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Abstract

Mass incarceration has led to a host of problems for reentering offenders and the communities to which they return. The federal government has provided funds to states to address the problems associated with returning offenders. In Vermont, corrections partnered with local community justice centers to develop offender reentry programs. These took various forms but focused on support and services for offenders while enforcing accountability and community safety. This article analyzes three reentry program models and outlines their designs' ability to enact Bazemore and Stinchcomb's (2004) notion of a "civic engagement model of reentry." The vexing challenges of mobilizing communities to foster reintegration for returning offenders are discussed.

Keywords

offender reentry, restorative justice, civic engagement, Vermont corrections

Introduction

Leslie Wilkins said over 30 years ago: "A society can control effectively only those who perceive themselves to be members of it" (as quoted in Young, 1971, p. 52). Presumably, Wilkins could not imagine how fitting this statement would be for describing the intervention impetus behind offender reentry programs. Beyond the practical problems that offenders face in returning from prison, community attachments (and the power of any informal control mechanisms that stem from community engagement) are often ruptured by a long prison term (Clear, 2007). Reengaging formerly incarcerated individuals with the communities to which they return is a challenge only recently recognized by funding agencies and human services.

The trend toward mass incarceration has led to a host of problems for reentering offenders and the communities to which they return (Pager, 2007; Petersilia, 2003; Travis & Visher, 2005; Western, 2006). Longer sentences and fewer rehabilitation programs than in decades prior have left offenders with few skills, resources, and structural supports to reenter successfully (Garland, 2001; Petersilia,

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2003; Travis, 2005). Yet, reenter they do: almost 650,000 offenders are released from state and federal prisons annually in the United States, according to the Bureau of Justice Statistics. In addition, 52% of released offenders are re-incarcerated within 3 years of their discharge (The Urban Institute, 2008). This forecasts over 400,000 rearrests each year; these released offenders pose potential risks of community safety; recent reintegration programs have been designed to manage that risk.

Returning offenders often have few prospects for decent employment and limited resources to secure suitable housing (at times, they are restricted as to where they are allowed to live—see Levenson & Cotter, 2005), or other restrictions that Uggen (2007, p. 708) calls “weapons of mass disruption.” Many have ongoing substance-abuse problems or deep financial obligations; such high needs put them at greater risk of failure to succeed in the community (Petersilia, 2003; Travis, 2005).

Developing Reentry Programs

The federal government began to address offender reentry substantially in the early 2000s. Beginning in 2001 (although states began receiving money in 2003), the U.S. Department of Justice launched a funding initiative called the Serious and Violent Offender Reentry Initiative (SVORI), given to states to design and launch their own versions of offender reentry programs. The initiative brought together several agencies of the federal government, including housing and employment agencies, in an effort to address the structural barriers that returning offenders face. However, each program was required to address the stages of reentry: to assess needs prior to release and to bring together a variety of community agencies and support systems for offenders upon release (U.S. Department of Justice, 2009). All states received funds from the Department of Justice to create reentry initiatives to address the problems of reentry; states answered the call in a variety of different ways. Many states that received the (SVORI) federal monies used it to add community transition services to correctional settings (see Bouffard & Bergeron, 2006; Seiter & Kadela, 2003; Zhang, Roberts, & Callanan, 2006). Several states—most notably Ohio and Vermont—noted problems with expanding the correctional infrastructure as a way to tackle reentry issues (Wilkinson, 2001). Through a competitive process, Vermont reentry programs were funded to design reentry programs tailored to specific community needs; the programs operated within the existing structure of municipal community justice centers (CJCs), providing services to help offenders secure housing and employment, access drug treatment (in some cases), and supply pro-social opportunities for recreation, interaction, and community engagement.

Offender reentry programming as a process of “civic engagement” (Bazemore & Stinchcomb, 2004) entails a number of propositions that would accomplish the goals established in Vermont’s community justice paradigm inasmuch as they try to reengage the offender as well as the communities to which they return (Karp & Clear, 2002). Yet, how is this done?

This article draws upon an analysis of three offender reentry program models in Vermont. I outline each model’s design differences, highlighting the divergent ways in which each embody the civic engagement practices (and the challenges of enacting the best practices) advanced by Bazemore and Stinchcomb (2004). Bazemore and Stinchcomb (2004, p. 2) focus on three dimensions of civic engagement: helping offenders to develop “prosocial identities,” changing “the community’s image of such persons,” and marshalling “community capacity” to supply emotional support and concrete help. The reentry programs described here will be considered in terms of how they address these dimensions. The challenges of formally reintegrating offenders and the larger implications for structuring effective reentry programs will be discussed.

The Community and Restorative Justice Context

Vermont has been on the cutting edge of new trends in justice (in spite of its relatively small prison population of approximately 2,200 offenders). For example, Vermont has a community justice

system that is well-established and has adopted restorative justice in principle and practice—going so far as adopting it by statute—to create alternatives to incarceration and giving control back to communities (see Karp, 2001). Deciding in the early 1990s that communities are the appropriate venue for determining how offenders should be addressed, and trying to wrest some authority away from the state government for community-based issues, Vermont corrections has asked communities for assistance in finding ways to reduce the prison population and recidivism rather than building new prisons (Perry & Gorczyk, 1997). This has been accomplished through the establishment of a dozen CJs that operate restorative justice programs, and until recently, seven offender reentry programs. (Federal funding ended in 2007.) Vermont has committed deeply to restorative principles, and its reparative boards have been demonstrated to be more effective than standard probation (Humphrey, Burford, & Huey, 2007).

The reentry programs were a logical offshoot of the restorative practices that are part of Vermont community justice. The reparative boards that function in Vermont's CJs use community panels to serve as an alternative process outside the court system, by maintaining offenders in the community, holding them accountable, and engaging them in community service and reparative practices such as restitution (see Karp, 2001). Thus, the community justice infrastructure was in place; reentry programs would serve similar restorative and community engagement functions for offenders released from confinement.

The offender reentry programs were designed to engage in prerelease planning collaboration between the Department of Corrections and the communities to which incarcerated offenders would return. The idea was that communities could play a pivotal role in ensuring community safety by monitoring and engaging returning offenders. As Wilkinson (2001, p. 2) explained, there has been a "fragmentation between institutional and community service divisions within the correctional system." He suggests corrections' leaders need to reconceptualize when reentry planning should begin and how important "the maintenance of community linkages" can be for success (p. 4).

