criminal justice system. Alan and Stephen believed that CoSA was an offshoot of the criminal justice system. Alan described thinking he was going to be handcuffed to the volunteers while Stephen believed he was ordered to participate in CoSA as part of his sentence:

I thought to meself, am I gonna be handcuffed while I am with these people? (Alan)

The judge gave me 2 years' [supervised by probation], 2 years on any course and 15 years on SOPO and I have to do this [Circles] (Stephen)

This unease was also evident in the selection and use of volunteers who were also criminal justice practitioners. Phil and Eddie, immediately identified one of the volunteers in their Circle as having experience of working in the criminal justice system:

I knew straight away Peter [volunteer]⁸⁷ was an ex-copper so straight away I thought he would see me as a criminal (Eddie)

Graham [volunteer] is a prison officer ... Geoff [volunteer] who is a probation officer ... Then Sandra [volunteer], she's a prison chaplain ... But I thought that these volunteers were people at random from the community, but they aren't really cos they are all people who are working with offenders (Phil)

⁸⁷ 'Peter' is a not the volunteer's real name. Pseudonyms are used to maintain the anonymity of Core Members and volunteers.

In some cases Core Members were told at the start of the Circle that one of the volunteers was a criminal justice professional, though this was not always done. Christopher described a troubled history with some of his previous probation officers and after a couple of meetings realised one of his volunteers was a criminal justice professional. This made him question the extent to which CoSA was a tool to monitor him, and also increased his suspicions about their truthfulness:

I found out that one of the volunteers, was a probation officer and I thought 'no' not after everything I've been through with probation officers and I told her that ... it took a couple of weeks but I told her that. I said that 'I am not keen on opening up with you as a probation officer sat there' (Christopher)

These initial concerns about the impartiality and neutrality of the volunteers were often allayed in subsequent meetings as 'practitioner volunteers' clarified their roles. In many cases, these messages had strong control narratives but were off-set by the support functions of CoSA. This was especially apparent in Christopher's Circle. The practitioner volunteer stated she was just a volunteer:

when I finish work and come here I shut the door on my probation work and I am here just like the rest of them as a volunteer. She said, 'Yes if you are talking about things which are out-of-line then I will step into my uniform and just put you right on it without bringing probation into it' (Christopher)

The extent to which this volunteer was 'just like the rest of them' is questionable because of the level of training and experience which she had accumulated. This training can enable Core Members to gain better access to relapse prevention or coping strategies or enhance their understanding of decision-making processes of practitioners which improve compliance and self-control:

Eileen is a perfect volunteer, cos she .. is an ex-probation officer and being an ex-probation officer is a heck of a boost cos you've got experience of dealing with people (Norman)

It was good cos he brought the professional side to it in an informal way (Ruben)

Conversely Core Members may perceive the use of 'practitioner volunteers' to be a tool for surveillance rather than support and as such Core Members may reject the Circle.

I suppose the first thought that went through my mind was this is supposed to be volunteers, why have they got somebody off the course on me (Ronnie)

In summary, the support and accountability functions of CoSA both work to provide a web of control over Core Members. For some Core Members, the regulation and monitoring was appreciated as the gravity of their offending required them to make significant changes. For others, the subtle efforts of the Circle to improve their behaviour through the development of a close bond was welcomed. The remainder of this chapter will discuss the mechanisms being used by Core Members to comply with the law and licence conditions and the acceptable behaviours of society, with varying degrees of engagement.

Compliance

All agencies are looking to increase degrees of compliance and have no further offending. Core Members use different strategies to increase compliance with the law and conditions imposed on them and for some Core Members the advice and interventions from webs of control encouraged them to comply with socially acceptable norms and values. Compliance with the law and the regulatory authorities who are responsible for upholding the law has emerged as a key concern amongst academics seeking to better understand the processes and practices of punishment and regulation (Robinson and McNeill, 2008). Bottoms et al (2004) add that if the intention of criminal justice agencies is to assist offenders to long-term compliance and ultimately desistance, then attention to mechanisms of compliance should be given.

The framework of compliance used to analyse the data in this research was Bottoms' conceptualisation of compliance mechanisms. The four key

mechanisms in the achievement of reasonable behaviour and conformity, are 'instrumental' or prudential compliance; 'constraint-based' compliance; 'normative' compliance; and compliance based on 'habit or routine'. Bottoms warns that while these are all individual categories, these mechanisms should not be viewed in individual silos as they will interact and overlap; he also divided the concept into short term and long term compliance (Bottoms 2001).

Robinson and McNeill (2008) have built on Bottoms work and introduced a distinction between short term formal compliance and short term substantive compliance. Short term formal compliance refers to behaviours which simply meet the minimum specified requirements of any order. Short term substantive compliance, however, is seen as requiring more active engagement by the individual to the social and ethical responsibilities of the order not just the minimum standards of any penalties.

These categories of engagement are intended to distinguish between those who comply to minimise the consequences of the punishment, those who are seeking to change their behaviour to avoid a further punishment, and those who are seeking to change broader behaviours that have contributed to an offending lifestyle. At this point we consider these compliance mechanisms in more detail.

Compliance Mechanisms

Instrumental compliance refers to compliance based upon the rational calculations an individual makes of the benefits which will be gained from compliance versus the rewards on offer by not complying. For Bottoms a person makes decisions according to two simple processes, 'incentives' and 'disincentives' and calculates what is best. Within the context of community penalties and sanctions where CoSA is situated, Robinson and McNeill (2008) state the principal disincentives involve the threat of further sanctions or restrictions being added to an order or even a recall to prison following the order being 'breached'. Conversely, good behaviour in prison, or satisfactory

progress on a Community Order or other supervision may lead to the entrusting of incentives or positive rewards such as early release from prison or termination of a community order (Bottoms, 2001; Robinson and McNeill, 2008).

Constraint based compliance refers to physical restrictions an individual has. These can be physical restrictions caused by a disability or conditions to contain a person's movement. The most obvious of these would be incarceration, however, as all Core Members were in a community setting, physical restrictions are not easy to impose. The only such measures which would establish a physical restriction for Core Members in the community would be GPS monitoring or 24/7 intensive surveillance by the police. SOPOs and other civil orders may restrict a compliant offender but they do not impose a true physical restriction. As such, the focus in this chapter will be on constraint-based compliance through a disability.

Normative compliance is achieved where an individual has a moral conscience or personal morality which leads them to behave in socially or legally acceptable ways. Robinson and McNeill (2008) acknowledge that this form of compliance is a kind of moral commitment to a set of accepted norms or social values, which lead individuals to act in particular ways. Normative beliefs can be influenced by many factors including socialisation, community contexts, commitments, beliefs, social norms and social networks, as well as the psychological development of an individual (Crawford, 2013; Jackson et al, 2013). This behaviour is underpinned by a perception that compliance is 'the right thing to do'. For Jackson et al (2013) compliance of this kind is what most people do.

Normative compliance may also occur through the development of pro-social attachments being created between an individual and significant others. The webs of control discussed earlier in the chapter seek to establish this level of compliance as it promotes a non-criminal lifestyle and encourages the creation of social bonds such as the development of meaningful

relationships which in turn causes some form of behaviour modification (Bottoms, 2001).

A further mechanism of compliance occurs unthinkingly either through '**routine and/or habit**' and becomes a mechanism of compliance in its own right. 'Routines' facilitate or produce compliance from the everyday patterns of life that are ingrained in individuals. The routine of sending a child to school is an example of Routine compliance (Robinson and McNeill, 2008). 'Habitual compliance' on the other hand emerges from the 'mental dispositions' or habits of mind which make obedience to the law unquestioning (Bottoms, 2001). As Bottoms acknowledges, however, habits of mind are open to change. Thus, those with socially unacceptable or criminal habits of mind may benefit from cognitive-behavioural programmes which aim to produce altered ways of thinking. In effect they are seeking to create new dispositions or 'habits of mind'. It is the alteration of habits, or ways of thinking, that is likely to be central to longer term compliance (Bottoms, 2001). This mechanism is regarded as the best form of compliance and utilises elements of other compliance mechanisms.

An additional mechanism of compliance has also been identified within this research and was employed by a small number of Core Members. This mechanism of compliance is referred to as **Manipulative Compliance**. Manipulative compliance involves Core Members actively seeking to manipulate the supervisory arrangements imposed by statutory agencies or deceive the Circle volunteers who are working with them. Manipulative compliance is similar to McBarnet's notion of creative compliance applied to tax avoidance. While manipulative compliance may involve complex strategies, creative compliers adopt sophisticated legal strategies to 'accomplish compliance with the letter of the law, while totally undermining the policy behind the words' (McBarnet, 2003: 229).

Being Compliant

Having outlined the mechanisms of compliance and how they apply to Core Members, the discussion will now focus on how Core Members' behaviours fit within these mechanisms of compliance.

Instrumental compliance

The incentives from complying with licence conditions, civil orders and other demands from 'webs of control' led many Core Members to using instrumental mechanisms. Indeed, instrumentally-based calculations were behind some Core Members decisions to join CoSA. Many of the Core Members reported feeling pressured by their probation officer to join CoSA. Thus by agreeing to join CoSA Core Members stated they gained some relief from the scrutiny they were facing from the probation officer because of their lack of engagement. Such motivations involve clear examples of both 'incentive' and 'disincentive' calculations made by Core Members. Participation in CoSA was not only seen as a way Core Members could increase their levels of freedom while 'on licence' but it also avoided any additional supervision or restrictions being imposed.

Well to be honest, at first it was just to please her [probation officer] at first! (Brian)

It was my probation officer's idea (Maurice)

To be honest at first it was about keeping everyone happy, you know ticking a box basically (Max)

The avoidance of further sanctions was frequently cited as being a driver in compliant behaviour. The sanctions included increased supervision and monitoring or a recall to prison. Those who had been in prison prior to their Circle spoke of the traumatic experiences and hostile environments they encountered as a sex offender in prison as a motivation for their compliance

I can't handle prison, especially when I know where I am going. It would be for life! And I won't get to see my wife, ... It's horrible [prison experience] ... I had nightmares for about a year and a half afterwards ... hearing the screams the shouting at night times, the violence, fights breaking out, the riots ... I even was witness to a fire in the cell above me (Stephen)

Because I know that if I reoffend again I ain't getting out I'll be IPP'd⁸⁸ ... That's the one thing that scares the shit out of me, cos I know I am looking at IPP. That's what stops me you know (Ruben)

I broke the law once before and I ended up in prison, so it's not rocket science to know that if I do something wrong then I am going back and probably for a lot longer! ... I've had mates murdered and everything in prison so ... (Troy)

The fear of being recalled to prison or returning for a new offence also influenced Maurice's compliant behaviour. Maurice said he was compliant because he did not want to go through the criminal justice process again. His strategy was one of 'obedience' to authority which required he did as he was told. Maurice stated that "if he was unsure if he could do something, he would do nothing". This led to an amusing incident on his first morning in the hostel he was required to stay in. Maurice received a 10 year custodial sentence for a 'historical offence',⁸⁹ and recalled how he stayed in his hostel room until 11am on the first day out of prison as he was not told he could leave his room. It was only once a member of staff came to check he was ok and told him he could leave his room that he did. Maurice's philosophy was that he could not get into trouble if he only did what he was told, even if everyone else was doing it.

A further example of instrumental mechanisms of compliance was described by Norman. Unlike other Core Members who described pressure from criminal justice agencies to comply, Norman described pressure from his Circle leading to an instrumental calculation to comply with their requests to attend various age-appropriate social groups. This suggestion was made by the volunteers as a solution to Norman's social isolation and loneliness. Norman attended two different social groups though his level of genuine engagement with these groups was limited. Norman described the groups as being:

Like one of these weird cult things (Norman)

⁸⁸ Imprisonment for Public Protection

⁸⁹ Historical offences refer to offences committed any sexual offence committed before 1 May 2004 when the Sexual Offences Act 2003 came into force – there is no time limit on how far back the offence might be. In recent years the term 'non-recent offence' has started to be used as well as a 'historic offence'.

Adding:

I went to it just to keep the Circle people happy to be honest, I didn't really want to go to it ... I probably won't ever go again because it uneased me (Norman)

Norman's are hardly shining examples of successful reintegration, but the ability of the Circle volunteers to persuade Norman to attend such a group despite his hesitation and pessimism could be seen as some success in moving towards instrumental compliance, as he had refused to complete any earlier treatment programmes or interventions. For those working with Norman, the hope is that the continual interventions from police, probation and CoSA, as well as other providers will facilitate him in moving in a positive trajectory.

Constraint-based compliance

The constraint-based compliance mechanisms described below only include non-rule based constraints such as a physical disability. Two of the Core Members had severe physical disabilities which restricted their mobility. Both stated that their disability affected their behaviours and lead them to acting in more compliant ways. The nature of these constraints meant that the webs of control described previously in this chapter had no effect on securing compliance through this mechanism except to monitor Core Members mobility and changes in attitudes.

Two of the Core Members had severe physical disabilities which restricted their mobility. Both Fred and Brian implied their physical disabilities acted as a control over their behaviour and was something which they utilised to increase compliance. Brian inferred that being in a mobility scooter was a barrier to accessing children – seemingly suggesting the mobility scooter prevented him from offending. The extent to which this is true however is questionable as Brian committed his offences while being disabled.

By contrast, Fred's disabilities had increased in severity since his offences and stated that because of his constant breathlessness and chest problems

he was distracted. This was witnessed first-hand during the interview as Fred wheezed whenever he spoke and during a 30 metre walk to the lift. Fred had to stop to catch his breath. Fred claimed his deteriorating health had made him reflect on the fragility of life and had influenced him to give back what he could to society – which in his own words ‘wasn’t much cos of the knackered heart’ (Fred).

While these disabilities undoubtedly affected the daily activities of the Core Members, the extent to which they provide complete physical restrictions required for compliance to be constraint-based is debateable given they both had access to mobility aids.

Normative compliance

A key theme to emerge from interviews with Core Members were the references to Core Members wanting to move away from their sexual offending and live normal lives. Almost three-quarters of all Core Members gave statements claiming to have learned or realised the harm of their offending and wanting to move forward. These Core Members said they had taken on-board the messages delivered from their police and probation officers, from the sex offender treatment programmes, and most recently from the Circle. The consistency of these messages, together with the realisation of the harm of their offending led Core Members to proclaim they wanted to live the rest of their life offence-free:

To get my life back on track and make sure that I don't reoffend, which I knew I wouldn't anyway but loads of people say that and they do (Anthony)

I'm not a big one for looking into the future. But basically an offence free life, cos now I know how hugely it can affect other people.. I mean before I didn't understand consequence of actions, now I do. And there is no way I would go back there again (Fred)

Within these narratives, however, two categories emerged. One group of Core Members held normative ambitions. They spoke of wanting to have an offence-free life, but they were not living this narrative. I have defined them as dis-engagers or Core Members who only ‘talk the talk’. The second group

displayed a deeper level of engagement with normative messages and therefore have been categorised as displaying normative compliance. These Core Members are referred to as engagers or those who 'walk the walk'.

The disengaged Core Members or those categorised as 'talking the talk' often spoke of their desire to start a new life free from offending, however, active engagement or independent measures to fulfil these ambitions were not evidenced. Anthony, for example, a Core Member who had to relocate to another area of the country following his conviction for contact offences against a female child, reported wanting to get a job:

just a job, and then eventually settle down, meet the right person, girlfriend, wife, whatever, and then have a family of my own then
(Anthony)

Max persistently sought to say that he was a 'good guy' who made a mistake. He displayed some normative ambitions stating he "wants to be a reformed person" (Max). Unfortunately neither Max nor Anthony gave any mention of how they would do this, nor did they appear to have a particularly strong inclination to translate these messages into more compliant or pro-social behaviour.

