

CRIMVOL: The International Criminal Justice Voluntary Sector Research Network

**Fourth CRIMVOL virtual working
paper session: *5th November 2020***

Paper Presenter: Abigail Salole (University of Toronto/ Sheridan College, Canada)
Event Chair: Dr Melissa Pepper (University of Greenwich, UK)



CRIMVOL
CRIMINAL JUSTICE RESEARCH

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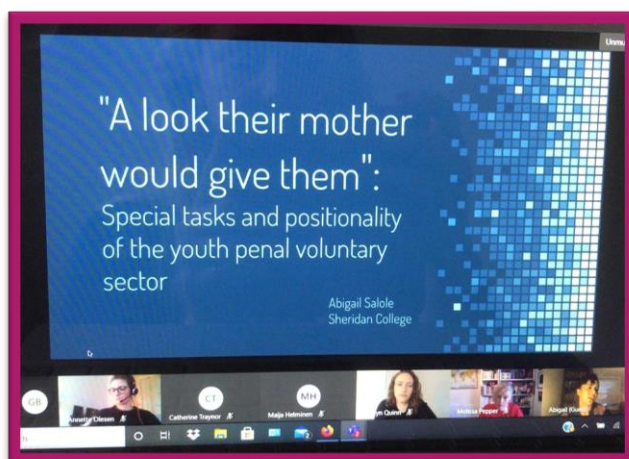
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About CRIMVOL: The International Criminal Justice Voluntary Sector Research Network

[CRIMVOL](#) is an international, multidisciplinary criminal justice voluntary sector research network for academics, practitioners, and policymakers. The network fills an important gap in scholarship and infrastructure: the criminal justice voluntary sector is more topical than ever before, but has not received academic attention commensurate with its importance anywhere in the world. The network is chaired by [Dr Philippa Tomczak](#) (Senior Research Fellow, University of Nottingham, Author of *The Penal Voluntary Sector*). CRIMVOL was established with the generous support of the British Academy (Rising Star Engagement Award) and the Socio-Legal Studies Association (Seminar Competition). A core focus is the development of [specialist early career researchers](#) and scholar-activist work.

Fourth virtual working paper session

The International Criminal Justice Voluntary Sector Research Network (CRIMVOL) hosted their third virtual event on Thursday 5th November 2020, with a presentation from Abigail Salole on the Youth PVS in Canada. Abigail has worked for over ten years in the field with young people in conflict with the law, sex trade workers, women leaving abusive relationships and LGBTQ communities. She is completing her PhD in Criminology at Griffith University in Australia where she is the recipient of the Griffith International Postgraduate Scholarship. Her dissertation research investigates community sanctions and the role of non-profits in Canada's youth criminal justice system. Abigail has been a faculty member at Sheridan College since 2008 and teaches community development courses.



"A look their mother would give them": Special tasks and positionality of the youth penal voluntary sector

Abigail's presentation summarized a chapter of her doctoral research that examines the service provision role of the PVS in the youth criminal justice system in Canada. In this research she

focuses on a small sub-section of PVS organizations that receive client referrals and funding contracts from statutory criminal justice agencies to run programs exclusively for youth in conflict with the law (e.g. custody facilities, diversion programmes, and pre/post sentence supervision). In this chapter Abigail tackles how PVS workers govern youth in conflict with

the law, suggesting that the “special positionality” of PVS workers vis-à-vis the criminal justice system impacts the particular tasks that these workers can undertake with youth.

