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Meeting the Person, Not the Crime

A Qualitative Study on the Motivation, Role, and Experiences of Red Cross Volunteers Meeting with Prisoners Sentenced for Sex Crimes

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My two years at the University of Oslo have been some of the best, and also most challenging, years of my life. Now that I am submitting my thesis and officially marking the end of my studies, I want to show my appreciation to some people who have contributed to this thesis:

To the Red Cross volunteers who were willing to share their time and experiences with me. This thesis would not have been possible without your contributions, and I am truly impressed by the devotion and engagement you put into being a visitor – thank you!

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Runa Åsgard Mandt, 22.05.25

Abstract

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How do you befriend a 'monster'? Or, rather, why would you want to?

There are few acts in modern society that evoke as much moral outrage as sex crimes does. The person committing them are described as 'monsters' – irredeemable and inhuman. Over the past two decades, legal and public responses to this category of crime have intensified. The number of reported cases of sex crimes has increased, as has the length of sentences they receive. Today, nearly one in four persons in Norwegian prisons are serving a sentence for sex crimes. Despite this growing presence in the prison system, this group remains highly stigmatised. Their time in prison is marked by strained relationships with staff and fellow prisoners, loss of the social networks they once had, and an awareness of how the society to which they will return now only see them as a criminal action and not a person - and will therefore never fully accept their reintegration. They are, in other words, some of the most isolated persons in prison.

For some of these prisoners, their only remaining contact with the outside world comes in the form of an hour-long conversation, once every two weeks. This is when volunteers from The Red Cross Visitor Service comes to visit. These volunteers, the 'visitors', enter the prison with the aim of reducing social isolation for those who need it the most. They are not therapists or professionals; they are simply fellow human beings. Human beings, who completely voluntarily and without receiving any form of payment chooses to spend their free-time in prison, engaging in conversation with those that the rest of society tries to avoid.

Through nine qualitative interviews with Red Cross visitors, this thesis seeks to explore voluntary motivation and voluntary role in these one-on-one meetings with prisoners sentenced for sex crimes. The interviews are further explored through a thematic analysis, which is informed by the theoretical contributions of Clary and Snyder's Voluntary Function Inventory, Goffman's dramaturgical framework, and Christie's humanising of criminals.

The analytical findings suggest how the volunteers continuously negotiate their motivations and roles in order to meet the expectations that exist to their voluntary engagement, even at times where this may challenge their own personal values and beliefs. Over time, separating the role of the private-self and the voluntary-self can become increasingly difficult, raising questions about whether true neutrality and altruism *actually* are achievable goals in voluntary work with stigmatised groups. For the visitors who have remained committed to their role, it appears that the voluntary activity becomes transformative, rather than merely performative. Through a process that appears to give as much as it takes, the volunteers challenge their own prejudices and preconceptions, resulting in a change in how they view themselves, the legal system, and the prisoner – all through their meeting with a person, not a crime.

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1 Introduction

In June 2024, in a wooded area in eastern Norway, a man in his 50s was attacked by five young boys in balaclavas. The man had been chatting on social media with what he believed to be an underage girl and had now entered the woods expecting to meet her. Instead, he was ambushed and stabbed repeatedly in the neck and hands, in a case that has been classified as attempted murder. The incident was filmed and shared on social media by the attackers who, as the video quickly spread, received support and applause from members of the public. According to the police, this was not an isolated incident, but part of a growing national trend. The news-headline read: 'Violent trend reaches Norway: Youth call themselves 'pedo-hunters'' (NTB Nyheter, 2024; Øksnes et al., 2024).

The emergence of vigilante groups that take the law into their own hands by identifying, exposing and confronting persons who are accused or sentenced of sex crimes is not a new phenomenon (Lomell, 2020). However, the existence of these groups and the public support they receive, highlights the moral outrage that society feel towards this category of crime and those who commit it. Arguably, there are few crimes that evoke as strong reactions in society as sex crimes does. The persons committing them are viewed not only as criminals, but as moral monsters who fall outside the boundaries of redemption (Kruse and Skilbrei, 2024). Here, the moral outrage is so deeply embedded in public discourse that, for many, persons sentenced for sex crimes represent a group of people that they would prefer to completely avoid engaging with (Lowe and Willis, 2020). In this context, the idea of voluntarily entering prisons to engage in conversations with this group of prisoners, with the aim of reducing isolation and in turn improving their prison experience through socialisation, may seem unthinkable.

The volunteers in the Red Cross Visitor Service, however, choose to do exactly that. The visitors do not differentiate between types of crimes and are to be equally motivated to meet all types of prisoners. They visit a person in prison every one to two weeks, spending an hour in an one-on-one conversation. They are not paid to be there, nor are they there as a professional who aims to treat or 'fix' the prisoner. Rather, they are simply there to talk. As neutral, impartial, and humane representatives of society, their aim is to reduce loneliness and promote social interaction for prisoners (Norwegian Red Cross, 2016). Despite how a considerable number of

members of society are not accepting of people sentenced for sex crimes living in their community, let alone voluntarily choose to have regular contact with them (Kerr et al., 2018), there is yet a small number of community members who actively chooses to volunteer with this group of persons (Wu et al., 2023). The motivation behind such engagement, however, may for some be difficult to understand.

1.1 Research Aim and Questions

This thesis seeks to explore voluntary work with persons sentenced for sex crimes within Norwegian prisons. Of particular interest is the voluntary motivation, their understanding and managing of their role, as well as their experiences of participating in such an activity. Data from interviews with volunteers from the Norwegian Red Cross Visitor Service who has experienced visiting a prisoner sentenced for sex crimes, and their own reflections of the voluntary activity they have carried out with this group of prisoners, will aim to enlighten this phenomenon through the following two research questions:

1. What is the motivation behind voluntary work with prisoners sentenced for sex crimes?
2. How do volunteers experience and manage their role when working with prisoners sentenced for sex crimes?

These research questions aim to enlighten an area of research which arguably is underdeveloped, but highly relevant. While there is existing research on voluntary work and voluntary motivation (Clary et al., 1998; Gilliam et al., 2021), on volunteering with persons who have previously been sentenced for sex crimes (Höing et al., 2016a; Kerr et al., 2018), and on voluntary work within prison settings (Lowe et al., 2019; Wu et al., 2023; Wurtuele, 2021), there remains a notable gap in research specifically examining prison-based volunteer work with persons sentenced for sex crimes, particularly within a Norwegian context. Through the presented research questions, this thesis therefore hopes to contribute to furthering the understanding of this important form of voluntary engagement and the volunteers who choose to participate in it.

1.2 Defining Key Terms

The term **'visitor'** refers to a volunteer within the Norwegian Red Cross Visitor Service who participates in one-on-one visits with prisoners. While the activity has been referred to as the 'prison visitor service', and the volunteers as 'prison visitors', this thesis adopts the terms 'visitor' and 'Visitor service' for consistency and alignment with the terminology that is used in the Norwegian Red Cross.

The term **'sex crimes'** is used throughout this thesis to describe the category of crime that is defined in chapter 26 of the Norwegian Penal Code. Here, a range of acts that violate an individual's sexual autonomy and integrity is encompassed. Despite how these crimes vary significantly in terms of severity and nature, this thesis makes no further distinction within the category, as all forms of sex crimes defined by law were considered relevant to this study. However, I acknowledge the variety of criminal actions that are included within this category, and recognise both the diversity within it and the possibly problematic aspects of gathering all these underneath a singular umbrella-term.

The term **'person sentenced for sex crime'** is used throughout the thesis in order to use person-centred language. This decision is informed by a body of research highlighting the stigmatising effects of labels and language (see, for example, Lowe and Willis, 2020). Rather than using terms such as 'sex offender', which can be argued to be a label that reduces the person to being just their criminal action and possibly reinforcing societal prejudice against them, person-centred language rather emphasises the individual beyond their crime. This aligns with a more ethically conscious approach to research.

Contradictory to this, this thesis has still chosen to use the term **'prisoner',** rather than person-centred language such as 'person in prison', when referring to the persons the visitors meet with. While acknowledging the importance of person-centred language, the term refers specifically to the persons legal and institutional status and is therefore used for clarity and consistency in the context of this thesis. While not intending to reduce the persons whole identity to being imprisoned, it rather highlights how the person the visitor meet with is in prison *right now,* which is an important aspect of the Visitor Service. Arguably, 'prisoner' functions as a more temporary label as it is tied to the persons current situation, whereas for example 'sex offender' operates as a more permanent social label and is more likely to follow the person back

into society. Regardless, this choice is made with recognition of, and respect to, how language have an important role in shaping perceptions.

1.3 Thesis Structure

The thesis consists of eight chapters. This first chapter, **Chapter 1**, has introduced the thesis topic, outlined the research questions, and presented the overall aim of the study.

Chapter 2 provides the background and contextual foundation of the thesis. It explores the development of sex crimes as a legal and social category within Norwegian society, followed by an overview of the challenges persons sentenced for such crime faces both during and after their time in prison. The chapter continues by introducing the Norwegian Red Cross's Visitor Service and reflects on relevant research on voluntary work. This includes an introduction to Clary and Snyder's Voluntary Functions Inventory (VFI) and other existing studies on voluntary work both within a prison setting and with persons who have previously been sentenced for sex crimes.

Chapter 3 presents the theoretical frameworks that will be used to inform the analysis. The chapter begins with Erving Goffman's dramaturgical framework, which is suitable to explore how volunteers manage their role and interactions during one-on-one conversations with persons sentenced for sex crime. It then introduces Nils Christie's concept of the humanisation of prisoners. This theory provides tools for analysing how volunteers experience the development of their role and motivation through their engagement with persons sentenced for sex crimes. Together, these two frameworks enlighten the social processes at play in the volunteers experiences, while simultaneously leaving room for analysis regarding how this affects their motivation, role and experiences.

Chapter 4 presents the methodological approach of the study. It details the choices behind the conducted qualitative interviews, describes how the data has been collected and processed, and explains how it was further analysed through a thematic analysis. The chapter concludes by reflecting on data quality and key ethical considerations.

Chapter 5, 6, and 7 are the three chapters of the thesis where the empirical findings are presented and analysed. **Chapter 5** examines the motivations behind volunteering in the Visitor Service.

It discusses initial altruistic and justice-based motivations, explores how these evolve over time and with different groups, and introduces the tension between altruistic and egoistic motivation. **Chapter 6** uses Goffman's dramaturgical framework to analyse how volunteers perceive and manage their roles according to the expectations of the Red Cross, while focusing on the frontstage and backstage dynamics of their meetings with prisoners. **Chapter 7** explores how, through their interaction with persons sentenced for sex crimes and in light of Christies theory of humanising offenders, the visitors experience a shift in stereotypes and preconceptions towards both the prisoner and the justice system.

Chapter 8 brings together the findings from the previous chapters and discusses them in relation to broader themes such as societal narratives, role conflict, and the negotiation of boundaries in voluntary work. The chapter concludes the thesis by reflecting on the research questions and suggesting areas for future research.

2 Background and Literature

Before one can understand the voluntary activity that is explored in this thesis, there are three main areas that needs to be explained: sex crimes and its development in Norwegian society, The Red Cross and its Visitor Service, and voluntary work both inside and outside prison. Together, these three themes paint a picture as of *why* researching voluntary motivation and voluntary role in meetings with prisoners sentenced for sex crimes is both relevant and important.

2.1 Sex Crimes and Society

Norway, alongside the other Nordic countries, has gained a reputation where their prison conditions and penal practices are frequently described as 'exceptional' (Pratt, 2008). The intention of a prison sentence is solely to restrict the persons liberty, not to remove any other fundamental human rights (Norwegian Ministry of Justice and the Police, 2008). There is a low rate of recidivism, and the inhabitants feel safe in society. But, there has been apparent changes within the Norwegian criminal landscape. And one of these changes is the noticeable development in sex crimes.

In recent years, there has been an evident increase in the cases of sex crimes reported to the Norwegian police and prosecution authority. In 2010, there was 3311 reported cases. This number steadily raised until its peak in 2018 at 8386 cases, before slightly decreasing to 7484 cases in 2023 (SSB, 2024). 36% of women and 11% men report to have been victims of sexual assault, while 1 of 5 girls and 1 of 14 boys have experienced sexual assault before turning 18 (Reneflot et al., 2020). Whether one attributes this development to an increase in larger-scale cases of internet crime involving multiple young victims (Dyrstad and Stene, 2022) or to developments in penal policies such as how the implementation of the new Penal Code of 2005 came into force in 2015 (Sandbukt, 2022; Grøndahl et al., 2021), this trend is both evident and worrying for the Norwegian prison system, health care system, and population in general (Sandbukt, 2022).

The rise in reported cases of sex crimes is mirrored within the Norwegian prison system. As of March 2025, 23.5% of the prison population were imprisoned for sex crimes (KDI, 2025). Consequently, making this group the largest category of prisoners at almost a quarter of the prison population. Notably, this is not only due to a higher number of reported cases. The societal shift

in focus on sex crimes can also be seen in changes to how sentencing is being carried out (Sandbukt, 2022), as the average prison sentence for sex crimes rose from 606 days in 2010 to 867 days in 2019 (Grøndahl et al., 2021). Furthermore, while the use of alternative forms of carrying out prison sentences such as electronic monitoring or home detention has expanded, persons sentenced for sex crimes have traditionally been excluded from these possibilities. Although current policies are under review, this has been a contributing factor to the high numbers of prisoners in Norwegian prisons who are serving a sentence for sex crimes (Grøndahl et al., 2021; Sandbukt, 2022).

2.1.1 Particularities with time in prison and rehabilitation

Almost paradoxically, persons sentenced for sex crimes are among those who can face the most challenging prison-experience. In Norway, based on the rationale of inclusion and normality, there are no prisons designated solely for persons sentenced for sex crimes and only a small number of prisons have dedicated units with specialised programs for this group (Sandbukt, 2019). As a result, they typically serve their sentence alongside the general prison population. However, research has shown that their relationships with fellow prisoners and with prison staff tends to be strained, and persons in prison for sex crimes report difficulties in gaining and maintaining meaningful relationships. Ultimately, they evaluate their relationship with fellow prisoners more negatively than persons sentenced for other types of crime does (van den Berg et al., 2018). As the prison culture separates between the defendable crimes of ‘proper criminals’ and the immoral crimes done by ‘rapist monster’, persons sentenced for sex crimes are placed at their designated position at the bottom of the prison hierarchy (Ugelvik, 2020). Consequently, this may leave them with the choice of isolating themselves or being frozen out, mutually resulting in them being removed from the everyday interactions on the prison wing.

Persons sentenced for sex crimes are also generally less positive about the support they receive from, and their relationship with, prison staff (van den Berg, et al., 2018). Prison staff, compared with forensic staff and the general public, held the most negative attitudes towards prisoners sentenced for sex crimes (Higgins and Ireland, 2009), and prison officers in high-security prisons hold more negative views towards this group than the rest of the prison employees does (Kjelsberg and Loose, 2008).

An important pillar in the Norwegian prison system is how the loss of liberty is the punishment itself. Within this view, individuals are considered to have ‘paid their debt’ upon completing

their prison sentence and should be supported in their reintegration back into society (Pratt, 2008). However, the abovementioned factors suggest that following a challenging time in prison, this process can be more complex for persons who have been sentenced for sex crimes (Sandbukt, 2022). Although Norway may have fewer systematic hindrances to reintegration compared to other countries, Sandbukt (2023) argues that persons with a history of sex crimes continue to face significant social stigma, also after their release from prison. This stigma is often reintroduced through processes of 'othering' and exclusion from social communities, making reintegration particularly challenging for this group.

2.1.2 Sex crimes in the media

One arena where stigma can be reinforced is the media. The media can for many function as their primary source of information, and consequently carries the ability to influence how the public perceive sex crimes and the persons who commit them (Lowe and Willis, 2020). Much research suggests how media coverage tends to portray those sentenced for sex crimes as untreatable and dangerous 'monsters' (Höing et al., 2016a; 2016b; Gilliam et al., 2021; Grøndahl et al., 2021). These portrayals focus on extreme cases that are selectively presented without expert opinions or information about the possibilities or effectiveness of treatment. As a result, sex crimes can become sensationalised. This creates an inaccurate representation of both the crimes and the persons behind them and ultimately contributing to harmful stereotypes and biased public awareness (Kruse and Skilbrei, 2024).

Interestingly, when Grøndahl (et al., 2021) examined a sample of Norwegian newspapers coverage of sex crimes, they found that overly negative or demonising portrayals were relatively rare. While the newspapers generally did not express empathy for the person who committed the crime or focused on possible solutions, they also rarely used identifying details or stereotypical narratives to expose them. Despite how this suggests that Norwegian newspapers may be primarily problem-oriented rather than solution-oriented, it also suggests how they are notably less sensationalistic and demonising than what is often observed in international press (Grøndahl et al., 2021). However, this does not mean that examples of demonising narratives are unheard of in Norwegian media. Sandbukt (2023) exemplifies this through how the then-Minister of Justice, Sylvi Listhaug, in 2018 publicly declared how all child molesters are monsters (NRK, 2018 in Sandbukt, 2023), a statement that received much support, particularly on social media platforms. As traditional media in Norway is bound by strict ethical guidelines

that discourage identification or stigmatisation of the individuals involved in sensitive criminal cases (Norwegian Press Association, 2021), it can therefore be suggested that the more openly stigmatising and demonising discourse can take place primarily on social media, where regulations are less consistent and public opinion may be more visible.

This can be exemplified through vigilante groups, such as the 'pedo-hunters' and 'nabovarsel' (directly translated to 'neighbourhood-warning'), who use social media as a platform to publicly expose persons accused of or sentenced for sex crimes. In some instances, sponsored by donations from their followers, members of these groups have even travelled across the country to physically locate and publicly shame these persons (NRK, 2021). These initiatives are framed as 'efforts to protect society' and aim to push for legislative changes such as establishing a public registry for persons sentenced for sex crimes. Although these kinds of registries breach with the Norwegian view of punishment solely being the removal of liberty, and rather leads to a sentence that will follow the person back into society, a survey from 2017 found how 7 out of 10 Norwegians wanted a public registry for persons sentenced for sex crimes against children (NRK, 2017). In the absence of such registries, it appears that these initiatives functions as a way for such groups to attempt to reinforce their own version of justice. As stated on the 'Nabovarsel' website: 'We believe that the work that we do, is the state's responsibility, not ours! However, until the state takes on the responsibility that belongs to them, we will continue our work' (Nabovarsel, 2025). What one can gather from the support behind such initiatives, is the reality that 'even' in Norway, there are highly stigmatised views on persons sentenced for sex crimes.

These kinds of initiatives are likely to stem from a fear that the person returning to society after serving a sentence for sex crimes will reoffend. However, research shows that this group has one of the lowest rates of recidivism (Wurtuele, 2021). A Scandinavian study found no recorded instances of reoffending within two years following release from prison for this group (Graunbøl et al., 2010). Similarly, a Norwegian study reported that only 3.4% of persons released from a sex crime sentence were convicted of a new sex crime within six years of release (Sandbukt et al., 2020). These findings challenge the common perception that persons sentenced for sex crimes pose an elevated and constant risk to society.

Evidently, sex crimes and the persons who commit them, represents a significant and sensitive concern in society. Having explored the social attitudes and structural challenges this groups

faces, this thesis will now introduce and explore those who contributes in responding to these issues through voluntary engagement. One such actor, is the Red Cross.

2.2 The Red Cross and the Visitor Service

The Red Cross, founded in 1863 by Henri Dunant (1828-1910), is an internationally recognised organisation known for its commitment to humanitarian aid. At the heart of the Movement's activities are its seven fundamental principles: humanity, impartiality, neutrality, independence, unity, universality, and voluntary service (ICRC, 2025). All Red Cross activities are based on these principles. One of these activities, is the Visitor Service.

A visitor is a volunteer within the Red Cross Visitor Service who visits Norwegian prisons and prisoners. The initiative began in 1960 when a group of 25 volunteers entered Oslo Prison for the first time. Since then, the activity has maintained its central aim of reducing isolation and providing prisoners with a neutral and non-judgemental conversation partner. Now, the activity is one of the oldest within the Norwegian Red Cross and has continuously expanded over the years. The activity aims to have active volunteers in every Norwegian prison (Norwegian Red Cross, 2020), and as of 2024, approximately 500 volunteers were registered as visitors (Norwegian Red Cross, unpublished). 37% of the visitors are men, while 61% are women (Røde Kors, unpublished). The mean age of active volunteers is 57 years old, and only 15% of the visitors are under 40 years old. Instead, 51% are aged 60 or older.

While the Visitor Service also arrange events inside the prisons, such as Christmas-parties or BBQs in the summer, the core of the visitor mandate is the confidential one-on-one conversation. On the prisoners' own request, they are paired with a volunteer from the local Red Cross branch[1] who typically comes to visit for an hour once every two weeks. Although there are no formal requirements for a prisoner to 'qualify' for a visitor, the activity aim to prioritise those who are especially isolated. This could be first-time prisoners, young adults, persons in preventative detention or pre-trial custody, prisoners struggling with mental health issues, and foreign nationals (Norwegian Red Cross, 2020). While not explicitly named in the Red Cross's strategy, it may on the basis of the aforementioned literature review be reasonably assumed that persons sentenced for sex crimes also can be encompassed in this category. Visitors are only in one pairing at the time, and the relation continues until either party chooses to end it or until the

prisoner is released or transferred to a different prison. Importantly, the Red Cross does not allow continued contact after the pairing ends (Norwegian Red Cross, 2005).