Carl also expressed normative ambitions and suggested these were furthered through the accountability functions of the Circle. Carl claimed the tough, probing questions from the volunteers helped him to become more aware and conscious of his responsibilities:

Kelly [a volunteer]⁹⁰ always has a lot of questions. They can be difficult questions sometimes but that's why I'm here, to face difficult things (Carl)

Despite this, Carl could not elaborate on how these probing questions had translated into changes in his behaviour.

The development of normative ambitions can be interpreted in one of two ways. The first is that normative ambitions can be a sign of Core Members transitioning to a normative compliance mechanism whereby they are

⁹⁰ 'Kelly' is not the volunteer's real name. Pseudonyms are used to maintain the anonymity of Core Members and volunteers.

beginning to adopt a moral commitment to social norms as endorsed through their webs of control. Alternatively, normative ambitions may be a sign of manipulation whereby Core Members use socially accepted messages to gain credibility, a greater level of freedom, or even use these messages to facilitate further offending.

Engaged normative compliers also spoke about the same desires to move away from their offending background and lead a normal life. The key distinction between the disengaged narrative and the engaged narratives is the greater level of evidence presented by the engagers who could 'walk the walk, while talking the talk'. The level of evidence which the engagers drew upon to show how they were 'walking the walk' was noticeable.

Both Gordon and Henry stated their motivation for joining CoSA was to gain additional help and support to change their behaviours, to be safe in the community and not wanting to harm any more victims. To assist this change, Gordon and Henry reported having voluntarily signed up to additional courses. Gordon's courses were to help improve his mental health and were provided by a voluntary organisation with specific expertise in this area. Henry also sought private counselling to assist in his management of stress, but also to help him to finally address some personal issues in his life. Henry and Gordon paid for these courses themselves and said that they had signed up to these courses as they would complement the inputs they had received from their existing webs of control. At the time of the interview Gordon had just completed his course which he described as:

Very useful and it enables me to sit back and look at the bigger picture (Gordon)

Habitual and Routine Compliance

Habit and Routine is a mechanism which was not frequently observed among Core Members. However, there were seven Core Members who did display some actions and behaviours which would signify a change towards habitual and routine compliance. Given the relatively short-period between starting in CoSA and the interviews, the extent to which this behaviour is

truly habitual or routine compliance cannot be definitively determined. Henry was one such Core Member who indicated having developed mechanisms of habitual and routine compliance; he displayed strong normative compliance and had begun the process to habitualise socially acceptable behaviours. Henry reported having transformed his whole lifestyle and behaviours which were very hedonistic to becoming entirely socially acceptable and habitual. Henry's new routines have improved his relationship with statutory agencies and his change in perspective has enabled the development of a variety of pro-social behaviours which are being internalised and habitually practiced. As well as giving up his "care-free" lifestyle, Henry also sought out private counselling to help and support his compliance:

I'd been to [Clinic] and I paid for myself to start weekly sessions and that was my only outlet, twice a week for months and months and months (Henry)

Henry's example also highlights the relationship between normative compliance and habit and routine compliance, with Henry's normative behaviours now being regularly and routinely practiced.

Jack was another Core Member with evidence of habitual and routine compliance mechanisms influencing his daily life. During the interview with Jack, he stated that he was desperate to get a job to give him some self-worth and help him feel more like a normal person. He said he was not bothered what type of work he did as long as he could do something. At the time of the interview, Jack was also attending a job training course but had not managed to secure employment. Shortly after the interview, while I was speaking to the project coordinator of Jack's Circle, the coordinator revealed that Jack had gained a job, but not before turning one job offer down because the employer would only pay cash-in-hand and Jack wanted to "play honest" from now on.

These examples, while seemingly small changes to many, represented significant achievements by Core Members. The influence of the webs of control are apparent in encouraging Core Members to seek support, be open

to taking advice and criticism, and to the modelling of pro-social behaviours which these three examples demonstrate.

Manipulative Compliance

Both Phil and Dennis engaged in behaviours which pushed the boundaries of the conditions they were subject to and was arguably driven by a manipulative streak. Dennis had extensive conditions attached to his licence and his SOPO yet continued to push the boundaries of what was acceptable within his restrictions. Dennis revealed in his interview to being caught using two mobile phones by his Circle volunteers. While Dennis was not exempt from using two mobile phones, he did not inform the Circle volunteers about this second phone, was vague about whether statutory agencies had been informed, and could not give a clear rationale for having two phones. Suspicions were therefore raised that Dennis was in the process of grooming children or acting deceitfully and outside of his licence conditions and SOPO.

Phil also spoke of placing himself in a perceived risky situation. Phil had conditions and restrictions which prevented him from having unsupervised contact with children under 16. Phil explained earlier in the interview that the conditions of his SOPO meant it was not acceptable for him to be in unsupervised contact with children and that adults who were with the children must be aware of Phil's convictions. Despite this he reported that he had decided to go to a sixth form college to see a show where children under 16 were present in the audience; he later told his Circle volunteers that he had seen the show. Phil told the volunteers this was 'allowed' as attending a show was not specifically contained within his conditions and was definitely not a risky behaviour because adults were in the audience (despite none of them knowing about his offence). Phil alluded to his volunteers being uncomfortable with his behaviour and that they felt such behaviour was close to being 'breach-able'. Phil stated that the volunteers were concerned by the potential for young children under 16 to be at such an event and therefore Phil could have breached his SOPO. They also tried to explain to Phil that even if his SOPO allowed this, such activities could

place Phil at risk of being in an area of the school where he would be with a child unsupervised and thus in breach of his conditions. Phil said the volunteers sought advice from Phil's probation officer without consulting him (though he later contradicts this, saying the volunteers did tell him they would pass this information on), and he was 'called in' for a meeting by his police and probation officers.

Phil's actions here are defined as manipulative compliance because he was aware of the restrictions of his licence conditions and SOPO, but consistently tried to manipulate and contest the definitions of the restrictions. The actions of his volunteers had clearly upset Phil, however, after lengthy discussions within our interview he said he could not see any validity to the volunteers' concerns, consistently citing the performers being over 16 years, while overlooking the volunteers' concerns that other members of the audience could be under 16 years. Thus reinforcing the attempts to convince himself that he was acting appropriately and being unfairly targeted.

Non-Compliance

Unlike the Core Members who complied because of the potential incentives which could be gained from compliance, non-compliers rejected the legitimate pathways to gain incentives. Non-compliance typically occurred for three reasons: Core Members either rejected social norms; Core Members were no longer deterred by licence conditions; or they rationalised their SOPOs as being unfair and unjust. Examples of such behaviours were rare but by virtue of the non-compliance, are significant to the risk of future offending. The two Core Members who adopted manipulative compliance mechanisms were also non-compliers. Another three Core Members were identified as being non-compliant.

Phil showed some normative ambition but also indicated engaging in a series of risky behaviours which suggested an underlying non-compliance with instrumental and constraint-based mechanisms. Throughout the interview with Phil, there appeared to be a concerted effort to gaining my agreement for a lowering of the 'age of consent'. The repetition of this,

combined with his manipulative behaviours in the incident at the sixth form college and in the subsequent Circle meeting demonstrates a rejection of aspects of the law and rejection of social norms and values. As such, this attitude is defined as non-compliance. It was also of concern to those managing Phil given his previous conviction was for inciting a child (11 year old boy) to have sex in a public toilet.

Dennis was another Core Member to display non-compliant behaviours. Dennis had a history of sexual offences against children and was aware of the number of restrictions on his contact with children. Throughout his time in the Circle he continually sought to manipulate the conditions of his licence and justified any deceitful behaviour as his attempt to lead a 'normal' life and make a little bit of money for himself to spend on his elderly mother. One of these schemes involved Dennis setting up as a fairground attendant and purchasing soft toys and a market stall. Although the police found out about Dennis' plans prior to him travelling, such preparation represents a clear level of non-compliance and a high risk of reoffending:

I wanted to go round doing fairs and fetes and stuff. Now I've got a restraining order and I am not allowed to work with kids, or be with anybody under the age of 17 and so, ... I bought a market stall and I went down with the caravan down to a big show. I paid the fee or £160 ish, and [pause] I was doing it deceitfully to be honest, the police knew I was going on holiday but they didn't know what I was gonna do. Anyway I could've got put inside for doing it ... and I didn't tell anyone in case it got back to the police (Dennis)

Richard also revealed a strategy for non-compliance on two separate occasions. One involved creating online identities, the other was a relationship with a pregnant women. Both were things he was restricted from doing and were done deceitfully.

Richard revealed to having created several 'aliases' or identities to use online. These 'virtual lives' provide a degree of anonymity away from his sex offender identity, but also require the 'omission' of information about himself to others. The reason Richard's behaviour constitutes non-compliance is because he created these new identities without telling his police or

probation officer. Richard only revealed the existence of such virtual behaviours after they had become known to the statutory agencies. On a separate occasion Richard reported having secretly started a relationship with a pregnant woman without informing either his police or probation officer, or his Circle. Details of this relationship with the pregnant woman only emerged after this relationship ended and she returned to the father of her unborn child. Because Richard's offences were against young children, his decision to begin this relationship discreetly was deemed by the police and probation services to represent a significant risk.

While Richard was commended for eventually revealing his virtual identity and relationship with the pregnant female, there is also reason to suggest he would have continued the deceit for as long as possible had the pregnant woman not ended the relationship and his virtual identity not been uncovered. Moreover, his actions represent a clear rejection or non-compliance to the requirements of his order which restricted him from having any relationships without telling the police. The greater problem illustrated by the case of Richard is that the webs of control which exist to protect the public from further offending do little to address Richard's desire to be 'accepted by others' and 'have a loving relationship'.

The result is that the relationships which are so highly sought after by Richard are also restricted in the interests of protecting the public. While Richard's webs of control have sought to educate him on the need to disclose further relationships, his paranoia that the police will make him reveal his offences and he will be attacked mean he is likely to continue pursuing risky and secretive relationships.

The final two examples of non-compliance are different to those actions of Dennis, Richard and Phil. Both Alan and Norman described engaging in behaviours which they knew would bring them to the attention of criminal justice agencies. This was not to achieve some personal reward, but was in an attempt to gain more attention from statutory agencies. Alan chose to act in a deliberately non-compliant way at a time he was about to lose contact

with those monitoring and supporting him. In doing so Alan succeeded in gaining more attention and contact with his housing support worker and other criminal justice professionals:

I was frightened of having accommodation on my own (Alan)

Conclusions

The chapter has illustrated how external agencies exercise some level of control over Core Members and how this control can lead to more compliant behaviour, but may also result in resistance to, and rejection of socially accepted norms and values. All Core Members identified control first being exerted from criminal justice agencies with statutory responsibilities to supervise and manage sex offenders and protect the public. This led to a top-down application of control which demanded obedience from Core Members. Over time, and with compliant Core Members this display of authority could reduce and be replaced with a less authoritative application of control. Core Members perceived this less authoritarian style of control as being more constructive and enabled them to use the police and probation services as a form of support to maintain their own self-control strategies rather than being subservient only to the restrictions. While control was clearly defined in webs established by the police, control by probation was described by approximately half of the Core Members as being less established, despite the potential for probation officers to impose sanctions on Core Members.

For CoSA however, the lack of legal powers means Core Members are under no obligation to participate, engage or attend the Circle. This necessitates the building of a safe and open environment where volunteers can demonstrate their trustworthiness to Core Members. Once trust is established a passive web of control can be established where volunteers support and encourage change through positive reinforcement of good behaviours. A clear message from the interviews therefore is that the supportive functions provided by CoSA to men who often had little other

social contacts generated a level of trust and engagement between Core Members and volunteers that was different to the relationships which existed between Core Members and statutory agencies. The non-enforcement background of CoSA combined with the non-professional background of many of the volunteers created a lighter, more relaxed environment in which Core Members felt able to engage in more open dialogue. Volunteers also presented an image of aspirational individuals who Core Members sought to gain praise from. This trust also enabled volunteers to challenge Core Members about risky behaviours and attitudes, thus enhancing the narrative of compliance.

Webs of control were also experienced by Core Members due to the associations of CoSA with criminal justice agencies. This quasi-statutory status of CoSA induced a level of uncertainty in Core Members and simultaneously enhanced the level of control by CoSA volunteers. It could be argued that the combination of heavy controls by police and probation, combined with the softer or passive controls of CoSA complement each other and enable Core Members to more quickly understand the necessity to change and the strategies to comply.

The influence these webs of control had on Core Members behaviour varied among Core Members. The chapter identified, through the use of Bottoms' (2001) concept of compliance, that Core Members utilised all four mechanisms Bottoms' developed: instrumental, constraint-based, normative, and habitual and routine compliance. A fifth compliance mechanism – manipulative compliance was also identified as being used by Core Members. In addition, there were a small number of cases where Core Members were non-compliant. Webs of control also affected the levels or depths of engagement with compliance. Some Core Members displayed a short-term legal compliance which meant they abided to the letter of law or by the conditions in their licence or SOPO, but little substantive changes beyond this compliance. For others, the webs of control combined with the learning from the sex offender treatment programmes, and an internal drive

to change led to significant engagement with the law and behaving more responsibly.

Chapter Seven: Identity Change and Change Agents

Introduction

Media representations of sex offenders have fuelled the perception and powerful imagery of an incurable and sub-human sex offender (Spencer, 2009). As a group, sex offenders are routinely cast as being inherently different to the rest of society and in need of significant interventions to rectify and manage their 'otherness' (Garland, 2001). At the same time media representations infer that treatment approaches and the management of sex offenders in the community fails to protect the public. The same media reports are simultaneously endorsing further restrictions to manage sex offenders in the community to ensure that the community is protected (Hudson, 2005). Over the last decade, however, findings from the desistance literature suggests that offenders can and do change behaviours and adopt more pro-social attitudes (Maruna, 2001; Appleton, 2010; Farrall et al, 2014).

This chapter will examine the processes of change adopted by Core Members in the period prior to participating in CoSA and how their processes of change developed following the assistance of CoSA and other criminal justice interventions. Change can involve many distinct areas, and this chapter will focus on the three areas of change consistently indicated by Core Members. There are changes to attitudes and thinking patterns, changes in identity narratives and attempts at reinventing the 'self' and changes to social networks.

To assess the causes of change the chapter utilises the concept of 'change agents' to explore how change is affected, and the limitations of change agents. For the purposes of this chapter, change agents have been split into 'Self-Change' and change facilitated by 'Others'. The concept of change agents is applied in three ways in this chapter. First the concept is used to

describe the internal changes which Core Members have made; in this application the Core Member is a self-change agent. The second change agent refers to CoSA and the third change agent refers to criminal justice professionals. CoSA and criminal justice professionals are external change agents. In their role as an external change agent the Circle volunteers act as a facilitator and supporter of change within Core Members. The second external change agents described by Core Members and which fits the concept of a change agent is the role of criminal justice professionals in instigating and supporting change. The chapter will discuss this concept in more detail.

It is also important to be aware that in this research the pace of change varied among the Core Members. At the time of interview, the periods spent in a Circle varied from 5–18 months. The period spent in the community also varied between Core Members, with one of the Core Members beginning a Circle almost immediately after his release from prison, but others having spent some years in the community before being offered a Circle. The sample also included some Core Members who received a community sentence and started a Circle in the immediate aftermath of their conviction. The level of previous interventions also varied. As such the levels of transformations differed among Core Members. For some, transformations were minimal and Core Members struggled to accept their behaviour, while others had been able to increase levels of self-confidence and independence. This discrepancy in changes occurs across the sample and is indicative of the stages of change across Core Members, and also the levels of responsibility they are prepared to take in relation to their offending.

Change and Desistance: A review of key findings

In recent years the focus on what factors influence someone to stop offending and the process of how someone desists from crime has received a significant amount of attention within the criminological literature (Laub and Sampson, 1993; Maruna, 2001; Farrall, 2002). Factors said to explain why someone stops offending include ‘burn out’, religion, maturing from crimes,

and emotions. The work of Maruna and colleagues (2001, 2004, 2004a, 2009) and Giordano et al (2002) also identify the role of self-motivation and 'significant others' as influential in providing explanations for *why* but also *how* desistance occurs.