Civic Engagement in Reentry Programming

Bazemore and Stinchcomb (2004, p. 1) acknowledge that communities can be "both a major stumbling block and a major resource" for returning offenders. The key is to create reentry models that effectively harness the community's best attributes for transforming itself and its members in creating a safer community. They advocate that community actors "serve as primary agents of action" in crafting approaches to reentry (p. 3). However, community responses need to be situated within evidence-based frameworks, drawing upon the accumulated wisdom from three distinct literatures: "identity transformation research" at the micro level, "life course research" at the meso-level, and "community level research" at the more macro-level (Bazemore & Stinchcomb, 2004, p. 3). In short, reentry programs would need to provide ways for returning offenders to create new identities for themselves by inter-mingling with pro-social individuals and performing valuable services. In addition, successful reentry programs would account for the changing nature of criminal commitments and social bonds, drawing upon their mutability to establish informal social controls (see Sampson & Laub, 1995). Finally, communities would also build capacity to change the retributive culture to a more inclusive and restorative one through its practices. Although the dimensions of civic engagement outlined by Bazemore and Stinchcomb (2004) are theoretical, this article will apply their basic premises to the observed Vermont models to make an assessment of the nuances of doing civic engagement with returning offenders. This article will argue that reentry programs' *structure* affects capacity for civic engagement. The implications for community involvement in preparing returning offenders for civic life are discussed. Specifically, I will analyze the types of support offered to offenders, the degree of social distance to/from them, and how much engagement the community asks of offenders and of itself.

In Vermont, there were seven reentry programs in operation around the state; all were linked to the CJs. Among the seven programs, 95 formerly incarcerated individuals participated. However, the numbers of individuals that received some sort of assistance, such as help finding employment or housing, is much larger. All but two of the seven programs used a variation of the Circles of Support and Accountability (COSA) model; the other two developed community panels as a major component of their programs. One (referred to as the “mentoring model”) used mentoring as an auxiliary component and the other (referred to as the “panel model”) incorporated additional services, such as housing and employment assistance. Thus, there are three distinct models presented here: the “*panel model*,” the “*mentoring model*,” and the “*COSA model*” (Circles of Support and Accountability).

The more formal model—the panel model—involved a single community panel that met every 2 weeks; all of the returning offenders would meet with the same panel on the same evening. The panel was comprised of a city official, a police officer, probation officer, reentry coordinator, and a few volunteers. The “mentoring model” had a panel as well, but it was individually configured for each offender and included a single mentor for one-on-one meetings outside the panel. Its design could be conceived as semiformal. The less formal “COSA model” sometimes included a more prescribed, occasional case conference (similar to a panel) but was mostly characterized by a smaller core of volunteers who met as a group weekly with the “core member” in the community to offer support and social connection.

Restoring Offenders, Restoring Communities

Bazemore and Stinchcomb (2004) recommend that offender reentry programs model themselves upon concepts similar to the best (restorative) practices of community justice, which balance support with accountability. Restorative justice’s strengths include reestablishing the sense of community and victim safety, while maintaining or enhancing the offender’s attachment to the community; one way to do this is to repair the harm through community service (see Karp & Clear, 2002). According to Clear and Karp (1999, p. 56), an ideal community justice model would “emphasiz[e] the obligations of citizens to one another.” Offender reentry programs enact this ideal insofar as they try to reengage a serious offender after a prison term and alter the stigmatized identity on both sides—including the offender’s sense of self and the community’s perspective on the offender (Bazemore & Stinchcomb, 2004). In attaching or reattaching the offender to the community, one positive outcome can be reducing the stigma that comes from a deviant or criminal label (Maruna, 2001; see also Clear & Karp, 1999). The challenges are somewhat magnified, as communities may feel more at stake with a returning serious offender (compared to the relatively less serious offenses handled in restorative panels), and the offender will likely need more intensive support services and support to succeed after a long prison stint.

Bazemore and Stinchcomb (2004) emphasize several avenues for reintegrating offenders into communities. Essentially, they argue that individual offenders must have an opportunity to forge new identities, that they need support systems to attach to, and that communities must rally to engage offenders. They advocate the social psychological dimension of engagement in “new, prosocial roles” that can change a community’s image of an offender (Bazemore & Stinchcomb, 2004, p. 3). We can think of this as the micro level of civic engagement. Clearly, though, helping to create new identities happens in a context of community opportunities that allow positive reinforcement. Communities must marshal their “social capital” to provide these occasions “to develop shared norms and values, and build relationships of trust and reciprocity” (Bazemore & Stinchcomb, 2004, p. 3; see also Putnam, 2000).

According to Bazemore and Stinchcomb (2004, p. 2), a “civic engagement model” of reentry would involve helping with the “development of prosocial identities” for offenders, changing the “community’s image of such persons,” and providing community support. In other words, the

authors suggest that successful reentry depends on the building of *social* and *human capital* (Bazemore & Stinchcomb, 2004; see also Clear, 2007; Putnam, 2000). Clearly, these capacities are linked and draw upon one another; for instance, a community's image of an offender may change based on his or her engagement in prosocial behaviors. Likewise, offenders' abilities to capitalize on their own personal capital may be affected by the strength of their social networks—some of which they may develop through the reentry program. Thus, the three principles of engagement that Bazemore and Stinchcomb (2004) describe are intertwined and reinforcing. I will discuss the micro and meso-levels together, and the more macro-social capital dimension separately.

Methods

I was familiar with Vermont's CJs' restorative justice panels. When I became aware of the new reentry programs, I contacted the panel program and the Department of Corrections about the prospect of conducting observational research. My aim was to understand the challenges of returning offenders, as well as the capacities for communities to help in this process, and the process the program had developed. Observing the panel meetings and interviewing participants would allow me to develop a set of "best practices." Months later, an acquaintance from Corrections told me about the other models and suggested I consider looking at those for comparison. I approached a few COSA programs and one allowed me to observe; the mentoring program agreed as well.