The Visitor Service is a cooperation between the Red Cross and the Norwegian Correctional Service, regulated through formal agreements on both national and local levels. This lays the groundwork for the trust the Visitor Service receive, and the unique access they have to one of societies most closed off arenas. Due to the sensitivity of the service, there are more requirements to a person who wants to become a visitor, than for many other voluntary activities. A visitor must be at least 25 years old and have no criminal record. They undergo an interview conducted by the local Red Cross team, ideally with a representative from the prison present, to assess their motivation and suitability for the role. The applicants who 'pass' their interviews have to participate in a general orientation of the Red Cross, first-aid and psychosocial first-aid training, as well as a 15-hour 'visitor-course' that consists of lectures, case studies, and discussions. After the applicant has completed training, they must apply to be approved within prison that they are going to visit, and sign strict ethics and confidentiality agreements to both the Red Cross and the correctional service (Norwegian Red Cross, 2005). Then, after this process is completed, all they must do is wait for their first pairing to be made.

Visitors are not supposed to actively change or 'save' the prisoner, nor are they voluntary therapists. Rather, the foundation of the service is an hour of socialisation for the persons who may otherwise experience isolation. Therefore, in addition to confidentiality, the visitors commitment to neutrality and impartiality are some of the most essential principles in the visitor-prisoner relationship. This is reflected in how the visitors are unable to choose what categories of crime they want to visit. They are expected to meet all persons equally and respectfully, regardless of what they are imprisoned for. Before the first meeting, the visitor is informed of the prisoner's name, while the prisoner is told the visitor's gender. Beyond that, it is up to the pair to navigate their conversations and decide what to share. The visitor, however, visits the prison as a representative for the Red Cross, not their private self, and should keep this in mind during their conversations (Norwegian Red Cross, 2005).

2.3 Voluntary Engagement

The Red Cross may be seen as one of the most prominent and well-known voluntary organisations. And, in Norway, there is a longstanding tradition of contributing voluntarily to society. From the Norwegian 'dugnad' to more organised voluntary activities, Norwegians gladly come together to support one another, not for financial gain or obligation, but out of a shared sense of responsibility and community. Volunteerism is an intentional and active process, in which persons seek out opportunities to contribute to their communities, resulting in mutual benefits for both the volunteers and the community alike (Lowe et al., 2019). It is estimated that 69% of Norwegians are members of one or more voluntary organisations, 64% have engaged in voluntary activities, and 52% have donated money to voluntary organisation within the past year (Frivillighet Norge, 2024). However, not all forms of volunteerism gain an equal amount of support or motivation, and the general public may separate between volunteering for the gain of their local community and volunteering with stigmatised persons, such as prisoners or persons sentenced for sex crimes. In order to look at what motivates voluntary engagement, it is interesting to explore research voluntary motivation.

2.3.1 Voluntary Motivation

Much research aiming to understand voluntary motivation has utilised Clary and Snyder's (1999; Clary et al., 1998) functional analysis approach. This approach, the Voluntary Functions Inventory (VFI), is a perspective that looks at the personal and social processes that both initiate and sustain motivation (Clary and Snyder, 1999). The VFI is an instrument that can assess the six functions that Clary (et al., 1998) hypothesised to be served by volunteerism (Clary et al., 1998; Clary and Snyder, 1999). These motivations are 'career', where a person can obtain career-related experience and improve job prospects by volunteering. 'Enhancement', where a person can increase their self-esteem and psychological growth through volunteering. 'Protective', where volunteering can be used to reduce negative feelings or address personal problems. 'Social', which improves the volunteers personal social relationships. 'Understanding' how volunteers gain new learning experiences and/or utilise unused skills through volunteering, and 'Values' how a person wants to express altruistic and humanitarian concern for others (Clary et al., 1998; Clary and Snyder, 1999; Gilliam et al., 2021).

The core proposition of a functional analysis of volunteerism is that the act of volunteering, which might appear to be one-dimensional on the surface, in reality reflects different underlying motivational processes (Clary et al., 1998). Clary and Snyder (1999) argue for how there is no

singular motivation to volunteer, rather people choose to volunteer in order to fulfil multiple needs or motives. In this sense, one action can be done and performed in the same way but ultimately serve different psychological functions. This also means that voluntary motivation, and the reason people choose to volunteer, is likely to be multifaceted. Thus, it is important to consider how a wide range of personal and societal motivations can influence and motivate voluntary work.

Clay and Snyder's (1999) assumption is however predicated on being able to identify and, with some degree of precision, measure the motivations underlying volunteer work. However, this has been critiqued for over-simplifying motivation, with scholars such as Hustinx (et al., 2010) claiming how motivation rather is fluid, and that rigid classification is problematic, ultimately leaving the six distinct functions to be insufficient. Whereas Wilson (2012) critique the inventory for focusing too much on individual motivation and thereby neglecting the structural and social factors that shape volunteer engagement, Musick and Wilson (2008) critiqued the VFI for not taking into account the cultural and organisational factors that influence motivations, and therefore ultimately a lack of contextual sensitivity.

In light of Musick and Wilsons (2008) critique, it can be valuable to briefly contextualise the VFI, which was originally developed in the United States, to the Norwegian context of this thesis, as the two countries differs in societal structure and values. A Norwegian study which applied elements of the VFI to assess the motivations of search-and-rescue volunteers demonstrates how the VFI can be contextualised within the Norwegian cultural and social framework. The study highlights the importance of trust and community engagement in voluntary motivation, while suggesting how there is a potential need to consider contextual motivational factors, such as trust and social values, when seeing voluntary work in Norway through the VFI. In light of this, when looking at voluntary work within a prison setting, one needs to consider how Norway is a country with social-democratic values and a strong sense of civic duty and social cohesion. Volunteering in Norway can therefore be linked to community welfare and egalitarian values, where one may expect less emphasis of the functions of 'career' and 'enhancement', and rather more on the 'values' and 'social' functions. Secondly, as Norway is known for its strong welfare state, there may be less need for volunteerism to fill institutional gaps that rather are complementary to public systems. Norwegian volunteers may therefore be driven more so of ideological alignment and community solidarity, rather than out of necessity or institutional insufficiency. Therefore, the VFI functions of 'values', 'social engagement' and 'ideological

commitment', may be more present. Lastly, the Norwegian correctional service' focus on rehabilitation and humanity over punishment can align with the values of 'values', 'understanding', and 'enhancement', more so than 'protective' or 'career', which is imaginable to be prominent within the context of The United States.

2.3.2 Voluntary Work and Prisons

Despite how the Red Cross Visitor Service has been active for 65 years, very little research is conducted on the way in which the activity operates. From what I have found, there are four previously written master theses who has explored the relationship between visitor and prisoner: Nes (2006), Bjelland (2006), de Brisis (2012) and Bjørkli (2015). While not exclusively looking at engagement or experiences with prisoners sentenced for sex crimes, they highlight a different but complementary dimension to the role the volunteers take on and therefor contribute an important and useful background on the relation between visitor and prisoner.

Nes (2006) focused on how volunteers form a sense of community and identity through their voluntary participation, despite experiencing relatively weak interpersonal ties with other visitors and the organisation. Their thesis states how the visitors develop a strong sense of commitment and internalise the service's guidelines as part of their identity, while they emphasise how adhering to the rules of their role is key to being a professional visitor. Bjelland (2006) explores the dynamics of the prisoner-visitor relationship, showing how both parties experience the interaction as humanising. Engaging in conversations about everyday topics help prisoners feel seen as 'normal' individuals, while the structured yet personal nature of their relationship allows both the prisoner and the visitor to experience mutual dignity and respect. De Brisis (2012) emphasises how the nature of the prisoner-visitor relation is co-constructed, as both parties influence the content and the tone of the visits. While volunteers aim to balance professionalism and empathy, they may struggle with the emotional demands of their role. They describe the visitors as 'professional fellow humans' [*profesjonelle medmennesker*], who contributes to the prisoners' well-being by reducing isolation. Bjørkli (2015) highlights how the importance of neutrality for the visitors, and how in some cases, the visitor becomes a significant person in the prisoner's life. The visitors are motivated by how they can become meaningful for another person but can also struggle to find the balance between being a professional Red Cross representative, while still not becoming the prisoner's friend. This is particularly evident for visitors who visit the same prisoner over a long period of time.

Despite how research on the Red Cross Visitor Service is limited, there is an existing body of research on voluntary work aimed at persons sentenced for sex crimes. Notably, largely focused on the work of Circles of Support and Accountability (CoSA). CoSA is an initiative where volunteers, guided and accompanied by professionals, form a 'circle' around someone who have been sentenced for a sex crime. The goal is to support their reintegration into society and reduce the risk of reoffending, with their motto being 'no more victims' (Friestad and Sandbukt, 2024). The role of a CoSA volunteer differs from that of a Red Cross visitor. Where the visitor is solely aiming to be a neutral conversation partner, the CoSA volunteers take on a more active role as agents of change, working to encourage desistance and promote accountability. Despite these differences, the insight one can gain from the research on CoSA volunteers and their motivations, role, and experiences, can still offer valuable perspectives when aiming to understand the visitors and their engagement with persons sentenced for sex crimes.

When researching CoSA, Gilliam (et al., 2021) emphasised the positive benefits of this type of voluntary engagement, such as personal satisfaction and development of social skills. This study is however consisting of self-reported perceptions and can therefore be overlooking negative outcomes such as stress or social alienation, which are issues that Höing (et al., 2016a) raises in their study. They present a comprehensive evaluation of CoSA volunteering that argues for how, while volunteering promotes personal growth and civic engagement, there is also a significant emotional burden present. These potential challenges are not emphasised in Gilliam (et al., 2021), which may make their analysis less balanced. Höing (et al., 2016a) instead identifies moderating variables such as individuals personality traits and organisational support in order to highlight how voluntary outcomes are not uniform, but rather relying on contextual and individual factors.

While Höing (et al., 2016a) and Gilliam (et al., 2021) focuses on the internal voluntary experiences, Lowe and Willis (2020) shift the attention to public perceptions and willingness to volunteer with this group of prisoners. They found how labelling language such as 'sex offenders' has a significant negative impact on recruitment and willingness to volunteer with this group. As they found clear differences in willingness to volunteer with different crimes, this highlight the power of discourse and stigma in shaping public opinion, and how this again is connected to voluntary engagement. This is exemplified by how it was reported more willingness to work with 'murderers' than 'sex offenders', due to how this can be seen as a 'one-off thing' (p.603).

This ultimately suggests how the perception of a crime is central to a participants willingness, or unwillingness, to volunteer with the persons behind it.

Kerr (et al., 2018) found how volunteers, compared to a sample of the general public, hold more positive attitudes to the group of persons sentences for sex crimes and their rehabilitation. They pose the question of how, contrary to previous research, more positive attitudes may be associated with more *positive* contact with persons sentenced for sex crimes, rather than more contact with this group in general. Lowe and Willis (2020) aligns with this, but also questions if the findings of how volunteers are more accepting of sex crimes is rather connected to how the volunteers who are willing to volunteer with this group, already are predisposed to more progressive views rather than solely being shaped by their engagement.

A critical consensus across the studies, however, is how volunteer selection, training and supervision is pivotal. As there are persistent negative attitudes to persons sentenced for sex crimes and their rehabilitation, Kerr (et al., 2018) highlights the importance of engaging the *right* volunteers in this type of activity. These are persons who preferably do not share these kind of public attitudes. This is important as social support has been identified as a key factor for reducing risk of reoffending and promoting desistance for the persons who receive it (Lowe et al., 2019) As volunteer programmes within prisons have the ability to improve the psychological health of the prisoners by reducing social isolation (Wu et al., 2023), this indicates how relationships between prisoners and volunteers can be valuable as it facilitates a different emotional connection than that of prison staff (Tomczak and Albertson, 2016). Thus, the voluntary organisation can, in a sense, become ‘mediators’ between the criminal justice system and the community (Kerr et al., 2018), providing positive relations instead of social rejection. At the same time, voluntary organisations must be aware of the emotional risks involved when recruiting and using volunteers in voluntary work with persons sentenced for sex crimes, and provide sufficient training and support throughout the activity.

3 Theoretical Framework

To understand why voluntary activity for some works as a societal response to criminal behaviour, one needs to understand the meanings that is assigned to actions and identities. In this thesis, the theoretical frameworks that underpin the analysis of voluntary motivation, role, and experiences, namely Goffman's dramaturgical framework and Christie's humanising of offenders, is rooted in interpretivist approaches to social life through symbolic interactionism and social constructionism.

3.1 Goffman's dramaturgical framework

Symbolic interactionism is a sociological perspective that focuses on the ways in which interaction is used to create and interpret the meanings of the world (Scott, 2017). Through personal encounters between the social actor and the meaning they attach to their behaviour, both 'society' and individual identity emerge from everyday interactions. Symbolic interactionism is influenced by thinkers such as George Herbert Mead (1934 in Scott, 2017) and Herbert Blumer (1969 in Scott, 2017), who argue for how reality is not objectively given, but rather actively constructed through social processes. Persons adopt roles, and thereby form and negotiate their identities in social settings, which ultimately allows us to understand how people act towards others based on the meanings those actions have, but also by how these meanings are shaped and reshaped through interaction (Scott, 2017).

The sociologist Erving Goffman (1956), also a symbolic interactionist, gave his attention to theories regarding human social life. Based on how he observed the self to be performed and presented to others in everyday situations, he constructed a dramaturgical, analogy (Bullingham and Vasconcelos, 2013). Presented in the 1956 book 'The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life', Goffman depicted the similarities between people socialising and a theatre play, ultimately introducing the idea that social interaction can be compared to a staged performance. Goffman saw people like actors, who play and portray different roles and presents different characters depending on the audiences they encounter. Therefore, he also utilised terminology borrowed from the theatre to analyse these social situations (Aakvaag, 2008; Brisman et al., 2017). Individuals 'perform' and 'act' for each other on a 'stage', aiming to portray a specifically intended impression to the 'audience' (Aakvaag, 2008).

Goffman's dramaturgical analogy uses the terms 'frontstage' and 'backstage' to control the access the audience members have to the actors. For the actor, there is a clear difference between their appearance in the frontstage and in the backstage. Therefore, in order to understand what happens in frontstage, one needs to understand what happens in the backstage (Khan, 2020). The setting of the frontstage is where the public appearance occurs. Here, the actor is aware of how they are observed by an audience and will therefore aim to perform in accordance with what is expected of their act. If they fail to appear in accordance to these expectations and consequently fail to portray the intended persona, the actor will lose face. Ultimately, resulting in embarrassment (Bullingham and Vasconcelos, 2013). In the backstage however, which is the only space where the actor is free to separate themselves from their character and its act, no performance is necessary (Goffman, 1956). Therefore, when entering this space, the actor's behaviour and demeanour will be different. By having the majority of one's interactions take place in the frontstage, Goffman argues for how one can carefully design how one is presented to others through impression management (Brisman et al., 2017).

Inconsistencies can however occur between the impression the actor aims to portray on the frontstage, and the impressions that exists in the arena of the backstage. Goffman argues for how an actor have both the expression that they aim to *give*, and the impressions they subconsciously *give off* (Goffman, 1956). The impressions produced in the backstage area, which the actor attempt to hide from the audience, can unintentionally shine through the frontstage area and be communicated, nonetheless. Here, the impression the actor aims to present may in other words rather be undermined by the ones they try to supress.

As a preventative measure, the actor can instead utilise facework in face-to-face interaction as a way to adjust and control what aspects of themselves they present on the frontstage (Bullingham and Vasconcelos, 2013). Developed in his later work 'Interaction Ritual: Essays on Face-to-Face behavior' (Goffman, 1967), facework is presented as strategies used to maintain the positive social value a person has claimed for themselves during their act. This is also referred to as their 'face' or a 'mask'. Facework operates within the frontstage-backstage dynamic of the dramaturgical framework. Here, individuals in the frontstage work hard to maintain their face during social performances and use facework to ensure the interaction and their act aligns with societal expectations. While, in the backstage, individuals process or recover from threats to their portrayed face, preparing strategies to manage future performances (Goffman, 1967).

Goffman's dramaturgical framework has however not been without criticism. Critics, such as Habermas (1987), argues for how the framework overemphasises the idea that persons are always performing and managing impressions. Instead, they argue that it reduces human interaction into strategic manipulation, and ignores the possibility of genuine communication based on mutual understanding (Habermas, 1987). In addition to this, scholars have argued for how the distinction between the frontstage and the backstage is presented too simplistic, with Schutz (1967) suggesting that in real life, these boundaries are instead fluid, and people mix elements from both frontstage and backstage in their daily interactions.

In this thesis, this theoretical contribution will be used as a framework to analyse the performance the volunteers step into through their role as Red Cross visitors. The prison visiting room becomes the stage, where the volunteer has to manage their performance and face in order to align with the expectations of the Red Cross: neutral and impartial. It aims to explore how conversations of sensitive nature are managed in the backstage, and how the performance is carefully structured in order to make sure that the actors do not break face in their meetings with persons sentenced for sex crimes. This could ultimately compromise the act they are expected to perform in the frontstage of their act.

3.2 Christie and the Transformative power of personal relations

'Crime does not exist. Only acts exist, acts often given different meanings within various social frameworks' (Christie, 2004: 3). Here, Nils Christie highlights the essence of social constructionism, which emphasises the ways in which knowledge is produced through social processes rather than existing as objective truths. Persons assign meaning to the world around them through social interaction and by this process, social phenomena is accepted as reality (Best and Snyder, 2017). The work of Berger and Luckmann (1966 in Best and Snyder, 2017) presents the foundation for this approach, arguing that much of what we perceive as 'real' is rather made through institutional practices and language. Crime is argued to be constructed, where specific behaviour has been made criminal rather than being inherently a crime. From this perspective, crime is not only the violation of legal norms but a label that is applied through social and political processes. The creation of a 'criminal' is shaped by cultural narrative and moral judgment and is deeply embedded in society (Best and Snyder, 2017).

Although not presented in one singular theory, many of the Norwegian sociologist and criminologist Nils Christie's (1928-2015) contributions are of value when exploring voluntary work

with prisoners sentenced for sex crimes. In his book, 'A Suitable Amount of Crime' (2004), Christie explores the social construction of crime and the ways in which different societal narratives shape attitudes towards crime and criminals. He argues for how some groups in society can become disproportionately stigmatised from social attitudes, institutions, and media representation, through dehumanising labels such as 'criminals', manufactured in order to maintain a 'suitable' level of crime.

In his book 'Crime Control as Industry' (1994) Christie argues for how the criminal justice system thrives on the mass production of criminals. The group of people who are constructed as 'the dangerous criminal' (Christie, 1994), are turned into a distinct and demonised group. Here, they are viewed as fundamentally different from the rest of society and thereby further distanced from it. By branding criminals as 'monsters', society can consequently alienate them and further justify a punitive response to crime over a restorative one. This is based on how the prisoners' humanity, alongside the sense that they are deserving of moral and legal rights, are removed (Wurtuele, 2021).

As a critique to the depersonalisation of criminals, Christie (2007) emphasises how societies with a more relational approach to crime tend to handle people who offend with greater empathy. As opposed to the dangerous and estranged criminal in a professionalised legal structure, there is instead a process of humanisation of offenders. Christie suggests how the more removed individuals are from direct interaction with those who are labelled as criminals, the more likely people are to accept and adapt to a punitive stance. Rather, through personal encounters, justice should be about dialogue and personal engagement. In smaller communities, Christie (2007) argues, personal relationships lead to more restorative responses, rather than punitive ones. Here, where crime is seen not as an abstract and threatening entity, but rather as something familiar, the emphasis may be on reconciliation and repairing harm, rather than focusing solely on punishment (Christie, 2004).

Christie depicts this process through the example of 'the man in the park' (Christie, 2004:4). Here, we imagine that there are two separate apartment-buildings who both look down at the same park. The first apartment-building, 'The House of Turbulence', is a close-knit community where all residents are familiar with each other. They have previously worked together as a unity to fix troubles in their turbulent apartment-building, and there is a sense of community. In the other building, 'The House of Perfection', the residents are unfamiliar with one another.

There is not a sense of community, and they have never worked together towards a common goal. One day, there is a man in the park. The man, who is visibly drinking alcohol while being surrounded by the neighbourhoods children, appears to sing and talk to himself. Ultimately, he goes to publicly urinate in the park-bushes. The two apartment-builds react differently. The House of Perfection quickly calls the police. The man is a stranger, and thereby possibly dangerous and threatening. On the other side, the House of Turbulence rather approaches the man themselves. Due to the small community, the man is not scary, he is instead familiar. They know who his family is, how his mum is just a phone call away to come pick him up whenever he drinks too much, and that he, despite often behaving a bit strangely, is a kind man (Christie, 2004).

This example clearly shows how the limited amount of knowledge inside a social system can open for the possibility of giving an act the meaning of crime (Christie, 2004:5), as well as speaking for how the unfamiliar often is perceived as more dangerous than what the familiar is. In 'Limits to pain', Christie (2007) argues for how the less we see of prisoners, the easier it is to make them into monsters. When most people in society never interact with 'the dangerous other', it is easier for stereotypes and fear-based narratives to dominate the public opinion as prisoners becomes abstract figures rather than real people. This makes it easier to justify harsh treatment. Rather, it is shown that the most effective anti-stigma intervention, instead is face-to-face contact with members of the stigmatised group (Wurtuele, 2021). Based on this, Christies theoretical contributions will therefore function as an analytical tool to analyse the face-to-face experiences the visitors stand in, and how this affects their motivation, role and experience when volunteering with persons sentenced for sex crimes.

4 Methods

This chapter is going to introduce, explain, and reflect on the methodological considerations and assumptions that underpins this thesis. It addresses the chosen research method of qualitative interviews, reflects on the recruitment process leading to the finalised sample, and explains the steps taken for data collection. Following this, the preparations for, and conducting, of individual interviews will be reviewed, as well as the analytic process. Lastly, positionality and ethical considerations will be reflected on.

