

Solidarity and Subsidiarity: Complementary Principles of Community Development

Francis J. Schweigert

Introduction

Efforts to enhance or strengthen the life of communities cannot avoid the complexities of the relations between society and community. Community development must navigate the converging streams of power flowing between the larger culture of societies and the local cultures of communities, between the administration of government and the operation of civic organizations, between overarching public institutions and clusters of families. Working within these streams of power requires a respect for both poles in these pairs of relations: respect for belonging to society and to community, respect for institutional power and communal power. This cannot be a merely abstract or vague sense of respect; it must be an operational commitment, guiding all initiatives of community development.

Community-based victim-offender conferencing provides an excellent experiential base from which to examine the operation of this kind of respect. Because these conferences are located at the intersection of governmental systems, local communities, families, and individuals—and because they have been instituted as decision-making processes valid for all these levels at the same time—victim-offender conferences can be viewed as a rich social experiment in the relationship between membership and power. The respect operating in victim-offender conferencing, which can be extended to other areas of social and economic development as well, can be captured in two key principles of social justice: solidarity and subsidiarity.

Solidarity refers to shared membership characterized by mutual care and mutual respect, that is, a sense of belonging enriched by a commitment to human dignity—to love one's neighbor as oneself. *Subsidiarity* is understood as a guide for social action, directing decision making to the social level that is most effective, with particular respect for the power of local and communal levels of society. This article presents these two principles as complementary principles of community development, first, in an examination of victim-offender conferencing as a social practice characterized by the respect identified with solidarity and subsidiarity; and second, by exploring the significance of solidarity and subsidiarity as basic terms in a functional definition of community.

Solidarity and Subsidiarity in Victim-Offender Conferencing

Victim-offender conferencing is a process of dialogue, negotiation, and problem solving that focuses on repairing the harm done by the crime—restoring what has been damaged or lost on the part of the victim, the offender, and the community—to the extent possible. Although this practice has emerged in the last two decades as a prominent reform movement in the criminal justice system, it draws upon a variety of social sources long known and long utilized in responding to crime and other offensive behavior: the demand for restitution, community justice in non-European cultures, notions of biblical justice as *shalom* and redemption, and—more recently—mediation and nonviolent conflict resolution. Among these several sources, it is possible to discern a coherent moral and philosophical understanding of justice as an attempt to set right what has been done wrong—not primarily by punishing the offender, but by restoring what has been harmed and constructing a solution that includes all parties as active contributors. It is this sense of collaboration in a just solution that goes beyond retribution and “rectificatory justice” as defined by Aristotle in Book V of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, restoring social equality by taking away unfair gain from violations of contracts and restoring losses to the victims. Victim-offender conferencing is a rediscovered social technology not only for responding to crime but for rebuilding society, oriented more toward future solutions than toward blame for the past. The conferencing process is the keystone of the movement from retributive justice to restorative justice.

Four key notions of restorative justice were articulated in Albert Eglash’s notion of “creative restitution,” twenty years before the first victim-offender conference was convened in the United States. First, the response to crime should be a *constructive* sanction, involving “an offender giving something of himself,” and therefore nonpunitive and open to a broader meaning than simply payment of money. Second, it should be *creative and unlimited*, taking account of the nature of the offense and the kind of damage it inflicted on the victim. This can go beyond simply returning or repairing of property to reconciling the victim and offender, and even beyond reconciliation to social improvement. “Creative restitution requires that a situation be left better than before an offense was committed,” Eglash writes, “beyond what any law or court requires, beyond what friends and family expect, beyond what a victim asks, beyond what conscience or super-ego demands.” Ideally, participants can perceive the crucial nuances of the situation and tap into individual and communal strengths to design effective remedies. Third, the sanction should be *self-determined* by the offender, with the guidance of “a skillful guide.” This kind of sanction can remove the stigma attached to criminal behavior and provide a means of personal growth extending far beyond the immediate situation of crime. Fourth, the sanction can be determined by a *group* and carried out by a group, providing a way for offenders to “seek out and to help others in the same boat.” Creative restitution thus provides an opportunity for pursuing a kind of “poetic justice” in which the unique situation of the offense and the conflicted parties can be utilized to design forms of restitution that are practical, meaningful, and symbolic of mutual respect and trust (Eglash 1958, 620–21).