A key finding of much of the desistance literature has focused on the significance of sociogenic factors to explain change or abstinence from crime. Three of the most frequently cited causes are said to be ageing or maturing out of crime, the love of a 'good woman' and gaining employment (Laub et al, 1998). For sex offenders however, many of whom receive convictions later than most offenders or had established employment or relationships such variables do not easily fit (Farrall and Calverley, 2006; Harris, 2014).

Equally important is the individual's motivation to change. Maruna argues that alongside the social factors, change is also attributed to the role of human agency, and an internal desire to change. He adds that without the desire to change 'families, jobs, age, or time cannot change a person who does not make a personal effort to change on the inside' (Maruna, 2001: 32). Maruna argues that key to making and succeeding with longer-term transitions away from crime is a 'fundamental and intentional shift in a person's sense of self' (Maruna, 2001: 17). These findings have encouraged further research which focuses on the role of cognitive transformations and narrative identities developed through self-motivation or with assistance from significant others – primarily in this case the Circle and the role of social networks in the process of moving on and early attempts to 'make good'. More recently, Farmer et al (2015) have concluded from their research with 32 sex offenders that the creation of forward planning narratives, which are filled with hope and optimism, reinforces Maruna's findings of the importance of cognitive transformations and narrative identities to longer-term desistance.

Change agents

The concept of change agents is one which is used extensively in the field of organisational development (Armenakis et al, 1993). Change agents refer to individuals who possess the attributes, skills and status to 'stimulate, facilitate, and coordinate the change effort' (Lunenborg, 2010: 1). Change agents are the initiators of efforts to change behaviour, and they act as the catalyst for change but importantly they also have responsibility for managing changes (Pathak 2011). Pathak adds that a change agent is an individual who identifies the need to change, the areas change is required to be undertaken in, what changes should be made and also assists in the implementation of these changes. Thus change agents:

'help individuals and groups within the organisation to work more effectively together. This typically involves changing the attitudes and behaviours ... through communication decision making and problem solving' (Pathak, 2011: 134).

Efforts to change should also incorporate the individual's ability to complete the change (Alkaya and Hepaktan, 2003). Echoing findings from the desistance literature, where individuals do not possess a desire to change, so the efforts of change agents may be limited.

The literature on change agents also identifies a distinction between internal change agents and external change agents. The distinctions used within the organisational development literature are very specific to internal change agents being located within an organisation and external change agents being an expert or consultant in a particular field who assists the organisation to diagnose and provide alternative strategies behaviours or practices based on his or her experience. For the purposes of this study, the notion of change agents will be adapted so that an internal change agent will refer to the individual Core Member who is in essence an expert on themselves. While the Core Member may be an expert on themselves, they may not be fully cognizant with the need to change, what changes should be made or how to implement these changes. Nevertheless, with some guidance Core Members can be effective in changing behaviour patterns to

resist temptations and undertake some level of self-control (as discussed in Chapter Five).

External change agents refer to groups, individuals or organisations external to the individual. This chapter will focus predominantly on CoSA volunteers and treatment programmes facilitated by the probation service as external sources of change. The application of change agents in this context is supported by Schein (1988) and Van de Ven and Sun (2011) who associate change agents as being individuals of a 'cast of characters' whom are either formally appointed or informally appointed or even self-appointed. The primary focus of change agents in this context is in driving forward change and being individuals who possess 'the willingness to help others to perceive, understand and act upon the meaning of events that occur in the environment' (Jabri, 2012: 52).

Areas of Change

Analysis of interviews with Core Members revealed three key areas of change to be frequently discussed and sought-after by Core Members. The three areas were changes in thinking – referred to as cognitive transformations, shifts in perceptions of themselves – identity transformations, and changes to their friendship networks – and social transformations. The reason cognitive transformations are so important is that sexual offending is often facilitated by certain types of cognitive distortions being neutralised by Core Members (Abel et al, 1989; Marshall and Barbaree, 1990; Maruna and Mann, 2006). A range of cognitive distortions were identified by Core Members throughout the interviews and include sexual cognitive distortions, misogynistic attitudes, minimising their offences and low levels of victim empathy.

Identity transformations and the creation of redemption scripts have grown in importance in recent years following the ground-breaking work of Shadd Maruna. Maruna (2001), and later Giordano et al (2002), argued that changes in self-identities, self-concepts and personal agency can influence

and shape future personal narratives through an ongoing process of reappraisal of the self. Maruna argues that ex-offenders are able to legitimise their own lives through a process of narrative identity change. This involves the ex-offender creating a new identity for themselves which focuses on the positives of their character and identity rather than on their pro-offending label (Maruna et al, 2004a). The ultimate identity transformation is where the ex-offender or 'narrator' is able to create redemption scripts or redemption rituals. Redemption scripts involve the individual or 'narrator' establishing themselves as a good and conventional person, who can 'give something back to society as a display of gratitude' (Maruna, 2001: 87) and begin to 'make good'.

The final area of change is that of social transformations. Social transformations refers to the developing and establishing of social networks as well as improving relationships with statutory agencies who Core Members will have dealings with – sometimes for at least 10 years. Social networks may include family members, new friendships and other 'significant others'. The value of these relationships to maintaining the Core Members future life is of particular importance to supporting and aiding the process of change and desistance from offending (Farrall, 2002; Farrall and Calverley, 2006).

The extent of change: A typology

Following analysis of the interviews what began to emerge was that Core Members had different motivations, experiences and strategies to change. Some spoke of being motivated by their own will, others stated the role of the Circle to be the stimulus for change, and some were facilitated to change through interventions from within the criminal justice system. A number of Core Members explained their change due to a culmination of sources that overlapped the clearly divided categories of 'self', 'CoSA' or 'programmes'. Levels of commitment to change also varied amongst Core Members. Some spoke, for example, of making substantial changes in their entire lives and moving towards what Maruna (2001) describes as redemption rituals. For

others, change was minimal and involved a small increase in self-confidence enabling them to leave their house to attend a meeting with the volunteers each week, or constituted them recognising they have improved their time-keeping when attending meetings with the Circle or their probation officer.

In an attempt to better define the extent of change, six broad categories were devised which accommodate all 30 Core Members. Categories range from no evidence or reference to changes in personal identity to significant transformations with attempts at redemption (Maruna, 2001). The categories within this range are labelled: (from high to low change) 'seeking redemption', 'good guys', 'moderate transformations', 'early stage transformers', those giving 'lip service' to notions of transformations, and finally, those displaying 'no' significant transformations. These categories apply across the three areas of change which this chapter focuses on.

None

These Core Members failed to describe making any efforts to adopt pro-social values, or to distance themselves from their past offending. Four Core Members were classified as displaying no significant changes and reported having received regular attention from criminal justice professionals due to their behaviour, thus reinforcing their status as making very limited changes. In one instance, Norman described how he had discussed a potential instance of harassment or stalking of a vulnerable young adult female with his Circle. This was behaviour which had already caused a lot of concern to those managing him in the community due to the potential harm which could be caused. Norman recalled that during the meeting he said:

Don't tell PPU. And PPU came round and they said you can't say that, you can't come between PPU and CoSA. So I got a bollocking again. .. if I hadn't said don't tell PPU I probably wouldn't have got such a bollocking (Norman)

'Lip Service'

These Core Members were aware of the perceived need to change and spoke about the need to move away from their offending identity and values

but lacked the evidence to show they were acting out their messages. Eight Core Members were grouped as only giving lip service to changing narratives. These Core Members also received some attention from criminal justice professionals, with some appearing to receive greater attention than the Core Members who were categorised as displaying no changes. Dennis, Alan and Max were re-arrested or recalled to prison due to concerns about their behaviour. Unlike the four Core Members who showed no evidence of developing new narratives, these Core Members gave indications that their police or probation officer wanted to see more pro-social attitudes being displayed and thus presented such an image but made acknowledgements to 'playing the game' and being unable to deliver them.

Early Stages

Five Core Members were identified as being in the early stages of change and wanting to be a different person. Both Bruce and Ruben reported to being held back from distancing themselves from the past offending but had taken small steps towards a more productive self-identity. For Ruben, this was through the focus on his future aspirations to become a masseuse. Ruben acknowledged that he would have difficulties in gaining accreditation for this given his convictions, but he had discussed his ambitions with those responsible for his supervision. He added that, at this stage they supported his plans:

I mean I am only doing the plans at the minute and obviously there will be restrictions but they are very supportive of me to explore the idea (Ruben)

Bruce also spoke of aspiring to a new life away from his offending identity. Unlike Ruben, Bruce had only recently returned to the community before starting his Circle and reported that he had struggled to adapt to 'life on the outside'. These struggles included difficulties with neighbours, family problems, the loss of his job and being rejected by friends. Despite this however, Bruce spoke with a mixture of optimism for a new life and a measure of pessimism of what life held for him post-conviction:

This is the first time I've been on the dole, truly on the dole, I've had little batches where I've signed on and then I've signed off ...

The unknown is the scary bit, I suppose, but it's also a challenge. I suppose its 'Don't let the bastards grind you down' and 'Just go for it' (Bruce)

Moderate

Four Core Members are categorised as having made moderate changes in their lives. Typically those with moderate changes were more aware of the harms of their offending and described placing a greater distance between their past offending and their new identity. On the whole, these Core Members reported more productive relationships with criminal justice professionals but also were engaging more widely in age-appropriate social activities. Within the interviews, these Core Members also expressed strong ambitions to lead a 'normal' life and supported these ambitions with supporting statements. Maurice, for example, made numerous references to his desires to lead a more sedate life as he is getting old and felt cooking, baking and fishing would provide the sense of normality he now seeks. When he joined the Circle he was able to develop this pro-social identity further with the volunteers:

Peter [volunteer] I got on with straight away cos we go fishing, I'd brought a cake in with me and they had some and after that we got on fine anyway (Maurice)

Despite the changes they had made, all four Core Members categorised as having made moderate changes still encountered barriers to their reintegration such as restrictions on their movement, and described a lack of established support networks outside of the Circle. These Core Members also spoke about still requiring support to overcome and address personal problems related to their reintegration and also to managing their behaviour in response to certain temptations or unanticipated events. In the past this would have fallen to the supervising probation officer who would 'advise, assist, and befriend', such a role continues to be present today but is often lost behind the more arms-length and all-encompassing 'offender management' that is required.

'A good guy'

Being a 'good guy' was a message recalled by almost all the Core Members interviewed, however, six of the Core Members are categorised in this group. Being 'a good guy' was closely associated with living a normal life, though Core Members in this group had received some recognition or validation of their change from others. Core Members categorised as being 'a good guy' also demonstrated they were living in a socially acceptable and responsible way, but they reiterated throughout the interview that they wanted to move away from their offending identity and thought patterns. Applying the knowledge from interventions such as the sex offender treatment programme into their daily lives was important. Eddie summarised the traits of 'a good guy' in the following quote:

You know I like what most people like, you know I'd like a nice new car, nice holidays but you can't can you, you've got to live within your means ... I learnt to save in prison, and I've stuck to that now I am out ... The offending-related courses helped me ... I take a bit from each one [of the programmes] and use them all the time really (Eddie)

Seeking Redemption

The final category of change includes Core Members who have progressed through each of the previous stages and are now seeking some form of redemption from their past behaviours. Three Core Members were included in this group and each displayed a high level of self-motivation, and having sought-out an offence-free lifestyle were living responsibly and progressing towards this new life. These Core Members describe having overcome some of the barriers experienced by other Core Members in this sample and were advancing along the pathway to desistance. They were also starting to engage in acts of redemption by giving back to the community, albeit these were done anonymously at this stage. For instance, Gordon provided frequent examples of his attempts at good deeds which he had done in an attempt to make himself feel better, but importantly which also brought benefits to others in the local community. Gordon described how he had given various items to the village school which was short of resources for the children. Gordon gave things like paint and supermarket coupons to the

school anonymously but then received praise and recognition from the volunteers and coordinator of his Circle:

In the village I am in I do things anonymously, like when the supermarkets are doing the offers [sports equipment for schools] I collect them all up and then give them to the school [in the village] and ... a friend of mine gave me a lot of these tester pots of paint from a factory that had closed down, I'd had them for about 18months and not used them so I took them down to the school [in the village] and asked if they could make use of those in the art department ... I am doing things behind the scenes to try and integrate back into the community and feeling that if I do things on the quiet it helps the village thrive (Gordon)

Realising the need for Change: The Self as a change agents

One of the essential criteria for effective change is an open and willing individual (Giordano et al, 2002; Hudson, 2005). Acceptance of past wrongs and a desire to move on is at the heart of many intervention programmes (for example, *Alcoholics Anonymous*) as well as being cited in various theoretical models (Prochaska and DiClemente, 1983; Maruna, 2001; Laws and Ward, 2011). Twenty-nine of the 30 Core Members gave an inclination that they wanted to change, though as the typology of change (see above) seeks to demonstrate, levels of desire and change can vary between Core Members and was on a scale of minimal inputs by Core Members to significant efforts at self-change. At the most minimal level, this inclination to change was illustrated by Core Members agreement to join CoSA and through their participation Core Members are demonstrating some inclination or openness of a need to change.

Two of the 29 Core Members made reference to wanting to change, but also routinely stated to not requiring help:

They [Circles] realised that I didn't really need that level of support. I mean I have travelled all over the world, I've done some quite fantastic jobs and I've run my life quite successfully and so I am quite capable of doing most things myself (Max)

Max later explained however, that he was recalled to prison following a nervous breakdown, that he routinely "fell off the wagon" and that he needed

help with lifts to places as well as having a substantial amount of contact with the Circle volunteers via text messages and phone calls.

For most, this desire to 'start again' was hampered by the barriers they faced living life as a convicted sex offender. Where Core Members offending identity were known, communities were suspicious or hostile on their return. Where the sex offender identity remained hidden, Core Members' internal doubts prevented them from active engagement. Despite the barriers some Core Members did achieve some self-change as the following discussion will show.

Cognitive Transformations as a Self-Change Agent

Three distinct changes to thinking patterns were identified from the interviews. These are changes to cognitive distortions, the process of realisation and appraisal following conviction and changes in their attitudes to engage in programmes. On the whole Core Members struggled to make significant changes to their thinking patterns as Self-Change Agents, especially in challenging and reducing cognitive distortions. In many cases changes to their levels of engagement and the process of reappraising their lives occurred during their participation in CoSA. These are attributed to self-change, however, as there was no direct intervention or involvement by CoSA volunteers.

Effecting cognitive transformations is regarded as an important area of change because of the links between the use of cognitive distortions and their initial offending. Previous studies have highlighted how cognitive distortions can be adopted and utilised by sex offenders to facilitate their offending (Abel et al, 1989). For the purposes of this chapter the definition of cognitive distortions created by Blumenthal et al (1999) will be used. Blumenthal et al (1999: 129) states cognitive distortions 'are attitudes and beliefs which offenders use to deny, minimize and rationalize their behaviour'. These attitudes and beliefs can promote deviant or offending behaviour in order to satisfy particular urges. Cognitive distortions also

influence attitudes to victims (Ó Ciardha and Gannon, 2011; Brown et al, 2013).

Approximately two-thirds of the Core Members referred to having held cognitive distortions during their period of offending. The remainder made no reference to this in the interview. Some cognitive distortions related to their process of legitimising their sexual preferences to children, others related to misogynistic attitudes towards women, minimisation strategies and some cognitive distortions were still evident. Cognitive distortions were identified either through Core Members openly disclosing their use of cognitive distortions or through Core Members expressing distorted thinking patterns which they did not acknowledge to be cognitively distorted.