4.1 Choice of Methods

A qualitative approach was at an early stage of this research project identified as the most appropriate method to explore the research questions. The selected methodology represents a logical progression from earlier stages in the design cycle and reflects the broader epistemological and theoretical paradigm underpinning the study (Hennink et al., 2020). In light of how Caulfield and Hill (2014:93) stated how 'we cannot expect to obtain a full picture of the thoughts, experiences, developments, and needs of any group of people without speaking to them directly', qualitative interviews were considered the most suitable method to access the perspectives of volunteers first-hand experience in their meetings with persons sentenced for sex crimes, and hence shed light on the thesis research questions. It creates an opportunity to gain insight into their subjective perceptions, opinions, and lived experiences, which as Peräkylä and Ruusuvuori (2018) argue, are areas of reality that would be inaccessible with other methods. Furthermore, previous studies which explore voluntary perceptions and experiences (e.g., Gilliam et al., 2021; Lowe et al., 2019) have employed qualitative interviews, reinforcing how this is an appropriate method for this project.

4.2 Data Collection

4.2.1 Recruitment process

Given how the research questions focus on the motivations, roles, and experiences of volunteers who have volunteered with persons sentenced for sex crimes, the ideal study population is naturally defined by the research questions itself. Accordingly, the sampling criteria was twofold: first, eligible participants must currently be, or previously have been, involved in delivering volunteer work for the Red Cross within a Norwegian prison. Secondly, they must have experienced that at least one of the persons they have volunteered with are serving a sentence for sex crimes. There is no requirement that the two parts have discussed the crime in detail. Ini-

tially, the inclusion criteria required that the prisoner had told the visitor about their crime directly. However, during the recruitment process, it became clear that some volunteers knew that the person they were visiting was sentenced for sex crimes, without it having been explicitly stated in conversation. Based on this insight, I decided to include these participants in the study as they would still be able to reflect on their role, motivation, and experiences in volunteering with this group. In addition, one participant have not been active in the Visitor Service, but in a similar Red Cross Activity. Here, they also experienced voluntary engagement with a prisoner sentenced for sex crimes. After talking to the person, I was under the impression that their experience was similar enough that they could reflect on their voluntary motivation, role, and experience in a similar manner to how the other visitors could, and this person was therefor included in the sample.

Once the inclusion criteria had been established, the next step was to identify effective strategies for recruiting suitable participants. As the Red Cross does not keep records of which visitor who visit which prisoner, nor of the types of sentences served by the prisoners being visited, I was dependent on spreading information about the project to as many visitors as possible, and request persons who recognised themselves in the criteria to contact me. In other words, the recruitment process depended on the right information reaching the right volunteers.

As part of my master's degree at the University of Oslo, I had previously completed a placement at the Red Cross National Office, working with the Visitor Service. During this period, I collaborated with Red Cross staff at both national and regional levels[1]. The initial part of recruitment aimed at engaging these professionals, who oversee the Visitor Service in their respective regions, as gatekeepers to help facilitate contact with volunteers in the local Red Cross branches. Gatekeepers can act as trusted advocates for the study and contribute to recruitment, as community members tend to be more inclined to join studies endorsed by people in leader-positions (Hennink et al., 2020). My hope was that by having these higher-level officers endorse the project, it would reassure volunteers that partaking in my project would not jeopardize their roles and would, rather, encourage their participation. However, three main challenges appeared with this sampling strategy.

[1] The Visitor Service is structured threefold: on a National level, on a Regional level, and on a Local level. A Red Cross visitor is therefore affiliated with a local branch, which falls under a regional office, all of which operates under the national office

First, my recruitment strategy relied on multiple 'layers' of gatekeepers to establish contact with volunteers in the local branches. After initially reaching out to the national officer, I proceeded to reach out to the regional officers in hopes that they could further connect me with the local branches in their regions to distribute information about my project. However, out of the four regional officers I contacted, only two responded, and only one of them appeared interested in engaging. Although this one regional officer provided significant assistance in recruitment, and the first participants were recruited from this persons efforts, the organisational structure of the Red Cross posed challenges in accessing the target population, as I remained dependent on gatekeepers to facilitate contact with volunteers. Secondly, even when contact with local visitors was established, there was no guarantee that the volunteers I reached met the sampling criteria of having experience with persons sentenced for sex crimes. Some may not have volunteered with prisoners from this group, and some may have been unaware of how they were eligible for participation. As noted, visitors are not initially informed of the criminal action unless the prisoner themselves choose to disclose it. Consequently, some volunteers who were eligible to participate may have been unaware that they met the sampling criteria, simply because the crimes had not been discussed. Lastly, and as previously noted, the visitors have signed strict confidentiality agreements. While participating in this thesis would not compromise their confidentiality, it appeared as if agreeing to participate and thereby confirming how they have been visiting a person sentenced for sex crimes, could raise concerns about breaching confidentiality or unintentionally exposing the person they visit. It was therefore crucial to emphasise how the focus of the study was on the experience and understanding of the volunteer, not the prisoner, while reassuring potential participants that their involvement would not disclose any confidential information.

A breakthrough in the recruitment process occurred when one of the regional officers agreed to distribute an e-mail to the volunteers in their region, both endorsing the project and providing information on how to contact me for those who would be interested in participating. Shortly after, I received a phone call from the first interested volunteer, with a few additional inquiries in the days that followed. I did however need a larger sample. Therefore, by using information available on the Red Cross website, I contacted 22 local branches that indicated they offered the Visitor Service as part of their activities. Of these, 9 agreed to share information about the project with their volunteers. Although the remaining branches did not respond, I am under the impression that some may still have forwarded the e-mail to the local volunteers in their region,

reflecting on the persons who contacted me. I followed up with the non-responding branches two weeks after the initial e-mail.

Gul and Ali (2010) reflect on how recruitment challenges matter most to inexperienced researchers who tend to overestimate the number of avid, easily accessible, and perfectly suitable participants in their study. In many ways, this observation reflects my own experience. While the ideal approach to determining the number of participants is to continue recruitment until you have reached a point of saturation in the interview data (Galletta, 2013), practical constraints such as time and accessibility has also shaped the final sample size of this study.

The finalised sample consists of nine volunteers: Tore, Lise, Rune, Kevin, Solveig, Emilie, Nora, Laila, and Lars. The four men and five women ranged in age from 35 to 80 years old, with a mean age of 56. Only two participants were in their thirties, while the remainder were aged 55 or older. As noted in Chapter 2, the average Red Cross visitor is a 57-year-old woman. Therefore, the finalised sample of this study appears to align with the broader demographic profile of the Red Cross visitor. As it is a small, and purposely chosen sample, it is however not aimed to be generalisable for the whole of the Visitor Service. My impression was that all participants were resourceful and active persons, who appeared to be highly committed to their role as visitors. I found that all participants were eager to engage in conversation surrounding their voluntary engagement, and none of the interviews required me to force discussion. The volunteer with the shortest experience had volunteered for 'only' a couple of years, while others reported over thirty years of continuous engagement. Notably, over half of the sample had been active for more than a decade, which suggest that the sample consisted of volunteers with a strong sense of motivation and satisfaction in their voluntary work.

4.2.2 Conducting the interviews

I conducted one interview with each participant, with durations ranging from 53 to 79 minutes and an average length of 62 minutes. Of the nine interviews, three were conducted in person, while the remaining six took place via voice or video calls. All interviews, whether in-person or through digital platforms, were conducted as synchronised communication. In-person interviews offer the fullest potential for interpersonal contact, context sensitivity, and conversational flexibility (Brinkmann, 2018) and were therefore preferred. However, as Brinkmann (2018) also notes, telephone and internet-mediated interviews have become increasingly common and

offer the advantage of enabling access to participants in remote and otherwise inaccessible locations. Given the projects aim of including volunteers from various parts of Norway, arranging physical meetings in Oslo were not possible for all participants. The possibility to conduct interviews digitally was therefore a significant advantage, allowing for volunteers that would have been unable to participate otherwise to be included (Skilbrei, 2023). Three of the remote interviews were conducted over Microsoft Teams with video enabled, while the remaining two interviews were audio-only. Adams-Hutcheson and Longhurst (2017) observe how it has become increasingly possible in contemporary society to build rapport without meeting physically, as digital interactions now often is experienced as natural extensions of face-to-face encounters. However, conducting interviews through online platforms can also present certain limitation, particularly in the lack of immediate access to the participants body language or the nuances in their expressions. Skilbrei (2023) highlights this as a potential challenge, as non-verbal cues can be essential for interpreting participants responses. However, she also suggests that the absence of such visual information may enhance the researcher's awareness of how non-verbal communication is interpreted. In one of the audio-based interviews, the participant initially seemed concerned about the possibility of their participation breaching confidentiality or inadvertently revealing information about the prisoner they visit. In this case, my impression was that the absence of a visual component actually made the participant feel *more* secure, enabling a more open and candid conversation.

Two of the in-person interviews were held in a private room at University of Oslo's campus and one were held at a quiet, nearby cafe. While I initially suggested meeting at the University of Oslo's facilities, my primary focus was for the participants to choose the location in order to ensure their comfort. As the topic of discussion was not sensitive, I was willing to conduct interviews in public spaces if the participants preferred to, as my overarching aim was to create an environment where participants would feel at ease and able to speak openly about their experiences. At the beginning of each interview, I reminded the participants of the main themes we would be discussing and reiterated that they would not be asked to breach their confidentiality agreements. They were also reassured that any accidental disclosure would be redacted from the transcripts and excluded from the final thesis, however, this did not occur.

4.2.3 Interview Guide

To best understand the descriptions and interpretations of the participants, the interviews were decided to be semi-structured. When exploring the research questions of the thesis, I wanted to

let the conversation, within certain thematic frames, naturally gravitate toward the aspects of volunteering with persons sentenced for sex crimes that each participant felt most strongly about. Compared to more rigidly structured interviews, the semi-structured interview allows more flexibility to follow up on what the interviewee chooses to focus on, and as such making better use of the dialogue and its potential of producing information (Birkmann, 2018). To best facilitate this, I developed and utilised an interview-guide. An interview-guide, in this case in the form of a list of questions the researcher wants to ask the participant, is a useful tool in qualitative research (Skilbrei, 2023). The interview-guide consisted of specific questions within each of these themes, which notable were regarded as a guideline rather than a strict 'to-do list'. I initiated conversation through the prepared questions but would not interrupt the participants thought-process to rigidly proceed to the following question in the guide. It is my opinion than the interview setting can become overly formal and intimidating to participate in, and I rather wanted to facilitate a setting where the participants felt comfortable to share their experiences. While the interview-guide was a useful tool if the conversation stalled or if it steered too far away from the intended topic of discussion, I rather prioritised for the interviews to feel like a conversation than a rigid interview. An example of this can be how throughout the interviews the participants' responses would occasionally become overly general, rather than focusing on sex crimes. Although anticipated, as I had chosen to recruit volunteers who visit prisoners of all crimes and not just sex crimes, the interview-guide proved useful to guide the conversation back to the focus of the study.

Skilbrei (2023) however warns how the researcher must use caution when allowing an interview to resemble a 'normal' conversation as the participants may lose sight of the aim of the meeting, consequently, affect the content of the data. Additionally, given the asymmetrical power relation of an interview, a casual conversation can risk being seen as a manipulative dialogue where the interviewer upholds a monopoly on the interpretation of the participants statements. The researcher initiates the interview, sets the topics of discussion, poses questions and critically follows up on answers, depending on their research aim (Birkmann, 2018). Therefore, it is essential that interviewees remain aware that they are participating in research (Skilbrei, 2023). That said, focusing on a comfortable conversation should not always be seen as an instrumentalisation of empathy to extract information, but rather as a means to create a safe and open space where the participants feel safe to share their personal truths. In that sense, the use of semi-structured interviews, as it allows for reflection upon the exchange between researcher and participant, can be seen as a methodological strength in this research project.

4.3 Analysing data

4.3.1 Transcribing and translating the interviews

All interviews were audio-recorded using '*Nettskjemas'* Dictaphone and transcribed shortly after each interview. As I both collected and transcribed the interviews personally, it enabled a deeper understanding of the material prior to analysis (Caulfield and Hill, 2014). A verbatim transcript with a word-for-word account of everything spoken by both the interviewer and the participant was created for each of the nine interviews. This included speech fillers and pauses, which can assist in interpreting the meaning behind the spoken words (Hennink et al., 2020).

All interviews were conducted in Norwegian. Since I, as the researcher, understand the original language of the interviews, the transcripts too were retained in Norwegian. Hennink (et al., 2020) recommend analysing qualitative data in the language it is collected whenever possible. This allows the analysis to stay close to the participants' own words and expressions, more accurately capturing their emic perspectives. Where excerpts from the interviews are presented in this thesis, they have been translated to English by the author. As every language has sayings and phrases that are unique to that specific language, including words that could prove difficult to translate directly from Norwegian to English, I have aimed to reproduce the words original meaning throughout. Where I have felt like the translation did not accurately catch the full original meaning of the word, the Norwegian word has been written in parenthesis. This approach ensures that the translation maintains the colloquial style of language while also providing a reference that is useful for interpreting data (Hennink et al., 2020).

4.3.2 Thematic Analysis and Coding Process

To analyse the data from the nine conducted interviews, a thematic analysis was applied (Hennink et al., 2020). This involves identifying and developing codes and broader categories that can help in exploring the research question. Through an inductive approach, where codes and categories were developed directly from the data rather than being pre-defined by theories (Brinkmann, 2018), I wanted the analysis to reflect the participants' own experiences and attitudes of volunteering with persons sentenced for sex crimes. Therefore, in this project, theory was not used as a starting point for coding but was rather incorporated after the coding stage as a tool to interpret the findings (Skilbrei, 2023).

The coding process consisted of several steps. Despite there being many good, efficient, and accessible programmes that can assist the researcher in this process, I chose to do this manually on the computer and by hand. First, the interview transcripts were read through multiple times to gain an overview of the content. As I read, I noted down codes for recurring themes and highlighted common patterns. These codes varied in scope, ranging from broader codes such as 'motivation to begin', 'motivation to continue', 'sex crimes', or 'conflict of role', to narrower codes such as 'inner conflict', 'feedback', and 'personal growth'. The codes were grouped into five thematic groups: motivation, role, sex crimes, society, and prison. Each of these themes was further attributed the 'smaller' codes. 'Motivation' received sub-codes such as 'initial motivation', 'specific motivation', 'sustained motivation', and 'Role' received sub-codes such as 'role balance', 'role conflict', 'confidentiality agreement', and so on. During this process, I came to realise that the codes within the themes of 'society' and 'prison' primarily functioned as support for the other categories, rather than as independent themes. As a result, they were merged into 'motivation', 'role', or 'sex crime', to better reflect their contextual roles. By the end of this process, I had a clear overview of the most prominent themes that were discussed in the interviews, each accompanied by different angles and approaches through their related sub-codes. The final analytical framework is made on the basis of these three themes.

4.4 Data Quality

4.4.1 Positionality

The researcher in qualitative research is often seen as the primary tool for data collection. As active participants in the field, it is important to acknowledge how personal beliefs, biases, positions and roles can impact the research process and consequently the resulting data material (Bourke, 2014; Damsa and Ugelvik, 2017). As research is inherently a shared space, where researchers inevitably bring their own biases into the research process, the context in which the data has been collected can influence the material and consequently the quality of it (Bourke, 2014). Therefore, by critically reflecting on my own position in this research project, I am forced to confront personal biases, how I have presented myself in the research, and how I have met the volunteers who have participated in the project (Lincoln et al., 2018).

My interest in how the voluntary and penal sector interlinks predates my placement at the Red Cross. Within the criminological field, my attention has been on prisons and correctional services throughout my degree, I have experience working in both high-security and low-security

prisons, and I wrote my bachelor thesis on the barriers third sector organisations meet when attempting to deliver volunteer work within English prisons. I would even argue, that my interest in this part of the field is what motivated me to do my placement at the Red Cross in the first place. Despite this, my experience during my period at the Red Cross undeniably influenced the topic of this thesis. Prior to my time at the Red Cross national office, I had no experience with the organisation, and I was not familiar with the Visitor Service. Therefore, the placement taught me about the Visitor Service and introduced me to staff and volunteers, who all were eager to help develop possible angles of my research project. Consequently, this has not only shaped the project, but also my views on the activity. If this thesis aimed to evaluate the Visitor Service as an activity, the results would undeniably be affected by my personal bias. I have however never personally volunteered and although having worked with persons sentenced for sex crimes during my part-time jobs in the Correctional Service, I have not worked more extensively with this group and its specific characteristics than with other groups of prisoners.

Yet, this is something I have been vary of throughout the project, and as a precaution I aimed to minimalise emphasis on my previous placement in the Red Cross during the interviews. Caulfield and Hill (2014) argue for how the researcher should not aim to remove their own value position, but rather they should act in a way that maximises the participants' ability to speak openly. Although not denying or actively hiding my experience within the activity, I did not want to be perceived as a representative for the organisation in a way that would make the volunteers feel like they *had* to participate, make them hesitate to share their honest opinions, or shape their reflections. This was done so the data collected reflected the true beliefs and thoughts of the respondents, without being shaped by what they believed the Red Cross might *want* to hear (Mann, 2016).

As I entered the interviews as a student researcher rather than a Red Cross representative or a fellow volunteer, it was assumed that I was unfamiliar with the activity and how it operated, and I was initially placed as an 'outsider' in the insider-outsider dichotomy of qualitative research (Bourke, 2014). When the conversation naturally touched on my background however, such as my placement in the Red Cross or my experience in prisons, the perception of me shifted and rather made me an 'insider'. It appeared that in a small service such as the Visitor Service, which may be unknown to most who are not themselves involved in it, my knowledge of the

activity qualified me to be seen as 'one of them'. This illustrates the complex interplay of positionality in research, where background and experiences influence both the relation between interviewer and interviewee, but also the researchers' approach to the research process.

In addition to this, I was surprised to find how my objectivity as a researcher was at times challenged during the interview process. This was not due to the participants, but rather as a result of my own awareness of the stigmatised nature of the crimes being discussed. Although being careful not to, I found myself occasionally wanting to clarify how my decision to focus on volunteer work with persons sentenced for sex crimes did not stem from a judgmental or negative stance towards this group. I felt concern that the participant could misinterpret my questions as attempts to probe for negative responses of this group, rather than efforts to understand their experiences as volunteers. I even felt the urge to emphasise that I too held an open-minded and nonjudgemental perspective. As both the interviewer and interviewee participate in shaping the interview, recognising these feelings made me aware of the risk of becoming overly agreeing or engaged in the conversations. Ultimately, this could have compromised my role as a critical and objective researcher, and possibly even shaped the responses of the visitors. This was something I needed to remain conscious of throughout the interview process, and which I hope I succeeded in.

4.4.2 Validity and Transferability

Validity is the concern of how the produced material is relevant to its research aim, described by Kirk and Miller (1986:21) as 'not a matter of methodological hair-splitting about the fifth decimal point, but a question of whether the researcher sees what they think they see'. A fundamental condition for assessing the quality of qualitative research is that the researcher clearly presents the steps of the research process and includes thorough reflection on the framework for knowledge production. This should include reflection on their own role in the execution of the study (Skilbrei, 2023), as well as the connection between the methods the research uses, and how they interpret the following findings.

There are limitations that should be considered when interpreting the findings of this study. Firstly, the sample may not be representative of the broader population of Red Cross Volunteers. Transparency and reflection on the chosen sample is important when arguing for how the

findings not only shed light on the included participants experiences, but also if it can be generalised to apply to other individuals and contexts (Skilbrei, 2023). In qualitative studies however, this is rather speculations than it is definite claims. In this study, recruitment was conducted by aiming to spread information about the project to as many volunteers as possible, relying on interested volunteers to initiate contact with me directly. While a strength of this approach is how it minimises the influence of staff or professional in selecting participants and thereby reducing potential sampling bias, it also introduces the possibility of self-selection bias. Specifically, this way, those who chose to participate may be among the most committed and engaged volunteers. While the sample generally expressed positive experiences and attitudes, this should not be interpreted as evidence that such views are uniformly held across all of the Visitor Service. It is plausible that volunteers who hold more negative views or who have had fewer positive experiences with persons sentenced for sex crimes chose not to participate, either due to a lack of interest or due to reluctance to reveal opinions that may conflict with the Red Cross's values. As a result, the sample may not fully reflect the range of perspectives among all Red Cross visitors.

Secondly, there is a considerable variation among the participants in the recency and frequency of their contact with persons sentenced for sex crimes. While the aim of the study is to explore motivation and perception of role among visitors who have volunteered with this group, for some participants, these experiences can have taken place many years ago. As none of the volunteers stated to currently be visiting someone sentenced for sex crimes, all interviews are based on their current reflections on past interactions. As a result, the study partially relies on a retrospective perspective. In research involving retrospective reflection, there is a risk that participants have forgotten their immediate feelings at the time, and rather express how they are *currently* feeling about those experiences, influenced by processing and interpretation (Thagard, 2019). In the context of this thesis however, such a process is likely to have contributed to shaping their *current* motivation and understanding of role, which is of relevance to the project.

When looking at the transferability of this thesis, this small-scale, qualitative study has unique aspects that are shaped by the context of the study and the lived experiences of the nine Red Cross volunteers who participated in it. While the sample size is reasonable for the study's intended purpose, there are no guarantee for how similar findings would be replicated in a different situation. The findings are therefore not intended to be statistically generalised to a broader population. Rather, the findings are seen in line with Andenæs's (2000) understanding

of transferability in qualitative research. She argues for how generalisation in qualitative research is not about replicating results but rather concerned with exploring how these insights can resonate with or inform understanding of the phenomena in other contexts. Andenæs (2000) argues for how, despite being context-dependent, a well described and theoretically grounded qualitative analysis can still contribute to new insight into social phenomenon. If done correctly, it can create a ripple-effect, where qualitative knowledge spread outward and providing new ways to understand similar phenomenon elsewhere. Therefore, despite not being directly transferable in the traditional sense, there can still be value in the findings of this thesis. The experiences and reflections described in this study may not be entirely unique to the participants who contributed and may therefore generate insight of value regarding the motivation, role, and experiences of volunteers who have volunteered with persons sentenced for sex crimes.

