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Learning to Heal: The Impact of a Restorative Justice Program on Crime Victims

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LEARNING TO HEAL: THE IMPACT OF A RESTORATIVE JUSTICE PROGRAM
ON CRIME VICTIMS

by

JACQUELYN P. POPLAWSKY

A DISSERTATION

Presented to the Faculty of the University of the Incarnate Word
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

UNIVERSITY OF THE INCARNATE WORD

December 2017

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Jacquelyn P. Poplawsky

DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my parents, James and Michelle Poplawsky. I feel blessed that you are my parents, and I recognize that you have made innumerable personal sacrifices throughout the course of my life to give me the most meaningful existence possible. Thank you for teaching me the inherent worth of education and giving me the confidence to pursue my dreams.

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LEARNING TO HEAL: THE IMPACT OF A RESTORATIVE JUSTICE PROGRAM ON CRIME VICTIMS

Jacquelyn P. Poplawsky

University of the Incarnate Word, 2017

In the United States, someone is murdered, raped, robbed, or assaulted every 26 seconds (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2015). Violent victimization is a uniquely disorienting dilemma because it is the result of harm from another human being. Extensive research has shown that crime victims' complex emotional and psychological needs are not adequately fulfilled by the dominant retributive system of justice. The other paradigm of justice that has received extensive consideration from theorists and scholars, with research that now covers multiple continents and 3 decades, is restorative justice.

Restorative justice theory and practice have become effective complementary, and at times, alternative approaches to assist victims, offenders, and communities in the healing process after the experience of crime. Several studies have indicated that when restorative justice is coupled with retributive justice, victims' needs for information, participation, emotional restoration, apology, and meaning are more adequately fulfilled. While previous research has addressed victims' satisfaction with restorative justice initiatives, it is unclear how restorative justice programs serve to transform victims' emotions and schemas of meaning after crime.

This instrumental case study addressed a gap in the literature by exploring the process of learning used by victim volunteers participating in an established restorative justice program

designed to foster healing for those impacted by crime. Using constructivist grounded theory methodology, this case study illuminated the complexity of the experience of 15 victim volunteers, and one staff member, in the Bridges To Life restorative justice program. An interpretive theory entitled therapeutic restorative justice that was comprised of three categories (i.e., fragmentation, evaluation, and integration) and numerous associated properties emerged in the analysis of this research. The strategies victims used to assist in their ongoing healing were also identified within the interpretive theory. Increasing knowledge about the learning process used by victims in the Bridges To Life restorative justice program can be used to improve professional practices, theories, and policies that are relevant to victimized populations.

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Chapter 1: Restorative Justice as an Alternative Approach

Context of the Study

In the United States, someone is murdered, raped, robbed, or assaulted every 26 seconds (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2015). Victimization by crime is a uniquely disorienting dilemma, because unlike the experience of confronting a natural disaster or severe illness, crime victimization results from the harmful behavior caused by another human being (Zehr, 2005). After a crime occurs, a ripple effect ensues for both the victim and the offender. Families, friends, and communities are impacted by the consequences of crime, and all must face the challenge of rebuilding a sense of identity and meaning. Healing after victimization requires that an individual engage in the process of rebuilding the fundamental pillars of “autonomy, order and relatedness” that construct the human identity (Zehr, 1999, p. 141).

The Western legal system has greatly impacted how we respond to crime and how we think about wrongdoing. The dominant method for responding to crime in the United States is through the retributive justice system, evidenced by the unprecedented growth of the incarceration rate over the past 40 years (Alexander, 2012). The United States has the highest incarceration rate in the world, greatly surpassing the rates of nearly every developed country, including repressive regimes like Iran, Russia, and China (Liptak, 2008). Despite that the United States makes up only 5% of the world’s population, 25% of the world’s prison population is housed in this country (Liptak, 2008). Unfortunately, prison often does not serve as an effective deterrent to committing more crime, as the recidivism rate is 76% for rearrests within 5 years of release (Durose, Cooper & Snyder, 2014). Previous research asserted that retributive justice through imprisonment continues the cycle of crime, rather than assisting with rehabilitation or healing (Alexander, 2012; Zehr, 2002, 2005). With such high rates of incarceration and

recidivism, one must question whether the retributive system of justice is meeting the needs of victims and offenders, who often make up the most vulnerable members of our society.