To illustrate the difficulties Core Members face in seeking to challenge cognitive distortions on their own, the chapter will briefly show the problems of Phil, Joe and Troy. Phil had some of the most entrenched cognitive distortions of any of those described by Core Members. During the interviews Phil recalled how he was able to legitimise his illegal sexual behaviour by perceiving himself as being a caring and compassionate sexual partner despite knowing his relationship with a 15 year old boy was illegal. Phil displayed a range of rationalisations to counter his cognitive distortions adding that as a child he “didn’t have any problem having other lads to mess about with” (Phil), he claimed that the peak of sexual activity was from a person’s teenage years to their early 20s, and that if his offences have taken place in a different jurisdiction then it may not have been an offence at all. Despite completing a community-based sex offender treatment programme Phil continued to hold some of these cognitive distortions in particular his attraction to 14-15 year old boys, and his flirtations with pursuing his attraction to under-age boys continued to cause him problems. In particular his attendance at a drama production performed by teenagers at a sixth-form college by teenage students, and his subsequent reaction when challenged by Circle volunteers and criminal justice professionals demonstrates these unresolved cognitive distortions.

Phil's actions draw parallels with the work by Womer (2011: 56) who states that 'results suggest that while many sex offenders desire change, they do not take full responsibility for their actions'. Within the context of cognitive transformations therefore, the openness to changing ways of thinking and accepting their role in their offending must be internalised and accepted by Core Members before change can be pursued. Even when Core Members appeared to have accepted and internalised the need for change, barriers can still restrict cognitive transformations from taking place.

Joe and Troy also admitted to having held cognitive sexual distortions which facilitated their offending. Both Troy and Joe received prison sentences and both completed the SOTP in prison and stated strong inclinations to change. On return to the community however, both stated they had struggled to manage and control their thinking. In Joe's opinion, his isolation because of the move to a new area, being rejected by his old friends, and not being allowed to socialise with others in the hostel prevented him from distancing himself from his pro-offending thoughts. He described how his empathy for his victim decreased as the isolation allowed him to convince himself that the relationship was mutual and consensual (despite his victim being below the age of consent). James also recognised how social isolation created a barrier to cognitive transformations. Like with many Core Members, James sustained self-change only came after joining a Circle. James reflected that without CoSA being available in the community to support his SOTP learning and challenge his thinking he would have struggled to effect change:

I would probably still be stewing over it [thoughts related to his offence] now (James)

Although Core Members struggled to challenge cognitive distortions independently, some evidence of cognitive transformations as a self-change agent were visible in the other two areas. In particular their arrest and subsequent feelings of shame led many Core Members to attempt to take stock of their life and to set about establishing what went wrong. For some Core Members this process began in the immediate aftermath of their

offending, for others it was during the trial, while some were prompted to make changes following the realisation of their new life and as they sought to adjust to being a convicted sex offender. The latter was often provoked by a culmination of events including struggles managing stigmatising situations, isolation and a sense of despair over what their life has become. For Henry, this opportunity to reflect came in the aftermath of his arrest, while for Troy realisation was prompted by the advice of an 'ex-con':

It was a case of taking it one day at a time and seeing how I was gonna deal with it ... you know I was committing a sexual offence but the madness of it was that I didn't see myself as a sexual offender (Henry)

it was actually a prisoner that said to me, you did it didn't ya, and he said don't you think you owe her one act of decency and stop her from going through that ... I finally came clean to the world and I said that I had done this horrible thing and to be honest I think that was the saving of me really (Troy)

In most instances these acts of self-change sowed the seeds of change rather than having profound and extensive effects. At the same time the changes in attitudes resulted in a more open and accepting individual who could seek help and take advice more constructively.

Changes in the level of engagement and personal responsibility were also described by some Core Members. These changes often involved Core Members taking the initiative and seeking to progress their own lives. In one instance, Jack described his 'seizing the day' moment occurring following a series of 'drab' and mundane Circle meetings. Jack stated that the volunteers did not appear to have their typical enthusiasm and so he took on their role and tried to encourage conversation. Jack described this meeting as follows:

I can remember [one] meeting we had and it was just Ken and Kath [Circle volunteers], the other two had commitments and I walked in and the look they had on their faces then was that they didn't wanna be there, seriously it looked like they didn't want to be there ... They must have had a hard day. But I noticed that, and they weren't talking much so I decided to take the initiative and just like encourage everybody and I managed to bring them out a bit and eventually we had a really good group (Jack)

Not only did Jack's effort illustrate a deeper level of engagement than he had described throughout much of his life prior to CoSA, but he described how his efforts were rewarded in future meetings with the volunteers becoming more involved and supportive:

After that it's been really brilliant and they've shown real commitment and it's been really, really good

DT: So actually you ended up supporting them?

Yea [big smile] just that one occasion though (Jack)

Not all Core Members were able to refer to specific events of change. Instead, they were able to compare life prior to starting a Circle and their life at the time of the interview. Core Members often reflected on the changes they had made in their thought processes and the benefits they have received as a consequence of these changes:

Just been more aware of deep thinking and what do other people think before I say things and before I do it ... So my thinking skills have really improved, you know positive thoughts and positive actions and [probation officer] was really pleased with that (Matthew)

Yea I am quite an impulsive person naturally and I've slowed down my thought processes quite a bit I think ... and by talking about it, it helped me to understand things better (Carl)

On the whole, most Core Members struggled to challenge and make significant changes in their cognitive distortions, but some small changes, especially to cementing a desire to change was evident among Core Members during what was termed the "period of realisation" (Henry).

Redefining a sex offender identity: Identity Transformations and Self-Change

Prior to commencing a Circle, all 30 Core Members described little change in their identity narratives and few stated having made any attempts to do such a thing. Such findings are in line with other research on desistance and narrative identity, which suggests the role of others is vital to successful change (Maruna, 2001; Farrall and Calverley, 2006; Maruna et al, 2004a, 2009; Appleton, 2010). A common tale repeated by Core Members were the

numerous barriers they experienced such as the stigma of being a convicted sex offender as well as the loss of, and subsequent lack of social networks to support reintegration and reinforce any attempts to create a new narrative (Harris, 2014). Many Core Members also struggled to comprehend the consequences of their behaviour and as such the prospect of a new life was deemed to be either inappropriate given the recent history of their offending, or was something which they perceived as something which they were not worthy of.

After what I'd done I didn't think anyone would want me ... so to have the volunteers every week ... that was special (Matthew)

Regret for their actions was not the only barrier to changing their self-identity and narrative, adjusting to their status as 'social lepers', and a lack of confidence and self-esteem were frequently cited by Core Members. Many of the Core Members were also experiencing, to varying degrees, a loss of social contacts to assist in the creation of a new self-identity.

I was so far away from my family. And that's frustrating cos ... I'd a job lined up through my uncle and a flat through a friend of his who rents out properties. But I've had to lose that and come here with nothing (Troy)

Such was the hammer-blow effect of their conviction and the loss of life as they knew it, Core Members struggled with anything greater than developing a desire to change their identity. Core Members lacked the capacity or capabilities to pursue genuine change and therefore a frequent technique adopted was to minimise the harm of their behaviours through explaining their early life stories as part of a wider personal tragedy. This is a strategy noted in other studies which have focused on identifying changes in narratives of ex-offenders. Appleton (2010: 143) refers to this group as having 'contaminated beginnings'. Tragedies retold by Core Members included deaths of close family members, histories of neglect and abusive family relationships, isolation and limited social skills or from disadvantaged and fragmented families.

I was abused by my father at 13 and sexually abused for about 17 months (Alan)

I just lost my dad six months before I went into prison and that drove me nuts that (Bruce)

My mam died, my brother has mental health problems and ... my wife left me for my best friend (Matthew)

I've never really had any friends (Kyle)

The strategy of explaining their criminality through past histories was commonly cited by those who were least able to act as an agent of self-change. All 30 Core Members described limited forward movement in developing or changing their identity entirely independent of others. Participation in CoSA did enable the development of some self-change to a Core Members identity however.

Identity Change in CoSA

Self-change also occurred once Core Members had started a Circle. For instance, Core Members spoke of becoming more aware that change must come from within the individual and will not be effective if it is forced up on individuals:

The only person that can change their attitude to me is me (James)

I'm the one that needs to make the changes, others can help but I have to do it (Gordon)

This realisation of the role and responsibility of the individual Core Member to change their narratives usually emerged after they had participated in the Circle for some time. In particular, a number of Core Members, especially those categorised as 'seeking redemption' and 'good guys', gave accounts of behaviours in which they had taken the initiative and were driving forward a change in their narrative, albeit with the help and support of the Circle. This is not categorised as being change facilitated by CoSA because the change was initiated by the Core Member and the role of others was eloquently described by one of the Core Members as being akin to "stabilisers on a bicycle" (Gordon).

The self-development of pro-social narratives varied significantly. Using the typologies of the extent of change discussed at the beginning of the chapter it is possible to see these variations. Unlike with the 'good guys' or those

'seeking redemption', Core Members who were categorised as being in the 'early', or 'moderate' stages of identity transformations had not yet instigated change into their daily lives but they had used the experiences and messages from the Circle. As such they had started to see themselves in a better light and thus were being provided with a foundation from which they could achieve further development of a new narrative. Fred and Maurice expressed how they were human beings and ultimately were driven by the same desires as other people in society:

Underneath ... there is quite a nice person [Core Member referring to himself] you know, it's just hard to see through the big bad monster of stuff that went on (Fred)

I'm not a bad person, if I'm walking down the street and see an old person being beaten up by a group of youths then I'm gonna help that old person if I know 'em. If I don't then I will call the police, if they don't come I will help. I've been the same practically all my life, a big softie until they get on the wrong side of me and then they get slashed! (Maurice)

Even some of those categorised as only giving "lip service" could present new narratives. However, these were often overridden by statements throughout the rest of the interview which questioned this narrative. Phil was one such Core Member who gave conflicting messages during the interview in which he expressed having immoral sexual fantasies, anger towards his portrayal and societal injustices, and a desire to distance himself from "druggies, bigots and the like" (Phil). Despite this Phil also spent quite a long time emphasising his similarities with the rest of society, on one occasion stating:

You know I'm not an evil person, basically all I want is to find a partner which is what everyone else wants and what is so bad in that (Phil)

'Making friends' as a self-change agent

Only one of the Core Members reported establishing a new social network in the period between the conviction and commencing the Circle. Matthew stated he had visited the library "off his own back" and met some people who he became friends with. As Matthew spoke more however, this group of friends was described as a being "regular acquaintances" rather than

friends. Despite the temporality of this arrangement however, Matthew was clearly keen to establish greater social networks.

The remaining Core Members described a state of stagnation in their efforts to establish new social networks as a self-change agent. Social isolation and lack of self-esteem were cited as the primary reasons given by Core Members for the lack of any new networks being created:

I kept putting it off and putting it off (Joe)

I haven't got much self confidence in myself (Norman)

I make myself lonely by pushing people away (Richard)

For some however, poor social skills meant they had never had any strong social networks to call on. Indeed, Jack described how he had no-one to call a 'friend', the nearest he felt he had to friendship were the people who also attended the 2-week skills workshop which he had just started:

The only friends I've got are on this course I've just started on (Jack)

Where social networks were mentioned, these were pre-existing arrangements which had continued between the Core Member and one or two friends after the Core Members conviction. In most cases, these networks were with other disadvantaged or vulnerable individuals:

I still see [female friend], she's my closest mate. Everyone thinks we are a couple but we aren't. She also suffers from mental health so we can deal with each other's problems (Anthony)

Like with changes in offender narratives, a small minority of Core Members also recognised how their participation in Circles had given them the confidence to seek out new hobbies or activities through which they could develop new social networks. For James, the Circle played a vital role in improving his confidence and in identifying new activities he may be interested in exploring but left James to pursue these activities.

We have been looking into LGBT groups nearby that I could go along too and that to me is now a major part of my life (James)

CoSA and Volunteers as Change Agents

The following discussion now focuses on the direct interventions the Circle has had in promoting change in Core Members. This differs from the examples identified in self-change where the Circle gently facilitated change but which Core Members led and took responsibility for. The role of CoSA as a change agent involves much more active engagement in identifying areas for change, the techniques employed for change and requires the Circle to provide a crutch to Core Members during their change process. CoSA and the volunteers acted as a change agent in various ways. They were often cited as providing a sounding board for Core Members to discuss ideas and seek appropriate solutions to problems. This was valued by Core Members because of the lack of other support structures. In time this role as a sounding board morphed into the role of a mentor or positive role model to guide and promote alternative directions.

CoSA had an important influence on Core Members lives' and encouraged and promoted change in all three areas of change discussed in this chapter. The safe environment enabled Core Members to reflect on their cognitive patterns, but they were also challenged about these. The volunteers provided an image to Core Members of normalised identities and they modelled pro-social narratives which Core Members could relate and aspire to. Most Core Members still had limited social networks but the majority acknowledged the role of the Circle in identifying and promoting new opportunities to meet new people to transform networks of social life.

The impact of CoSA and the volunteers therefore was significant in the opinion of Core Members. Such messages were made by over two-thirds of the Core Members at various points throughout the interviews and was verified towards the end of the interviews when Core Members were asked

what they felt was the cause of change, and over two-thirds of Core Members reported the Circle:⁹¹

I got sent down for 10 years and I ended up doing 7 years and since then I've not looked for trouble and Circles have helped me with that (Maurice)

they've talked to me about controlling my feelings, controlling my actions, ... talking in proper sentences, stopping me swearing and getting in contact with me feelings and expressing them, which is something I couldn't do. Cos it was me on the internet 14 hours a day, not eating, smoking, drinking. I don't drink anymore I've quit. I've cut down on my computer games, I mean I may have only been on it 2 hours a day, compared to 7 hours a day (Stephen)

Monitoring and Challenging Cognitive Distortions

Rather than receiving intensive training to spot risks and respond to cognitive distortions, most volunteers receive a two-day training event for an introduction to the work of CoSA and what they may experience (Thomas et al, 2014). One rationale for this is that the Circle volunteers should provide a lay perspective to Core Members and the volunteers are therefore encouraged to discuss any perceived anomalies with the Core Member in the Circle meetings (Hanvey et al, 2011).

The ability of the volunteers to challenge cognitive distortions from Core Members emerges from the volunteers efforts to create a safe and open environment in the Circle. Key to this process is the ability of the volunteers to build a relationship with the Core Member and establish a safe space where the Core Member will feel comfortable and be able to discuss their thoughts and feelings. The importance of the safe space in Circles meetings was expressed by all Core Members. In particular meetings not only offered a safe environment but provided a respite from the chaos of their life:

It was more like going to see a couple of mates down the pub if you know what I mean. I did feel welcome and comfortable at all meetings (Eddie)

⁹¹ Often in combination with other sources including sex offender treatment programmes, internal changes and criminal justice professionals.