4.5 Ethical Considerations

Ethics in qualitative research involve adhering to principles of moral conduct throughout the research process (May, 2001). Ethical dilemmas may arise at any stage of a project, and some om the most complex challenges can be those who are unforeseen and context specific, emerging during the course of the research itself (Wiles, 2012). Predicting harm in research can be difficult, and as such, it is essential to remain aware of new and unforeseen challenges that can develop, and to ensure continuous assessment and reflection in the ethical choices that are made. To ensure that ethical principles are upheld, this project has received ethical approval in accordance with the guidelines of the University of Oslo and SIKT. Additionally, this thesis' approach is based on the guidelines for research ethics within social sciences and humanities, developed by The National Committee for Research Ethics in the Social Sciences and the Humanities (NESH, 2023).

4.5.1 Informed Consent

Informed consent is a fundamental ethical requirement in research, ensuring that participants fully understand the nature of the study, the methods involved, and their role in it (Hennink et al., 2020). It is the responsibility of the researcher to provide participants with sufficient information to enable them to make a voluntary and well-informed decision about their participation (NESH, 2023). To uphold this principle, an information-sheet was provided to all potential participants at initial point of contact, which outlined the purpose of the study, the research

methods, and ensured how their privacy and anonymity would be protected. It also emphasised how participating was voluntary, and that they could withdraw at any time (Hennink et al., 2020; NESH, 2023). The final page of the sheet included a consent form which participants were asked to sign, and written consent has been obtained from all nine volunteers, confirming that they have read the information sheet and agreed to participate in the project.

4.5.2 Anonymity and Confidentiality

A central ethical commitment from the consent form is the full anonymity of participants. This ensures protection of the identity of the participants and aims to foster an environment where they feel comfortable sharing honest and unfiltered opinions (NESH, 2023). Accordingly, the names of the participants, their respective Red Cross local unions, and the prison they volunteer in will remain anonymous. Traditionally, researchers have maintained participant confidentiality by either not recording identifying information or by anonymizing such data as early as possible (Israel and Hay, 2006). In this study, all research participants were assigned a pseudonym and all Red Cross local branches, names of prisons, and names of cities or towns were anonymised during the transcription process. Furthermore, I deliberately chose not to construct participant 'profiles', such as combining the pseudonym, age, and how long they have been a volunteer for, in order to further minimise the risk of backwards identification (Galletta, 2013).

Some volunteers had questions surrounding their anonymity, particularly in relation to the name of the prison they visit and the Red Cross branch they belong to. This concern stemmed from how, if they were identified as a participant, this could potentially expose the prisoner they visit. I came to understand that, although volunteers are not informed of which volunteer visits which prisoners, there are at times possible to observe other volunteer-prisoner pairings when entering or leaving the prison facilities. As such, accidentally identifying the visitor could also compromise the anonymity of the prisoner. This can be particularly significant for smaller prisons, as there are Red Cross branches that consists of as few as a couple of visitors. Where this study focus on volunteering with persons sentenced for sex crimes, it would further unintentionally expose the nature of the crime the person is in prison for and ultimately result in harm on a third party, the prisoner, who has no involvement in this research project. Thus, protecting anonymity in this thesis is not only an ethical obligation to the volunteer who has chosen to participate, but also necessary to prevent potential consequences for persons beyond the research itself.. Consequently, I ensured the participants that no identifying information, including participants'

names, the prison they visit in, or the Red Cross branch they belong to, would be included in the study.

4.5.3 Do no harm

In social science research, harm is more likely to manifest as psychological distress, discomfort, social disadvantage, or invasion of privacy than as physical injury (Israel & Hay, 2006). As it is the researchers' responsibility to minimise the risk of such harm, they must carefully consider the potential impact methodological choices made at the design stage of the project can have for participants (Caulfield and Hill, 2014). The analysis of this thesis is built on the researchers interpretation of the descriptions the visitors have given of their own voluntary motivation and experiences. People's motivations may be complex, and it is important to respect participants' own self-understanding and avoid framing them and their actions in ways that can dimmish their activity or stigmatise their engagement (NESH, 2023). It has therefore been important to approach the analysis carefully, and ground analytical points in both theoretical framework and empirical evidence, in order to not appoint meanings onto the participants or depict them in a manner that does not reflect the content of their interviews (NESH, 2023).

Additionally, it is important to consider the possible emotional impact participating in this research project can have on the interviewees. While it was not anticipated that discussing their own voluntary engagement would cause psychological harm to the participants, and the project itself was not classified as sensitive, I had to remain aware of how these conversations could unexpectedly evoke memories of distressing or graphic interactions with prisoners or recollections of the crimes discussed. Research has shown how volunteers can experience secondary traumatic stress if they are exposed to traumatic material, such as detailed descriptions of a person sentenced for sex crimes' criminal act (Höing et al., 2016a; 2016b). This can generate responses that can resemble post-traumatic stress reactions of a 'real' victim. As such, I remained mindful of this possibility throughout the interviews. However, my impression is that this has not occured.

On the contrary, participants expressed appreciation for an opportunity to speak about their voluntary engagement. The Visitor Service can be a lonely service as, although the volunteers are part of a community by belonging to a local branch, they stand alone in their activity. Therefore, some described participating in the interview as 'almost therapeutic' or a 'debrief', as they were given a rare opportunity to be able to share from their experiences. It appears that this is

something they rarely do due to the strict confidentiality agreements they adhere to. While these agreements were fully respected during the interviews, participants appeared to find value in being able to share their thoughts and reflections in a safe, anonymous setting, and feedback received from participants after the interviews have been positive.

5 “But why would anyone want to do that?”

Throughout the last year, whenever I have been asked about the topic of my thesis and I explain how it investigates Red Cross volunteers and their experience in volunteering with prisoners sentenced for sex crimes, I have often been met with the same question: ‘but why would anyone want to do *that*?’. This question appears to reflect broader societal attitudes, where such voluntary activity may be hard to understand for those who do not engage in it. After all, the Red Cross volunteers willingly and actively seek out prisoners: arguably the part of the population that others try to distance themselves from. And, as previously discussed, society seem to want an even greater distance between themselves, and persons sentenced for sex crimes.

Many of the visitors who participate in this thesis explains that when they visit a prisoner, the nature of their crime is irrelevant. It is not the focus of their conversations, and in some cases, they visit the same prisoner over a long period of time without ever knowing what crime the person has committed. In theory, this suggests that their voluntary motivation should apply equally to all prisoners. Research on voluntary motivation within prisons, however, have found that this often is not the case. Studies have consistently found that attitudes toward persons sentenced for sex crimes are more negative than towards those convicted of other crimes (Lowe et al., 2019), and that people are significantly less likely to consider volunteering with someone labelled as a ‘sex offender’ (Lowe and Willis, 2020). This contrast highlights the value in exploring how the visitors experience motivation to volunteer with persons sentenced for sex crimes and how this motivation is sustained.

5.1 Motivation to become a visitor

There can be many reasons behind *why* persons decide they want to volunteer. In an internal evaluation of the Visitor Service in 2024, 139 out of the 177 respondents stated that their motivation is ‘a wish to do something for someone else’ and 88 stated it was due to an ‘interest in the field and the group’ (Norwegian Red Cross, unpublished). Similarly, when the nine participants in this study reflected on their own motivation, justice-based motivation and altruistic motivation were most stated.

Justice-based motivation, related to the Value or Identity functions of the VFI, can be seen as the desire to promote and advocate for fairness or addressing social inequalities (Clary and

Snyder, 1999). Volunteers who ground their motivation in restorative and justice-based ideals tended to describe their role as an opportunity to align personal values with meaningful social contributions. Lars, for example, describes how a justice-based belief motivates him, as he sees how even small acts such as showing up for an hour-long conversation can support long-term change:

> This is something I feel like society needs. And... what else can you do if you want it to be fewer violent incidents in society or fewer cases of sex crimes? We have to contribute to giving these people a better future and helping them change their lives. And what we do in the Visitor Service is just a small drop in the ocean. It's not... we can't change a person's life with just an hour here and there, where we just sit and talk. We can't do anything very practical. But hopefully, just the fact that we're there as fellow human beings [*medmennesker*] and that we come in without judgment and just meet them as people—maybe that in itself can make a difference? I believe we're making a difference. (Lars)

Here, Lars' motivation comes from a sense of purpose that is grounded in the idea that his effort can be a meaningful contribution to change. And that, by socialisation, volunteering can be a small step that contributes to building a safer and more just society. He acknowledges the limitations of his voluntary, role but still positions empathy and presence as powerful tools of transformation. Similarly, Nora situates her motivation within a wider societal context, highlighting how society has a shared responsibility of preparing people in prison for re-entry into society:

> We all want the people who live around us to be good people. And in our country, most prisoners will be released at some point. So, it makes sense that we have treated them in a way that makes them better people when they're released than they were when they were imprisoned. Because they will be living among us again. And for that to work, we need both professionals and volunteers who do a good job. *(Nora)*

This framing reinforces previous research that found how volunteers with restorative values are more likely to be drawn to roles that aim to reduce reoffending and promote community safety (Souza and Dhami, 2008; Lowe et al., 2019). While these volunteers are not involved in formal treatment of the prisoner, they still see their presence as contributing to rehabilitation through consistent, non-judgmental interaction.

The second key motivation is altruistic motivation. This is based in a more general desire to good by helping others and positively contributing to society, relating to the 'values' function (Clary and Snyder, 1999). Without expecting to gain any form of personal benefit from the activity, this form of motivation is rooted in empathy, compassion and moral principles (Clary and Snyder, 1999). For several participants, this drive appeared to stem from a broader interest in engaging in voluntary work more so than a specific intent to work with the prison population. This is reflected in Kevins description of how he started as a volunteer:

> So my motivation was really just to contribute something positive and be part of something, you could say. So I was actually just looking for something that would suit me, and then I saw that they were looking for visitors in my city. So I applied and started helping out, spending my time on that. *(Kevin)*

It appears that Kevin wanted to do *something* good and 'fell' into the Visitor Service, almost by chance. This is similarly described in other interviews, indicating that for some volunteers their initial altruistic motivation was not necessarily directed toward prison work especially, but rather to voluntary work more generally. However, the Visitor Service is a special activity, both in what they do and in who they meet. Therefore, as the process of becoming a visitor requires more engagement than many other voluntary activities, it would still suggest that the persons that become visitors, have *some* sort of motivation to work with prisoners specifically.

The interview process that the visitors must go through, aim to assess aspiring visitors' suitability for the role. One of the ways to 'fail' this interview, and subsequently not qualify to become a visitor, can be by displaying values or attitudes that are incompatible with the principles of the organisation. For example, speaking in a derogatory manner about certain types of crimes or groups of prisoners (Norwegian Red Cross, 2015). Rune describes this process:

> I have heard people talk about cases where, during the interview process, some people want to become volunteers, but they don't want to visit those who have been convicted of sex crimes. But they try to hide it, right, so the interviewers have to dig a little deeper and ask them 'What do you mean by this' or 'what do you mean by that'. And then, when they admit they have a problem with it [sex crimes] they are clearly told that 'but you never actually know what the person you visit is in prison for. You just don't. *(Rune)*

This selection process reflects the Red Cross's clear stance: Volunteers must be prepared to meet individuals without prejudice, regardless of the nature of their crimes. And, Emilie expresses her trust in this process:

> I hope, and I believe, that the Red Cross filters out people they don't think will be able to handle it during that interview process you go through, and I also hope and believe that people drop out when they realise that they might be matched with those convicted for it [sex crimes] if they have a problem with that. *(Emilie)*

However, despite how this interview-process is in place to ensure that people who may struggle to appear neutral do not become volunteers, there are evident doubts about whether true neutrality is possible. Tore, for instance, highlights the importance of this process, while also describing a tension between Red Cross principle and emotional response:

> When it comes to sex crimes...I don't know how many cases there are, but many of those who have done such crimes apply for a visitor to come see them, because they get...well, they get extra stigmatised of course, a bit more than others, if what they are in prison for gets out. (...). So, I believe that this effort to try and filter the volunteers and remove those who have prejudice...but I mean, everyone has them [prejudice] anyways. We all do, right? I mean, those who have been fiddling with small children and that kind of stuff...it is just completely...yeah. *(Tore)*

As it appears from Tore's reflections, he highlights an ethical complexity: even those who endorse neutrality may still carry internal preconceptions. While the structure and recruitment process of the Visitor Service aims to filter the volunteers for suitability, complete detachment for moral or emotional reactions may not be realistic, as he reflects on how everyone, including himself, carry some level of prejudices. This is further illustrated in Kevin's reflection when asked whether his motivation remains the same for all prisoners, regardless of the crime:

> I mean...I guess you can say both yes and no. Or...no. It's not [the same], in a way. It's not. You could say that it's perhaps easier to be motivated with financial criminals and drugs, to put it like that, than with 'sex offenders'...it's a bit special. It's a bit heavier, you could say. *(Kevin)*

Kevins' somewhat hesitant response can be seen as revealing an internal conflict. On the one hand, he appears to recognise how the expectation to a Red Cross volunteer is to be neutral and

impartial, meeting all prisoners equally. But, at the same time, he acknowledges how there is a difference in the emotional weight based on the crime, and how it therefore is easier to engage with prisoners who are in prison due to drug- or financial-crimes, rather than sex crimes. His reluctance to openly state this suggests how he is aware that these feelings do not fully align with the ideal principles of a Red Cross volunteer. Like Kevin, Lise also compares sex crimes to drug-related or financial crimes, and reflects on her initial reaction to meeting someone convicted of this category:

> Well, I did know that in this prison, when I first chose to become a visitor, I knew that there were people convicted for sex crimes in that prison. But...I never really thought about what it would be like. So, I think that the first meeting I had of that kind...I feel like it was pretty special and…different. I mean, no one ever just walks around and talks about how they have abused another person, you know? So that was a bit...I had to swallow that in sense.
>
> *Do you feel that being a visitor for people convicted of sex crimes is different, or is it the same as with other categories?*
>
> No, I think it's...well, yes, of course. There are so many different types of crimes. Talking to someone who hasn't paid their taxes, isn't the same of course. Or drug dealing, which many are sentenced for, it's a bit different...it's a bit less sensitive, in a way. I feel like, when you talk to someone who has committed a sex crime, you have to in a way be a bit more careful, because...you have to be extra mindful. Not be judgemental. It would have been easy to say 'How could you do that?' but that is something you absolutely must not say as a visitor. So, it's probably easier to have a conversation with someone who has sold a few kilograms of drugs, yes...I think so. *(Lise)*

The first part of Lises' reflection reveals that, by how she admits to not having thought about what it would be like to visit persons from this category of crime, the training-process she has gone through has not sufficiently briefed her on this possible situation. And, despite the Red Cross principle of neutrality, it appears that visiting prisoners sentenced for sex crimes is more challenging for some visitors' motivation. Lises' account highlights how this can be due to the sensitive nature of the crime, ultimately resulting in how there is more restraint and self-regulation required in these conversations. Her reflection demonstrates how this category of crime, more so than others, challenges volunteers' internal neutrality, to the point where she has to remind herself to act neutral and non-judgmental.

5.2 Why do they continue?

Where the volunteers' initial motivations for joining the Red Cross are largely grounded in altruistic or justice-based ideals, the motivation behind sustained volunteering over a longer period of time may differ, as the idea of the activity and the experience of it may not align. When reflecting on why they have stayed in the activity, the participants describe how the main motivation for continued engagement is the direct positive feedback they receive from the prisoners themselves. As Tore, Lise, and Kevin describes it:

> And I get this kind of feedback...when you even get a big hug from a prisoner, from young people and from old people alike, you just know you have done something that is good. And it's extremely motivating. It really is. *(Tore)*

> It's still just as strong of an experience when you feel that you are making a difference as a fellow human being. And I do believe that. I believe that I am making a difference. *(Lise)*

> They come up to you, and they shake your hand, and they thank you for coming...and many of them show a lot of gratitude, to put it that way. Yeah. *(Kevin)*

It appears that these moments of appreciation serve as key motivators for the volunteers. Expressed through verbal gratitude or physical gestures in the form of hugs or handshakes, it can serve as small but powerful affirmations that their presence matters. For the volunteers, these moments confirm that their time and effort is not only noticed but also valued. Aligning with Clary and Snyder's (1999) research, this may emphasise how satisfaction increases when the experience of volunteering matches the individual's initial motivation. When there is a good 'person-situation fit', such as when persons who began volunteering because they wanted to make a positive difference receive affirmation that they contribute to doing just that, they are more likely to feel fulfilled and thereby remain committed to their activity (Clary and Snyder, 1999).

In addition to positive feedback, the volunteers express how their voluntary engagement fosters personal growth. Through their conversations with persons sentenced for sex crimes, they are exposed to lives and perspectives that are different from their own.

> I think the conversations we have gives me something, and I hope they also give something to the prisoner. Because in many ways, I'm their window to society. They ask me questions, and they are very interested in what I think, although no

> one has ever asked me directly what I think about them. But once, someone said to me, 'I just don't understand why you come here? You don't get travel compensation; you don't get paid. You just sit here and talk to me?' But as I told him, it gives me a lot. It has given me insight into a world and into people that, I must say, I had never encountered before. And that is good for me. I have always lived in a world and worked in a world where people are successful. Where they have done well, where they have achieved things in life. And then suddenly, I meet people who haven't. And I realize that much of it comes down to chance. So, I must say, this experience has been very valuable for me to discover. *(Lise)*

For Lise, being a visitor has offered direct insight into a world which she describes as very different from her own, providing her with a new perspective on the role of chance and circumstance in life. This highlights how volunteering can work as an educational experience that challenge personal understanding. Her account of how 'even' one of the persons she used to visit questioned why she would bother to come, without receiving anything in return, not only speaks of what it gives her but also how this is something that the prisoner does not take for granted. The fact that Lise shows up voluntary seems to be something almost unexpected yet appreciated. Rune similarly reflects on how his visits made him more appreciative of his own life, renewing his awareness of his own privileges and circumstances and shifting his internal perspective:

> I felt that when I came home… I appreciated my life at home more after visiting the prison. Because I thought they had it so bad. So I've used it as a kind of motivation for myself, to remind myself: 'don't complain, you're good! Think about those who are sat in there'.

Together, these reflections suggest that the visitors' continued engagement is sustained, not only by the confirmation that they are making a difference, but also by the transformative impact the role has on the volunteers themselves. It becomes clear that continued engagement in the Visitor Service is not solely altruistic, but often shaped by the personal rewards the volunteers receive - both directly given from the prisoner and in form of development within the visitor themselves.

Where motivation is easy to sustain when the activity is experienced positively, it may instead be challenged if the encouraging elements are removed. There are times where the role of a visitor can be emotionally and physically demanding too, and the resilience and motivation of the volunteer is put to a test. Emilie reflects on this:

> It's like...even though it's just one hour, twice a month, there are some people who are more exhausting to deal with while others are easier to talk to. I have spoken to some prisoners who have required a lot of energy, I will say that. And that can be pretty draining. It really depends on how my day has been beforehand, and of course, on how their day has been. But...there have definitely been times when I have thought 'Ah, okay, today I'm not really looking forward to this visit because I know it's going to be an hour of conspiracy talk', for example, or 'I know he is just going to complain about things'. And it's understandable that they do, of course. But it can be mentally exhausting. (…) And then there are others who can be emotionally draining to visit. If they really open up and share a lot and are having a really tough time. Which, to be honest, most of them are. And, if they open that door and let me into some of it, I can definitely get affected by it. Yeah...But it's also very special...in a good way. Yeah, I really appreciate when they do that. But it's demanding in a completely different way.

It appears from these descriptions that, as a visitor, there are meetings and moments of the voluntary service that can be experienced as draining, rather than rewarding. Whereas sustained motivation previously has been described to come through positive feedback or personal growth, these instances that Emilie describes seem to be draining more so than encouraging. Ultimately, these interactions can affect the volunteers and may even reduce their motivation. Emilie, however, has always moved past this emotional strain. When asked what motivates her to keep showing up despite how it sometimes can be exhausting, she replies:

> Oh, but it's so rewarding! It gives me so much! They are all so different, and they are so...yeah. No, it's just really wonderful...simply put. *(Emilie)*

Her response reflects on how draining incidents or pairings are balanced out by the positive emotional reward she usually receives from being a visitor. It appears that the sense of purpose and meaning that Emilie gains from her visits, even when they are with prisoners who are challenging, transcends the difficulties she experiences. For Kevin, rather than emotional challenges, he reflects on how the structural commitment of being a volunteer can at time pose a challenge to his motivation:

> It kind of becomes something that I feel I...*have* to follow up on, you could say. That you take on a responsibility. (...) And sometimes, it does feel like a lot of effort when you are traveling home after a visit. After all, it's several [Scandinavian] miles of travel each way, right? So...I would say that, sometimes it can

> feel like it's a bit of effort. Yeah…But then again, when I get home, I feel like it's given me something. That I feel like I have done something useful in a way. That the person you visit is happy that you came and that it means something for them. So, in the end...I guess it balances out. And becomes worth it. *(Kevin)*

Where Emilie speaks of the emotional toll, Kevin describes the physical effort of travel and time investment. Yet, both clearly express that the benefits they receive from volunteering outweigh the burdens. Their reflections echo the broader theme of how sustained volunteering is not just about sacrifice, but also about reciprocal meaning and fulfilment.