This analysis relies heavily on observation, especially for analyzing the perspectives of offenders. Although nine offenders were willing to be observed in both kinds of panel meetings and COSA conferences, some seemed reluctant to participate in separate interviews, and some were hard to reach after initially agreeing. Some others were difficult to reach to schedule or to gain consent even for observation. Although I took great pains to emphasize my independence from the reentry programs, it is possible I could not convince people of it. I suspect most were too busy managing their individual reentry challenges to consider participating in research. In total, I interviewed seven offenders (six from the panel program and one from the mentoring program). The interviews I did conduct with program participants centered on discovering their perceptions of their reentry challenges, how the program worked for them, and what could help them more. Including offenders, volunteers, staff, and Corrections personnel, I conducted 26 open-ended (usually tape-recorded) interviews. Most were associated with the panel program.

I spent more than 80 hours observing meetings and taking notes on the exchanges between the program members and the returning offenders—the vast majority of these observations were from the panel program. I studied the panel model more intensively and did so for approximately 20 months. I attended and observed a majority of its bimonthly, 2-hours reentry panel meetings, interviewed volunteers, and other panel members and observed and interviewed a handful of offenders (six from this program).

The number of panel members and volunteers I observed was significant, as each panel included six to eight volunteers. From the panel program, I observed six participants' recurring meetings over a period of many months, two from the mentoring program, and only one from the COSA program. Much of this disparity is due to the fact that logistically it was easier to study the panel model. Because the set of panel members was the same for all returning participants, getting consent from all parties was easier than in the other two models, which composed different community members for each offender. Because new offenders were incorporated regularly into the mentoring and COSA programs, and community groups were formed around them, these were evolving continually. In addition, the panel met in the evening, which did not conflict with my teaching schedule. Daytime meetings proved to be difficult. In addition, in the midst of my research, the status of all of the programs' continued funding became uncertain and led to some transition in services and a slow-down in the recruitment of new participants.

With consent, I sat in on and took notes during the program meetings, observing interactions between the panels and the returning participants. The notes were later coded and analyzed for conceptual themes, using the techniques of Lofland and Lofland (1995) for teasing out thematic content. The concepts presented here emerged out of the data (Charmaz, 2006; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The names of places and people are changed or remain unnamed to protect the identity of the players involved in the processes. In addition, describing the size and other characteristics of the cities would make disguising them more difficult.

Each of the programs served approximately a dozen or so formerly incarcerated individuals during the time I conducted the research. Trying to compare numbers of re-offenses in programs would be fruitless as the sample size of offenders in each program would be too small to generalize about regarding their relative accomplishments; any difference in success rates could be attributable to chance. Thus, rather than focusing on which model “works” best at reducing recidivism, this research focuses on the *process* by which offenders try to reengage and the *structure* within which programs try to help.

Formality of Community Investment

In reentry programs, the investment of citizens can be expressed formally (as in the panel model) or less formally (as in the COSA model). Formality is a spectrum across which the three programs plot differently. For example, the panel model entailed six or seven community members from various capacities and a few volunteers who sit around a table to which the offender becomes seated. The panel met with the offender every 2 weeks generally. The mentoring model included a similar panel configuration but included a one-on-one volunteer mentor from the panel, who would meet more casually and regularly with the offender. The COSA model was based on informal, consistent meetings with community volunteers. There was a trick in determining how formal a structure to create: Formal structures appeared to ask more of offenders and less of community members, although it is important to recognize the commitment of the volunteers involved (see Figure 1).

Asking offenders to engage in communities that express less overt social involvement in offenders' lives run the risk of seeming authoritative and potentially punitive because of an appearance of lack of reciprocity. For example, the panel model prescribed higher degrees of engagement from offenders, in the form of community service, writing essays about past offenders, or allowing more monitoring by the program. As one participant complained: “Well, it’s just like sometimes they say do this and do this and you have to go see these people and see these people.” The COSA model demonstrated high levels of engagement *from* its volunteers, in the form of weekly social commitments, whereas the mentoring model occupied the space in between these two. In an example from the mentoring model:

Core Member: I feel odd looking for support here. I feel I don’t deserve it after my crime, but . . .

Volunteer: It’s important to ask for help when you need it. It’s a big step to be able to ask. Look at what you’ve accomplished, don’t look at where you have to go.

Mentor: The thing to remember is—the basis of the panel is for everybody, not just you—it’s the community of [Oaklawn]’s best interest for you to be successful.

Core Member: That’s exactly why I’m here. To tell the community “you guys are safe with me living here.”

This exchange demonstrates the mix in the mentoring model between a focus on community safety as the program’s primary objective and a willingness to engage in social support in the form of personal encouragement. The panel program offered encouragement as well, and served cake to mark rites of passage, but the support was mostly confined to the allotted panel meeting time, which was bounded.