In accordance with the social contract, citizens are morally obligated to obey the state's laws if they receive their rightful share of benefits to warrant their obedience (Reiman, 2007). Thus, by way of the social contract, "the obligation to obey the law is a function of what citizens get back in return for being law-abiding" (Reiman, 2007, p. 7). Because obligations are "conditional on receipt of benefits from the rest of society," the social contract reveals a fact about retributive justice that is rarely acknowledged, specifically that retributive justice involves reciprocal obligations (Reiman, 2007, p. 7). Within retributive justice, the focus is placed on how the criminal failed to fulfill his/her obligations to society—yet, there is a "correlative question of whether society has fulfilled its obligation to the criminal" (Reiman, 2007, p. 7). It is important to recognize that many convicted offenders often experienced social injustice, as they received a disproportionate distribution of social benefits prior to incarceration (Reiman, 2007).

Many social justice activists have asserted the harmful impact that retributive justice and mass incarceration have on the ethical and economic future of the United States (Alexander, 2012; Elsner, 2006; Jacobson, 2005). The U.S. Court's website estimates that 1 year of prison for a single inmate costs nearly \$25,000. Currently, there are more U.S. citizens serving time in prison than ever before, yet the deep societal wounds caused by crime are not ameliorated (Alexander, 2012; Umbreit, Coates, & Roberts, 2001; Zehr, 2002). This juxtaposition presents the need for an alternative means to assist in decreasing the cycle of violence. An outgrowth of the work of social justice and civil rights activists is the development of a new theory to help foster victim and offender restoration termed "restorative justice." Restorative justice is an

alternative means to educate, heal, as well as transform victims, offenders, and communities affected by crime.

In the past decade, the conventional criminal justice system has been deeply scrutinized for its failure to address properly the psychological and emotional needs of those affected by it. The criminal justice process is centered on the crime, rather than the victims' suffering, thus victims have been described as the "forgotten party" (Zehr, 1999, p. 140). In the retributive criminal justice system, the needs of victims are secondary, as the definition of crime is a violation against the state and the role of the victims is to serve as witnesses (Zehr, 1999). The victims' needs for information, participation, apology, and emotional restoration can often go unaddressed, in order to fulfill the states' protocols and agendas. Thus, the criminal justice system can be characterized as "punitive, impersonal and authoritarian," with the focus on establishing guilt and administering punishment, thereby discouraging "responsibility and empathy" from the offenders (Zehr, 1999, p. 132).

In the late 1970s, victim advocates began seeking additional pathways to justice that could broaden victim rights and encourage outcomes that addressed the complex needs of those impacted by crime (Van Ness & Strong, 2010). Restorative justice began as an approach to address relatively minor offenses like burglary and property crimes, yet has progressed in its application throughout the world (Zehr, 2002). The goal of restorative justice is not different from retributive justice; each of these theories seeks to "vindicate through reciprocity" or "even the score" after a crime is committed (Zehr, 2002, p. 58). When wrongdoing occurs, people recognize with "basic moral intuition" that an imbalance exists and the offender now "owes something" to the victim (Zehr, 2002, p. 59). Where retributive and restorative justice differ is in the "currency that will fulfill the obligations" in an effort to "right" the imbalance that was

created by crime (Zehr, 2002, p. 59). The currency of retributive theory is “pain” through the administration of punishment in the form of imprisonment (Zehr, 2002, p. 59). In practice, effecting vindication through “pain” has proven often to be counterproductive and expensive, hence the 76% prison recidivism rate throughout the United States.

Zehr (2002) asserted that “restorative justice is neither a panacea nor necessarily a replacement for the legal system” (p. 12). Also, it is important to clarify that “restorative justice is not necessarily an alternate to prison” (Zehr, 2002, p. 12). Many criminal justice scholars believe that if “restorative justice was widely implemented, some form of the Western legal system would still be needed as a backup and guardian of basic human rights” (Zehr, 2002, p. 12). There are certain criminal cases that are simply too complicated or abhorrent to be dealt with by the direct stakeholders involved in the offense (Zehr, 2002). The Western legal system supplies a process that attends to the “societal needs and obligations” beyond the “immediate stakeholders” (Zehr, 2002). Similarly, it is essential that society does not lose the qualities that the legal system, at its best, upholds: “the rule of law, due process, a deep regard for human rights, and the orderly development of law” (Zehr, 2002, p. 60).