It appears that the continued engagement in the Visitor Service is resting on a delicate balance between giving and receiving. Emotional or practical challenges, which could potentially have strained the voluntary motivation seems to rather be forgotten under the deeper feeling of purpose and reward. However, it is possible that balancing how much to 'give' and how much to 'receive' becomes harder when the visitor meets a person who have done a crime that they struggle to morally understand. Lars draws a distinction between a crime he can imagine committing under extreme circumstances, and therefore can to some degree understand, and crimes which he describes as impossible to comprehend. Ultimately, this distinction affects his motivation to volunteer with certain groups:

> So...uh...yeah. I find it harder to actually have an invested relationship with them [persons sentenced for sex crimes] than maybe all the others. Even when I think about people who have committed extremely violent acts otherwise. What I feel makes the difference is that...even if we talk about murder, for example...it obviously depends on the type of murder (...). But if it's self-defence...if it's self-defence and someone you loved was in danger or a 'me or you' kind of thing, you could imagine that in such a desperate situation and if your life was at risk, then maybe you could have done something like that. Maybe you could. But for example raping someone...that is a planned and premeditated act and you did that despite what the other person wanted. And it has an extremely devastating impact on the victim. It's a grotesque, horrible thing to do to another human being. It's completely impossible to imagine ever having done something like that. So it's completely impossible to take the perspective of that person, in a way.
>
> So...you can try to have an empathetic understanding and think that 'yes, we still have to treat them as human beings, and we don't want them to do it again. We have to rebuild their lives, help them take responsibility, and understand what they have done'. But...you can still be left with the feeling that...you could never

> have done something like that. And it's also impossible to understand how another person could do something like that. On a totally different level than maybe with all the other crimes that people are in prison for. *(Lars)*

Here, Lars offers an example of the emotional complexity of volunteering with prisoners sentenced for sex crimes. It seems that he finds it more difficult to sustain motivation for persons he struggles to emotionally connect with. He articulates a central tension where, although he upholds the importance of treating everyone with dignity and respect, he experiences a psychological and emotional barrier that can make a sustained connection more difficult, as he seems to base the notion of empathy on being able to understand the perspective of the person. This supports Lowe and Willis (2020) findings that perception of the nature and the severity of the crime can shape a volunteers' emotional engagement to the person they meet, as well as for how emotional investment is closely linked to what the volunteers feel like they receive in return. This highlights the paradox of how voluntary engagement is fuelled not only from what one gives to others, but also what one gets in return.

Because there is, and rightfully so, a limit to how much emotional strain one is supposed to endure as a volunteer within a voluntary activity. And although Lars describes an example of what can be seen as an emotional struggle, as he is still active in the Visitor Service, this has not been enough to cross that limit. Both Solveig and Tore offers a thought of how they navigates this boundary:

> I think that the day I start feeling discomfort, then maybe it's time to reconsider whether I can actually keep doing this. Yeah... *(Solveig)*

> I haven't felt any major challenges, really, I haven't. If I had, I don't think I would have continued [as a volunteer] (...). If I had felt that this was difficult to do or too challenging, I simply wouldn't have continued with it. *(Tore)*

It appears that, due to the voluntary nature of the Visitor Service, those who actively choose to engage in the activity do so because they receive something in return. When seen together, these reflections highlight how sustainable voluntary engagement is dependent on a balance where the act of giving something to someone else must also be offset by the emotional reward or satisfaction they receive in return. Because, if the cost begins to outweigh the gain, the motivation is likely to fade.

5.3 'It is a little selfish too' - altruism or egoism?

An ongoing debate in voluntary research is regarding altruism versus egoism, addressing the interplay between giving and receiving. Whereas one side of the debate argues for how all helping behaviours ultimately serve the self, the other side maintains that truly selfless acts are possible (Clary and Snyder, 1999). Some of the visitors themselves reflects on the paradox between wanting to act in the best interest of others while simultaneously receiving positive rewards. And, when doing so, both Nora and Emilie uses the word 'selfish' to describe their engagement:

> It's actually rewarding and fulfilling for us as well. You get so much gratitude, you get people who put their trust in you. Honestly, it makes us feel very good too. So, I almost want to say that...in a way, it's a little selfish too. Because we feel so good afterwards. *(Nora)*

Emilie's reflection echoes this:

> Yes, I guess it's because I have had a really good... or, I have had a safe and good life myself. And that makes it interesting to talk to people who haven't. And I... don't really meet many of them otherwise, in a way. Because we tend to surround ourselves with people who are like us, unfortunately, in many ways. So I think it's really cool to seek out people who have had a completely different background than my own. And that applies to many of the people I visit. So it is interesting and educational, in a way. It might sound a bit cliché, but yeah. It is very valuable, in a way... for me. It is selfish in that sense too, since I get a lot out of it. *(Emilie)*

When reflecting on how their voluntary activity enriches their own lives by making them feel good or being educational, both Nora and Emilie appear to use the word 'selfish'. Possibly, this can stem from an altruistic expectation of how voluntary work is supposed to be an activity that is solely meant to *give*, not take. There may be an underlying assumption of how the positive feelings they feel from their engagement is supposed to be found in the other person, rather than within themselves. Therefore, when the visitors experience these positive feelings within, they seem to characterise it as 'selfish'.

Most empirical research suggest that motivations are rarely singular, and Clary and Snyder (1999) argue for how multiple motivations often coexist. Especially in situations where there is a high level of stigma or empathy present, egoistic and altruistic motivations often become entangled. Apparent from the interviews conducted in this study is how these two sides may

coexist without cancelling each other out. While participants often cited altruistic motivations to why they initially began volunteering, such as wanting to help other people or to make a difference, their continued engagement can be seen to be sustained by the personal fulfilment they receive in return, such as emotional feedback, deeper self-understanding, or by challenging their personal views. Therefore, what the volunteers describe as 'selfish' may perhaps be better understood as a part of a sustainable emotional loop that makes long-term volunteerism possible.

And, the result of this loop, can be a reciprocal emotional exchange. The person in prison receives a conversation-partner from the 'outside', someone to talk to and someone who will listen, while the volunteer, in turn, receives purpose, perspective, and even self-fulfilment. Instead of looking at this emotional reward as undermining the altruistic intentions of the activity, one can rather see it as motivational fuel that allows volunteers to remain committed in what can be a draining setting. These interviews support Clary and Snyders' (1999) idea that volunteer motivation is not static or singular, but rather how it can evolve over time and include a combination of multiple motivational drivers. The altruism-egoism debate can in this case therefore be seen as a spectrum rather than a dichotomy, as the binary between altruism and egoism can be destabilised.

An interesting aspect to this is how volunteering with persons sentenced for sex crimes can function as an example of motivational ambivalence. The volunteers may want to help, but at the same time, may be wrestling with their own discomfort and values in doing so. It may feel easier, and maybe even more meaningful, to volunteer with someone who has committed a non-violent or situational crime. Lars' quote, for example, highlights how he experiences a disruption in the emotional reciprocity that usually is experienced when he is in pairings with persons sentenced for sex crimes. Consequently, volunteering with this group of persons may highlight the tension between the altruistic motivations of wanting to be there for someone else, and the egoistic motivation of wanting to feel good about helping. These pairings can provide a scene where the volunteers need to negotiate empathy in the face of stigma and present as a good example of how the lines between self-less and self-serving reasons for volunteering can be blurred.

6 Managing the Role of a Volunteer

The one-on-one meetings between a prisoner and a volunteer takes place within the frames of the prison, which is arguable one of societies most closed arenas. Patenuaude (2004:69S) said: 'it is far easier to gain access to the residents of a remote Alaskan community than to study the lives of prison inmates and/or those persons whose task it is to keep them within the prison walls'. The access the visitors have is given to them as they are representatives for the Red Cross. And, alongside this access, comes an expectation to uphold the organisations fundamental values and principles. Two of these principles are impartiality, which is to aid people solely based on their needs without any form of discrimination, and neutrality, which ensures that the Red Cross does not take sides in or engage with political or ideological controversies (Norwegian Red Cross, 2005). In other words, the visitors are set to have a neutral and unbiased appearance in their role.

The persons who volunteer in the Red Cross Visitor Service are ordinary members of society. As they are not meant to fill a professional role, they do not receive 'specialised' training aside from the coursing they receive through the Red Cross, combined with any relevant experience they may bring with them from other aspects of their personal or professional life. Rather, they are just meant to be present as a fellow human being and a as a representative from society on the 'outside'. The society they represent, however, are proven to have negative attitudes to sex crimes and those convicted of them. One can therefore question if it is possible for visitors to be completely free of prejudice when they enter conversations with prisoners from this group, and how they manage these if they arise.

6.1 'Only' volunteers, not therapists

The Visitor Service is built on the Red Cross' strong humanitarian foundation, aiming to facilitate social interaction and a sense of connection between prisoners and the outside world. Within the highly restricted arena that the prison is, the conversations are meant as a way to provide a form of normalcy and work against isolation. The volunteers' visits aim to give an opportunity for the prisoners to engage in everyday conversations that does not necessarily revolve around their sentence or their rehabilitation, with someone who does not live or work in the prison. It is however important to distinguish between the role of a visitor and that of a

therapist, counsellor, or healthcare professional. Throughout my conversation with Tore, he repeatedly emphasises this distinction and reflects on the nature of the role volunteers take on:

> I think…yeah, if I were to only visit those convicted of sex crimes, I would need a different kind of training and…well, knowledge.
>
> *Why do you think that?*
>
> It seems to me…because then it sounds like you are taking on a therapeutic role. A more specialised therapist. But we are not therapeutic. We are just someone to talk to. It's not a therapist role or anything like that, we are conversation partners. I believe we bring something positive, because we do, but not in a therapeutic sense. You have to remember that…we give them a sense of normality, without being in the role of a therapist. But I think they appreciate that. *(Tore)*

The broader societal belief that prisoners sentenced for sex crimes are fundamentally different or more dangerous than others can make so that ordinary, non-directed conversation may seem insufficient, and therefore, such as Tore suggests, there is instead necessary with a more therapeutic or specialised role when volunteering with these persons. By looking at CoSA, for example, which is a voluntary activity solely aimed at persons sentenced for sex crimes, the volunteers takes on the role of an agent of change through a dual focus on both offering social support and holding the person accountable while aiming to reduce the risk of reoffending (Friestad and Sandbukt, 2024). Where CoSA focuses on challenging the person they volunteer with, the Visitor Service has a different aim, overruled by a total neutrality. They are not present in order to help the person change their behaviour or discuss accountability. Their role is purely social, focused on reducing loneliness rather than guiding and monitoring conduct (Norwegian Red Cross, 2020).

This is an interesting distinction, which can question the assumptions that underpin voluntary work with different groups of prisoners. It may appear that the boundary between being a visitor and taking on a more specialised role can change when the person they meet are in prison due to sex crimes. Despite how all prisoners may experience feelings of guilt, shame, or remorse, sex crimes are often regarded as extra stigmatised, both within society and the prison system itself. Lise reflects on this boundary, as she differentiates between the role of a visitor and that of a therapist, noting how she remains aware of this distinction:

> I have to think a lot about that [my role]. Because it's very easy to slip into…not a therapist role, but a role that is a bit too defined, in a sense. So I have to be careful not to…and I'm very aware of it.

Although in our conversation Lise states how she does not feel as though she is stepping into a role when visiting prisoners, rather, and that she is rather there as herself, she still acknowledges how the boundaries between the two has not always been an intuitive approach and that she has had to actively navigate this balance:

> I think it's become easier over the years. But it was difficult the first time. Because I went to the prison and the prisoner and I thought to myself 'Am I supposed to save you?'. But that is not what I was there for, that is not my role. I am just there as a person and a fellow human being; someone they can talk to and who can listen. *(Lise)*

This highlights a key tension: the ambiguity of the visitor role. Lises' first impression was that she had to 'save' the person she visited, having to remind herself how this was outside the scope of her role. The relational nature of their encounters is built on presence and human connection, but it can also challenge how they maintain the formal boundaries the Red Cross expect from them. This suggests how, what the visitor may *feel* as is expected of them in their role, and what is *actually* expected, may not always naturally align. This is further exemplified by how one volunteer described that a prisoner asked them to accompany them in court due to how they had built an emotional bond, and the person saw the visitor as the person closest to them who could provide support in a difficult landscape such as the court room. Another visitor described needing to alert the prison's medical team due to how the interactions with the prisoner turned into what felt like a therapeutic relation, and they saw the person to be in need of a *real* health-care worker in order to provide sufficient support. These moments illustrate how volunteers may be pulled into situations that exceed the scope of their role. The boundaries appear to not always be self-evident, neither to the visitors or to the prisoner, and expectations ultimately ends up entangled.

This complexity reveals how the dual presence that visitors hold, both as individuals and as representatives of the Red Cross, can create tensions. While people naturally adapt their behaviour to different social contexts, the volunteer role is more constrained. As Faccio and Costa (2013) note, individuals do not have unlimited freedom in their 'performance' of roles, but they are shaped and limited by the institutional structures they operate within. Unlike trained professionals, volunteers are not equipped with clinical tools to process sensitive topics like sex

crimes in a structured manner. As a result, while they strive to remain authentic and build rapport, they must also be cautious not to overstep the boundaries of their role. This balance requires constant negotiation. In this negotiation, it can be challenging for the visitors to adjust how much of themselves they bring into the conversation and how much they leave out. While The Red Cross states how the volunteers enter the prison as representatives of the organisation, not as private individuals (Norwegian Red Cross, 2005), it appears that this distinction can be challenging to navigate. Emilie captures this duality when asked whether she sees herself stepping into a role when entering the prison:

> Yes and no, but mostly no. I feel like I have a kind of…a good backing from the Red Cross, like a sort of stamp of approval. But at the same time, we are supposed to be ourselves…and then it's up to us how much of ourselves we bring into the conversations.

Her reflection reveals a layered identity that is both grounded in her organisational belonging but also shaped by personal presence. Emilie feels protected by her Red Cross role yet still sees herself as acting on her own terms, selectively deciding what to share. This ambiguity reflects the dual role of visitors, where they have automatic legitimacy from their organisation, but the interaction still relies on their individual choices and personalities. Solveig expands on the feeling of having the Red Cross as a support during her interaction. She emphasises that while she is entering the prison and conversations as herself, her identity as a Red Cross volunteer shapes both how she is perceived and how she presents herself:

> Yes, I do [enter a role]. I represent the Red Cross…that's a role I have. I'm not necessarily acting as a private individual. Even though it's my private self that drives me…but I have to be a 'Red Crosser' when I go in, so obviously I have a role. And they also receive me as someone who is in that role. My experience is that the Red Cross is very well accepted in there, right? You do not touch the visitors. There is this kind of respect that exists for that role. If I had come in as something else, I definitely wouldn't have gotten the same treatment as I do. No, no, no. I have to put my Red Cross hat on. Yes..I do.

Her experience suggests that the Red Cross affiliation provides a form of legitimacy that allows volunteers to gain trust easier than they would have if they came without this form of organisational support. However, at the same time, she also complicates the notion such a personal performance and the paradox that comes along with it:

> But it's also me as a person that drives me to do this… I associate myself very much with the Red Cross. So I guess, there aren't many differences between the two…there really isn't. So no, I can't separate myself from it…I can't become someone else when I walk in or out of there, so to speak. *(Solveig)*

Solveig's experience suggests that, over time, the organisational values of the Red Cross may even become intertwined with their personal identity, which makes it even harder to separate the two. The role may be internalised as it is no longer something they merely step into, but something that merges with who they are. This can make it difficult to maintain an emotional distance or to draw clear lines between 'visitor' and 'self'. Similarly, there seems to be a fine line between the personal and public side of a visitor. This distinction is for Laila refined by separating between being 'personal' and being 'private'. She explains:

> I'm going in as a Red Cross volunteer. But when you enter a conversation with a prisoner, you become personal. You don't become private, but you become personal (…). However, at the end of the day, I'm of course a representative of the Red Cross. But…there is something about the fact that the prisoner is meeting *me*. He's not meeting just some Red Cross volunteer, he's also meeting Laila, so to speak. And I believe that's important for the prisoner too. *(Laila)*

Laila's account highlights an interesting distinction. Being personal involves warmth, connection, and authenticity, which are aspects that are essential in order to build trust. Being private, on the other hand, involves sharing information or emotions that might compromise the boundaries of the role. Emilie highlights how she manages this in a strategic way, in her presentation of self. Here, she describes how she deliberately adjust how much she reveals, while giving just enough to foster trust without overexposing herself:

> And I guess I think…well, it might sound a bit harsh, but I do think a bit strategically about the trust and the loyalty…or, yeah…the relation of trust and the relation between us that we build. Like…I can share things that I don't find too sensitive, that might sound more significant than they are. For example, if they ask if I have children, I can say that I don't, and that I'm not sure if I want any. That me and my partner are discussing it from time to time, and stuff like that. Because, in that way, I share a bit of myself that sound private, but without crossing any of my personal boundaries. But it makes it sound like I'm sharing a lot, without actually revealing things like my address, where I work or where I live.
>
> *So it feels private, but it is still within your comfort zone?*

> Yes exactly! And I get the impression that they [the prisoners] understand these boundaries too. And honestly, they are mostly starved for someone to talk to…like, someone who isn't another prisoner or a member of staff. So they just keep talking…it's mostly about listening to them rather than speaking. *(Emilie)*

This illustrates how the appearance of vulnerability can itself be a resource. Emilie performs openness while maintaining control, a balancing act that preserves the emotional safety of both parties. At the same time, this also challenges the idea that volunteers solely function as passive listeners. Their role involves a constant negotiation of boundaries, between involvement and detachment, and between sincerity and performance. While Emilie notes that prisoners do most of the talking, her example also shows that the volunteer's presence is not neutral. It is shaped by what kind of 'self' they choose to present, how much to give and when to pull back.

In this way, Emilie's example, along with the reflections from her fellow visitors, can be understood as part of what Goffman (1959) calls the presentation of self. Through speech and conversational choices, they create 'fronts' as performances that help define the situation for both the actor and the audience (Fine & Manning, 2003). In the case of Red Cross volunteers, the front is that of a humanitarian, neutral, caring visitor, and the audience expects a coherence between these traits and the volunteers act (Beames et al., 2021). Here, the Red Cross 'backing' becomes more than just symbolic, as it helps the visitors construct a moral and emotional boundary that enables them to be *personal* but not *private*. It also legitimises the interaction itself, providing a kind of shared script through which prisoners and volunteers can relate.

However, this boundary is not just protective, it is also limiting. It constrains how much empathy can be expressed, how reciprocal conversations can be, and how far emotional intimacy can go. At the same time, as Emilie's final reflection suggests, this boundary is not one-sided. While the prisoner mostly talks and the volunteer listens, both are still engaging within a space marked by clear limits. These boundaries work to make the relationship possible, as it preserves trust, affirms dignity, and keeps both volunteer and prisoner safe within the roles they are there to 'perform'.

6.2 Discussing crime in the front stage

The criminal actions are not the main theme in the interactions between prisoner and visitor. Rather, the visits are shaped by a humanitarian ethos, grounded in neutrality and non-judgment. While all participants know that at least one of the prisoners they have been in a pairing with has been sentenced for sex crimes, all participants still emphasise how their role is not to address the persons criminal actions - and they certainly never ask why they are in prison. Some volunteers even actively avoid discussing crime and instead try to steer the conversation towards everyday topics. In his interview, Tore for example, explained how he does not like to focus on *why* the person he visits is in prison, but rather wants to ensure that the hour they share together is a positive experience. Similarly, Lise states how she also *used* to do this, but after she saw how this could affect the conversation, she changed her approach:

> I don't view the different types of crimes differently. So, I have sometimes thought that, at the first meeting, I should tell them that 'I don't want to know why you're in here'. But...then I realised how that would be to, in a bad way, shut something down. Because they often want to talk about themselves and what they walk around thinking about, which may as well be their crimes. *(Lise)*

Here, she points to an important tension: while it is key for the visitors neutrality to avoid displaying any form of visible judgement, this must not come at the cost of silencing the prisoner or their conversational needs. By rejecting the topic, she realised that she might unintentionally undermine a space for self-expression, particularly if the crime is central to what the prisoner is emotionally processing. In this sense, the visitors' neutrality needs to be balanced against an openness to the prisoner's subjectivity. Solveig adds to this, highlighting how being a trusted listener can offer emotional support to the person in prison:

> It's a relief for them to talk to someone who isn't allowed to share what they say, someone who doesn't have any influence, someone who has no power. So, I think it's good for them [to talk about their sentence]. And we let them talk, if they want to. But we never ask. We're trained not to go in and say 'hey, so what did you do?'. We are not allowed to do that. *(Solveig)*

Here, Solveig presents the volunteer as a sort of liminal figure who are present within the prison space but still positioned outside the formal power structure. This allows the prisoner to explore topics, such as their sentence or their crime, without fear of negative repercussions. However, this dynamic is still taking place within a performative structure. Whereas Tore and Lise reflects

on how they may try to create a frontstage setting where normalcy and neutrality is the priority, for the prisoner, their criminal actions or their prison sentence may *be* the normality and therefore a natural, or even necessary, part of the conversation. Shutting this down, may therefore have the effect of rejection, rather than support.

When the prisoner may want to talk about subjects that can create moral discomfort or challenges to the volunteers' personal boundaries within the conversation, a layer of complexity is introduced to the interaction. When engaging with sensitive themes, the volunteers facework is vital to avoid breaking their role as a neutral listener. As, if they were to lose face, this would further break with the expectations the prisoners have to them in their voluntary activity. Lise reflects on this complexity:

> I do think they [prisoners sentenced for sex crimes] are sensitive to how I react…I think they're scared that I will turn around and say 'this isn't for me'. Because I know that some visitors have said that before. And maybe that comes from them feeling a bit…uneasy. You are sitting across the table from someone with a rape conviction. And, of course, you have to…it is not right to say swallow it, but you have to think 'okay…he is telling me this', and sometimes I think to myself 'is everything he is telling me true?'. I can't verify it, so I don't know. But some of it is so extreme that I almost wonder if it even *could* be true. *(Lise)*

Lise's account illustrates a moral balancing act where she must allow space for the prisoners' disclosure while managing her own emotional reactions. This challenge can be intensified by the stigmatised nature of sex crimes. As shown, people sentenced for sex crimes are often met with extra strong public condemnation and social isolation (Gilliam et al., 2021), volunteers may be more hesitant to work with this group (Lowe, 2019), they experience additional layers of marginalisation by being excluded or isolated within the prison population (Ugelvik, 2020), and institutional actors such as staff and psychologists hold more negative attitudes toward people convicted of sex crimes than toward other prisoners (Van den Berg, 2018). And, the prisoners themselves know all of this way too well. As a result, they may fear, or even expect, rejection. Therefore, the moment of disclosure, becomes a critical point of facework for the volunteer. As Rune puts it:

> You just have to listen to it and not look too surprised.