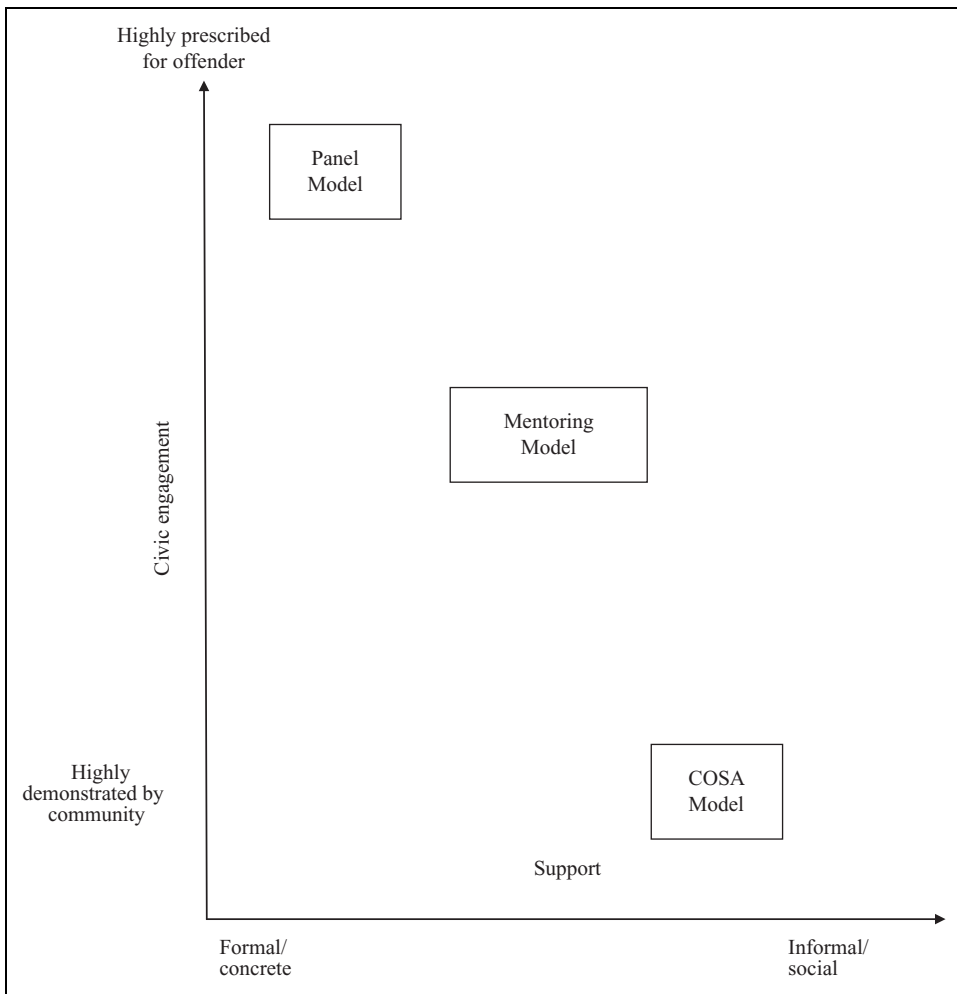


Figure 1. Dimensions of Civic Engagement

The COSA team members invested more personally in the returning offender they sponsored. At least once in a COSA team, the team members made a flyer with their names and pictures on it with quotes endorsing the “core member” for employment. The core member could take the flyer to job interviews. Having the team vouch for the returning offender demonstrated a commitment on the part of the community. Ideally, the bond created should function as an informal control: offenders would not want to disappoint people who put themselves on the line for them. Any moral authority that a community can assert over a returning offender can establish itself formally or informally; however, to enable the informal social control mechanisms that communities could construct, reciprocity may be critical to legitimizing moral authority (See Walgrave, 2003).

One offender, call him Todd, from the panel model, created a budget for himself, complaining as he did so “because everybody was asking me where my money goes.” In an exchange with the panel:

Panel member: You don’t think it’s important for people to monitor this?

Todd: No, not really.

Panel member: Can you think of any reason why we'd be interested in where you spend your money?

Todd: No.

Panel member: If you get behind on your bills, that's when people put themselves in bad situations . . . it's our job to monitor whether you're making sure you don't go back.

Todd: I'm responsible for whether I go back.

Panel Member: You're responsible for the decisions you make. We're responsible for how we respond to that—for keeping the community safe Maybe I could see something as a problem before you do.

In this example, the returning offender did not appreciate the extra monitoring. There were similar situations observed within the panel model, in which offenders expressed frustration with the scrutiny the program provided. Although all the models included a degree of surveillance, formal structure highlighted community safety in a particular way that imposed a kind of monitoring that could be interpreted as coercive. In fact, the panel model described the community's role as "community monitors" rather than mentors, according to someone involved in its design.

The authority dynamic was most salient in the panel model, moderately so in the mentoring model. The mentoring model maintained a semiformal relationship between the panel and participant, as well as the mentor and mentee. Yet, the social distance was not as diminished as in the COSAs because the mentor relationship was bounded and structured. For example, one mentor mentioned that going out for coffee with his mentee was difficult because he was not allowed to buy him anything, and his mentee was financially strapped. The type of support provided emerged from the structure of the programs; the relative formality of each program design influenced the type of support offered, as well as the degree of social distance (see Figure 2).

Concrete Versus Social Support

The panel model entailed a community reentry panel, comprised of a city official, a police officer, a probation officer, and three community volunteers. (At one point, there was a representative from the victims' advocacy community, but that position was not replaced.) Although the panel design had little formal authority, the power in the other models was more obviously "de-centered" (Braithwaite & Mugford, 1994, p. 143). Because the panel model was—as one early developer of the program described—"a professional model," this program focused on *concrete (or structural) supports* for offenders in the form of housing and employment assistance. As one panel member said, "The program was built around jobs and housing." In fact, the program had dedicated housing, employment, and substance-abuse specialists to which it could refer its program participants (they were able to offer this service to many offenders not involved with the panel program also); this kind

	Panel Model	COSA Model	Mentoring Model
Support	Formal/concrete	Informal/social	Both
Civic engagement	Highly prescribed for offender	Highly demonstrated by community members	Both
Social distance	Greater	Lesser	Moderate

Figure 2. Comparison of Reentry Models

of concrete support was a key value the program offered. Other programs offered this kind of support in a more piecemeal way rather than institutionalizing it in the way that the panel model did. For example, the reentry coordinator in a COSA program might suggest jobs or refer someone to the Department of Labor, but the program did not have a funded position to help with employment, or have a line on housing, or offer sessions with a drug counselor. By contrast, for example, the housing specialist associated with the panel model helped offenders find apartments (and landlords who would rent to them) and made special negotiations with landlords. The reentry coordinator would contribute funds toward rent deposits or help with rent if a participant fell behind financially. The employment specialist would assist with quick job placement and some skill enhancement, such as resume writing and interview tips. Outpatient substance-abuse counseling was more easily accessible via the panel program. These concrete, structural supports enabled offenders to reenter sooner and to become stabilized more readily. Because of the heavy emphasis on practical supports, and the intention of not involving community members deeply with offenders, the program assisted offenders in more concrete rather than social/emotional ways.