Well its somewhere to go and I've got a meeting point and a meeting place and it was nice to spend time with them (Kyle)

I would turn up to a meeting and they'd bubbly ask me how I am and I'd mumble back 'yea alright'. And then it'd be 'right come on what's up?' and they'd pounce on me. I used to call them my 4 little Rottweiler's [laughs] but that's what I need (Troy)

The meetings with the volunteers served a further purpose as well as just being a safe place. It is one which provides CoSA with the kudos to operate in this particularly high-risk and sensitive area (Thomas et al, 2014). As well as supporting the Core Member, the Circle also provides an accountability function which in conjunction with the supportive elements of CoSA was claimed to have been a catalyst to change by Core Members. Not all Core Members were clear as to the meaning of accountability in the context of CoSA:

I don't even know what it means [laughs] (Anthony)

erm [pause] accountability [long pause] ummm, [pause] (Bruce)

Blimey I would have to get a dictionary out I think to figure it out (Christopher)

It's one of those words where I know what I wanna say but I don't know how to say it. I've got a few words like that (Richard)

I don't really understand much about it really but I have to account for my behaviour (Alan)

The accountability side of things I've never really got my head around myself. I am presuming that erm ... I am trying to understand what the accountability side means, whether it's that I am accountable for what I tell my volunteers; or if I disclose something which shouldn't have been disclosed; am I accountable; who is accountable, do they have to pass the message on (Bob)

Despite some Core Members initially being unsure of the meaning of accountability, many provided instances where Circle volunteers held the Core Member to account. This accountability role was described by many as unoppressive with some stating to have not specifically experienced any form of accountability from the Circle. In the same sentence however, Core Members would reveal how accountability was often performed subtly by volunteers. For Alan, Bruce and Ruben this was part of a flow of natural conversation:

They used to say how are you Alan, are you stressed this week and what's going on with you? (Alan)

If we get into the conversation they may ask ... a question as it pops up, and why this happened and then it's up to me whether I want to answer that or not and I'm more likely to answer it than not (Bruce)

We'd talk about things I had done in the week, what had gone in my life. I'd say I've been to town, I've done this, or I've been to church and this happened ... and if there were any issues we would talk about it in more detail and pick up little issues to see if there were any issues and then if there was we'd discuss it deeply (Ruben)

For others the accountability came from the volunteers' knowledge about the Core Members past offences, Core Members risk factors, and in some cases through issues which the Core Member chose to discuss with the Circle.

I think there has been the odd occasion where I have touched on certain things, specifically in my respect, ... my offences were based around a laptop and ... I got rid of my laptop early last year, and it's been a subject that has cropped up every now and then (Bob)

They will ask me questions like if I've had any fantasies, anything like that, and it goes from there then (Eddie)

The most frequent displays of accountability within the Circle emerged as Core Members made disclosures or statements which contained cognitive distortions or low levels of victim empathy. As discussed earlier in the chapter, cognitive distortions included deviant sexual fantasies involving children, holding misogynistic attitudes and lacking victim empathy. Core Members described how they were challenged about these cognitive distortions at various times by the volunteers. This accountability function reinforced the inappropriateness of cognitive distortions but also led to Core Members being offered alternative approaches to how they think about their behaviour, or even what things they think about.

When confronted about their cognitive distortions by the volunteers, Core Members typically reacted in one of two ways. Either the Core Member

would accept their chastisement and continue in the meeting with their tail between their legs or Core Members described being unhappy with the reaction of the Circle to his statements and left the Circle with this disagreement being unresolved. These different responses illustrate the various stages of change which Core Members appeared to be in. Those Core Members who were categorised as displaying more advanced levels of change, such as 'moderate change', those who presented a 'good guy' image or a narrative transformation were more likely to accept their 'chastisement' and seek to use the advice from the Circle constructively. In doing so, these Core Members described important changes in thinking processes while in the Circle:

I suppose they help you to realise that you are accountable to other people, you might have done something, have committed an offence and if you take responsibility for it you are owning it and they make you realise that you are not on your own and that you need to accept ownership and responsibility for what you have done and if you do that other people will accept you and are willing to give you a chance and the benefit of the doubt (Ronnie)

They have supported me emotionally. .. they've kind of re-booted me life, they've wiped me memory of what I used to do and they've kind of put in an anti-virus on and wiped it clean. They've just left the parts I wanted left in. The simplest way I can put it is what I do everyday, especially when I am out there, ...there is a little room inside my head that's in a steel box that's locked up with padlocked, behind another door, inside a safe and the key is on the other side of my mind ... before I even open the first latch I think about me rules. If that latch is opened there is another set of rules ... and so forth all the way down to that box (Stephen)

If I did something like send a stupid message to my ex-wife, and I'd say I shouldn't have done that, and we are now at that level where Janet would turn round and tell me that I did a stupid thing (Bob)

Where these Core Members described being unhappy with the verdict of volunteers, most later revealed their mood improved over the following week (or weeks) as the volunteers continued to support the Core Member. Importantly volunteers also explained to the Core Member why they reacted the way they did and thus Core Members were able to learn from the experience:

I'd say what I did and Sheila [volunteer]⁹² would be 'why've you done it that way? And what about that one? Why haven't you done that one?' It was just like that, she wasn't nasty with it or anything like that, but you could tell she had done it before and she knew the questions and yeah the first couple of weeks when she was going through my offence and me explaining, and [Sheila] would ask 'why did you do that? and What made you do that?', things like that, they were the same types of questions you got asked on the course and I suppose if you get ... it made me feel uncomfortable to start with, in the first couple of weeks, when that happened and I'd sort of sit up and maybe hold back a little bit (Ronnie)

Those Core Members who reacted negatively to being challenged were typically in the earlier stages of change. In one case, Brian, a Core Member with various learning difficulties, stated to having had an argument with one of his volunteers after he stated he “hated gays” and that he had “nothing against Asian people” but wasn’t able to understand them on the phone. One particular volunteer challenged Brian’s prejudicial statements but Brian obstinently refused to listen to their advice. Following one exchange Brian claimed that volunteers remarked: “you’re childish”. Brian stated:

It pushed a button inside my head and I left and went home, I couldn't stay there anymore ... It was near the end of the Circle! Everything had been fine until I said that word and the way they reacted (Brian)

Norman also reported having a negative response to a Circle meeting. Norman stated that during a review meeting with, the CoSA coordinator, and the volunteers, he was told by the coordinator that he had made no changes since starting the Circle.⁹³ Norman described feeling dejected after this meeting. Unlike with Core Members who displayed greater levels of change, Norman did little to disprove such perceptions and in the case of Brian and Norman, they continued to display their prejudiced and troubling behaviours to the frustration of those attempting to work with them and therefore both were categorised as having made no or only limited changes.

⁹² ‘Sheila’ is a not the volunteer’s real name. Pseudonyms are used to maintain the anonymity of Core Members and volunteers.

⁹³ An opinion shared by the PPU officer responsible for managing Norman in the community.

Despite the rare examples of Norman and Brian, in most cases, Core Members reported finding the challenging by the volunteers as being a turning point in their attitudes and thinking patterns. The volunteers were seen as especially valuable in making changes with Core Members being appreciative of having people available who could simultaneously listen, correct and support Core Members in their process of change:

When I realised it was because she [volunteer] knew that the other [volunteers] didn't have the knowledge to ask those sort of probing questions to get more out of me. So soon it relaxed between the two of us (Ronnie)

Listening to the volunteers opinions and getting alternative options has made me look at things a lot differently (Ashley)

I think they can help me with it, but I think I also need to reaffirm to myself that they are doing it to help me that they aren't picking on me (Jack)

She's never crossed the line and been abusive or whatever, cos sometimes I think you need that you know, someone to point the finger and say told you so kind of thing (Bob)

As well as challenging cognitive distortions in the meetings, Core Members also reported the Circle had assisted them to safely practice their relapse prevention techniques and coping strategies learnt on sex offender treatment programmes. This support and assistance was deemed to be important to Core Members and crystallised the intentions of the programmes:

COSA is a support and [the volunteers are] understanding and we talk about the things I've done on the TV-SOGP⁹⁴ (Simon)

the SOTP pin points some of the risks that on their own might not actually lead you to offence, but together know they make the risk that you may reoffend a possibility so you look at ... what you want to do to change and to minimise each of those and the CoSA helps you to actually move forward with actually doing that you know ... and making sure that you have got a hobby for instance was one of the things for me (Bill)

The offending-related courses helped me to understand my crime and the ETS [Enhanced Thinking Skills] helped with thinking

⁹⁴ Thames Valley Sex Offender Group work Programme – This is a community based sex offender treatment programme managed by the probation service.

patterns and my stop and think patterns, where I want to be and that sort of thing ... the Circle just enhance all that (Eddie)

Normalising Identities

CoSA and the volunteers were attributed with a substantial amount of credit for driving Core Members to have a new 'normal' self-identity. One of the areas the work of volunteers was seen to be most effective was in the changes Core Members felt in the perceptions they had of themselves and how this was being transformed through their participation in CoSA. Core Members spoke of life before the Circle as being difficult, isolating and unpredictable but Core Members practiced this new identity while in the confines of Circle meetings, and later in wider society under the supervision and support of the volunteers. This often involved the Core Member making 'baby steps' or marginal gains from their tainted identity towards a new self:

Everything is little steps, it's not making .. you know one great leap for mankind, it's those little steps forward (Ruben)

At the time of the interview, over two-thirds of Core Members indicated they had become more responsible and accountable. Not all could evidence this discourse however. Some wanted to have a new identity but lacked the will, control or opportunities to achieve this. Others were more successful though. For instance, Bruce stated that prior to the Circle he would frequently resort to violence as a natural reaction to difficulties situations in his life, but with the help of CoSA he felt he had changed and was a better person as a result:

the fact that I hadn't lost me temper and gone aggressively back at the person and I'd taken my time and looked at the bigger picture ... [the volunteers] said 'yeah the best thing you could have done was go to the police, write it down, make sure you've got notes covering yourself'. And that made me more human, more part of society, a good part of society (Bruce)

Maurice also frequently resorted to violence as an immediate reaction to encountering difficulties in his life. Maurice gave examples of violence in the street, whilst in prison and had threatened to use violence since his release.

Maurice believed that the Circle had tempered his use of violence in these situations and he put this down to the characteristics of his volunteers. This feeling of respect from law-abiding and 'nice' 'respectable' citizens led to Maurice wanting to change to reaffirm the respect they gave:

The Circles have got me out of that [his angry and aggressive state of mind]. Yea I think they've reduced my risk of hitting anybody,... I will walk away from trouble they've taught me that ...I've never used any violence towards them cos I like them. I wouldn't do that, as far as I know they are my friends and there aren't many people like that round here (Maurice)

Some Core Members had even more developed self-narratives than Maurice and Bruce and they too acknowledged the role of the Circle in assisting them in changing their narratives. Such Core Members referenced how the volunteers continue to assist them to denouncing their past lifestyle and in their efforts to reinvent a new pro-social self, distinct from their past (Maruna 2001). James, a Core Member who had participated in CoSA for approximately eight months at the time of the interview, stated he joined CoSA when he was at rock bottom:

I was literally spending pretty much 7 days a week inside my flat staring at the TV or playing on my Xbox. You know I didn't have the confidence to meet other people or to go out and go into a situation where I hadn't been to before but they have helped me (James)

As well as the isolation, James also discussed high levels of self-loathing, but with the help of the Circle volunteers believed that despite his offences he was deserving of a fresh-start:

We've made a balls up of our lives but we all [sex offenders] deserve a second chance (James)

For James, the Circle facilitated this fresh start by accepting his remorse and acknowledging his desire to move past his offending thoughts. James was introduced to an array of activities and events which would appeal to him based on his conversations with the volunteers. James describes how the volunteers used their 'freedom' to use the internet, to which he was restricted, and they found a "cooking course at college for me cos I love cooking", and introduced him to different social situations where he could

meet people. James summed up all of the efforts his Circle in helping him to change and improve his perception of himself stating:

I think they realise how much my confidence has grown and .. well six months ago I wouldn't have been able to meet you because it was meeting somebody else who was aware of the situation and I knew I would have to talk about it so I would have put it off (James)

'I'm a good guy really'

Even though some Core Members had developed new pro-social identity narratives, they still held some of their past identity of a convicted sex offender. Maruna (2001) has suggested that explaining past actions to others or understanding behaviours internally presents one of the biggest challenges for offenders seeking to move away from offending. Whilst acting as an anchor to a past life for some Core Members, others felt that the knowledge of their 'offender identity' enabled them to remain focused on their new goal of gaining a 'normal' life and being free from offending. This also led to many Core Members (irrespective of stage of change) making reference to their ability to be reintegrated as they were really 'a good guy' deep down in spite of their offending.

This good guy narrative tended to split into two forms. Some would make reference to their overall sociable natures and good things they have done since their offences. For Matthew, Norman and Max this translated into a desire to be seen as a person capable of doing good deeds and being considerate of others:

Ya know I get on alright with just about anyone (Matthew)

They tell me what a nice bloke I am (Norman)

I have set up a trust fund for him so financially he is very well taken care off (Max)

Others would demonstrate their actions during their trial and in treatment as the sign of being a good guy. For Troy the reminder that he could be a good guy was demonstrated through his guilty plea in the early stages of his trial. Troy described his plea not only was an admission of the harm he caused

but also was illustrative of his good deeds in saving his victim from further pain by recounting the details of his offending:

I finally grew a pair and pleaded guilty, cos I was in denial to start off with (Troy)

What emerged following analysis of the interviews was that Core Members could recollect these 'good deeds' but were unable to re-tell them due to their isolation. The introduction of CoSA and the routine contact with the volunteers gave Core Members an opportunity to rehearse these new narratives within the confines of the Circle meetings. This often involved the Core Member making 'baby steps' or marginal gains from their tainted identity towards a new self. In doing so, Core Members are able to claim a more acceptable and conventional set of values akin to the 'normal' citizen, while also starting to distance themselves from their past offences. This ability to neutralise past offences is increasingly recognised to be an important aspect of change, and one which 'actually helps to restore the speaker's bonds to society' (Maruna, 2001: 144).

Evidence of Core Members rehearsing new narratives beyond the Circle was limited, though seven Core Members had attempted to pursue their new narratives with varying success. The majority of these Core Members were those who had gained some form of employment or volunteering position in wider society which gave them a footing to maintain their identity but also made the maintenance of a conventional identity necessary to avoid stigma. The ability to adopt a new identity and then live by this new identity led some Core Members to feel more comfortable in using this new identity more frequently. James, Eddie and Richard had all found paid or voluntary work which had provided them with a further boost of confidence but also presented an opportunity to live with their new identity:

it's those little comments that really help, like down at the allotment where I volunteer, I'm down twice a week and one of the other guys who has to do his hours there couldn't get any more cigarettes so I said I would go and get some and he turned around and said do you work here then or when one of the girls said that I was like part of the furniture now and it's those comments that make you feel accepted (James)

I was an unofficial volunteer but ... now I'm properly part of the team, I'm an I.T. apprentice ... if there are any problems with the computers, and they've given some of [the job] to me to fix (Richard)

A similar finding was found in the work of Appleton (2010: 161) who stated 'as respondents began to feel accepted and trusted within some conventional social circles, their determination to exit from crime was strengthened, as were their social and personal identities as noncriminals'.

Transforming Networks and Social Life

Reducing social isolation is a key function of Circles UK and the regional projects. A number of strategies for reducing social isolation can be witnessed from the Core Members accounts. All 30 Core Members noted that the first three to six months of the Circle were spent forming relationships in meeting rooms. After 3 months a small minority of Core Members stated to meeting 'outside' of the usual Circle meeting room at venues such as coffee shops, museums and other social settings. The majority of Core Members stated that activities with the volunteers occurred later in the Circle, usually at, or after the six month period. Core Members valued the opportunity to reengage in these 'normal' activities with others.

The best? Maybe going out for dinners and going to the pub instead of being in the like an office. The atmosphere is different as well (Brian)

I've enjoyed some of the meetings where we go out, or where we just sit and chit-chat (Dennis)

I think me best meeting was like the visits to the [attraction] and to the art gallery, it was something to do (Kyle)

It was a meal, paid for by CoSA. It was a Christmas meal at a pub on the outskirts of [city] that was nice (Bob)

Despite these meetings being widely regarded as being some of the best experiences in the Circle, few Core Members spoke of having made any direct changes in their behaviour following these visits. As such the activities were regarded as being 'nice treats' by Core Members, but implied they did not supply a grounding from which Core Members could develop their own social networks independent of the Circle. By themselves, visits to 'nice'

places with 'coffee and cake' bought by the volunteers or funded by the project, remained treats. Further analysis however, suggests that what did emerge was that these activities represented a stepping stone to further integration. These visits enabled Core Members to be subtly reintroduced to wider society, while being supported to expand their social boundaries while being subtly monitored. In doing so, the CoSA volunteers were able to assess the suitability for further activities with their Core Member as well as judge the potential risks the Core Member may pose to others, and whether the hidden identity of the Core Member would be revealed by the Core Member and thus compromise the goal of safe reintegration.