The moment of disclosure, when the prisoner decides to talk to the visitor about sex crimes, appears to for some function as a test. Not only of the visitors' neutrality, but also of their authenticity. According to Goffman's dramaturgical framework, the actor gauges the audiences' reaction to assess whether their performance is being accepted (Goffman, 1959). In this context, the volunteer becomes the performer, watching closely to see if their front of unconditional and nonjudgemental presence is accepted by the prisoner. At the same time, as prisoners sentenced for sex crimes can be extra vary of the reactions they receive, they may also use this moment to assess the visitors:

> They always tell me about their sentences. I think it's important to them. One thing is that they are sat in prison right now, having done what they have done. And then there is another thing where they are testing what kind of person I am. Like, 'hey, this is what I am in for – do you still want to be here and talk to me?'. It is kind of a test. *(Solveig)*

By discussing or disclosing their crime, the prisoner challenges the volunteer's frontstage performance, ultimately testing whether their commitment to the principles of their voluntary role will hold up when confronted with the knowledge of the sexual nature of their crimes. It therefore appears that these interactions involve more than casual conversation. They can instead be seen as structured and symbolically loaded performances, where both prisoner and volunteer are in some ways engaged in an assessment of one another. This disclosure becomes more than telling a story of the past. Instead, it becomes an act, a sort of relational risk-taking, where the person attempts to determine: will you still want to visit me after you get to know this? And, for the volunteers, the answer must be – or at least appear to be – yes, if a relation of trust is going to be preserved.

6.3 Discussing crime in the backstage

In her interview, Emilie shared a story which depicts how frontstage behaviour at times can exist in tension with backstage processes. Over a longer period of time, she visited a man who never explicitly told her what he was in prison for. He did, however, occasionally bring concrete or surprising details and strange topics into their conversations, catching Emilie off-guard and at times leaving her wondering what he *really* meant by what he had just shared with her. She consciously and repeatedly tried to remind herself of how the expectations for her role was to

simply listen and be present as a conversation partner. However, based on the pieces of information he shared with her, Emilie struggled to fully let go of her curiosity and could not help but to wonder what this person had done. Her backstage thought processes, where she privately fought with questions that collided with the expectations of her frontstage performance as a neutral visitor, created an inner conflict. She described this struggle:

> When I caught myself starting to think 'could it be possible that he's done this or that', I had to work a bit with my brain and work on pushing that thought away. I had to try and separate it away, because it didn't matter. Or at least I tried to. I had to focus on being present in the moment and not think 'what if he actually did this?', but instead just be there in the conversation. (…) I had to remind myself that 'okay, but I'm not here just to sit and wonder about what he has done. That is not my focus. I'm here to listen, and to be a break for him in his everyday life'. I think I managed. I think it went fine. But I also caught myself having to deal with it a bit at home when it crossed my mind. It was like 'oh my god, what was he talking about here? Why did he mention that in that way, and why those details? What on earth?'. But then I had to remind myself that 'No, that's not my role. I am not here to try and figure out what he has done'. (…) I was working against myself.

This illustrates the core of the backstage struggle. Emilie acknowledges how she was 'working against herself', as it is evident how her thoughts about the person and his crimes was challenging the frontstage requirement of neutrality. Her repeated reminders of how 'that is not my role' shows an awareness of what is expected of her as a volunteer but also places the backstage as a space of self-regulation and ongoing internal dialogue. This dialogue was not presented in the frontstage, highlighting the tension between the two.

It was only after their pairing had ended and Emilie was no longer visiting this person that she saw a media portrayal of a criminal case and quickly realised this was the case of the person she had been visiting. She describes this realisation as unexpected, further intensifying the backstage processes she had experienced:

> When I realised that this was him…it hit me. It was…it felt very, or, I got a sort of reaction. Because this was a pretty intense case of sex crimes. And by then, I had already been sat there, laughing, getting to know him, right? And even though I thought he was a bit odd, he also had good qualities. And it was just…no, it felt really strange. It was a bit unsettling, of course. I have to admit that. I thought it was unsettling.

The backstage becomes a site of retrospective discomfort. Here, the contrast between her experience of him as a person in the relation they have had, and the reality of his crimes creates a divide. This quote suggests that the backstage is not just where uncertainty is managed in the moment, but also an arena where aftershocks can be felt, even after the performance is over. When asked if she would have felt differently about visiting this person if they had spoken about his crimes, she admitted:

> Yes, for sure. Of course I want to say no. But for sure. I would've had to construct a way for myself to…yeah…work on it. But I would definitely still have wanted to continue visiting him. Absolutely.

While the ideal of neutrality would prompt a 'no' to this question, her honest response acknowledges how she now would have needed to reconstruct her approach in order to handle her performance and role. As this person would have been changed in light of his crimes, she imagined how she would have needed to construct a way for herself to adapt to this change. This indicates that the backstage also is a constructive space. Here, volunteers can actively build the frameworks they need to hold their role together in the face of emotional strain or moral discomfort, in order to perform their required neutrality on the frontstage. The backstage experience appears to not only be active during the visit, but it can retrospectively linger in reflection and speculation, clearly shaped just as much by what is unsaid as what is said.

Lars shared a similar story, where he experienced the moment the person he was visiting told him about the nature of their crimes. His reflections clearly show backstage processes in action, as the moment the prisoner disclosed his crime disrupted Lars's performance and prompted him to confront the limits of his neutrality:

> I had started to think that what he was in for couldn't be that serious because he otherwise seemed like such a decent person. And that's the problem, right? Because that's a judgment. I was starting to assess this person, as if you can tell just by looking at someone whether they have a conviction for sex crimes or something like that. As if you could see it in their face…which, of course, is ridiculous. You can't. And, of course, you walk around wondering 'what is he *actually* in here for?'. But then, right at the very end of our pairing, he wanted to talk about it. And that day, I remember it so well, that I went home and I had this conflict within me because I suddenly saw him differently. And I was still trying, because I feel like it's so important to keep the same relationship as before and not let it take over. But at the same time, there is something artificial about that, because you *do* have an opinion about it. Deep down, you now see

> that person differently, when you know what they have done. It's hard to not see them differently once you know.

Lars acknowledges an uncomfortable truth: without intending to and despite efforts to suppress it, knowledge disrupted his neutrality. Knowledge of the crime the person has committed creates a divide between how he *saw* the individual and how he *now* sees them, making it hard to separate the person he had got to know from the crime it turns out he committed. Lars further highlights the tension between his emotional self and the moral expectation of his role when he discusses what it means to maintain empathy when faced with discomfort:

> As a visitor, you have to try and have understanding, humanity, and empathy. Precisely because you want that person to return back to society and not do it again. But there's…a conflict there. A conflict between your emotional response and your ideological beliefs on it. But in a way this is how…it's how you realise what you truly think about it, in a way. That is when you put it to a test. When it is actually said out loud, when it becomes real…can I *actually* be okay with this? But when it comes to cases like that, involving children and…that's, for most of us, probably the most horrific thing we can imagine. There is no getting around that.

The backstage struggle can be experienced as a disruption from the persons ideological commitment to empathy and rehabilitation. Also here, the moment of disclosure can be seen as a test. And, in this case, it appears to be testing both the volunteer and the prisoner. Whereasa the prisoner may see this moment as a test of 'do you still want to see me now that you know that I have done this?', the volunteers may reverse this question and instead asks themselves: 'can I *actually* be okay with this?'. Such backstage struggle is what Goffman suggests reveal the fragility of performed identities. Beames (et al., 2021:3) stated how: 'impression management becomes much more interesting when there are inconsistencies between an actor's appearance and manner", when there differences between the moral claims made by the actors identity initially and their subsequent abilities to act in accordance with those claims. When disruption or inconsistencies occur, the performers aim to manage these by employing defensive and protective practices to safeguard the impression they aim to present (Goffman, 1959:14). Such management is what Lars describes; he regulates his responses, both internally and externally, in order to uphold his frontstage performance of neutrality:

> But, I'm very conscious of not showing any signs of how I feel about it, and I have never commented on anyone's actions, no matter what they are. It's not my

> role to say anything about what that person has done. To criticise them…there's no point. They already know. They have had plenty of time to think about it. Often, you can see it in them, that they are struggling with their own internal conflict over what they have done. So they don't need me to say anything. It's not my role to say anything. But yeah…you can't just switch off what is going on in your own head either. *(Lars)*

Lars shows that there is a duality to his awareness. On one hand, he is disciplined in his frontstage performance, carefully avoiding judgemental expressions, commentary or body language, not displaying his views. On the other hand, he recognises that he can not simply turn off his internal dialogue that takes place in the backstage. His repetition of how 'it is not my role' acts like a repeated mechanism for reinforcing the boundaries of his position, but it also reveals the effort it can take to maintain those boundaries when faced with ethical dilemmas.

Laila however is critical to how volunteers' perceptions can be altered by learning about the prisoners crimes, and the processes of change that follows. Her questions challenge how there can be an immediate and automatic moral shift solely due to new information about a persons' previous actions:

> Let us say you visit the same person for three months. And you have a great connection. You really 'click'. But then, one day he tells you that he's in prison for sex crimes. Something that no one in the world is okay with and accepts. Does that mean he's not a good guy anymore? Do you not 'click' anymore? Is all good in him gone? Yeah...I think we need to think about that. (...) In that case, you actually have to go home and think it through. What is it that makes it so a human being can change in an hour? *(Laila)*

Laila highlights the emotional shift that occurs when a previously positive connection is suddenly placed under moral strain and questions this sudden internal shift. Her question, asking if a person can truly 'change in an hour', suggests that it is not necessarily the prisoner who has changed, but maybe rather the visitor's internal narrative that has been disrupted. Maybe then, what unfolds in the backstage is not only emotional processing, but also a revaluation of moral frameworks. Here, Laila's reflection invites a broader understanding of the relational dynamics at play. In light of this, it is worth briefly exploring what this may mean for the other side of the interaction – the experience of the prisoners.

Because, Lars points out an interesting aspect when he states how ‘often, you can see it in them, that they are struggling with their own internal conflict over what they have done’ (p. 63). When you see this statement alongside Lise and Solveig’s reflection on how some prisoners appear to test the visitors when they are disclosing their crimes, it invites you to consider not only the visitors’ backstage, but also the one of the prisoner. Just as visitors work to maintain a non-judgmental front while at times privately working with emotional or moral discomfort, the prisoners too might do the same. This can ultimately transform into mirrored impression management unfolding on both sides of the visiting room. For the visitor, the tension lies between empathy and moral discomfort, between the ideal of maintaining a non-judgemental front and their personal reactions that may challenge this ideal. For the person in prison, the conflict may rest between openness and self-protection, between the desire to share personal details and the need to managing the risk of rejection. This thesis does not have access to the prisoners’ own accounts. Therefore, these interpretations are instead based on the visitors impressions, which again is shaped by the frontstage performance of the prisoners. Yet, both Emilie’s and Lars’ reflections suggest that the prisoners also engage in impression management. Emilie describes how the person she visited deliberately withheld details about his crime, while Lars reflects on how the person he visited only disclosed his sentence after a connection had already been established. These choices imply a frontstage performance shaped by backstage considerations. Their disclosure, or deliberate withholding, can be understood as a calculated performance. For persons sentenced for particularly stigmatised crimes, the act of disclosing their crime involves risk and vulnerability and can become a moment of exposure. Here, the potential for rejection, judgement, or damage to an important social connection, is at risk.

Therefore, the conversations between the Red Cross volunteers and the prisoners sentenced for sex crimes may represent a shared space of performance, where both visitor and prisoner manage what to reveal and what to withhold. Here, they are both performing roles where they manage aspects of their internal experiences. In this light, the prison visiting room can be seen not only as a site of dialogue, but also as a carefully managed stage, one where both the visitor and the prisoner move between frontstage roles and backstage negotiations, each balancing their relation, expectations, and emotions.

7 Meeting the person, not the crime

For the majority of people, the information they hold about sexual crimes and the persons who commit them comes from the media rather than research or academic literature. However, media portrayals of sexual crimes often differ from the knowledge held within scholarly or professional environments (Grøndahl et al., 2021). Media outlets can contribute to reinforcing stereotypes and stigmatising depictions of individuals accused or convicted of sexual crimes, seen by the key example of the predominant 'monster-narrative'. Here, the term 'monster' has come to be almost synonymous with sexual offending behaviour (Grøndahl et al., 2021). Multiple scholars highlights the potential problems inherent in representing offenders as 'monsters', as this portrayal of person makes them into predators, and ultimately non-humans who are seen as undeserving of legal and moral rights (Willis et al., 2010; Wurtuele, 2021; Kruse and Skilbrei, 2024).

7.1 'They don't look like monsters'

It seems, however, that the face-to-face interactions that the visitors partake in can challenge this 'monster narrative', due to how the volunteers are introduced to the prisoner and their histories, vulnerabilities, and capacity for remorse, before they are made aware of the nature of their criminal actions. This process of confronting the human complexity of the person behind the crime is captured by Laila, who reflects on how her perception shifts when encountering someone face-to-face.

> When you hear about it on the TV or in the news, it becomes difficult to relate to because you know nothing. No. But here, you're sat with a person who you know what looks like. He has gentle eyes, he has nice hands. Then, it becomes concrete. I think maybe that's the word. Concrete, I think, is the right word. *(Laila)*

The concretisation of the person behind a prison sentence allows the visitors to meet a person and their complexities, and not just a criminal action. Christie (2007) argues for how the less we see of prisoners, the easier it is to make them into monsters. In contrast, by actually seeing the person, they are instead humanised. What emerges from the conducted interviews is how such a concretisation can take place when the visitors gets to see the circumstances around the prisoners and their sentence. This appears to lead to a bigger understanding, and at times even sympathy, for the person they visit. Emilie reflects on this:

> And then just the fact that people are different. And since I have heard about all these messed-up childhoods that some of them have had, it's no wonder that people end up screwed in the head. Really. It would have been strange if they didn't…some of them are so damaged that it would be…strange if they had turned out in a normal way. Or, what is normal, but I mean, if they were functioning normally. *(Emilie)*

Similarly, Rune states:

> I think about the person. Sometimes I think, damn, what kind of family did they have? Where do they come from? What was the mother like? What was the father like? What was love like? Then I start digging a bit into their childhood, and some of them breaks down crying and feel absolutely terrible. Because, many of them have had a horrific childhood. And that is why things have ended up the way that they have. So, I think about the person and about…yeah. *(Rune)*

Both Emilie and Rune depict how, by hearing the prisoners' stories and learning about their childhoods, the concretisation applies not only to the person in front of them at a current time, but also to their background. This leads to an increased understanding of and sympathy for the person. For Tore, this was intensified by seeing how the crime has affected the person who committed it:

> Yeah…the first visit I had, it was very…hearing about how people are doing such dark things on the web that I had never even heard about before. But then I saw how much this was weighing on the person. So I didn't go too much in detail about it, it didn't feel natural…it's so shameful. He was full of remorse. If you think about how, when someone does something stupid while drunk, something really bad…and then you wake up the next morning and feel the weight of it. But for these people, it's waking up in a different sense as they have done these things, right. So they're filled with shame. They're as low as they can possible get. *(Tore)*

Tore reflects on how he saw first hand the toll and regret it was taking on the person he visited. He compares it to the remorse felt after an alcohol-induced mistake, only magnified by life-altering consequences. This visual representation of the feelings felt by the person convicted of the crime is one that very few get to see, as the monster narrative is based on the fixed idea that a person is defined by an act. There is no room for the accused person to be complex enough to display feelings of remorse or regret within the label of a 'sex offender'. However, what the visitors get to experience, is how there are more layers to the person they meet, than just their crime.

For many visitors, the process of concretisations appears to break down certain stereotypes held towards persons sentenced for sex crime. One of these, is the physical, monster-like appearance they are assumed to have.

> You think they look like some kind of monsters, right? But no, you get quite surprised. Absolutely. Especially when you arrive for your first visit and you have no idea what they have [done]…you do get a bit of a shock sometimes, you really do. But you can't show it right then and there. *(Rune)*

What Rune refers to here is supporting research which shows how, when asked about 'sex offenders', many are inclined to envision the stereotypical image of a violent and predatory older male (Harper et al., 2022). This stereotype is in many ways engrained into society, and is also reinforced in Laila's reflection:

> Well, I mean…what you think of when you think of incest or sex crimes are those who are 75 years old, who touch their grandchildren and rape their grandchildren. But that's not how it is. No. They're young, they can just as well be 25 years old. *(Laila)*

Both Laila and Runes statements reinforces societies inherent views and expectations of a person sentenced for sexual crimes to look and appear a certain way, and they even appear to have been surprised by how the people they visit may not adhere to this. This initial surprise at the fact that the individuals they meet do not align with the 'monster-like' image often associated with sex crimes, becomes an entry point into a more complex understanding. Through their experiences as a volunteer, it seems as the visitors begin to see beyond the category itself and recognise the differences within it. What may begin as breaking down stereotypes at the surface-level can extend to a view of the grey areas within the moral and legal complexities of sex crime. Kevin reflects on how he, through his voluntary engagement, has become more aware of the nuances within each individual case:

> Usually, when you talk to people, you…you get an insight into…the story from their side in a way (…). You get a story from one side, which, in a way, neutralises…or, it doesn't neutralise or defend anything that has been done, but in a way, it's somewhat softening. Because you get to know the person and understand that…well, you slowly learn that things are not black-and-white. It is easy to sit on the outside and judge people and see it as black-and-white, like 'this

> and this happened'…but usually there are two stories, right? And I am not saying you should listen to and believe this story more, there is a reason they have been convicted, and I trust the courts, you could say, but still. The story you get from the other side…yeah, you see things a little differently. It's not black-and-white (…). I have become a bit more like that. You cannot generalise, and every case is unique and individual (…). And everything from things that have happened under the influence of drugs or things within relationships…not everyone is a monster. You can see that, and that is the thing with it not being black-and-white. *(Kevin)*

Kevin reflects on how his time as a visitor has contributed to developing his views on sex crimes, as he has progressively realised that things may not be black-and-white. Black-and-white thinking points to how public discourse, and at times even legal systems, can group all sex crimes and people convicted for them under one umbrella-term, removing any room for nuances between the counterpoints, regardless of severity, context, or circumstances. Laila and Nora reflects on how such a flattening within the category is problematic:

> So there's a big difference in…if you visit someone who is sentenced for sex crimes, it's such a big variety, because it could also be…a 17-year old that has a sexual relationship with their 15-year old girlfriend. You will get sentenced for that too. That's a three-year prison sentence. And of course, then the motherly-heart [mamma-hjerte] kicks in. Because, that's a 'normal' relationship. I haven't actually visited any of them myself, but there are quite a few of them in prison. Believe it or not. And I think that is a real shame. It takes up spaces from those who maybe actually *should* be there instead. *(Laila)*

A person who has committed a one-time offence under the influence of alcohol, or a teenager involved with someone under the age of consent, may therefore be treated equally, both legally and socially, as someone who has committed far more violent abuse. Hansen (2022) points out how this lack of differentiations can lead to young people serving lengthy prison sentences that serve neither them nor society, and illustrates this by stating how 'a brief assault committed by a young person in a party situation can be punished more than twice as severely as prolonged abuse involving a position of trust and false testimony about rape. In my view, such a legal state cannot be accepted' (Hansen, 2022:62). Noras reflections echoes this:

> You know that in that sentence, or in that 'bag' of crime, there is everything from someone who had sex with their girlfriend, and the girlfriend was a bit too young, and the parents did not like it, right…It ranges from something relatively

> innocent to the most serious offenses. There really is a whole spectrum there. *(Nora)*

Both Laila and Nora seem to problematise how the label of a sexual offender functions as an umbrella term in society, gathering a wide range of criminal actions into one singular, highly stigmatised identity. Once a person is convicted under this legal category, they can be perceived through a fixed lens which disregards the circumstances or severity of the case. Whereas society tends to flatten this category into a homogeneous group, both Laila and Nora highlights a tension between societal categorisation and their own personal experience. When Laila notes how 'it takes up spaces from those who maybe actually should be there instead' she implies how she does not see all persons sentenced for sex crimes as equally deserving of time in prison. Nora echoes this with her description of how there is a spectrum of severity and context within this group. These reflections may be seen in light of how those who engage directly with the persons behind the label of 'sex offender' begin to recognise a spectrum of severity and context, contrary to the public's often homogenous perception of sex crime. This supports Lowe and Willis (2020) argument on how it is problematic to use the term 'sex offender' as an umbrella term, as it erases the diversity of individuals and situations within the legal category, rather contributing to a rigid and punitive frame. Evidently, the differentiation that Nora and Laila makes between how someone sentenced for sex crimes deserves to be in prison while others do not, would not have been possible if all sex crimes were viewed equally, both socially and morally.