To be effective, the process must ensure that all participants are respected, heard, and permitted to contribute to the solution. No one is forced to participate, and although a variety of programs offer incentives to offenders to divert cases from court to conferences, individual offenders—and victims—can always elect to take their case to court. Trained facilitators, mediators, or coordinators bear the responsibility for creating and maintaining an “open space” in which injury and conflict can be converted into healing and community development.

Victim-offender conferencing can take a variety of forms, from a mediation or dialogue between victim and offender to a conference involving family members, neighbors, community representatives, and court officials. Despite this variety, the values guiding the practice are the same and the process follows the same basic steps:

1. The facilitator opens the session by welcoming the participants and introducing the process.
2. The victim and offender—and other participants such as personal supporters, community representatives, or public-service personnel—then describe the incident from their points of view.
3. Together, the parties identify the issues and interests at stake.
4. Participants explore possible ways to solve the problems that have been raised.
5. The victim and offender—and other participants if they are involved in the conference—agree to a settlement, which may include financial reparation, personal service, community service, education or training or counseling for either party, probation, incarceration, or other possible actions to which all participants agree.
6. The facilitator closes the session by summarizing what has occurred in the process and clarifying the terms of the settlement.
7. As the formal process comes to a close, the participants are often invited to share food and drink in an informal social setting, which provides an opportunity for informal conversation and sometimes the exchange of profound gestures of apology, forgiveness, reconciliation, and reintegration.

Victim-offender conferencing is described as a community-based process, but two observations regarding the communal dynamics in victim-offender conferencing need to be highlighted here. First, community and membership in community are not assumed as given; rather, it is assumed that the community involved in the conference must be invoked, convened, and constituted in response to a particular social injury. This is not to say that no community preexists the conference, but that the community convened and functioning in the conference does not depend upon a preexisting community to be effective. Solidarity, as a principle of action in victim-offender conferencing, is not merely a name for an existing sense of fellowship or affective connection. Rather, solidarity in action is a guiding principle for bringing communal dynamics into operation—convening the community-in-action—that may or may not be a part of a community in a more enduring sense.

Second, local empowerment is not simply equivalent to locating decision making at the local level, as though power is exercised locally and not at a municipal or county or state level. The key to empowerment in victim-offender conferencing is that the power vested in the elected government and exercised through its agencies is in this case *also* exercised by the convened community. The state is not absent in victim-offender conferencing; rather, the state stands with and in the communal process. By convening the community to determine the response to crime, the state shares the exercise of its power with the community and is willing to hold itself bound by the decision of the convened community. This raises concerns, of course, that the safeguards for the individual citizen that are built into the state's recognition of individual rights might not be present in communal settings. Yet it is precisely this concern that opens the way to the effective exercise of power in victim-offender conferencing. On one hand, the community is convened on behalf of the state and therefore is bound by the procedural safeguards of individual respect and equality that limit the state's power and serve as the ground of public trust (Rawls 1988). On the other hand, the community is convened on behalf of individuals personally brought into relationship by the offense—the victim and offender and their families, friends, neighbors, and others—thus becoming for these individuals a process and a forum for exercising interpersonal power. Victim-offender conferencing therefore brings about a combination or interweaving of the power of the state with the power of community—especially the power that arises from mutual accountability and care. Subsidiarity is thus more than a standard for assessing the social location of decisions. As a principle of action, subsidiarity is a process of instituting the complementary exercise of power—between different kinds of power and between different social levels. These insights are developed further in what follows.

Solidarity: Relations of Care

Robert Putnam speaks at length about the power of “generalized reciprocity” to build effective communities—that is, communities capable of democratic self-governance. By generalized reciprocity, Putnam refers to a willingness to give to others, not with an expectation of direct personal reciprocation from the one receiving the benefit, but with an expectation that eventually, in some way, the benefit will be returned. Putnam points to the lending of capital at interest as an example of generalized reciprocity: owners of capital deposit their money with the banker for others to use, even though the owners do not know the borrowers personally; and the owners trust that they will be repaid eventually, with a profit, by other unknown lenders and borrowers:

The norm of generalized reciprocity is a highly productive component of social capital. Communities in which this norm is followed can more efficiently restrain opportunism and resolve problems of collective action. . . . The norm of generalized reciprocity serves to reconcile self-interest and solidarity:

Each individual act in a system of reciprocity is usually characterized by a combination of what one might call short-term altruism and long-term self-interest: I help you out now in the (possibly vague, uncertain and uncalculating) expectation that you will help me out in the future. Reciprocity is made up of a series of acts each of which is short-run altruistic . . . but which together *typically* make every participant better off. (Putnam 1993, 172, emphasis in original)

This kind of reciprocal interdependence undergirds democratic societies, providing a fabric of relations of mutual benefit to which members contribute in a variety of ways.