The only snag at times I get the impression ... this is hard to say ... [that the activities are] all about me! (Dennis)

I thought are they testing me here to see if I get excited or something like that [laughs] (Bruce)

we don't talk about anything 'heavy' in case people hear ... They are always there to observe you, I've noticed. I don't know if they have noticed me noticing or not, but if females/girls go in and out of Starbucks as they walk away, I've noticed the volunteers looking at me like this (Norman)

These findings are further supported by the findings in Thomas et al (2014) who found that volunteers used activities outside of the normal meetings as opportunities for informal surveillance.

For those Core Members who 'passed the test' or who stated they had shown good progress and engagement within the Circle, so the volunteers increased their assistance to the volunteers. Core Members described having regained some levels of confidence and self-esteem and now wanted to take steps to not just 'survive' as they had done in prison, but begin to 'thrive'

I'd just come from an environment where you have to be brutal to survive or you become a victim yourself! I'd lost all of my social graces (Troy)

Core Members began to realise that through the work of the Circle they too deserved some pleasures in their life and sought out age-appropriate hobbies. In approximately two-thirds of cases the volunteers often instigated any proposed activities, however, for a handful of Core Members the drive

came from within, and they began to utilise the volunteers access to information on the internet to help plan a better life. For instance,

So at the moment they are online looking for holidays for us, Blackpool or Scarborough, I can't go abroad until licence is up ... I [also] wanna go paragliding and 'Philip' downloaded some information but it's a private club but I also wanna do that (Matthew)

The majority of Core Members reported that the Circles efforts had opened their eyes to new opportunities and age-appropriate activities for them to aim for. The financial insecurity of most Core Members may preclude immediate or regular engagement with some of these activities, however, Core Members spoke of a moment of enlightenment as to a new life.

Even where new social activities were identified to Core Members, some Core Members felt the Circle would never be able to 'create' new social networks without input from the Core Member. Norman spoke of having failed to form long-term or meaningful friendships with anyone since his conviction and he was surprised he had not done so. When asked if the Circle could or should have been more involved in facilitating this process Norman stated

No if COSA tried to make friends for you it wouldn't work, no it wouldn't 100 per cent (Norman)

Engagement in activities and hobbies in the local area was not the only form of social changes. Core Members acknowledged the sometimes invaluable roles Circle volunteers played in liaising with family and friends following a re-arrest or discussing how to proceed with family and friends following disputes related to their offending. In some cases the Circle has worked with the partners of Core Members to allow partners to be better able to spot risk factors or to assist wives and partners who had an involvement in the Core Members offending but had not been convicted.

My wife offended as well, but because I took the deal she didn't get charged ... so her charges were dropped but she still felt guilty so

she joined the Circle, not officially, but she'd come once a month (Core Member⁹⁵)

Core Members also stated to having repaired and re-established links with family members and friends after discussing concerns with the volunteers. For instance, while in the Circle, Ashley's relationships with his grandparents (whom he was living with following rejection by his parents) was deteriorating. Following a "falling out" with his "nan", Ashley recalled how the Circle have been helping him to develop solutions

They have tried to help with the situation I've been having with my parents and my grandparents ... We've done a bit of role-play of a situation I am having ... Like I'd play my granddad and then they play other people and it's trying to get me to see it from the other side sort of thing. It is good cos it helps me grasp their views as well (Ashley)

The role of volunteers in supporting Core Members to reconnect with estranged family members was also valued. Ronnie, Bill and Alan all identified having spent time discussing strategies with the volunteers about how to reconnect with family members. Ronnie, a father of two, received a 10 year custodial sentence for the Sexual Assault of a female child, and had lost contact with his children. While Ronnie was in the Circle his probation officer informed him that his children wanted to contact him and had been trying to do so since he was released from prison. Ronnie admitted to being scared about how his children would react to seeing him again and if they would be seeking revenge. Ronnie described the Circle as providing an objective arena for him to openly discuss his feelings and also a source of advice. Ronnie stated that the Circle:

Have been helping me with that, supporting it and wanting to know how things have gone ... just by basically giving me support, encouraging me not to take things to heart if my son or daughter step back a little bit. Encourag[ing] me to be honest with them and answer any questions, which I do anyway. But particularly with my daughter re-regarding my offence. She found it a little difficult and she had a lot of questions and I wasn't sure how to answer them. But with their support and backing, just to be open and accept ... my children's point of view (Ronnie)

⁹⁵ No name is attributed to this quote due to the content and sensitive nature of the material

The focus was not solely on reconnecting Core Members with social networks. Some of the most profound and lasting changes reported by Core Members involved the terminating of social networks. Over half of the Core Members stated to having actively sought the advice of the CoSA volunteers when faced with difficult family or personal problems. For Joe, this situation emerged twice during his Circle. On the first occasion Joe described receiving a “nasty” and “belittling” letter from an Aunty who he had a fractious relationship with. Joe sought the advice of his Circle to reply to the letter:

They said that they'd help cos I didn't know what to write, and they checked it all and said its perfect ... So they helped me do things that I never thought I could do on me own so I appreciated it (Joe)

On a separate occasion, Joe spoke of having attempted to reconnect with some old friends from his previous hobby. Joe explained that he was no longer able to partake in his hobby and so he sent a letter to a friend asking if he could sell the equipment on his behalf. Joe stated that he had received no reply after at least two months and following chats with his volunteers, reached the conclusion that the friendship was not worth pursuing.

They would say stop thinking about the past, they can't change the past ... There is nothing I can do about the past (Joe)

A noticeable transformation was also identified in the speech and tones Core Members used to speak of the police and probation services. Prior to their participation in CoSA, Core Members were generally hostile of the police and probation services. In some cases this was related to these agencies being involved in their arrest, or the setting of restrictions. Most of the narratives concentrated on police or probation officers having too much power or officers being unapproachable because of the power they held:

I never have liked the police (Anthony)

The less I see them the better (Richard)

During the interviews however, Core Members were asked to describe their relationships with police and probation now. While some Core Members maintained negative attitudes of one agency, their attitudes to the

organisations and individuals had softened:

I have a lot of time for [PPU officer], [they] helps (sic) me out a lot with stuff and there isn't a bad word I can say about [them] really (Anthony)

They work with us, they tend to come out to see us once a month or whenever they think they need to see us. We get on alright (Richard)

Core Members often put this change down to their participation in CoSA, and being made aware of the help, support and resources which they could receive through building positive relationships with these agencies. Typically this was prevalent among Core Members with greater levels of self-drive and those who had progressed with both cognitive and identity transformations. These Core Members spoke of realising the longer term benefits which they could receive from maintaining positive relationships with police and probation officers. Namely Core Members acknowledged that they are going to be subject to police supervision for many years and therefore developing positive relationships for future support now is a good thing. The message among this group was that a positive relationship may allow Core Members to approach their PPU officer during a time of 'crisis' and seek help rather than 'bottling up' feelings and potentially reoffending:

I was bottling everything up and I couldn't communicate ... that's where the building relationships comes in, in trying to build that (Fred)

I'd been bottling up so much for so long ... [Now] I get on great with my PPU officers. I engage with PPU and probation, and through that engagement my PO is looking at my CSCS card so I can do construction and building site work and all this stuff. I wouldn't have got this if I'd just gone and been all stroppy, stroppy, they aren't gonna be bothered (Troy)

The ability of CoSA to promote positive relationships in spite of some long-term attitudes or coping strategies such as 'bottling-up', indicates that where there is a willing Core Member, the level of change which is reported can be significant. The difficulty in this research however, has been the limited opportunities for longer term follow-ups to determine how much these positive relationships have continued beyond the life of the Circle. Nevertheless, this snap-shot in to the perceived changes among Core

Members does tally with some of the findings from other desistance studies which indicate the importance of significant others to generate and maintain change (Farrall et al, 2014).

Sex Offender Treatment Programmes as a change agent

The effectiveness of sex offender treatment programmes have been widely researched elsewhere (Beech et al, 2005) though less explored are participant's perceptions of these programmes in facilitating change. Twenty six Core Members had participated in a sex offender treatment programmes either in prison or in the community⁹⁶ and despite initial scepticism, Core Members predominantly described the course as significantly enhancing changes in thinking. Programmes were less able to assist with identity or social transformations with no Core Members making reference to this.

The cause of change in the sex offender treatment programmes typically related to one of three key categories. The first category related to aiding Core Members to understand why they offended. Another category referred to by Core Members was that the programmes provided them with the knowledge to realise the extent of their distortions and aided them to change attitudes towards their offending and victims. The final cause of change identified as emerging from the SOTP was that these courses provided them with coping strategies for life in the community.

At the point of my interviews, the majority of Core Members broadly accepted their convictions and admitted their role in their offending. At the point of arrest and conviction however, at least five Core Members stated to struggling to understand why they had offended. For these Core Members, the sex offender treatment programmes provided a sense of clarity and provided them with insights and explanations as to how and why they had

⁹⁶ 17 Core Members were recorded as having participated in the prison-based sex offender treatment programme (12 completed), 16 had participated in a community-based programme (nine completed, six ongoing).

offended. Bill summarised the messages from such Core Members when he stated:

The SOTP was useful in being able to structure what I thought were the reasons for my offences (Bill)

As well as enabling Core Members to understand and explaining the motives behind their offending, some Core Members also felt the sex offender treatment programmes provided them with 'new knowledge'.

Courses telling me stuff I didn't know before (Matthew)

Very helpful. You need to be aware of them. I wasn't aware that they were able to rehabilitate me into the community by being aware of them (Alan)

The implication being that if these Core Members had been in receipt of this 'knowledge' the offence may not have occurred.

Had I had that SOTP then probably that second offence wouldn't have happened (Phil)

The validity of such statements may be queried by those of a more cynical perspective, however, these statements are arguably representative of some of the efforts to reinvent a positive self-narrative. By claiming to have not known about the 'wrongs' of their behaviour, Core Members are able to place distance between themselves and 'the' offence, while also indicating (however, primitively) a shift in thinking patterns.

Sex offender treatment programmes were also regarded as being the key mechanism for understanding their behaviours and beginning to think about and make 'real' changes in thinking. For most, this came from the interactions and discussions with the programme facilitators and other group members. An integral part of this was to challenge and be challenged as Henry stated:

You've got to challenge and be challenged to break down those old values and beliefs so that's why the programme is important (Henry)

Gordon reflected on how he had "been pulled up on a few things" (Gordon) which ultimately benefitted him, while Fred described the culmination of the programme was a "change [in] your perspectives". The most vivid

description of change came from Troy. Troy had been sentenced to 10 years in prison and completed the SOTP in prison. Troy explained how he was in denial for much of the early period but then things “clicked”:

I was still doing a bit of the self-protection stuff saying it's all about the control, but for it to have moved from what it did to where it ended up there had to be a sexual element.. but it was only half way through that course that I could verbalise that ... I'm really glad I did cos that seems to have opened up all the change that has happened since (Troy)

The final aspect of change Core Members reported as being of value from the sex offender treatment programmes was its capacity to equip them with skills to avoid further offending. The identification of coping strategies or relapse prevention techniques was noted by numerous Core Members and some continued to use these. For instance, both Phil and Brian, two Core Members who had struggled with aspects of the sex offender treatment programmes and CoSA stated the “forward focused prevention” was “extremely helpful” (Phil). Brian described the best part of the whole course as being:

What you can do to prevent it and talking. We did actions, plays about it, written about it, the good things, what not to do, and if you do it again what will happen, again! And yea that was a good course (Brian)

This was echoed by Phil. Phil recalled one of the most valuable lessons from the treatment programmes he attended was the use of the “mystery process”. Phil explained that the “mystery process” encourages Core Members to think about the consequences of their actions before they do anything. Phil described this was something he still relies on:

The going forwards process is immensely helpful because as soon as you starting thinking things [i.e. deviant sexual fantasies] then you can go straight forward to ‘if I carry on with this then this is what's going to happen’, so you can changes things in the “mystery process” where you don't get yourself in a situation where you are going to offend again (Phil)

According to Core Members, sex offender treatment programmes are vital when sex offenders are prepared to change. Where the programme is

delivered to sex offenders who are open to change then Core Members placed a greater importance on the sex offender treatment programmes than CoSA in effecting cognitive change:

I would have to put the TV-SOGP as the top one then the COSA and then LFF⁹⁷ course as third (Simon)

While Phil stated that had he been able to access the sex offender treatment programme prior to his second conviction, then he would probably have not reoffended

the end point is that had I had that SOTP then probably that second offence wouldn't have happened; I would have curtailed my going down toilets looking for sex and also having done the course earlier I would be several years further on and better able or closer to my goals (Phil)

Not all held such positive views of the sex offender treatment programmes however. Ruben and James both spoke of their frustration at course facilitators not being accepting that 15 year olds are sexually active which subsequently affected their perception of the facilitators:

They were saying that I was more likely to reoffend because I believe it's ok for children to have sex. I didn't say that, I just said that under the age of 16 they are having sex. As far as they [psychologists] are concerned under 16 they [kids] have no idea what they are doing, so when they are 15 years and 364 days you have no idea what you are doing, but as soon as that clock strikes midnight you know. Of course not! (James)

Henry, Norman and Max all voiced concerns at being in a treatment programme with deniers, far more serious offenders, bullies or sex offenders who were intent on not changing. Henry spoke of all of these characters in his programme, at various times and the limitations on his progress

I would say the treatment programme is the most challenging, because of the people on it, I mean in his case [another sex

⁹⁷ Lucy Faithfull Foundation – The Lucy Faithfull Foundation is a charity which works to reduce the risk of child sexual abuse. They provide 10 week courses (*InformPlus*) for those who have been arrested, cautioned or convicted of internet offences. Groups typically include 6-10 men and 2-3 specialists from the Lucy Faithfull Foundation (for more information see http://lucyfaithfull.org/inform_and_inform_plus.htm)

offender in the treatment programme] he's just out to fuck the group up (Henry)

Conclusion

This chapter has identified a number of changes which have taken place within Core Members during the period of their Circle. Utilising the concept of change agents has allowed the sources of this change to be more closely examined than other research on Core Members has previously done. The chapter found that while Core Members had an inclination to change, the level of inclination varied considerably.

Prior research has previously indicated how resettlement pathways for convicted sex offenders are difficult, but this thesis allows space for the experiences of some convicted sex offenders to describe these barriers and the implications to their re-entry. Core Members reported extreme barriers to overcoming isolation and cognitive distortions, lacking the self-confidence and self-esteem which may facilitate them seeking out more social activities, and worryingly many Core Members felt their cognitive distortions were being exaggerated by their social isolation as they described having no-one to contest or counter-act these distortions. Change was also limited by the high proportion of Core Members who did not have contact with family members and friends, or who described weak or counter-productive relationships with friends and family which they felt restricted progress or opportunities to move away from their offending. Effecting change as a self-challenge agent was therefore extremely challenging, and often attempts to make change went unrecognised or unrewarded.

Participation on the sex offender treatment programmes in prison or in the community was regarded highly by the vast majority of the 26 Core Members who had experience of the variations of these courses. Programmes were described as illuminating and beneficial to understanding motivations for their offending while also quelling some of the cognitive distortions. The most beneficial part of the sex offender treatment

programmes however, was the final part of the programmes, the Better Lives module, which Core Members felt provided them with the skills to be able to manage some of their cognitive distortions and enable them to be better able to react to future temptations. A number of Core Members reported having retained this knowledge and incorporated the learning into their everyday lives. Moreover, the more determined self-change agents appeared to have tailored the learning from these programmes to their own requirements and in doing so, are presenting these themselves as agents of self-change.