The ability to rank or compare cases within the category of sex crimes implies that the visitors may not see this group as a singular category, such as society often does, but rather as a more heterogeneous group. Meeting the persons face-to-face can adjust the moral lens they are viewed through, and appears to show the visitors how the reality of criminal actions often are not clear cut enough to be placed under one singular umbrella term. It is rather morally grey, rather than black-and-white. As Christie (1977) suggested, personalised and relational encounters can promote more restorative and empathetic responses to crime. The humanising process that emerges in these interactions stands in direct opposition to the abstract and dehumanised image that is presented by mainstream societal discourse. It appears that the Red Cross visitors meet people, rather than monsters, which appears to reclaim the human behind the label.

7.2 Changed view of the legal system

For some volunteers in the Visitor Service, the experience of meeting and speaking with people convicted for sex crimes appears to have become an unexpected site of reflection on the legal system itself. As the conversations they engage in can involve alternate explanations or expressions of remorse, these moments can open spaces of doubt or critical engagement with how justice is carried out. Although the role of the visitor is not to assess guilt or innocence, these encounters can introduce counter-narratives that prompt inner new reflections. This can be seen in Lise's experience:

> Yes, many…maybe not excuse themselves, I think that's a bit wrong to say, but many attribute their upbringing as a possible starting point for a career in what they've done. They talk about their upbringings, what kind of family relationships they had. Some of them also place blame on having been abused themselves, those who have been convicted of sex crimes. I have heard that a couple of times as the first explanation. And then, of course, there are some who say that, especially one person that I have talked a lot with about a rape he committed against a former partner, and he told me that: 'but I know her so well that I know she wanted this, but she reported me anyways just to be cruel to me'. That was kind of a new thought that I had afterwards. Is it possible that it could really be like that sometimes? *(Lise)*

Being faced with these statements, from a person one has established a relation with, can unsettle the assumption that the legal system is always right. For some visitors, this may be the first time they find themselves asking*: Could it actually be like that?* These doubts are not conclusions or formal judgements but can be seen as indicators of a process of moral questioning within the visitor. Nora too reflects on how she does not view the justice system to be immune to error:

> And then there are maybe those who actually haven't done what they are in prison for. That happens too…in these cases [sex crime] there are often no witnesses or anything like that. It becomes a case of one persons' word against the others. And it depends on who is believed and who is heard. And that is probably one of the worst things. Not only do you have to serve time for something you did't do, but you also end up with your life ruined afterward. So it is a…it is a tough category to be convicted for. *(Nora)*

Nora's statement on how 'that happens too' speaks of a distrust to how the legal system is a system that never makes mistakes, especially when it comes to cases where it boils down to

word against word. This is not to say that all claims of innocence are true, or that such narratives should always be taken at face value, but they do illustrate how face-to-face interactions with persons sentenced of sexual crimes can reintroduce empathy, doubt, and moral complexity into what is otherwise experienced as a closed, legalistic process. This does not necessarily lead the visitor to side with the person they visit, question the conviction, or feel sympathy for the act. It does, however, open up a space for more critical engagement with the broader structure of legal interpretation. It invites a deeper reflection on the legal and moral grey areas of these cases, which often can be cases where questions of consent and memory come into play. Nora reflects further on how this has contributed to a shift in how she views this category:

> I think it [sex crimes] is a more complicated and larger area than people have in mind. I used to…you imagine rape, and you imagine it involving children, and you stop there. But it's much, much bigger. So I have…I have learned more about them as a group, and about myself as a person, I think. *(Nora)*

Evidently, the face-to-face encounters the visitors experience seem to challenge the common societal narrative and understanding of what sex crimes are, who commits them, and how they are treated in the justice system.

Although they present different approaches to the issue, both Lars and Lise talks about how being a visitor has resulted in active reflection on how the penal system and the level of sentencing works. Lars discusses how he, since being a visitor, has found himself to question the length of sentences:

> You become more doubtful about the law and the justice system. Because they can be very disagreeing…like when you visit a person who is in for something else [than sex crime], and you think 'well, this isn't good, it is criminal. It's not good'. But when they are serving a sentence that can be many, many years, and someone convicted for a sex crime have received a much lighter sentence, you sit there thinking that this [other crime] is much better. Much better. For example drug cases. You see a lot of that, I have met a lot of people who are in prison for some kind of drug-related thing. Drug-related stuff, sales, organised things. And sometimes they can have extremely long sentences because they believe its organised crime. And you think, should they really get a longer sentence than someone who has committed a sex crime? To me, that doesn't make any sense at all. It's totally incomprehensible to me that the system has that kind of hierarchy, or that kind of ranking of punishment. I don't understand that. *(Lars)*

Lise as well has found herself questioning the length of sentences. Although from a different angle than Lars, she also acknowledges how these opinions may have been shaped by her experience as a volunteer:

> Well, it's like…the number of sex crimes has increased. And the number has increased within Norwegian prisons. And then you wonder why. And I think... Of course, there are many, many reasons for that. There's the time we live in, and all sorts of other things. And then there's this thing where everyone who has committed a sex crime is convicted under the same... I was going to say paragraph. Whether it's... if you've had a 'regular'... or 'regular', you know what I mean, rape or if it's over the internet or whatever it is. You're convicted in the same way. I'm not sure I agree with that. So I think there should be a strict reaction, but maybe it should be differentiated a bit, I'm not sure.
>
> *Did you think that before you started volunteering as well?*
>
> I think I thought about it before, but I think I have actually become more aware of it now, yes. I have looked into it more, read more about it, been more concerned with how sentencing works and on what ground. But I think I had an interest in it before, too. *(Lise)*

Both Lars and Lise reflects critically on the structure and perceived fairness of sentencing for sex crimes compared to other crimes. Lars expresses a clear frustration with what he sees as an incoherent hierarchy of punishment and finds himself struggling to reconcile the fact that persons convicted of drug-related offenses can serve longer sentences than those convicted of sex crimes. This is a morally charged observation, as it appears that for Lars, drug offenses, while still criminal, are less harmful and more 'fixable' than sex crimes, while the sentencing structure can at times suggests the opposite. Lise on the other hand, while also questioning the justice system, directs her concern toward how the legal system treats sex crimes as a singular category. She highlights the lack of differentiation in how a wide range of offenses, from online activity to physical assault, are handled under the same legal framework, critiquing this to be too oversimplified. The flattening of complexity, she suggests, risks undermining the very justice it seeks to enforce.

This re-evaluation of the legal system can be understood through Christie's (1977) concept of Conflict as property and how modern justice has 'stolen' conflicts from the people involved, instead turning personal matters into technical procedures. In the courtroom, individuals become cases and moral complexity is reduced to sentencing guidelines. However, through the

visitors' conversations with persons in prison, they are reintroduced to the emotional and relational dimension of 'justice'. These conflicts are then, to some degree, re-personalised. Visitors are exposed to the moral nuances and emotional histories that legal classifications can fail to capture. As Christie suggests, this reintroduction of the personal dimension can invite deeper reflection, empathy, and at times, doubt - not necessarily of the guilt or innocence of the prisoner, but of the system's ability to fully accommodate the human reality behind legal categories.

7.3 As long as it is not one of my own

Several visitors reflect on how their time as volunteers has transformed their perceptions, and preconceptions, of individuals convicted of sex crimes. Solveig, for instance, admits to having once felt prejudice towards this group. However, her participation as a volunteer has helped softening these views:

> This was before I became, I hope old enough, and…wise enough. If I can call it that. But I didn't like that group either. I have my own, for example if it was against children, let us say it was children, I have my own children. And I'm a mother. And you probably know how protective a mother can be when it comes to her kids. So, it's more the disgust you feel for the fact that people could do something like that. It was completely incomprehensible! That is how I felt before, yes, but then it became…you become more educated. You get to talk to people more and it has simply just kind of watered down. And now I do feel differently because I have experience with this group and I have seen and heard... it has become...I would almost say it's on par with other groups. Yes, I would say that.

When asked directly whether her voluntary experience has influenced this shift in attitude, she continues:

> Yes, it's like I have become…it's not right to say 'accepting', but I respect them more now than I did before, absolutely (…). It never completely goes away, but…as I said earlier, my views are strengthened by having been in these visits. That's my experience…it has made it so I no longer have as many of those preconceptions I had before. It's these visits, they are what strengthened it, where I can have these 'wow'-moments and then start thinking a bit and think 'oh, wow, yeah, okay'. *(Solveig)*

Emilie echoes this sentiment, while noting how exposure to the variety and individuality of the people she meets have helped disrupt the stereotypes she may have initially carried:

> Maybe I had to in the beginning [balance preconceptions]. But I've probably gotten used to it. Everyone has prejudices. I don't go in there without them, I really don't. But, since I have been doing this for a while, I know that they [prisoners] are just as different as we are in the rest of society. So, my answer might have been a bit different if I had been asked after a year [in the Visitor Service]. But now it's…yeah. *(Emilie)*

These depictions reflect the previously discussed views of Christie and how proximity to 'the criminal' can open up space for more nuanced and humanitarian responses, and his argument on how modern legal system has distanced society from the lived realities of crime. What these volunteers describe is in many ways a reversal of the process where the state takes over conflict and removes the relational and emotional dimensions of it. By stepping into personal contact with someone who is convicted of sex crimes, they become concrete. The volunteers meet the person where they are, hears their personal narratives and experiences, and sees the toll their actions have taken on them, ultimately debunking and working against the preconceptions they once had. As Lise stated: 'Something I tell myself again and again, is that they *are* not criminals, they have *done* something criminal. And that is something you have to repeat'. It seems, that the visitors then though a process of humanisation sees the person, and not just their criminal action.

Yet, this humanisation appears to have its limits.

An important tension emerges when volunteers consider how their perceptions might change if the harm had happened to someone close to them. Kevin reflects on this limitation:

> I try to be a friend, you could say. I try to be a friend and put my preconceptions aside. But I have sometimes thought that if this person had done the same to someone in my family, I would have had a problem being…well, being a friend, so to speak. If something like this had happened to someone close to me, or something like that, the tone changes (…). I feel like I can somehow switch off. But yeah, sometimes I think if this had happened to someone in my family…I have children and grandchildren myself. Then I might have said something else or had bigger problems with it. But it's easier for me to be professional when I sort of…or, not professional, but I get a little distance from it. From the actual crime, you could say. *(Kevin)*

This reflection highlights the complexity of how the extent to which the volunteers can humanise the offender is strongly shaped by personal distance from the crime and the persons involved. Further, this suggests how the capacity for empathy is significantly more available from a distance from the actual case. Solveig has thought about the same thing:

> But of course, it has happened that I have thought to myself that 'what if this happened to one of my own?'. Let's say we're talking about either a violence conviction or a sex crime conviction – what would I have done then? I have thought about that many times. But I don't know. No, I probably wouldn't have jumped with joy. So, if I had experienced this in close relationships or with family or my own…I'm not sure I would have been able to separate that role. But, since I haven't, I just do it. *(Solveig)*

What emerges here is how the moral space that volunteers operate in is made possible not only by their willingness to engage with people convicted of serious crimes, but also by the emotional buffer that is created by distance. They meet the person after the trial, after the sentence, after the act itself, and inside a prison – all factors which makes the meeting at a point where the criminal event is temporally and emotionally removed. Thus, while volunteering with persons sentenced for sex crimes appears to foster empathy and challenge societal narratives of crime, it also relies on a form of abstraction. The humanisation that Christie speaks of is enabled by the depersonalisation of the harm they have committed. Therefore, when imagining the crime happening to one's own loved ones, the emotional and moral calculus shifts, suggesting that empathy for the offenders is conditional and bounded by personal proximity.

This reversal, where it becomes harder to imagining empathy if the harm is done to someone close to oneself, may seem like an obvious statement. But it also reflects how the emotional dynamics of proximity shifts not only in relation to the offender, but also to the victim. For the volunteers, when engaging with people convicted for sex crimes, the victim often remains abstract and anonymised. It is solely the person that they meet in prison who becomes concrete and emotionally present. However, in imagined scenarios where the victim is a loved one, the balance is inverted: the victim becomes personal, and the offender is pushed back into abstraction, into someone dangerous, someone to fear and to condemn. This suggests that the possibility of humanising the offender is not only dependent on the visitors' distance from the crime, but also on the absence of a personalised victim. In other words, proximity to either side of the criminal act complicates the moral aspects of the encounter and challenges the boundaries of empathy.

8 Concluding Discussion

Evidently, the volunteers experience with both their motivation and their role appears to be complex and not easily defined. It is therefore relevant to attempt to situate these experiences within broader social discussions, such s the extent to which it is actually possible for the visitor to separate between the role of a volunteer and the role of their private person, whether neutrality and impartiality can be achievable in inter-personal relations, and the potential role that egoistick motivation play in sustaining motivation. Together, these reflections shed light on what appears to be a transformative process for the volunteer: from their initial motivation to start volunteering, to how they now see persons sentenced for sex crimes.

8.1 Visitor, Privat Person, or Both?

When looking at the motivation behind voluntary work with prisoners sentenced for sex crimes, it is important to understand how such an activity does not take place within a vacuum, nor is it reasonable to expect it to do so. As volunteering is embedded within the social structures of society, the volunteers may carry social norms, values, and moral frameworks with them into their activities (Omoto and Snyder, 2002). This can be even more evident in the context of voluntary work on a one-on-one basis, such as the conversations between a prisoner and a visitor. In other voluntary activities, which may be less frequent and include more or different persons each time, the activity will be less person dependent. The Visitor Service, however, aims to build trust and rapport between the two people who partake in the conversation. Then, it appears to be almost unrealistic to not in some sense bring oneself into the activity.

From the statement: ‘In their contact with prisoners and staff the visitors are acting on behalf of the Red Cross, not as a private person’ (Norwegian Red Cross, 2015), it appears how the Red Cross expects the volunteers to embody the values of the organisation when partaking in the activity. The findings of this thesis, however, suggests how it can be challenging to fully separate the two roles of volunteer and private self. Over time, active volunteers can experience a ‘role-person merger’ (Snyder and Omoto, 2008). Here, being a volunteer becomes deeply integrated into the individuals’ identity, making it harder to separate the private-self from the voluntary-self. As a result, there is a blend of personal and organisational identity. Role-person merging is especially evident among older volunteers, where volunteering can function as compensation for a change in social roles elsewhere in their lives (Van Ingen and Wilson, 2017). For example, after their children have moved out of the family home or if the person enters retirement. While this can be a predicter for higher performance and commitment to the role, it

can also increase the likelihood of a merge between the voluntary-self and the private-self, evidently bringing both into the role (Grube and Piliavin, 2000).

Given this role-merge, it is important to consider how volunteers, as 'ordinary' members of society, are not immune to broader cultural narratives. Voluntary work is not only shaped by individual motivation, but also the surrounding social norms and moral expectations (Musick and Wilson, 2008). And, as a result, volunteers are exposed to the same social discourses and media portrayals as rest of society. Here, the public narratives of who is 'worthy' of help may inevitably influence the motivation to volunteer with this group (Oorschot, 2000), and the societal narrative of 'unforgivable crimes' can contribute negatively on voluntary motivation. Ultimately, the othering and stigmatisation of persons sentenced for sex crimes makes this an undesirable group to help. It is reasonable to believe that these views can manifest as implicit biases that operates beneath the consciousness, even in the most well-meaning of volunteers. Therefore, even when volunteers strive to embody the principles of neutrality, impartiality, and humanity that is central to the Red Cross, their interactions and views may still be subtly, or even unconsciously, influenced by social scripts surrounding sex crimes and the people who commit them. This may, arguably, be nearly impossible to avoid in an activity that is as dependent on personal relation as the Visitor Service is.

8.2 Navigating the Role(s)

In this inter-personal activity, there are numerous expectations tied to the role of a visitor. When these conflict, they can create tension by placing different demands on the volunteer. Expectations from the Red Cross, from the prisoner, and from the volunteers own sense of responsibility may pull the visitor in different directions, resulting in a conflict of roles. On its website, the Red Cross describe a visitor as a person who 'provides the prisoner with a much-needed opportunity to share their thoughts and feelings' and as a 'neutral conversation partner who listens without judging' (Norwegian Red Cross, 2025). This reflects some of the organisation's expectations to its volunteers, namely that they should be a neutral and non-judgmental listener. The prisoner who has requested a visitor may hold similar, yet possibly not identical, expectations. As the visitor for many is their only point of contact with someone from 'the outside', they become an important source of human connection. As such, the prisoner may hope for more than a passive listener and instead seek emotional validation, active engagements, and a genuine social interaction. Rather than meeting solely with a representative from an organisation, they may want to connect with an individual. And lastly, the volunteers themselves bring their own

internal expectations to the role, which are shaped by both organisational guidance from the Red Cross and the inter-personal meetings they participate in. They may want to offer meaningful support without overstepping boundaries, to listen without being overwhelmed by sensitive stories, and to be active contributors to the conversation without sharing more than what is appropriate. Balancing these different and sometimes conflicting expectations to the role can be challenging, as the visitor constantly must navigate the tension between being present and engaged while also maintaining the neutrality and boundaries required by the role.

Evidently, this form of navigation involves not only external expectations from the Red Cross or the prisoner they visit, but also internal tensions within the volunteer themselves. A conflict of role can occur, where personal, institutional, and societal expectations collide. There are emotional ambivalences described by the volunteers in how they show up, listen, and engage with the prisoners, despite at time experiencing internal struggles surrounding the content of the conversation or the crime the person has committed. And, the volunteers who experience doubt or internal emotional discomfort in their meetings with persons sentenced for sex crimes, seem to experience this as breaching with their internalised expectations of who they are in their role as a visitor. Thus, they may feel like they 'fail' to live up to the expectations from the organisation, the prisoner, and themselves. As this reduce the personal reward and satisfaction that is usually gained from the activity, it can instead affect voluntary motivation.

Here, it is interesting to reapproach the altruism versus egoism debate. From the altruistic aspect, where the voluntary motivation is solely based on doing good for others (Clary and Snyder, 1999), the effort to manage discomfort can be interpreted as an attempt to protect the emotional well-being of the prisoner. When the volunteers regulate their own emotional responses, primarily for the benefit of the prisoner and keep striving to meet the organisational expectations of neutrality, their self-management can be understood as motivated by altruism. This reflects a commitment to centring the needs of the other person, even at a personal emotional cost (Clary and Snyder, 1999). From the egoistic aspect, the volunteers are motivated by factors that allow them to derive personal benefit from their activity, not only by supporting the prisoner but also by affirming their own sense of self (Clary and Snyder, 1999). A visitor who chooses to stay in the activity, despite experiencing discomfort and inner conflict, may do so partly to uphold their identity as a 'good volunteer' or even a 'good person'. Efforts to live up to their own internal moral standards, while also maintaining a self-image that aligns with any

external expectations, can be read as egoistic stemming motivation, where volunteers may, even unconsciously, act in ways that assist them in avoiding feelings of moral failure.

It is therefore difficult to categorise voluntary motivation as purely egoistic or purely altruistic. Instead, voluntary motivation seems to be situated in a space between the two, in what seems to be a moral grey area where actions may be altruistic in their outcomes but egoistic in their emotional processes, or the other way around. Continued engagement appears to result from an ongoing negotiation between an egoistic need for moral consistency and an altruistic commitment to upholding the respect and humanity in their interactions with persons sentenced for sex crimes. Thus, the role conflict that the volunteers can experience, between organisational expectations, interpersonal relationships, and personal moral standards, mirrors this underlying tension between altruistic and egoistic motivation. Their ongoing negotiation of these expectations suggests that volunteering cannot easily be categorised as purely altruistic or purely egoistic, much like Clary and Snyder (1999) has argued. Instead, the motivation seems to be situated in a dynamic interplay between concern for others and concern for self.

In regards to the altruism versus egoism debate however, it is important to note how the precise nature of a volunteer's motivation and whether it is altruistic or egoistic, does only matter to understand the voluntary experience, not to evaluate the voluntary contribution. It seems like there is a moral absolutism tied to the word 'egoism', where it appears to be quickly associated with selfishness, as an act based solely on the expense of others and thereby dismissed in moral discussion. A definition of the words states egoism as: **'**a doctrine where individual self-interest is the actual motive of all conscious action' (Merriam-Webster, 2025). This raises the question if self-interest in voluntary activity is inherently a bad thing. Rather than being something negative, it can instead highlight how the care for others can be entangled with the care for oneself.

As we have seen, despite how the binary of the egoism versus altruism debate suggests a clear divide between the 'self' and the 'other', these lines may rather be blurred. Here, sustained motivation is often, at least partly, motivated by egoism. This thesis does however argue for how this is not a flaw, but a feature. The Visitor Service is a voluntary and unpaid activity and requires physical and emotional commitment from its volunteers. In this setting, it would be close to unnatural to stay actively engaged for the time the visitors who participated in this thesis have, without receiving any form of benefit from it. Rather, it seems as if engagement in an activity such as the Visitor Service would not be sustainable over time, if it was based purely

on the altruistic motivations of giving but not receiving. This thesis' discussion surrounding altruistic or egoistic motivation is therefore not aiming to remove from the value of the voluntary contribution or to belittle the intentions of the volunteers. Rather, it highlights how there is value in important voluntary work, where helping others can be seen as helping the self, and vice versa.

8.3 Managing the boundaries between 'us' and 'them'

It appears that the visitors who volunteer with prisoners sentenced for sex crimes experience a moral process. By choosing to remain a volunteer despite facing ethical dilemmas or role conflicts, they are confronted with their own biases, values, and emotional responses. Over time, this appears to lead to a shift in perception. Societal stereotypes, such as the 'monster narrative', is broken down and show the visitor how the person they meet may not automatically fit the societal portrayal of persons sentenced for sex crimes. Instead, they meet people that highlight the nuances within this category of crime that is usually hidden in public discourse. Ultimately, they experience how they visit a person, not a criminal action. This transformation is supported by research on intergroup contact, which has shown that sustain interpersonal contact with stigmatised groups can reduce prejudice and increase empathy (Willis et al., 2010; Boag and Wilson, 2014; Swinkels et al., 2023). In addition, sustained contact with persons sentenced for sex crimes appears to humanise them by reducing the volunteer's reliance on stereotypes when forming attitudes and beliefs (Ferguson and Ireland, 2006; Kjelsberg and Loose, 2008; Willis et al., 2010). These findings support how ongoing interpersonal engagement fosters a humanising effect, ultimately challenging existing stereotypes and rather developing the volunteers' views and opinions.