Similarly, victim-offender conferencing might be seen as an example of generalized reciprocity, in which members of the community assist one another, recognizing the likelihood of their own need for similar help at some point. However, victim-offender conferencing is complicated in that it appears precisely at the point that communal reciprocity—and the trust it entails—has been violated. The violation of communal trust raises the possibility of a revocation of communal membership, excluding the untrustworthy from the community. Thus, in addition to the feelings of compassion and empathy evoked by other social needs, crime also evokes feelings of animosity, betrayal, mistrust, and rejection. It is the opposite of reciprocal benefit.

Thus a dual dynamic of reciprocity operates in human societies. Upon a basis of trust, reciprocal benefits build more trust; when this trust is violated, reciprocity calls for a withdrawal of trust and for rejection or exclusion of the offender. The dynamic is neatly summarized in the gospel according to Matthew: “You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy” (Matt. 5:43).

Although the exclusion of those who violate trust can strengthen bonds among the trustworthy momentarily, it also exposes the vulnerability of these bonds in the long run; for all friends will fail each other in some ways at some times. Social injury is inescapable. Harm and the violation of trust—criminal and noncriminal, interpersonal and impersonal—pervade our social relations. Therefore community would not be possible at any level without a mechanism for overcoming the exclusionary dynamics that injury sets into motion. Reciprocity is not this mechanism; for reciprocity—either generalized or direct—*depends upon* some measure of social trust already in operation. Solidarity, in other words, is not reducible to reciprocity; rather, reciprocity presumes solidarity.¹

This is precisely the dynamic that Plato addresses in the *Crito*. In this dialogue, Crito presses his friend Socrates to escape from prison and thus avoid execution, arguing that Socrates does not owe his friendship and loyalty to those who are out to harm him unjustly (45–46). This is an argument based on reciprocal justice: do unto others as they do unto you; return injury for injury, and return love for love. To this argument, Socrates responds by arguing that acting justly means doing the right thing, doing no evil, returning good for evil, and being willing to suffer for the right rather than to be rewarded for the wrong (49). Speaking on behalf of the laws that define the terms of membership, Socrates points out that the community has given him life, and he owes the community his loyalty—even his loyal opposition (50ff).

Because he has chosen to reside in Athens, he owes Athens obedience to its laws—and if a law is wrong, he also owes his fellow citizens his best efforts to change the law by changing their minds.

The critical point is this: community is possible only if the citizens pledge their unconditional loyalty and commitment to do good and avoid evil and to contribute their good life to the shared life of the community. A commitment to reciprocity is inadequate, since the survival of community requires the maintenance of community even in the face of injustice and injury. Civic membership, for Plato, requires cocreating the polis—and cocreating requires more than reciprocity.

Victim-offender conferencing reveals the same social fact. That is, the offender is incorporated into a circle of citizens, including the victim, who are convened to reaffirm social membership despite the failure of membership. The citizens must be prepared to do good where evil has been done. The conference does not merely draw upon community as a resource; it heals community where it has been damaged and creates community where it has wasted away. These dynamics of healing and creativity are the keys to solidarity, and the operation of solidarity is thus through acts of forgiveness, unconditional love, and loyalty beyond reciprocity. In short, therefore, solidarity as a principle of action is the love of neighbor—not only as mutual love but most critically as love of enemies. Without love of enemies, community is impossible.

It may seem that love of enemies goes beyond realistic expectations in cases of criminal harm, especially severe harm.² If, however, love is understood as the extension of unearned membership or the offer of restored membership when the terms of membership have been abrogated or violated, then such acts of love are common in families, schools, neighborhoods, places of work, and elsewhere. This kind of love initiates or restores relationships that can then become the ground for cooperation and reciprocity. It is in this minimal—yet powerful and important—sense that love of enemies functions in victim-offender conferencing.