Although the concrete supports were important for stabilizing offenders, their emphasis led to a de-emphasis of the panel members' function. Because there was only one panel for all of the offenders in the program, the panel model program could accommodate all of the offenders by meeting with each briefly, usually about 30 minutes per participant. Offenders were staggered in the bimonthly meetings, but a given evening might entail visiting with three or four returning offenders. This translated to a level of social support that was necessarily superficial, and it caused offenders and panel members to question what could be reasonably accomplished in such a short time. As one panel member argued, participants "need one on one mentoring—'Hey how do I do a checkbook?' . . . I feel like I am not doing much." Another panel member said: "[Their] enthusiasm about people minding [their] business could fall off if it wasn't clear what the point was." Another suggested: "What people do like is the jobs and the housing." In other words, some panel members wondered what value they added if participants could access concrete support without them. However, the panel volunteers were kind and supportive in these sessions and generally had positive relationships with participants.

Thus, partially by design and partially by necessity, the panel itself did not work with offenders as deeply as other communities did. Interestingly, working with offenders in a formal way demonstrated a certain notion of reciprocity—the panel provided a great deal of concrete support but did not intend to reduce social distance, or establish more emotional reciprocity. Although a couple of panel members met occasionally with offenders outside the formal setting, the panel design did not prescribe this; whereas in other programs, there were more opportunities for social interactions, and this was actively encouraged. However, in the panel program, at least two community members spent some time with some participants outside of the panel setting, helping them secure computers or bicycles and helping them develop budgeting strategies, although this kind of involvement was intentionally left out of the design.

A particular community's model can develop based on the strength of the voices of various stakeholders. For example, in designing reentry programs, some members of the victims' community objected on two grounds: they were troubled by the fact that the resources for mentoring and support would go toward assisting offenders rather than victims (although that was the federal grant guidelines' stipulation), and they felt that working with offenders should be left to trained professionals rather than community volunteers because of the potential for manipulation by offenders. Their voice in the planning process constrained the design of the panel model insofar as the relationship between panel members and offenders was circumscribed; this was less of an issue in other models.

By contrast, although the panels in the mentoring model functioned somewhat similarly to the panel model, they differed in two important ways. First, panels were assembled individually for offenders, as opposed to the consistent panel for all offenders in the panel model. Rather than a

single panel meeting with most or all of the program participants in an evening, the mentoring model scheduled individual panel meetings for offenders. Practically speaking, this meant that their panels could delve more deeply with each offender. In the mentoring model, there was a community panel (which included the mentor) that met twice a month with the offender for approximately 1 hour. During this hour, which was essentially a long “check-in,” the details of the participant’s life were discussed: emotional health status, practical difficulties staying clean or out of trouble, finances, housing arrangements, recreation and leisure activities, company kept, and so on. The range of topics was similar to other panel meetings, but the depth was greater.

The second key difference was the kind of support that took place. Although the reliance on professionals to provide structural supports was not as great, the mentoring panel provided personal supports for each offender. In addition, in principle, a mentoring program allowed for a more tailor-made panel to suit the needs of individual offenders. As Figure 2 demonstrates, a mix of concrete and social supports engenders a moderate degree of social distance as well. The mentor functioned like a sponsor in alcoholics anonymous; she or he was someone the offender could call upon as needed, and they would meet for scheduled activities. One volunteer from the program explained the importance of the mentor role this way:

... when we are stressed, we lean toward what we know. When these guys—they haven’t found a job, they are stressed out as hell ... they’re gonna go to what they know, which may be substance abuse, or maybe think they can get away with something ... they don’t have a lot of resources ... I am a firm believer that people need help opening doors.

This mentor gave advice and helped his mentee navigate the social services maze, which was especially important because he had some mental health issues as well. The support offered was mostly practical but also social; however, the social dimension was bounded. The mentor relationship occupied the space between the formal relationships within the panel model and the informal and intimate relationships within the COSAs; thus, the mentoring model was a hybrid of the panel and COSA models.

The COSA model did not make structural supports the centerpiece of their model but emphasized *social supports* for offenders. In all models, some of the reentry coordinator’s time was dedicated to some social work functions, such as helping offenders develop and maintain a budget, helping them buy some food, clothing, or furnishings, and accessing basic services, such as food stamps and bus passes. The main difference was that the mentor model assumed that there were social/emotional support needs that could not be readily met within the confines of a panel meeting format. As one mentor panel member said: “You need to understand this doesn’t work. You know, you can’t extract people from jail and place them without support. It just doesn’t work.” There was clear recognition within all of the models that support was key to success for offenders’ reintegration; the type of support offered differed and created a distinction between a more “formal” (or quasiprofessional) model and a less formal (or lay) model.

Identity Transformation and Informal Social Control

An important aspect of Bazemore and Stinchcomb’s (2004) recipe for civic engagement involves reshaping the offender’s self-identity and the community’s image of the offender. Bazemore and Stinchcomb (2004) situate these in two divergent literatures—the literature on deviant identities (see Maruna, 2001) and research that addresses the “informal social control” benefits of attachments to conventional society (Bazemore & Stinchcomb, 2004, p. 3; see also Hirschi, 2001). However, to analyze the role of reentry programs as representative of the informal control function that shapes participants’ identities, it is useful to consider these as twin processes. Drawing on the notions of

“instrumental controls” and “affective controls” that attachments represent (Bazemore & Stinchcomb, 2004, p. 7), the authors distinguish between the practical (or what I call structural) supports, such as housing and other forms of concrete assistance, and the more social or intimate kinds of social support provided—and both are valuable. However, in considering the role the community can play in transforming identities, asking how to help in meeting identity goals could be one mechanism.

Uggen, Manza, and Thompson (2006, p. 302) refer to the felon status as a “unique status dishonor”; reentry programs could work to restore honor. To do this, a community must be willing to accept the returning offender, and this “willingness” may be contingent on “the offender [having] acknowledged the form of his actions to others and [having] made appropriate amends” (Bazemore & Stinchcomb, 2004, p. 5). Some of these issues can be seen in an example from a COSA meeting:

Facilitator: Making amends—have you thought about what that might mean?

Core Member: Getting better, doing things positive, communicating more . . .

Facilitator: What should your COSA team look for that would let them know—signs of a downward direction?

Core Member: being quiet, not communicating, being closed up . . .

[Facilitator asked him what his goals were]

Core Member: To be a person who some people think I can never be—a person—a person with feelings.

Facilitator: How will this program help?

Core Member: It helped me get on my feet. I never knew there were people like this out there.