While Core Members typically reported their participation on sex offender treatment programmes as being responsible for enabling understanding and providing strategies to prevent relapses, the addition of the Circle was beneficial on three counts. Firstly the Circle improved self-esteem. The majority of Core Members reported difficulties seeing themselves as 'normal' or 'worthy' human beings prior to the Circle. Through participation in the Circle however, Core Members described being accepted as human beings which in turn brewed confidence and enabled them to consider participating in social activities. Core Members who developed the greatest levels of self-esteem were able to progress to a stage whereby they actively sought out appropriate activities in communication with the Circle volunteers. Not all Core Members reported such responsibility however, a number of Core Members relied on the volunteers to organise activities and the Circle was very much a crutch. This highlights the fine lines upon which CoSA operates, the supportive elements can be reintegrative for those determined and driven to make changes, but can also be a comforting safety net which limits independency.

Another key mechanism of change within the Circle was witnessed through the accountability function. Volunteers challenged Core Members' cognitive distortions and thus enabled Core Members to discuss cognitive distortions and make transformations in the safety of the Circle. While research has questioned the relevance of cognitive distortions to reoffending levels (Marshall et al, 2011), the lay-perspectives of the volunteers was valued by Core Members who felt respected even when being challenged.

Finally, the Circle was able to facilitate the start of a process of redemption for a significant minority of Core Members who had taken on the advice of SOTPs, probation and PPU officers, and practiced these with the Circle. In doing so, CoSA compliments the work of criminal justice agencies. It is with this group, those labelled as 'seeking redemption' or 'narrative transformations' that the most obvious changes can be witnessed, however, substantial changes can also be witnessed in some of the other typologies of change. For instance, the changes in Core Members like Fred, who prior to CoSA would not leave the house for fear of being seen and attacked, who then visited a public museum twice with his Circle, or Ruben who stated he hated women but had not recognised the significance of women through his introduction to the strong, independent female volunteers. These three aspects of change closely echo very recent findings from Höing et al (2015a) which examined Core Members perceptions of change by CoSA in the Netherlands.

CoSA are clearly important change agents and have the organisation, determination and visions to change. As the change agent literature identifies, however, without a desire to change, effecting change is extremely difficult.

The levels and frequency at which sexual distortions were challenged varied among Circle volunteers. The work of volunteers in this area however was regarded by some Core Members as enabling them to begin to move forwards in their outlook on life. In the 'success' stories, this led Core Members to begin to 'reinvent' themselves with a refreshed and readjusted attitude to life which could be continually subject to questioning by the volunteers. Where cognitive transformations were not as successful, Core Members reported greater difficulties in successfully developing new narratives. Often the new narratives collapsed due to the rhetoric and actions of the Core Members not matching the proposed narratives and as such the Core Members would be 'found out'. In a number of cases this was

compounded by the pre-existing poor social skills which Core Members had described.

Chapter Eight: Conclusions and Implications for Policy

This thesis has focused on the role of Circles of Support and Accountability and their role in the reintegration of convicted sex offenders into the community. The PhD research set out to examine the experiences of the convicted sex offenders or Core Members who are the focal point in CoSA and from which relatively little had been heard of in previous research. The unique access offered by Circles UK enabled interviews to be carried out with 30 Core Members living in the community with convictions for sexual offences. The study sought to interview Core Members who had participated in a Circle for approximately six months at the time of the interviews. This was supplemented by questionnaire data collected from Core Members at the end of the interview and administrative data from the CoSA projects. In taking this approach the thesis is not a study of the effectiveness of the Circles in terms of re-offending but an examination of how these people with convictions for sexual offences or Core Members perceive their interaction with the volunteers and the police and probation officers they must deal with. These subjective accounts do not easily lead to a judgement on the impact of the Circles or its effectiveness in a way objective measures of recidivism would. Instead, the lens of study was to innovatively explore with Core Members the mechanisms which are essential in the desistance process from the perspective of Core Members looking at how CoSA is able to facilitate these mechanisms. These mechanisms of desistance which were identified from the interviews include the prevention of stigmatisation and isolation, self-controlling situations of temptation, compliance with rules, laws and restrictions and finally starting to change towards a better self.

In taking this approach the study revealed a number of difficulties and obstacles that Core Members have to confront on a day to day level, but also provided insights into the role of CoSA, how the Circle aids and supports the mechanisms of desistance and how this support and the support of statutory sources like the police and probation services are

received by Core Members. In identifying and examining Core Members' experience of these mechanisms of desistance the research revealed where CoSA assist and facilitate progress towards desistance and how that is done.

This chapter will first provide a summary of the thesis to draw together the key findings which inform the lessons and policy implications pertaining to CoSA in the latter part of this chapter. In describing the context of the law and criminal justice provisions at the time this research was undertaken, this literature review sought to describe the environment a convicted sex offender enters and experiences throughout the criminal justice process, but also to situate the environment CoSA was attempting to enter and work within.

Convicted sex offenders have been subject to increasing levels of legislation to control, manage, and supervise their behaviours on return to the community. These policies are introduced on the grounds of public protection and are largely underpinned by a model of containment of sex offenders. In turn, the opportunities to work with and rehabilitate high risk offenders has given way to a focus on risk management with an array of potentially punitive, exclusionary and dehumanising features (Kemshall, 2008; Spencer, 2009).

The consequence of the laws and policies – whether intentional or not – has two implications for this study. Firstly Core Members spoke of anticipating and receiving hostile situations caused by their convictions, but also of feeling doubly punished by a broad application of civil orders. The second implication is more specifically targeted at CoSA and involves the integration of an initiative with restorative justice and strengths-based values into a criminal justice system underpinned by a risk management model. Findings from this study indicates CoSA are well placed to complement criminal justice agencies through its accountability function but also well placed to deliver an additional level of support through the use of volunteers; (this will be discussed in more detail below).

Reducing Stigma and Isolation

All 30 Core Members experienced a variety of stigmatising situations which they had encountered following their release from custody. One of the barriers to desistance usually experienced by Core Members was stigma. Stigmatising situations could be experienced in almost every aspect of Core Members lives including during their arrest, while in prison and in the community. The types and levels of stigma experienced varied among Core Members but were typically related to the Core Member being labelled as a convicted sex offender, the loss of family and friends following their conviction, fears of physical or verbal attacks because of the label and being subject to stigma and isolation through criminal justice restrictions. All these factors affected Core Members attitudes and inclinations to re-enter society. The return to the community without friends or family to support Core Members was a common feature and one which caused a great deal of anxiety.

This lack of social structures to support re-entry has been widely acknowledged to hinder desistance pathways (Sampson and Laub, 2003). Interviews with Core Members revealed that CoSA helps them to reduce stigmatisation and the level of isolation they can experience. This is primarily through the Circle volunteers providing a safe environment where Core Members can be accepted back into society. Core Members frequently remarked that volunteers were 'good' or 'nice' people who gave up their own time. The inclusion of CoSA alongside other interventions was also regarded by Core Members as producing a sense of normality in their life and providing opportunities to re-establish contacts. This contributed to reducing their fears that they would be attacked (verbally or physically) or that everyone in society was "out to get them" (Kyle). The use of Circle activities – meetings beyond the four walls of the usual meeting room - also increased Core Members engagement in social activities or at least identified the opportunity for Core Members to develop age-appropriate activities in the future and thus make new contacts.

Temptations and Self-Control

A range of temptations were revealed by Core Members following their conviction. The majority of them reported having struggled to resist these temptations and lacking adequate self-control. Some Core Members spoke of maintaining deviant sexual fantasies involving children, others held pro-offending attitudes relating to their conviction. Another frequent temptation which Core Members spoke of struggling to resist was the restrictions placed on them by the criminal justice system. Managing temptations is an important part of anybody's life but for convicted sex offenders or Core Members self-control takes on an additional responsibility as it aids their desistance. If Core Members are to continue to live in the community however, they must learn to control and resist their temptations. A number of self-control strategies were adopted by them but these typically involved self-confinement or withdrawal from social events. While this strategy minimised Core Members fears of being stigmatised or succumbing to temptations, however, they feared the isolation could increase the prevalence of deviant sexual fantasies and the use of cognitive distortions would facilitate reoffending. This is also acknowledged within the wider literature which claims that the use of cognitive distortions increase the risks of reoffending as the harms are neutralised and behaviours legitimated (Ó Ciardha and Gannon, 2011).

Sex offender treatment programmes provided Core Members with information on how to resist temptations and achieve self-control. However, it was not routinely practiced in these programmes so Core Members said they lacked the confidence to test this learning in the community. CoSA was widely used by Core Members as the 'crutch' to begin to develop, practice and strengthen their own personalised coping strategies. The value of CoSA therefore comes in promoting techniques from the sex offender treatment programmes and providing a safe environment for Core Members to discuss their learning and create personal strategies which work for the individual Core Member. As Circle meetings expanded into activities, so the Circle

acted as a safety-net for Core Members to practice specific techniques and act responsibly while being observed and supported by the Circle. In this way CoSA supports Core Members to strengthen another important mechanism of desistance.

Enhancing Compliance through webs of control

Compliance is another important mechanism of desistance which CoSA was perceived by Core Members to have facilitated. Prior to starting in a Circle, Core Members' compliance with the laws, restrictions and social norms was often driven by a desire to avoid further sanctions including prison or longer periods of suspension. As such compliance was instrumentally based and involved Core Members calculating the potential benefits versus the consequences of being caught. Through the application of the concept of webs of control, the thesis was able to examine how the levels of compliance increased among Core Members following their participation in CoSA. CoSA was able to improve compliance due to the volunteers' acceptance of the Core Members and the respect shown to them in a safe environment. This provided a solid foundation from which trusting relationships could be established between the Core Member and volunteers and allowed volunteers to challenge a Core Members behaviour and make suggestions of how they could engage in more socially responsible behaviours.

Core Members described that through their participation in CoSA they developed more constructive working relationships with police officers. Core Members felt this led them to approaching police officers with problems or concerns, rather than interacting being instigating by the police officers from a top-down or controlling perspective. This led to some Core Members displaying a greater individual engagement with the social norms of society then simply complying with the rules or restrictions that they were subject to.

The influence these webs of control had on Core Members' behaviour varied. The thesis identified, through the use of Bottoms' (2001) concept of

compliance that Core Members utilised all four mechanisms developed by Bottoms: Instrumental, constraint-based, normative, and habitual and routine compliance. A fifth compliance mechanism – manipulative compliance was also identified as being used by Core Members. In addition, there were a small number of cases where Core Members were non-compliant.

Some Core Members displayed a short-term legal compliance which meant they abided to the letter of law or by the conditions in their licence or SOPO, but made little substantive changes beyond this compliance. For others, the webs of control combined with the learning from the sex offender treatment programmes, and an internal drive to change led to significant engagement with the law and behaving more responsibly.

Normalising identities, thinking and living normally

Core Members credited CoSA with helping them to normalise their identities and thinking. This represents a mechanism of desistance which was enhanced by CoSA. Most Core Members held a strong desire to positively change their identity, thinking patterns and social networks but encountered barriers to achieve such change. The trigger to change often came following their completion of a community-based or prison-based sex offender treatment programme which identified the areas change was required in and why. However change was frequently described as particularly difficult when Core Members attempted change by themselves. Not only were the fears of stigmatising situations preventing Core Members from actively engaging in social environments but the strategy of self-confinement enhanced Core Members' perceptions of being socially rejected and excluded. The addition of CoSA in Core Members lives provided a mechanism through which Core Members felt they could change much more effectively and quickly; as Ronnie described:

If I hadn't have been open with the CoSA group, and explained how I felt, and got their different views on it, things would have probably taken a lot longer and been a lot harder for me (Ronnie)

Core Members in particular valued the efforts of the volunteers in enabling Core Members to regain some self-esteem and for having accepted them as human beings. The Circle's challenging of cognitive distortions and deviant sexual fantasies was also credited with facilitating change within Core Member thinking.

Contributions to theories of desistance and control in community

There are a number of contributions this thesis makes to the existing theoretical literature. Additions are made to the emerging literature on desistance pathways for sex offenders, to the mechanisms of compliance specifically for sex offenders and to the wider issue of controlling temptations. The thesis also contributes to the growing research literature on CoSA and the extent to which CoSA is able to balance the support and accountability functions at the core of the Circles model.

CoSA: Increasing opportunities for desistance

In line with other research on sex offenders and their process of re-entry (Willis et al, 2010; Göbbels et al, 2012; Harris, 2014; Weaver and Barry, 2014), this research revealed Core Members experience a range of barriers to successful reintegration. These include, but are not limited to stigmatisation – both real and perceived, cognitive distortions neutralising sex offending, a lack of social supports and a range of civil orders which may be applied to them on release or at the time of their sentence. The thesis also revealed however, that the introduction of CoSA was seen as a positive development by Core Members and in many cases led to the opening up of opportunities to a form of social support through contact with the volunteers.

CoSA was credited as being pivotal in offering Core Members ideas and inspiration to begin to think about a positive future. Importantly some Core Members were also assisted with access to social networks and employment opportunities via the efforts of Circle volunteers. The

development of pro-social messages and support networks has been long established as a key feature in the process of desistance (Sampson and Laub, 2003; Farrall and Calverley, 2006). In the short-term, CoSA provides a support network for Core Members with inclusive messages. This is of particular significance and value to Core Members given the extreme isolation some described.

Cognitive Transformations

Another key finding of this study is that Core Members came to realise the value of sex offender treatment programmes and appreciated the knowledge these programmes provided about their motivations for offending. Core Members also noted the value of programmes in providing them with techniques or strategies to avoid relapse. In line with other studies that have concentrated on desistance pathways for sex offenders (Farmer et al, 2012; 2015; Harris, 2014), this study found that the Core Members who held positive messages about the influence of sex offender treatment programmes were further along in their process of change. Core Members recognised the input of Circle volunteers encouraging them to be open minded about the courses, and in assisting them to actively engage with the programmes as being a catalyst for this attitude.

Core Members also felt the learnings of the sex offender treatment programmes in making cognitive transformations was accelerated by the frequent contact with lay-volunteers who presented pro-social messages and optimistic views of the future. As mentioned earlier in this thesis, many Core Members reported feeling unprepared for managing and controlling themselves in the face of temptations even after completion of sex offender treatment programmes. The Circle, however, was a key addition to facilitating Core Members to live a better life, as well as encouraging and assisting Core Members to make pro-social cognitive transformations learnt in sex offender treatment programmes. This process of cognitive transformations or 'making good' (Maruna, 2001) has been widely recognised within the desistance pathways for "low level" offenders and was

suspected of being key for desistance pathways for sex offenders (Willis et al, 2010; Farmer et al, 2015).

While this study does not have data to be an examination of the desistance pathways of sex offenders, the findings from Core Members in this study, link closely with previous desistance findings. For instance, Core Members value the social support provided by volunteers which in turn leads to Core Members trusting the volunteers. As trust develops, so Core Members begin to see the volunteers as sources of support for discussing their learning from the sex offender treatment programmes as well as discussing temptations and risky behaviours. Through the advice and challenging of areas of concern within these discussion with volunteers, Core Members described undergoing varying degrees of cognitive transformations (Willis et al, 2010). The desistance literature says that cognitive transformations and moving away from anti-social peers and pro-offending thoughts, and messages are important factors in the pathways to desistance (Maruna, 2001; Farrall, 2004; Harris, 2014; Farmer et al, 2015). Thus, the process of participation on the sex offender treatment programmes and then the additional extra support from Circle volunteers it could be argued that CoSA might improve desistance for sex offenders (Willis et al, 2010; Göbbels et al, 2012; Harris, 2014).