Anecdotally, victims and offenders testify to the power of being seated face to face in a conference: seeing each other as human beings like themselves, someone from whom they can receive assistance and to whom they can reach out in hopes of reform. The two cases chronicled in American Broadcasting Company's *20/20* special report on restorative justice are typical. In the first case, the victims of vandalism and burglary refused to forgive the offending youth but extended tearful advice to him, asking him to change his ways. In the second case, the parents of a young woman killed by a drunken driver befriended the driver, "adopting" her as their daughter ("Restorative Justice" 1999). Thrown into a relationship with each other, victims and offenders can—if given the opportunity—break through the wall of pain and hostility separating them and respond to one another as fellow human beings worthy of respect and care. The high satisfaction rates reported in victim-offender conferencing studies indicate that most victims and offenders experience conferencing as a fair process with positive outcomes. In summarizing this data, John Braithwaite notes that "some victims will prefer mercy to insisting on getting their money back; indeed, it may be that act of grace

which gives them a spiritual restoration that is critical for them” (Braithwaite 1997, section A.1). Donald Nathanson addresses this dynamic in his analysis of the affective effects of conferencing on victims and offenders. Note that it is the community’s *love* that opens the way to the offender’s reform:

The conference facilitator invites offenders, victims, their family, and friends to a meeting to see how people had been affected by the offense and how the harm might be repaired. Most notably, the conference provides a forum wherein affect is permitted to resonate within a protective framework of respect and decorum. Unlike the legal system, the conference provides offenders with an opportunity to gain some empathy for those they have affected with their behavior. . . . Not surprisingly, the initial response of the perpetrator is often indifferent and unconcerned; even children seem unable to commit a crime when concerned about the needs and feelings of others. Yet as the conference runs on and both family groups began to speak about their estrangement from the perpetrator, that individual comes swiftly to learn that the love of the community is a deeply missed and quite important part of his or her world. With such recognition comes an avalanche of shame, after which the individual is likely to express remorse, accept the forgiveness of all concerned, and sign a document pledging to work in some way to repair or undo the damage produced by the antisocial act. . . . The mutative force is empathy, not shame, and the interaffective processes described in this communication are both ubiquitous and fractal at all levels of human interaction. (Nathanson 1998, 83–86)

Subsidiarity: Relations of Accountability

Subsidiarity in victim-offender conferencing is described above as a combination of the power of the state with the power of community—two different kinds of power in one setting. Within the complementarity of these two kinds of power, subsidiarity functions as both a limiting principle and a linking principle.

Subsidiarity is a *limiting principle* in directing that tasks be done at the lowest social level at which they can be effectively performed—whether the task is a making a decision, resolving a conflict, building a road, or educating children. This aspect of subsidiarity is valued in part as a limit to state domination, preventing the state from encroaching on local communities or usurping the rightful role of parents. However, the local level is not intrinsically more valuable or more just than a higher level. Civil rights legislation in the United States—in both the 1860s and the 1960s—proceeded on the national level only after it was stymied at the state and local levels. The value of local power is not merely that it is local, but that it taps into local relational dynamics. Here the experience of victim-offender conferencing is particularly instructive. Conferences do not depend only on the individual offender’s capacity to reform, for the power for change lies not in the individual will alone, but also in the behavior and attitudes in the network of relationships to which the individual belongs. Individual freedom of choice is real and

necessary, but the social nature of the human being entails social influence on choices. Individuals are always members of some local group or groups, however dysfunctional or fragmented or illusory they may be. This local power is relational, moving in the give-and-take of ordinary interaction, interwoven with and continually generating, reinforcing, and changing the myriad expectations, patterns, obligations, and norms that comprise the informal social order of the group and contributing ultimately to the order of society. The value in the local exercise of power lies in this direct relation to social and personal change—and, indeed, to the creation of personal and communal identity.

Subsidiarity as a *linking principle* refers to the way that higher and lower social levels interpenetrate each other in every situation. Urie Bronfenbrenner describes the ecological environment in which human development proceeds as a system of relations, “a set of nested structures, each inside the next, like a set of Russian dolls” (Bronfenbrenner 1979, 3). This environmental system operates at four different levels: (a) a *microsystem*, which is a “complex of interrelations within the immediate setting”; (b) a *mesosystem* of “linkages between settings . . . in which the developing person actually participates”; (c) an *exosystem* of “linkages between settings . . . that he may never enter but in which events occur that affect what happens in the person’s immediate environment”; and (d) a *macrosystem*, the “overarching patterns of ideology and organization of the social institutions common to a particular culture or subculture” (7–8).