In this exchange, there are several aspects of civic engagement addressed: first of all, a preliminary attempt to address making amends was broached. In this case, and in many other examples, offenders saw obeying the law and contributing positively to the community as ways to atone. In addition, communicating was viewed as a sign of positive community integration, and lack of communication was a sign of risk. Thus, continual communication between core and community members represented a risk-reducing process. This suggests ongoing interaction would be essential. The core member’s goals were modest yet profound: to be a person with feelings; in other words, to be an ordinary person. Finally, the core member marveled at the fact that there were people who could help or cared to help. Their willingness to help enabled him to see a way to become “a person” and change his dishonorable status. Additionally, the exchange represents how reentry programs can be restorative through the community’s engagement. In more formal models, such as the panel model and mentoring model, the community’s investment takes a different, more concrete form and communicates less of the “shared values” that COSAs communicate.

According to Maruna (2001, p. 162), “By its nature, criminal justice is almost entirely negative.” Incarceration does not lend itself to a positive self-assessment among offenders. Maruna advocates “redemption rituals” (2001, p. 162), which must be “unprecedented and unanticipated” and that would minimize the status as offender and enhance one’s status as a citizen (Maruna, 2001, p. 158; see also Bazemore, 1998; Braithwaite & Mugford, 1994; Maruna & LeBel, 2003). In other words, many offenders may not have experienced any expressed investment on the part of ordinary citizens in the community. Reentry programs provide opportunities for positive identity formation in a few key ways. First of all, the programs structure opportunities for interaction between offenders and community members; they contrasted in the ways and depths to which this occurred. For example, all three of the programs held some kind of rituals to mark progress, such as graduation ceremonies or cakes to celebrate certain milestones. One program volunteer described the impact this way:

The individual interaction that occurs between offenders and panel members—I can’t say whether it’s great or not. I can say I think [offenders] find that some people who want them to do well in the community—that may be the only time someone has encouraged them.

The consistent message in reentry programs is that there are people in the community who want returning offenders to succeed. All three models communicated this message. An interesting dynamic was the manifestation of this community desire for offender success; the form of its expression was contingent upon the relative formality of the program's structure and its attendant negotiation of social distance (see Figure 2). Understanding the relationship between structural formality and emergent social distance is essential to appreciating the distinctions between the models.

The Role of Social Distance

All three models addressed the harm done by the offenders' actions and insisted offenders take responsibility before receiving help. The more subtle aspect of restorative justice in reentry programs is the degree to which volunteers or associates of reentry programs establish a sense of *social distance* or *intimacy* with the offender. The greater the degree of community commitment, the greater the intimacy; with higher involvement, there is greater potential demonstration of a sense that they share "key moral values" (Hannem & Petrunik, 2007, p. 161). A more professionalized model suggests social distance or rather lacks a clear demonstration of shared values. COSAs represent a "strengths-based perspective on offenders" insofar as they work to integrate a member fully into the community (Bazemore & Stinchcomb, 2004, p. 3). The model also represented the symbolic gesture of forgiveness advocated by Braithwaite (1989) or what he terms "reintegrative shaming," which calls for remorse and accountability, but then genuine support and investment for reintegration.

In the COSA model, which involved greater interaction between the "core member" and the supporters in his or her circle, team members' personal commitments were evident inasmuch as the relationship was not simply "instrumental" but "affective" as well (Bazemore & Stinchcomb, 2004, p. 7). As Hannem and Petrunik (2007, p. 161) said:

The insistence that a CM [core member] denounce his offending behavior as both harmful and inexcusable helps to provide him with the primary identity of a worthy human being who shares key moral values with the larger community.

As one supporter said to an offender who had been back in the community a few months:

The way you've lived your life and made use of the kind of help we've provided is exactly what we want this program to be about . . . you've freed up a space in jail, you've become a productive citizen, you've done the right thing. *I'm happy to know you* [emphasis added].

The simple gesture of expressing being glad to know the offender communicated the prescription of Bazemore and Stinchcomb (2004, p. 3) for the community's role in identity transformation and enabling the process of change from "liability to asset" (see also Maruna, 2001).

According to Maruna and LeBel (2003, p. 96), reentry has been characterized by a combination of "carrots and sticks"—or a control- and needs-based design. They advocate instead that the narrative change to a "strengths-based narrative," which rewards offenders for doing well, rather than punishing them for failures (p. 95). In terms of the civic engagement model by Bazemore and Stinchcomb (2004, p. 5), one pathway to a prosocial identity is through "earned redemption" (see Bazemore, 1998). Consistent with restorative justice principles, one earns communal trust through service and reparation of harm, in whatever ways stakeholders deem relevant. However, in the strengths-based model, offenders become true collaborators in helping communities (as opposed to being mere receivers of assistance), thereby inspiring genuine community inclusion (Maruna and LeBel 2003; see also Zehr and Toews 2004).

The panel model, which emphasized community safety, would tend toward a restorative model that demands more of offenders, and in fact, finding appropriate and meaningful community service and accountability was a primary function of the panel's interactions with offenders. Asking offenders to make amends is distinct from engaging them in creating a life in which helping happens (Maruna & LeBel, 2003). For example, in one meeting, a panelist referred to the program as including an "accountability and reparative function." Support was part of the reparative function; however, clearly the emphasis was on *asking* reparations from the offender. Many times the panel would discuss the appropriateness of coercing community service. In one exchange between a returning offender, Doug, and his panel:

Doug: I want to be able to do something because I want to do it, not because I have to. That sounds bad.

Panel Member: No, I understand. You want to do it from your own heart. . . . what you're saying is consistent with what we're about. We don't want you to go back to jail either. Over time, we'll talk about how to give back.

Doug: I did my time. I know what I did was wrong. I don't have an excuse.

The panel also asked offenders to reflect on the harm committed by their actions. The panel would communicate disappointment when an offender did not express sufficiently the remorse or understanding that they considered important to the process. In many sessions, the dual objectives of accountability and assistance were in tension. According to one panel member who was ambivalent about the supportive function of the program:

. . . To the degree that the panel is supposed to be restorative—seems inconsistent that we'd be a support role for offenders because we're supposed to make them accountable.