Speed of Change

A further finding to emerge from this study which is relevant to the desistance literature is the speed of change. From the limited research on sex offenders pathways of desistance (de Vries Robbe et al, 2015), the journey is generally reported as being slow and filled with barriers and obstacles (Lussier and Gress, 2014). The findings from this study however, show that Core Members feel CoSA speeds up the progression along the desistance pathways, however, there was no comparative group to compare this with. CoSA does this by encouraging Core Members to create and maintain a positive view of their future life; challenging cognitive distortions and facilitates Core Members wanting to make pro-social cognitive transformations. The Circle can also work with Core Members to improve

their attempts to increase opportunities for pro-social support and in the forming of new socially accepted identities. Far more research is required to more accurately manage the extent to which CoSA can speed up desistance and reintegration, but narratives of Core Members in this study appear consistently more optimistic and hopeful, at an earlier stage, than in the limited studies exploring sex offender re-entry and processes of desistance (Harris, 2014; Weaver and Barry, 2014).

Compliance

A further addition this study makes to wider theoretical frameworks is the application to sex offenders of Bottoms' (2001) concept of mechanisms of compliance. More specifically, the research applies the concept of compliance to sex offenders and finds a new mechanism of compliance: Manipulative Compliance. As described in Chapter Six, Manipulative Compliance involves Core Members using complex strategies to actively seek to manipulate their statutory conditions or supervisory arrangements which they are required to abide by. This may also involve the attempted (or successful) deception of volunteers and criminal justice professionals who are working with them.

In addition to discovering a new mechanism of compliance this study also illustrated the important role volunteers can play in improving mechanisms of compliance. Compliance mechanisms are strengthened by the use of volunteers working alongside statutory agencies. This is all the more significant given the 'powerless' nature of volunteers. Where the top-down imposition of control from criminal justice professionals was often initially resisted by Core Members, in conjunction with the support of the Circle, Core Members began to understand and accept the control function of criminal justice agencies following a lay-explanation provided by the Circle volunteers. The use of volunteers in generating, strengthening and improving compliance has a number of implications for the wider theory of compliance and is worthy of further research.

Monitoring compliance is not only a strengths-based approaches but is also embedded in to the risk based approach. On the one hand, it was found that volunteers are supportive of compliance mechanisms and help Core Members to achieve compliance through strengths-based approaches. On the other hand, it was found that compliance is embedded in a risk based approach. Here the Circle act as a “mechanism of accountability”. For instance, Core Members revealed being frequently challenged about cognitive distortions, temptations and encouraged to consider pro-social attitudes by volunteers. As such, CoSA was also adopting risk-based approaches to offender management, however, even these risk-based approaches were framed within a context of support rather than condemnation.

Most Core Members reported that the volunteers were working towards strengthening and empowering their own ability to manage temptations on their own as no-one except the Core Member can effectively manage future temptations. The Circle volunteers did this through a primarily strengths-based approach which included promoting a positive social life, changing Core Members aspirations and instilling a positive outlook. The accompanying report to this PhD thesis shows how the volunteers held similar views to those of Core Members (Thomas et al, 2014). Volunteers acknowledged being initially motivated to joining CoSA by the idea of being able to help and support people. While volunteers were sceptical of the extent to which they could completely change Core Member behaviour, there was a strong feeling that they ‘could “nudge” them in the right direction through pro-social modelling’ (Thomas et al, 2014: 17). As well as modelling pro-social behaviours, accepting the Core Member as a fellow citizen, helping Core Members to become better people and providing a listening ear were all cited as part of the supportive and positive future volunteers sought to encourage:

We are modelling something that they don't normally encounter and he wasn't used to being listened to and I think that was something quite refreshing for him (V7)

It's difficult but I think it means helping somebody in all aspects of their life to become a better person and reach an aim and achieve the ultimate happy lifestyle that they can (V10)

To me it's being there for somebody. To help them to do something if they want to do it. Be a listening ear, somebody they know will be there and can contact if they need too (V19) (Source: Thomas et al, 2014: 122)

Criminal justice professionals, however, were mixed in their views of CoSA position being strengths-based or risk-based (Thomas et al, 2014). Some viewed the Circle as vital in providing a strong source of support to isolated Core Members, many of whom lacked social skills and informal control structures to support desistance. These practitioners felt Circle volunteers were best placed to offer this support because the high caseloads criminal justice professionals had prevented them from spending so much time with individual offenders (Thomas et al, 2014). Although the CoSA model was widely recognised as adding an extra level of support to the supervision and management of sex offenders, some criminal justice professionals regarded CoSA in a much more risk-based approach whereby CoSA provided an extra set of 'eyes and ears' for the criminal justice system (Thomas et al, 2014). These practitioners wanted to see 'any' information the Circle received believing it was useful and supplemented their own intelligence and supervision strategy for the Core Member.

Core Members do not appear to be averse to the fact that CoSA works closely with criminal justice agencies, to the contrary many spoke of having enhanced relationships with those supervising and managing them in the community following their participation in CoSA. This shows that initial worries about the systemic or top-down origins of CoSA in England and Wales affecting the effectiveness of CoSA are not justified.

Key Policy Implications

The key policy implications of this thesis are restricted by the nature of the study. This thesis was not a longitudinal study, nor did it seek to assess the impact or efficiency of recidivism or other measures of integration. What this

thesis offers to policy discussions, however, is an in-depth analysis of social support in the community setting from the perspective of Core Members or “service-users” who are involved in CoSA. Through this design, the thesis highlights the need for further research into offender or service-user perspectives so that it can contribute more effectively to policy and practice developments. At the same time, it recognises that research on the objective measures to assess the impact of CoSA in reducing recidivism and a longitudinal study of Core Members pathways after CoSA intervention would complement and expand on the findings of this thesis and further enhance the available knowledge about what CoSA contributes to longer term desistance amongst sex offenders.

The implications of this research for policy and CoSA are in highlighting the areas where CoSA does well and where attention could be directed in the future. That is stigmatisation, self-control and compliance and change processes.

One of the significant findings from this research centres on the roles of the volunteers. The value of volunteers has been recognised for some time within CoSA, (Hanvey et al, 2011 Thomas et al, 2014) but little has been heard from Core Members. This research has found that the use of volunteers is well accepted by Core Members who quickly connect with the lay-background and sense of normality which volunteers introduce into their lives. The use of volunteers was also perceived by Core Members as bringing an extra dimension to anything that had gone before. This again related to the lay-knowledge which many of the volunteers had and which influenced their responses. Troy, for example, referred endearingly to his volunteers as ‘his 4 little Rottweilers’ who he ‘couldn’t do without’. Like many Core Members, Troy spoke of quickly establishing a relationship with his volunteers which assists and contributes to mechanisms of desistance because it gave him the opportunity to be around normal people again rather than just being surrounded by criminal justice professionals and other sex offenders. The specific insinuation of Troy’s comment was that the volunteers had been ‘authorised’ by himself to identify and comment on

anything they did not like the sound of, or which they didn't understand. In return Troy felt the volunteers would provide the necessary support and assistance to help him move away from his offending identity.

The volunteers also contributed and facilitated Core Members acceptance of the idea of being able to have a normal life again. Core Members described the use of volunteers – non-professional and without formal authority – as the extra level of support they required to make good on their ambitions to change. This social support also provides something which criminal justice agencies cannot provide in the current climate – time. Core Members recognised the time which volunteers gave up to work with them. This thesis did not discuss the effects of this in great detail due to limits on time and space, but the excerpts from Core Members which are used in this thesis are consistent with the attitudes of many Core Members.

The overall reliability of volunteers to attend in all weathers and spend time with 'people like them' was also noted by at least two-thirds of Core Members. Core Members also recognised this intensive attention and significant amounts of time which was being invested in them was unavailable to other groups of offenders and that criminal justice agencies were unable to offer this level of attention. As such the Core Members described a certain gratitude but also spoke of a sense of exclusivity by having access to the Circle and the volunteers. It could be tentatively speculated that with such relationships and social ties being placed on volunteers by Core Members, that this may act as a trigger to move them away from their offending but this would need significantly more research.

As the support structure of CoSA is only temporary, however, (lasting approximately 12 months), creating new pro-social support networks beyond the Circle is important for Core Members to continue their journey towards desistance. Establishing new social networks was difficult for many Core Members however, there were attempts by the Circle and Core Members to improve this situation. In doing so, this thesis contributes further service-user narratives which signal an importance of social support and the need for

hope in the process of change. It also highlights the value Core Members place in CoSA to facilitate this change. Although this is not a study of desistance, many of these changes have significance to the sex offender desistance literature and pathways from sex offending.

A further policy implication from this research relates to the extent to which CoSA fits within current criminal justice practices. Since the implementation of CoSA in England and Wales there have always been questions as to how CoSA can integrate itself within the criminal justice system given the different theoretical underpinnings between the CoSA as a primarily strengths-based approach and criminal justice agencies having a primarily risk management approach. The perspectives of Core Members gained by this research tend to indicate a smoother fit than may have been originally expected. This is despite some initial confusion and misconceptions by Core Members about what CoSA involved, namely that CoSA involved being handcuffed to volunteers, or that volunteers would follow them around town or that volunteers were undercover probation officers. On the whole Core Members concerns reduced as they established relationships with the volunteers. Indeed what emerged among some Core Members was a greater appreciation of the necessities of, and responsibility to work collectively with police and probation officers to better manage their risks. These messages were only held by about approximately one-third of Core Members but represented a significant minority especially given their original attitudes or even animosity towards criminal justice professionals. This ability to facilitate such transformations in entrenched attitudes is something which has significant scope to be expanded in the field of offender reintegration but also specifically for high-risk sex offenders with entrenched cognitive distortions.

This thesis has found Circles provides a system which supports the mechanisms of desistance identified above and does so in ways which are receptive to the needs of Core Members. Moreover, the thesis contradicts some of the commonly-held beliefs that sex offenders can never change nor do they have any inclination to change.

Over the last 12-18 months, the provision of CoSA around the world has reduced somewhat. In Canada, the main funders, including Correctional Services Canada and the National Crime Prevention Centre have withdrawn funding for many CoSA projects leaving the future of the initiative perilous at best (Butler, 2015). In March 2016, the New Zealand Corrections Department also announced it was withdrawing funding for CoSA provision for the highest risk life-sentenced sex offenders (Pennington, 2016a, 2016b). Contrary to the current withdrawal of funding, findings from this thesis would suggest that CoSA is well placed to support mechanisms of desistance, improve compliance and self-control strategies, and increase collaboration between Core Members and criminal justice practitioners. Moreover, Core Members value the input of volunteers who, on the whole are felt to effectively balance the support and accountability functions which underpin CoSA and support reintegration.

The findings of this thesis, and the wider report on CoSA (Thomas et al, 2014) are supportive of the work of CoSA. In light of new explorations of how offenders can be managed in communities (Schaefer et al, 2015) this PhD makes a contribution in support of such programmes for sex offenders. Together with the wider report, the thesis does not show any adverse impact of CoSA to Core Members, in fact, as Core Members recognised, no-body else can do this kind of work because of the intensive time commitments required to build trusting relationships which are key to CoSA. Criminal justice practitioners, because of their already high caseloads, do not have the time to offer this support. CoSA and the Circle volunteers are therefore ideally placed to continue doing this work. As such, it is vital that CoSA provision is retained to assist in the reintegration of convicted sex offenders, and there is a clear requirement for such a model.

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Appendix One - Information Sheet



UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS

Invitation to participate in Circles of Support and Accountability research Information Sheet

Dear Sir,

My name is David Thompson and I am a PhD student at the University of Leeds. My PhD is looking at how Circles of Support and Accountability (CoSA) projects help and assist you and other core members to be reintegrated into the community. I am part of a larger research team from the University of Leeds which is evaluating CoSA projects. This research has the support of Circles UK and your regional CoSA project.

This is an independent research project which seeks your opinions and experiences of how helpful you think CoSA are. I would also like to find out the ways you think CoSA and other services have helped you. Your contribution will help to further improve CoSA services and their continued delivery. It is therefore important that your voice is heard.

This invitation is being presented by your regional CoSA project co-ordinator or circle volunteers on my behalf, though you are under no obligation to participate in this research.

Why have you been chosen?

Because your regional CoSA project co-ordinator has identified that you have participated in a circle for about six months.

What will you be required to do?

If you would like to participate in the research, I will meet with you and interview you (at a date, time and venue to be arranged by you and your regional CoSA project co-ordinator/circle volunteer). Interviews should take between one and two hours and I would like to tape-record the interview so that I make sure I correctly record your views and experiences. If you prefer the interview not to be recorded please tell me and I will take notes instead.

If you decide to take part you will be able to ask for a break or stop the interview at any time, refuse to answer particular questions or bring up new subjects that you think may be useful. After the interview I would also like to complete a short interview with you that is based on a questionnaire containing 10-20 questions and should last no more than 15 minutes. I will ask the questions to which you give short answers.

You may also recall when you first joined CoSA that you signed a consent form giving Circles UK permission to access you're the files that they hold of you, for research purposes. I would like to access these files to aid my study.

As with the interviews and questionnaire data, great care will be taken to ensure all files will remain confidential and all identifiers will be removed so you cannot be identified in any research publications, or by anybody else except for myself.

What I will do with your data?

The interview and questionnaire will be **confidential** and **anonymous** so that anything you say in the interview will not be identified as belonging to you. In this way it will only be known to me, David Thompson. The important exception to this is if you say anything which, in my opinion, might cause an unacceptable risk to you or others. If this is the case the information will be reported to the relevant authorities, and members of the research team.

It is very important that you do not feel pressurised into participating in this research. Therefore if you feel uncomfortable about participating in the research please contact me and we can discuss your concerns. If you wish to withdraw your consent to participating in the research you can do so at any time prior to me commencing the analysis of the interview data. If your consent is withdrawn prior to this, any data which I have collected from you will be erased.

What does confidentiality and anonymity mean?

To maintain confidentiality and anonymity your contributions will have all identifiers removed so that no-one can identify any comments coming from you. Any documents containing any personal details will be stored separately to all other data.

Publication and Use of Data

The findings of the study will be published in a report and other academic publications at the end of the research project. You will be able to read about the findings in this published research and request a copy of the report from Circles UK. If you are happy to speak to me, please tell your regional CoSA project co-ordinator or circle volunteer and they will arrange a visit on my behalf. You can also directly contact me by email (lwdt@leeds.ac.uk) or phone (07582 806139).

To express my gratitude for participating in my research, and to cover any costs you may incur as a result of participating in this research you will receive a £20 high street voucher.

This is an important project which will hopefully help to improve the services provided by COSA and ensure that they continue to run. Your contribution is very important and I hope that you will agree to talk to me.

I look forward to meeting with you.
David Thompson

Appendix Two - Consent Form



UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS

Assessing the impact of Circles of Support and Accountability

Consent form

My name is David Thompson and I am a PhD student at the University of Leeds. My PhD is looking at how Circles of Support and Accountability (CoSA) projects help and assist you and other core members to be reintegrated into the community. I am part of a larger research team from the University of Leeds which is evaluating CoSA projects. This research has the support of Circles UK and your regional CoSA project.

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Do you have any questions about the interview before we begin?

If you wish to contact me after the interview please telephone me on 07582 806139 or e-mail me at lwdt@leeds.ac.uk

In order to comply with the ethics code of the University I would be grateful if you would sign this consent form stating that I have explained the interview process to you fully and that you understand the interview process, and all procedures related to data storage and data analysis.

Participant's Consent

- 1. I voluntarily agree to participate in the research on Circles of Support and Accountability which is being undertaken by David Thompson.

- 2. I agree for my data to be used in other research publications and reports

- 3. I confirm that I have read and understood the information sheet for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask any questions.

- 4. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time during the interview without giving any reason.

- 5. I agree that David Thompson can record the interview or for notes to be taken.

- 6. I understand that information from the interview will be treated in confidence and that the research material is fully anonymous so that no individual will be identified

- 7. I have been informed that files held on me by Circles UK can be accessed by David Thompson.

- 8. I acknowledge receipt of £20 High Street gift vouchers to cover my travel expenses.

Signature

Name

Date

Voucher numbers

Researcher's signature

Date