Thus, from an offender’s point of view, a victim-offender conference would be a microsystem of “activities, roles, and interpersonal relations . . . in a given setting with particular physical and material characteristics” (Bronfenbrenner 1979, 22). As the offender moves between microsystems, for example, leaving home and entering the conference, the interactions between these microsystems constitute a mesosystem. The next ecological level, the exosystem, identifies the way the offender is affected in the microsystem and mesosystem by interactions among other participants in settings in which the offender does not participate, for example, the facilitator’s interactions with the victim’s support group. The fourth ecological level, the macrosystem, “refers to consistencies, in the form and content of lower-order systems (micro-, meso-, and exo-) that exist or could exist, at the level of the subculture or the culture as a whole” (26). Crime, criminal justice, community security, and moral standards are examples of such consistencies in the surrounding culture. These consistencies shape perceptions and interactions in the offender’s experience in microsystems (home or conference), in the mesosystem constituted by relations between home and the conference, and in the exosystem that includes the effects on the offender of the mediator’s relations in the victim’s support group.

Interactions at each level affect the other levels even in a single event. For example, from a juvenile offender’s point of view, disapproval of vandalism (in the microsystem of the victim-offender conference) is reinforced by parental disapproval of vandalism at home and at school (both mesosystems). The offender is also affected by—even if not aware of—the disapproval of vandalism by other corrections officials and by the local school board (both

exosystems for the offender). The conference's reprimand is further reinforced because vandalism is generally treated with disapproval in the culture, as represented in legislation and in moral norms (the macrosystem).

Every social situation—and therefore any response to crime—inevitably involves all four of these levels of interaction. The principle of subsidiarity draws upon this fact to take advantage of this interpenetration of power, invoking and evoking the influence of the mesosystem, exosystem, and macrosystem in the local situation of the microsystem. The exercise of local power is therefore never merely local. Indeed, only to the extent that the exercise of local power is endorsed, depended upon, and expected by higher levels can this local power be effective. Of course, the interpenetration works both ways, so that higher levels of power need also to be legitimated by local networks of relations. To use an ecclesiastical example, the local church is recognized as valid sacrament because of its communion with the denomination through the ordination of the pastor, and the denomination is validated and made real in the consciousness of believers because of its link with the local churches. Subsidiarity, as a principle of action, is therefore a linking mechanism—a process for giving local decision makers a means to exercise the combined power of the society-at-large and the family-of-heart-and-hearth on behalf of both and for the building up of both.

Solidarity and Subsidiarity in a Philosophy of Community

Victim-offender conferencing is not unique in being characterized by the principles of solidarity and subsidiarity, but it is well situated to make these dynamics visible. The capacity for these dynamics is rooted in the social nature of the human person, for humans cannot survive without membership in a network of relationships characterized by mutual care and mutual accountability. Human need provides an opening for care and an expectation of care—obvious in the cry of a hungry infant but no less true for all ages. Humans are born with a natural ability to discern what others expect of them (which is the basis of mutual accountability) and with a natural affective resonance with others (which is the basis for mutual care). Care also creates an expectation of reciprocity, especially in time of need. This interweaving of care and accountability in response to human needs is the language and power of community. In a functional sense, community is exactly such an interpersonal network, defined less by its boundaries than by these characteristic dynamics; community is as community does. Among some memberships, these dynamics are strong and effective, contributing to the overall health and well-being of the members; among other memberships, care and accountability may be weak or seriously undermined by internal or external forces. In some societies, each person may belong to only one community; in other societies, persons may have multiple memberships and be required to navigate among them. In every case, however limited or tenuous, the interweaving of care and accountability generates a web of power relations that binds members to each other and to certain expectations. This binding in community is moral rather than legal; it fixes on the individual conscience of each member, calling for the exercise of individual freedom of will in accord with network of relations.

The power of community, then, is moral and interpersonal. If the membership becomes too large, the interpersonal dynamics suffer and subcommunities form; if the membership is too small, needs cannot be met, care and accountability decline, and moral dynamics suffer.

This general description of community and communal power is consistent with the "moralnet" theory developed by anthropologist Raoul Naroll. Drawing upon a broad survey of cross-cultural research, Naroll traced the general health and progress of a society to the strength of local communal networks in twelve key areas: economic support, emotional warmth and support, political support and security, a set of morals backed up by an ideology and maintained by prompt and sure accountability, a pattern of ritual celebrations and foundation narratives, external emblems of membership, the homogeneity of membership, and a gossip system. To some extent, these elements can be provided by impersonal societal systems or by individuals for one another, but Naroll found that they are most powerfully provided in a set of relationships larger than families but still small enough for interpersonal recognition and attachments. In traditional societies, this would be the *band*: those that live together, celebrate ceremonies together, and share or exchange food.