Whereas the mentoring model asked community service of offenders eventually, the panel model developed community service opportunities for participants earlier in the process. These included helping with a neighborhood cleanup day, shoveling snow for elderly citizens, or volunteering at a youth center. The participants received positive feedback for their efforts in the community. A few participants described their interest in the program as providing a chance for them to "make amends." For some participants, their idea of "making amends" was, as one participant described, to "be doing good, being a productive citizen." In an exchange in a panel meeting with a returning offender, Tom:

Panel Member: What could we do for you at this point?

Tom: The main reason I came here is to access community services—to do community service. It helps my self-esteem.

When amends-making happens within the context of a relationship that is less distancing—if it appears to occur organically rather than coercively—it may be more meaningful. In terms of the civic engagement model by Bazemore and Stinchcomb (2004), adopting a prosocial identity is one piece; developing a stake in conformity (Sampson & Laub, 1995) or "conventional commitments" through interaction with conventional citizens seems integral as well (Bazemore & Stinchcomb, 2004, p. 3). This twin process represents what Maruna and LeBel (2003) consider true inclusion.

Community Social Capital: Breaking Down Social Distance

The three reentry models differed in their approaches to community investment in offenders. The panel model and mentoring model were distinct from COSAs in that most of the panel members did not meet with offenders outside the panel meeting and did not socialize with them. In this regard, as Figure 2 illustrates, the kind of support offered spanned a continuum from the more intensely social and emotional support provided by COSAs, the concrete physical assistance provided by the panel

model, and the middle ground between them reflected in the mentoring model. The type of support matters in many ways, but also in what kind of involvement in community life the programs expect for offenders. For example, emotional support and ongoing interaction in an informal capacity regards offenders as “of” the community or as a peer.

Bazemore and Stinchcomb (2004, p. 11) suggest that “community-building” would involve “collective ownership” of crime and quality-of-life problems in a community. At the macro-level, the civic engagement model advocates programs that would increase residents’ “collective efficacy” with regard to crime as a community problem—in addition to the ways that each of these three programs includes community members as volunteers, such a process would incorporate offenders as part of the response ultimately (p. 12). Perhaps, the goal of COSAs could be to include former core members in a COSA eventually, on reparative panels, or in other leadership roles. In this way, not only would offenders be in a position to contribute but would also share responsibility for the community’s function. Deeper involvement into offenders’ lives—operationalizing a “support narrative” as opposed to a “control narrative” would be a first step (Maruna & LeBel, 2003, pp. 95, 93).

The COSA model was labor-intensive: the fulcrum of the model was “building relationships,” according to one person associated with COSAs. The COSA model was adapted from Canada, which began the circles as a faith-based initiative for high-risk sex offenders who had served their maximum sentences (Hannem & Petrunik, 2007; Wilson, McWhinnie, Picheca, Pinzo, & Cortoni, 2007; see also Herron, 2004). As enacted in one program in Vermont, volunteers commit to at least one year. They meet as a group (COSA team) with the core member (offender) once a week—sometimes for coffee or lunch, sometimes to do things like bicycle together, or to assist the offender with money management, teach bus routes, get a library card, grocery shop, and other basic living skills. They become friends and are a main source of the offender’s social encounters. These practices serve to normalize the offender within the community and testify to ordinary citizens’ investment in offenders’ humanity.

Prescribing Civic Engagement—For Whom?

McCold and Wachtel (2003, p. 1) argue that restorative programs with high degrees of “control” lean toward being “punitive,” whereas programs that de-emphasize control (and instead emphasize support) lean toward being “permissive.” Similarly, informal programs that focus on social supports and reduced social distance will tend toward permissiveness or programs that ask less of offenders. The question of how to engage participants in community work, and how much to ask of them, was answered differently in the three models. All three assumed that offenders needed to get stabilized first, before asking too much of them. However, the more formal the model, the greater expectation there was that a key function of the program was to get participants involved in “paying back” the community. In addition to assisting offenders, the programs wanted to focus on “the restorative piece,” as one panel member described it—in other words, the offender must take responsibility for his or her actions and try to make amends. A few participants balked at having to catalogue their crimes in the program’s process or make amends, stating that they had already been through the court system and paid for their crimes. One participant complained:

... so many people who want to help and so many things I have to do for them—I’m starting to feel encaptured like I did when I was in prison.

And as one panel member complained about a resistant offender: “[He] talked about what people can do to help him,” rather than how he could make amends for his crimes. A tension existed about the manner of accountability that was required in exchange for the support. Community safety was always the paramount concern; support was given to reduce the chance of future victimization.

In a COSA case conference, a panel member said a participant has “gotta get on your feet before you can make amends.” She then went on to say that rather than putting the crime behind him, he should “make it your life’s work to find a way to give to society that is a giving and generous way of living that is in honor of your victim.” This quote represents the way in which community engagement can signal a kind of accountability: one’s crime is not forgotten but is transformed into a positive outcome. However, COSAs, which accentuate social supports and did not draw so directly from a reparative board model, expected less in terms of community service. In both the COSAs and the mentoring model, participants were told that being a productive citizen was sufficient to “give back.” In the panel model, the expectation of community service was explicit. Ideally, in all models, if true civic engagement were to occur, then offenders would participate eventually in various ways, such as voting or local events.

Reentry programs walk a tricky line between enforcing accountability and extending help. Hannem and Petrunik (2007, p. 154) describe the COSA model in Canada as having “twin but sometimes competing objectives,” which are summarized as “no one is disposable” and “no more victims” (p. 153). Restorative principles are different in reentry programs than in their usual reparative board context because reparative boards have sanctioning abilities—they serve as alternatives to courts. However, reentry programs have no real formal authority insofar as the programs are voluntary and there is no penalty if an offender opts out of the program at any point. However, the programs under study insisted on accountability as part of the contract. Offenders may have signed up because they could receive assistance for securing suitable housing, help with employment, or for the additional social support. Although the programs were informal in their sanctioning abilities, the degree to which this was understood was uneven. For example, in a meeting once, in response to a defensive participant, a volunteer pointed out: “We’re not the legal system,” to which the offender responded: “I’m sorry, but I look at you guys like the legal system.” All three models insisted that participants catalogue their crimes, why they were wrong, the effect on victims, their families, and the community at large, and how they could rectify the harm. In this regard, the various reentry programs may have seemed similar to a court or parole board.