Consequently, such a process of humanisation appears to challenge the 'us' versus 'them' mentality that often shapes perceptions of persons sentenced for sex crimes. The prisoner shifts from solely being seen as a 'criminal' to being recognised as a complex individual with personal qualities. This process does however require an ongoing negotiation of emotional boundaries. The boundary between closeness and distance becomes a personal and moral balancing act, shaped by the volunteer's role, expectations and identity. The visitors are not therapists, friends, or professionals, yet they are not fully detached either. Their role is ambiguous, rooted in care and human connection but still being shaped by ethical and organisational boundaries. As the visitors stand alone in their meetings with the prisoners, these boundaries must be interpreted and negotiated by the volunteers themselves, while still being within the defined structure and set of expectations from the Red Cross. This dynamic reflects a form of managed proximity

(Goffman, 1959). The volunteers regulate what they reveal of themselves, when to allow emotional connections to be built, and when they must maintain professional distance. Some of these boundaries, however, seem to remain firmly in place even after experiencing such a humanising process. A key example of this is the internal question many volunteers seem to have asked themselves: '*But what if it were one of my own?'.*

A visitor is not expected to engage with persons who has harmed someone close to them. Yet, this hypothetical question marks a critical point of moral reflection and role conflict. Volunteers are expected to act neutral and impartial, an ideal that is visibly challenged when imagining the criminal actions affecting a loved one. It seems that where the 'us' versus 'them' divide may be blurred through the process of humanisation, the boundary between what belongs to 'others' and what is 'mine' remains resistant to such change, ultimately revealing a fragility. When personal moral standards are triggered, volunteers may struggle to maintain neutrality in the frontstage performance of their role, and instead expose the emotional vulnerability that is usually stored in an area of the backstage. This highlight the limits of impression management, as the emotional demands of the role combined with the moral demands required to navigate it, cannot always be contained.

The experience of volunteering with stigmatised groups requires an ongoing negotiation between emotional closeness and professional distance, personal identity and organisational expectations, between empathy and moral self-protection. Through this process, volunteers may challenge prevailing social stereotypes and expand their own views. However, it appears that such growth rarely comes without internal conflict, and it is then up to the visitor to manage these tensions within the structural and ethical boundaries set by the Red Cross.

8.4 What can this transformational process show us?

The first research question of this thesis asked: 'What is the motivation behind voluntary work with prisoners sentenced for sex crimes?'. Based on the empirical findings, it appears that volunteers in the Red Cross Visitor Service are primarily driven by altruistic and justice-based motivations. Although the motivation seems to vary depending on the type of crime involved, where crimes that are more stigmatised, such as sex crimes, can be perceived as more emotionally and morally challenging than other types of crimes. Voluntary motivation does however not appear to be static. Rather, it emerges as a dynamic element of the broader humanising

process that the volunteers undergo. As they engage more deeply in their role, their motivation often evolves in response to their experiences and reflections. This can be seen as the first stage in what can be described as a three-step transformational process which volunteers engaging with persons sentenced for sex crimes may experience.

The following two steps of this process addresses the second research question: 'How do volunteers experience and manage their role when working with prisoners sentenced for sex crimes?'. It appears that the role the visitors enter is managed through the clear distinction between the frontstage and the backstage aspects of their 'performance'. On the frontstage, when sat in the visiting room with the prisoners, volunteers present themselves in a manner that reflects the core values of the Red Cross, with neutrality, impartiality, and humanity. Although they can set personal boundaries, any discomfort related to the nature of the crime is typically managed privately, in the backstage, and not shown in the frontstage. This form of facework is essential to maintaining the integrity and credibility of the Visitor Service. However, when engaging with stigmatised crimes such as sex crimes, there may be a greater need for internal impression management for the volunteer compared to in conversations with other types of crimes. The managing of this process, by attempting to reconcile internal responses with the external role, constitutes the second step of the transformative process. The third step occurs for those volunteers who, through a development in motivation and experience with managing impressions in their meetings with persons sentenced for sex crimes, experience a transformation in their views and impressions. The volunteers depict how preconceptions they previously carried are challenged through sustained, personal interaction. Seeing the person, not just the crime, can lead to a more nuanced understanding of the person, the category of crime, and the criminal justice system altogether.

What these findings show, is how there are multiple factors simultaneously at play in the experience of volunteering, maybe particularly when volunteering with a stigmatised crime such as sex crimes. These factors shape how volunteers navigate their role, balance interplay between altruistic and egoistic voluntary motivation, and negotiate emotional boundaries. And all of these dynamics are tied to the Red Cross commitment to delivering voluntary services grounded in the principles of neutrality, impartiality, and humanity. However, based on the findings in this thesis one can raise question to if one truly *can* be neutral in impartial. In emotionally charged voluntary work, it appears that these ideals are not automatically a given, but rather something that is constantly managed and negotiated, and at times even internally contested.

As discussed earlier in the chapter, it appears difficult for volunteers to enter the prison environment entirely free from prejudice, as they inevitably carry with them their personal opinions and cultural biases. When facing crimes that can be particularly hard to accept or understand, these factors may impact their internal experience of the role. Participants in this study described visiting prisoners sentenced for sex crime as especially challenging, precisely because of the sensitive and, for many, incomprehensible nature of the crimes. What is interesting, however, is the observable hesitation among the volunteers when they voice such discomfort. As explored previously in this chapter, this reluctance could stem from the volunteers' efforts to stay aligned with what is expected from them in their role, towards themselves, the prisoner and the organisation. Expressing discomfort may feel like admitting to a lack of neutrality or as a failure to meet these expectations. However, supressing such discomfort could reinforce stigma rather than reduce it. In contrast, approaching discomfort with curiosity and reflection can foster deeper empathy and a more informed volunteering practice. It seems clear that the volunteers who remained committed as visitors over time not only challenged their views and preconception of sex crimes and the people who commit them, but also developed a deeper awareness of their own values and biases. They describe a breakdown of stereotypes, a more nuanced understanding of crime, and a more critical view of the criminal justice system. These emotional processes suggest how volunteering is not merely performative, but how it rather can be seen as genuinely transformative. Paradoxically, it can therefore seem as if true neutrality may not lie in the absence of bias, but rather in the conscious recognition and reflection of it.

In light of the findings and reflections presented in this thesis, there are several directions for future research that emerge, both from the perspective of the volunteer but also from that of the prisoner. Firstly, from the voluntary point of view, it would be of interest to explore the perspective of former volunteers, who initially volunteered in the Visitor Service but eventually stopped their participation. Understanding what factors contributed to their loss of motivation and the decision to discontinue their voluntary work could provide valuable insight into how such voluntary programs can be better sustained. From the prisoners' point of view, there is evident room to explore how they experience receiving such voluntary activity: does it contribute to reduce isolation? Do they perceive the visitors as neutral and impartial? Do they themselves feel that they manage their presentation of self during these encounters? Given the limited research on voluntary work within Norwegian prisons, particularly involving persons sentenced for sex crimes, these are relevant areas for future research – especially in the context of the evolving societal discourse surrounding sex crimes, and the people who commit them.

Ultimately, the findings of this thesis suggest how voluntary work with prisoners sentenced for sex crimes serves as an important social function. The dedicated work from the Red Cross visitors offers a meaningful form of socialisation to some of the most stigmatised members of society. This work does not only signal to the prisoners that there are members of society who are willing to see and accept them beyond their crimes but also challenges dominant public perceptions and negative stereotypes that follow this group. As Kevin states: ‘They are seen as these monsters, right? But, honestly, they really are not monsters. They just are not’.

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Attachment 1 – Ethical Approval

Sikt

Vurdering av behandling av personopplysninger

Referansenummer
695180

Vurderingstype
Standard

Dato
30.05.2024

Tittel
Frivillig arbeid i fengsel med mennesker dømt for seksuallovbrudd

Behandlingsansvarlig institusjon
Universitetet i Oslo / Det juridiske fakultet / Institutt for kriminologi og rettssosiologi

Prosjektansvarlig
[redacted]

Student
[redacted]

Prosjektperiode
22.05.2024 - 20.11.2025

Kategorier personopplysninger
Alminnelige

Lovlig grunnlag
Samtykke (Personvernforordningen art. 6 nr. 1 bokstav a)

Behandlingen av personopplysningene er lovlig så fremt den gjennomføres som oppgitt i meldeskjemaet. Det lovlige grunnlaget gjelder til 20.11.2025.

Meldeskjema

Kommentar
OM VURDERINGEN
Sikt har en avtale med institusjonen du forsker eller studerer ved. Denne avtalen innebærer at vi skal gi deg råd slik at behandlingen av personopplysninger i prosjektet ditt er lovlig etter personvernregelverket.

TAUSHETSPLIKT
Forskningsdeltagerne har yrkesmessig taushetsplikt. De kan ikke dele taushetsbelagte opplysninger med forskningsprosjektet. Vi anbefaler at du minner dem på taushetsplikten. Merk at det ikke er nok å utelate navn ved omtale av brukere, pasienter el. Vær forsiktig med bruk av eksempler og bakgrunnsopplysninger som tid, sted, kjønn og alder.

FØLG DIN INSTITUSJONS RETNINGSLINJER
Vi har vurdert at du har lovlig grunnlag til å behandle personopplysningene, men husk at det er institusjonen du er ansatt/student ved som avgjør hvilke databehandlere du kan bruke og hvordan du må lagre og sikre data i ditt prosjekt. Husk å bruke leverandører som din institusjon har avtale med (f.eks. ved skylagring, nettspørreskjema, videosamtale el.).

Personverntjenester legger til grunn at behandlingen oppfyller kravene i personvernforordningen om riktighet (art. 5.1 d), integritet og konfidensialitet (art. 5.1. f) og sikkerhet (art. 32).

MELD VESENTLIGE ENDRINGER
Dersom det skjer vesentlige endringer i behandlingen av personopplysninger, kan det være nødvendig å melde dette til oss ved å oppdatere meldeskjemaet. Se våre nettsider om hvilke endringer du må melde: https://sikt.no/melde-endringar-i-meldeskjema

OPPFØLGING AV PROSJEKTET
Vi vil følge opp ved planlagt avslutning for å avklare om behandlingen av personopplysningene er avsluttet.

Lykke til med prosjektet!

Attachment 2 – Project Description and Informed Consent

Vil du delta i et forskningsprosjekt om frivillig arbeid i fengsel med mennesker dømt for seksuallovbrudd?

Dette er et spørsmål til deg om å delta i et forskningsprosjekt om frivillig arbeid i fengsel med mennesker som er dømt for seksuallovbrudd. Formålet er å undersøke hvordan frivillige i Røde Kors sin Visitortjeneste som har vært i en samtalekobling med en eller flere innsatte som er dømt for seksuallovbrudd ser på sin egen motivasjon og sin egen rolle som frivillig. Fokuset ligger på den frivillige, ikke på den innsatte. I dette skrivet vil du få informasjon om målene for prosjektet og hva deltakelse innebærer for deg.

Formål:
Målet med masterprosjektet er å forstå frivillig motivasjon og rolle, ved å intervjue frivillige, for å utforske hvordan frivilligheten kan anvendes med mennesker som er dømt for seksuallovbrudd. Spørsmålene i intervjuene vil dreie seg om den frivilliges egne refleksjoner og tanker, og vil ikke legge vekt på den innsatte eller dommen h*n soner. Materialet analyseres i lys av kriminologisk teori med særlig fokus på rolleforståelse og frivillig motivasjon. Oppgavens problemstilling er: *Hva er motivasjonen bak å jobbe frivillig fengsel med mennesker som er dømt for seksuallovbrudd, og hvordan opplever de frivillige denne rollen?*

Jeg ønsker å snakke med deg om din motivasjon, erfaring og rolleforståelse som frivillig. Jeg vil fokusere på din opplevelse av det å være frivillig i samtale med et menneske som er dømt for seksuallovbrudd, din motivasjon, din opplevelse av din rolle, og din erfaring. Jeg vil *ikke* be deg om å fortelle om detaljer knyttet til innsattes identitet eller sak, eller bryte taushetsplikten din hos Røde Kors.

Tema:
Det er lite forskning på frivillig arbeid i fengsel. Samtidig er det to hovedgrunner til at det er viktig å forske på frivillig arbeid med akkurat denne gruppen med innsatte. For det første er nå nesten 1 av 4 innsatte i norske fengsler dømt for seksuallovbrudd. Dette utgjør en stor og økende gruppe, som det er nødvendig å forske på. For det andre, er dette en ekstra utsatt gruppe under soning. Mange blir utestengt fra fellesskapet eller velger å isolere seg selv. Tiltak som kan bidra til sosialisering og å motvirke isolasjonsskader, slik som Visitortjenesten, er derfor av kriminalpolitisk interesse.

Hvem er ansvarlig for forskningsprosjektet?
Institutt for kriminologi og rettssosiologi ved Universitetet i Oslo er ansvarlige for prosjektet. Dette er ikke et forskningsprosjekt på vegne av Røde Kors.

Hvorfor får du spørsmål om å delta?
Du får spørsmål fordi du er eller har vært frivillig i Røde Kors sin visitortjeneste. Hvis du har stått i en samtalekobling der den innsattes dom har blitt et tema, og personen er dømt seksuallovbrudd, ønsker jeg veldig gjerne å snakke med deg.

Hva innebærer det for deg å delta?
Hvis du velger å delta i prosjektet innebærer det at vi avtaler en tid for et intervju som vil vare i ca. 1 time. I intervjuet vil jeg stille deg spørsmål om egne tanker og refleksjoner knyttet til din motivasjon som frivillig i Visitortjenesten, og din rolle i en samtalekobling med en innsatt som er dømt for seksuallovbrudd. Hvis det er greit for deg vil intervjuet tas opp med en lydopptaker. Det er kun jeg som vil høre på lydopptaket. Jeg har taushetsplikt, og hvis du ønsker å delta vil du forbli anonym. Jeg vil ikke skrive om informasjon der hvem du er, hvilken Røde Kors lokalforening du tilhører, eller hvilket fengsel du besøker vil kunne gjenkjennes, og Røde Kors vil heller ikke få beskjed om at du deltar.

Det er frivillig å delta
Det er frivillig å delta i prosjektet. Hvis du velger å delta, kan du når som helst, frem til oppgaven er levert, trekke samtykket tilbake uten å oppgi noen grunn. Alle dine personopplysninger vil da bli slettet. Det vil ikke ha noen negative konsekvenser for deg hvis du ikke vil delta eller senere velger å trekke deg.

Ditt personvern – hvordan vi oppbevarer og bruker dine opplysninger
Jeg vil kun bruke opplysningene om deg til formålene jeg har fortalt om i dette skrivet, og alle opplysninger vil bli behandlet konfidensielt og i samsvar med personvernregelverket. Det er kun undertegnede som vil ha tilgang til dine opplysninger og det du forteller meg. Navnet og kontaktopplysningene dine vil erstattes med en kode som lagres på en egen navneliste adskilt fra øvrige data. Dataene oppbevares på UiOs brukersystem bak lukket tilgang ved hjelp av innloggingsfunksjon.

Hva skjer med personopplysningene dine når forskningsprosjektet avsluttes?
Prosjektet vil etter planen avsluttes innen mai 2025. Etter prosjektslutt vil datamaterialet anonymiseres og personopplysningene slettes. Den seneste sluttdatoen for prosjektet vil være i november 2025.

Hva gir meg rett til å behandle personopplysninger om deg?
Jeg behandler opplysninger om deg basert på ditt skriftlige samtykke.
På oppdrag fra Universitetet i Oslo har SIKT – kunnskapssektorens tjenesteleverandør vurdert at behandlingen av personopplysninger i dette prosjektet er i samsvar med personvernregelverket.

Dine rettigheter
Så lenge du kan identifiseres i datamaterialet, har du rett til:

- Innsyn i hvilke opplysninger vi behandler om deg, og å få utlevert en kopi av opplysningene
- Å få rettet opplysninger om deg som er feil eller misvisende
- Å få slettet personopplysninger om deg
- Å sende klage til Datatilsynet om behandlingen av dine personopplysninger

Hvis du ønsker å delta i studien, eller har spørsmål om prosjektet, kan du ta kontakt med meg på e-post: eller på telefon:
Hvis du har spørsmål til studien, eller ønsker å vite mer om eller benytte deg av dine rettigheter, ta kontakt med:
Hovedveileder for prosjektet:

- ved Universitetet i Oslo på e-post:
-

Vårt personvernombud:

- Roger Markgraf-Bye på e-post: personvernombud@uio.no

Hvis du har spørsmål knyttet til vurderingen som er gjort av personverntjenestene fra Sikt, kan du ta kontakt via:

- Epost: personverntjenester@sikt.no eller telefon: 73 98 40 40

Med vennlig hilsen

Runa Mandt	Solveig Laugerud
(masterstudent)	(forsker/veileder)

Samtykkeerklæring

Jeg har mottatt og forstått informasjon om prosjektet *Frivillig arbeid i fengsel med mennesker dømt for seksuallovbrudd*, og har fått anledning til å stille spørsmål. Jeg samtykker til:

- ☐ å delta i intervju

Jeg samtykker til at mine opplysninger behandles frem til prosjektet er avsluttet

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(Signert av prosjektdeltaker, dato)

Attachment 3 – Interview guide

Introduksjon:

- Presentasjon av meg og prosjektet
- Informasjon om oppgaven, hvilke problemstillinger jeg vil komme inn på, anonymitet og taushetsplikt, deltaker kan når som helst avbryte intervjuet eller la være å svare på spørsmål. Tillatelse til å bruke båndopptaker
- Påminnelse om at jeg ikke ønsker å komprimere noe taushetsplikt

Åpningsspørsmål:

- Fortelle litt om deg selv (alder, hvor lenger har vært visitor, psydoneum)
- Kan du begynne med å fortelle meg litt om hvordan du ble involvert med Røde Kors sin Visitortjeneste?
- Vurderte du noen gang andre typer frivillige arbeid før du valgte Røde Kors/Visitortjenesten?
- Har du vært I mange samtalekoblinger?
- Bruker de innsatte du er i samtalekobling med å fortelle deg om dommen sin? Hvordan evt bruker dette å komme opp, etter hvor langt tid feks?
- Hva tenker du om at noen innsatte ønsker å dele med deg hva de er dømt for? Er dette av noe betydning for deg/forholdet deres?

Motivasjon:

- Hva var det som motiverte deg til å begynne med frivillig arbeid I fengsel?
- Hvis vi tenker på seksuallovbrudd spesifikt – hva er det som motiverer deg til å jobbe frivillig med denne Gruppen innsatte?
- Er det samme motivasjon til alle typer lovbrudd eller er det litt forskjellig? Evt hva er forskjellig?
- Har denne motivasjonen endret seg eller utviklet seg på noen mate fra da du startet å jobbe som frivillig og frem til nå?
- Kan denne motivasjonen endre seg underveis I samtalekoblingr, feks hvis dere snakker om lovbruddet

Seksuallovbrudd:

- Seksuallovbrudd er jo en spesiell kategori på flere måter – bade fordi sånn det er I samfunnet men og sånn det er under soning for denne gruppen. Jeg vet at Røde Kors har retningslinjer som sier I mot å diskriminere mot spesielle typer lovbrudd, men hadde du noen tanker om å jobbe frivillig med innsatte dømt for seksuallovbrudd før du ble frivillig?
- Har det å være frivillig med denne Gruppen påvirket dette på noen måte?
- Innsatte dømt for seksuallovrbudd blir beskrevet som "nederst på rangstigen" – er det noe du har merket/tenkt over I dine koblinger?
- For det er en tydelig trend I samfunnet nå –
- Opplever du at samfunnets negative syn på mennesker dømt for seksuallovbrudd har påvirket ditt ønske om å jobbe med de på noen måte?
- har du opplevd at noen syntes det er rart at dy jobber frivillig I fengsel med blandt annet mennesker dømt for seksuallovbrudd?
- Har du noen gang følt på det som et dilemma å være frivillig for mennesker som er dømt for seksuallovbrudd? Hvis ja; hvordan har du håndtert det?
- Innad mellom dere frivillige – har det vært noe snakk/diskusjon rundt temaet seksuallovbrudd?
- Vil du si at din erfaring som frivillig I Røde Kors har påvirket ditt syn på seksuallovbrudd/mennesker som er dømt for seksuallovbrudd?

Rolle:

- Når du er I fengselet som Røde Kors frivillig – opplever du da at du går inn I en Rolle? Hvordan opplever du/merker du evt dette?
- Hvordan opplever du å balansere rollen som Røde Kors frivillig med rollen som deg selv når lovbrudd, eller seksuallovbrudd, blir diskutert? Føler du at denne rollen kan bli utfordret på noen måter?
- Legger man fra seg fordommer/personlige tanker?
- Har du vært I situasjoner I samtalekobling med innsatte dømt for seksuallovbrudd der du har opplevd det som vanskelig å balansere rollen som Røde Kors frivillig og rollen som deg selv?
- Kan du beskrive en situasjon der du følte det var spesielt utfodrende å være frivillig med en innsatt dømt for seksuallovbrudd? Hvordan håndterte du det?

Avsluttende spørsmål:

- Er det noe av det vi har snakket om nå som du ønsker å utdype?
- Er det noe annet du har lyst til å legge tils om du syntes jeg burde vite om eller som jeg ikke har spurt om?

- Er det noen spesifikke erfaringer eller innsikter som du har fått fra å jobbe med innsatte dømt for seksuallovbrudd som du syntes er viktig å dele?