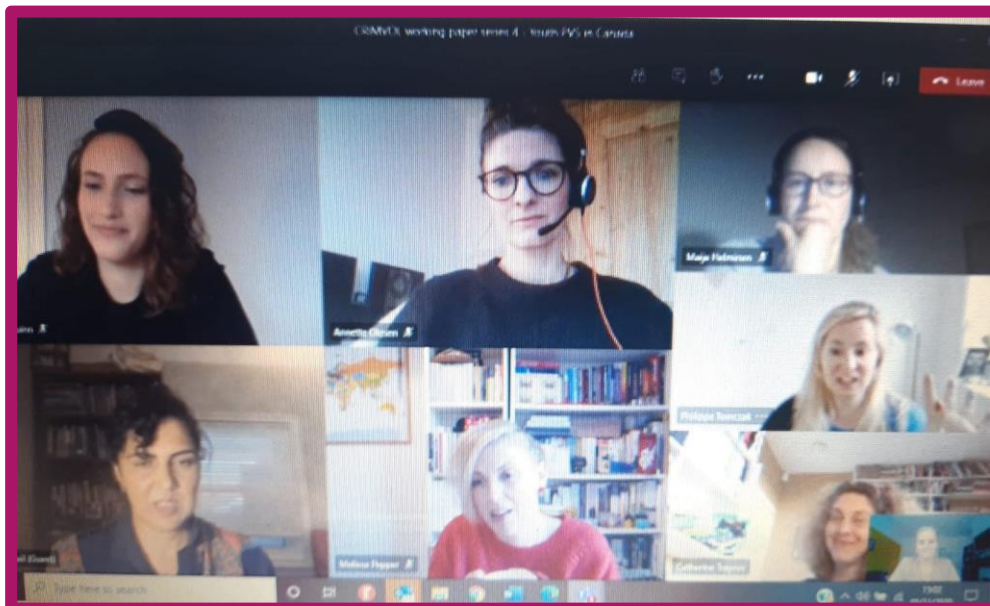
In this presentation, Abigail argued that the relationships between PVS organizations and the criminal justice system, and especially their contracted nature, inform the work that PVS workers conduct with their youth clients. These service delivery contracts place youth PVS organizations in *spatial proximity* to the criminal justice system, whilst also maintaining *social distance* due to their distinct missions, mandates, and beliefs about punishment. She suggested that the PVS is part of the criminal justice process, but not an element of the criminal justice system. To theorize this relationship, Abigail mobilized Georg Simmel’s concept of *the stranger*. According to Simmel, this social form is determined by its spatial relationships with others. The stranger, most fundamentally, represents the space between distance and proximity—strangers are “near and far at the same time.” (Simmel, 1908: 148)

Abigail described this “special positionality” of the PVS across spatial, temporal, and relational/ social dimensions. Illustrating spatiality, she gave examples of PVS workers that sometimes work in the distinct offices of their organizations and at other times work *inside* of courtrooms, state-run correctional facilities, or probation offices. The space between the PVS and the criminal justice system, then, is dynamic and dependent on the relationships that individuals and organizations form with criminal justice actors. Temporally, the efforts of PVS workers and the criminal justice system can overlap, occur in tandem, or unfold sequentially. Abigail used an example from her research to illustrate what she calls “spatial and temporal collapse” wherein the efforts of PVS workers are disrupted or stopped by criminal justice workers.

The stranger concept also reveals and helps make sense of the “special tasks” PVS organizations fulfill in the youth criminal justice domain. According to Simmel, the precise balance of distance and proximity that strangers embody affords them the opportunity to undertake tasks that others are not well positioned to take on. In the criminal justice domain these tasks include *personalized approaches* and *a personal touch*. The gap between the PVS and the criminal justice system is suggested to enable PVS workers to have different kinds of relationships with their youth clients. For example, PVS workers are able to help young people navigate the criminal justice system in ways that might be seen as being too advocacy-based if they were doing it in close proximity to criminal justice actors. They may also spend additional time with young people that is not based on criminal justice programming.

One such special relationship is based on shared “racial subjectivity.” Though there is no official data about the racial demographics of PVS workers in Canada, there is growing evidence to suggest that those working in these positions increasingly reflect the racial

demographics of those who are criminalized. In fact, some of the Black and Indigenous PVS workers interviewed specifically grounded their motivation for doing this work in the mass criminalization of racialized youth in Canada. Though the official discourses and programming of PVS organizations often reflect “race neutrality,” Black and Indigenous PVS workers carved out space to engage in race-based advocacy and resistance with and for their clients. These PVS workers explained that their shared racial identities and lived experiences of racism helped to forge closer relationships with their youth clients. In doing so, the stranger position allowed PVS workers to occupy particular discursive positions in the criminal justice penal field and seek out liminal spaces where they can pursue types of social interaction that are unavailable elsewhere. Abigail positioned this “personal touch” as productive, but also as having the potential for criminal justice interference when PVS practitioners efforts do not closely align with the curriculum PVS organizations are contracted to provide.



Abigail Salole (bottom left)

The fifth virtual CRIMVOL working paper session will take place on **Thursday 14th January 2021**. Presenter to be announced. This will be followed by a members’ choice of ECR career development discussion topic.