In trying to assess how reentry programs could reorient to overcome issues of authority and perception of coercion and to enhance greater community inclusion, we can turn to the distinction of Maruna and LeBel (2003, p. 93) between “control narratives” and “support narratives” (p. 95). To realize the civic engagement reentry model of Bazemore and Stinchcomb (2004), adopting a true support narrative would reduce formal structure, thereby reducing social distance between community members and returning offenders. In addition, such a narrative “asks” more of the community, would be perceived as less punitive, and would enable all levels of positive engagement (e.g., social psychological, life course, and social capital).

Conclusion

Clear and Karp (1999) argue that formal social control takes over where informal control is weak. The informal mechanisms provided by community engagement offer the possibilities that Clear (2007) advocates—in fact, if we engage communities in normalizing offenders as citizens, we may strengthen informal social control. The promise that reentry programs present is in the ability to expand capacities in communities for some of the processes associated with “reintegrative shaming” (Braithwaite, 1989), which has the capacity for enabling informal social control. In other words, as more reentry programs develop, and as they solicit more community volunteers to sponsor reentering offenders, the expansion itself could lead to a local cultural shift in the normative approach to offenders and offending. This would reflect what Bazemore (1998, p. 803) calls “a culture of redemption.” If a substantial number of citizens were involved in offender reentry programs, or were interested in demonstrating “reciprocity” (Perry, 2002, p. 6) with returning offenders, this

kind of civic engagement could diminish our “stigmatizing shaming” practices and expand our capacity for reintegration (Braithwaite, 1989). In Roche’s (2003, p. 239) vision, “restorative justice and state justice are mutually supportive,” which could “reinvigorate the justice of the state.” This could pave the way for the devolution of the punitive stance we have so heartily embraced in recent years.

At the programmatic level, the reentry programs reflect a slow but significant shift in the way we consider returning offenders in communities. We have tended to attribute high recidivism to a lack of effective programs or the recalcitrance of offenders. Yet, punitive public attitudes and sensibilities also have a negative impact on successful reintegration (Braithwaite, 1989; see also Tonry, 2004). The effect of community investment in offenders has been considered insufficiently as a tool for reducing victimization (Beckett & Sasson, 2004; Clear, 2007; Clear & Karp, 1999). The movement toward community-based justice has been gradually introduced in the United States, with the advent of drug courts, mental-health courts, and reparative boards. Communities have taken on some of the responsibilities formerly managed by the state; however, these systems are nonetheless formal and sanctioning. Reentry programs allow communities to invest in offenders, while allowing them a say in how offenders repair the social contract.

This article considers the vexing question about how to address communities’ “needs” for safety while supporting returning offenders through civic engagement. How reentry programs are structured yields various benefits and drawbacks regarding the engagement process. Best practices for such programs would take the strengths from the three models presented here. The COSA model contains the positive aspects of community investment in the form of intensive social support. The mentoring model occupies the balanced space between the “permissive” and “punitive” tendencies in restorative practice—demonstrating community investment through mentoring for daily life and avoiding excessive permissiveness by pressing for accountability in a formalized setting (McCold & Wachtel, 2003, p. 1). The panel model emphasizes the “making amends” feature of community service and offers concentrated structural supports to address the debilitating deficits of daily living. Schneider (1990) found that amends-making sanctions boost feelings of inclusion and civic engagement. Thus, enforcing accountability is consistent with inclusion in civil society. Accountability exercises can re-shape public images of offenders and feelings of inclusion.

The limits to this analysis concern the fact that the unique features of each program are highlighted and the samples are small; consequently, it is difficult to make general claims about which program is “better.” As these models were applied in a small state committed to restorative principles, extrapolating these experiences to other locations may be ill-advised. However, the features of civic engagement principles and an understanding of how they are cultivated or lost in various program structures should help develop prototypes for consideration in creating such programs elsewhere.

The larger significance of this analysis relates to the broader notions of civic engagement and citizenship in late modernity. Young (1999, p. 199) offers that “crime and intolerance occur when citizenship is thwarted; their causes lie in injustice.” By this, he refers to substantial patterns of social injustice, such as the exclusionary processes we engage in because of our intense individualism and changed market conditions. He advocates “a transformative openness to others” (p. 179) and suggests: “It is to civil society itself we must turn if we are to locate the sources of both cohesion and disruption in social life” (p. 148). Hard social control has proven to be fraught with problems related to social exclusion, from consequences stemming from mass incarceration to crises in democratic participation (Uggen et al., 2006). However, the problematic exclusionary tactics of the criminal justice system are not the only ways that “civic purgatory” is created (Dzur & Mirchandani, 2007, p. 158; see also Uggen et al., 2006). Young (1999, p. 198) proposes “a new contract of citizenship which emphasizes diversity rather than absolute values.” The grand re-shaping of the social contract that Young imagines is difficult to map from the analysis presented here.

Nonetheless, Young's critique of the cultural context of exclusion—the ways that we “essentialize” and “demonize” others—helps to explain the challenge in realizing true civic engagement for returning offenders (p. 96).

In addition, in leaning toward an inclusionary model, reentry programs should take care to avoid becoming “net-widening” or an expansion of greater soft social control (Cohen, 1985). Foucault (1991) warned of the tendency to adopt “technologies” of social control in the form of softer control mechanisms that reflect greater surveillance (see also Cohen, 1985). The potential price of harsh demands and formal authority is exclusion—or possibly partial inclusion; models that minimize the social distance between the offenders and the community members may enable greater engagement (Braithwaite & Mugford, 1994).

We could begin a dialogue about inclusion by imagining how structuring reentry programs could aim for optimal inclusion. Hannem and Petrunik (2007, p. 168) describe doing “risk management” but “within an inclusive context.” Such a dynamic process would entail engaging community members first and foremost—and not simply to manage risk. The “openness” Young promotes is expansive and would mandate a sociological understanding of the ways that pervasive social injustices sculpt differential public participation and re-integration. Thus, a vital element to community involvement in reentry processes would be to steep the design within a socially critical framework—one that would engender compassion and appreciate diversity.

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Bio

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