Everyone knows everyone else, watches everyone else, gossips about everyone else. It is through the band that the moral ideas of the tribe are transmitted, are transformed through gossip from theory to moral pressure. And it is primarily in the band that individuals may gain or lose the esteem or respect of their fellow men and women. To gain and hold esteem, a man or woman must perform skillfully and conscientiously the social roles assigned to him or her by the culture. (Naroll 1983, 136)

Naroll coined the term "moralnet" to denote this basic social network, defined as "the largest primary group that serves a given person as a normative reference group" (486). In other words, the moralnet is the interpersonal carrier of the moral code, which is passed on from generation to generation through the dynamics of mutual accountability and care—that is, through community. The moralnet may be a nomadic foraging group, a village, a clan, a ship's crew, a military unit, a business association, a sentencing circle, a religious congregation, etc. Whatever its specific identity, the moralnet carries an authority that cannot be generated by smaller groups such as families or couples or by individuals alone, and it conveys this authority through interpersonal relations impossible for the society as a whole. Community is the basic building block of both family and society.

The implications of this general understanding of community and communal power are several. First, community is primarily a functional concept. That is, community can be defined by its characteristic dynamics rather than merely by its boundaries. Geographical, political, and ethnic boundaries do indeed help to define communities, but the essential dynamics in a functional community are mutual interpersonal accountability and care.

Second, community in a functional sense is self-generating. That is, when human beings gather in a way that allows mutual interpersonal accountabil-

ity and care to operate, these dynamics emerge naturally—by the nature of human beings as social beings. This means that community-building and community development can be stimulated by creating the necessary conditions that evoke communal dynamics—as in victim-offender conferencing and equally applicable in education, commerce, agriculture, social services, civic activity, and religion. It also means that sustainable community development is by definition self-generating, as any sustainable system must be self-generating; it must produce the dynamics upon which its vitality depends.

Third, communities do not exist as discrete social entities, but as a cluster of families and as a part of a larger society. Each configuration embodies the others. Thus, a sentencing circle in a Minnesota town carries and conveys some of the power of American society as a whole, some nuances and assumptions of the region, some authority on behalf of local government, some authoritative expertise derived from institutional credentials, some relational power from interpersonal connections, and some of the dignity and worth belonging to each individual. The ontology of the community in the sentencing circle is inclusive and dynamic, including the whole and the parts in a configuration capable of exercising power locally.

Fourth, care and accountability are mutually reinforcing, each generating more of the other. Accountability creates the conditions of trust in which care can thrive; care creates and sustains the bonds that serve as a ground for accountability. Subsidiarity is thus a principle to guide the effective operation of accountability in concert with care—and at the same time as an expression of the whole fabric of society and the individuals present in the immediate situation. Solidarity is a principle to guide and guard the ongoing formation of affective connections, without which accountability disappears. Solidarity and subsidiarity are shorthand concepts identifying natural and complementary dynamics in well-functioning communities.

This functional understanding of community is important for two reasons. First, any approach to the human must presuppose community, since humans inevitably live in communities unless they are deprived of them—and this deprivation is a fundamental one, a loss of something essential to humanity. However weakened communities may be, some group or groups of persons serve as functional community(ies) for virtually every living person, and these functional communities play an inevitable and essential role in the broader social picture. Second, a functional definition of community puts the relational characteristics of accountability and care at the center of concerns for justice and sustainable development. Community, correctly understood, is the engine of development as well as a derivative of development.

Notes

¹Rene Girard (1972/1977) has also made this observation, which plays an important part in his argument that ritual scapegoating is a necessary mechanism for communal survival. My observations that follow provide an alternative thesis: that the spiral of violence is interrupted and escaped not only by scapegoating and sacrificial ritual but also by myriad acts of solidarity pervading the community.

²It is true that most victim-offender conferences involve cases of juvenile or minor crime, in which social harm is less severe. However, conferencing has been used successfully in cases addressing serious crime, and efforts to extend conferencing in this direction are increasing; for example, this has become the focus for practice and research by Mark Umbreit at the Center for Restorative Justice and Mediation in the School of Social Work at the University of Minnesota (personal communication, October 12, 1999).

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