Restorative justice theory contends that true vindication occurs through greater acknowledgement of “victims’ harms and needs, combined with an active effort to encourage offenders to take responsibility, make right the wrongs, and address the causes of their behavior” (Zehr, 2002, p. 59). Approaching vindication through positive communicative means (i.e., restorative circles, community conferencing, victim-offender encounters, and victim-offender mediation) allows for affirmation of both victim and offender needs, thereby helping promote adult transformation and learning.

The process of restorative justice is participatory, working to maximize shared information among victims and offenders while using empathy and promoting responsibility (Zehr, 1999). Perhaps the most influential visionary of the restorative justice movement is Howard Zehr, who contrasted the theoretical underpinning of retributive justice and restorative justice. Table 1 articulates Zehr's explanation of the contrast between retributive and restorative justice. Restorative justice places greater emphasis on the complex emotional needs of victims by focusing on the harms that were experienced more than the rules that were violated (Zehr & Mika, 1998). Restorative justice programs work to restore and heal victims through empowerment efforts, such as direct and indirect dialogue between victims and offenders (Zehr & Mika, 1998). The conceptual framework of restorative justice can be applied to individual programs, as well as system-wide interventions, that can complement retributive justice processes.

The theory and practice of restorative justice has become continually more accepted throughout the world as an effective way to foster personal and interpersonal transformation after crime. In the 1980s, the applications of restorative justice practices began in juvenile systems, with low-level property crime, but have become a "social movement in the twenty-first century, with an ever increasing presence" in many "global communities" (Umbreit & Armour, 2011, p. 65). In 1989, New Zealand legislated to use restorative justice as the fundamental construct for their entire juvenile system (Zehr, 2002, p. 4). Additionally, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa uses restorative justice philosophy and curriculum to create healing after apartheid (Zehr, 2002, p. 4). The policies and practices of restorative justice can now be seen at all levels of the adult and juvenile justice systems, including their application to severe violent crimes (Umbreit & Armour, 2011, p. 65). Within the United States, restorative justice

initiatives range from small community-based programs to entire county justice systems, which are undergoing systemic changes (Umbreit & Armour, 2011).

Table 1

Retributive Justice vs. Restorative Justice

| | Retributive | Restorative |
|-------------------------|---|---|
| The Definition of Crime | A violation of the law in which the state is the victim | A violation of people and relationships |
| The Aim of Justice | To establish blame (guilt) and administer pain (punishment) | To identify responsibilities, meet needs, and promote healing |
| The Process of Justice | A conflict between adversaries in which the offender is pitted against the state, rules and intentions outweigh outcomes, and one side wins while the other loses | A process that involves victims, offenders, and community in an effort to identify needs and obligations (dialogue, mutual agreement) |

Note. Adapted from Zehr (1999). Copyright 1999 by Restoring Justice, L. B. Lampman & M. D. Shattuck (Eds.). Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing.

The most well-researched type of restorative justice program is victim-offender mediation. During the victim-offender mediation session, victims who voluntarily chose to participate are able to meet face-to-face or through written communication with their offenders and a trained mediator. Mounting evidence from the United Kingdom, Australia, and the United States has shown that victims and offenders derive substantial benefits from mediation (Strang et al., 2006). After mediation, victims report feeling like they were finally heard, the offenders no longer exercised control over their thoughts, and they could see the offenders with greater empathy (Strang et al. 2006). Today, restorative approaches are applied to some of the most severe forms of criminal conduct, including acts of mass violence or deeply-entrenched political

violence, such as in Israel and Palestine. Because of the usefulness of the theory, restorative justice approaches have now extended to educational institutions, workplaces and religious centers, throughout the world (Zehr, 2002).

Many studies indicate that when victims can interact with offenders in a purposeful way, the interaction can be “transformative – from suffering in silence to shared healing, from isolation to community support, from powerlessness to empowerment, from depression to reengagement” (Choi, Bazemore, & Gilbert, 2012 p. 36). Advocates argue that continually to meet the needs of victims and to achieve positive outcomes, restorative justice programs must ensure consistent and continuous focus on core principles (Bazemore & Schiff, 2005; Choi et al., 2012). Careful and rigorous evaluation of restorative justice programs is required to ensure that neither present nor future victims are negatively impacted by a process that could potentially, if not well-researched and monitored, add to the harm, rather than foster healing. Many research studies indicate a lack of research that critically assesses how restorative justice processes foster therapeutic healing for victims and offenders (Choi et al., 2012; Doak, 2011, Umbreit et al., 2001).

Statement of the Problem

Restorative justice works to promote a type of vindication that is difficult to achieve within the retributive justice system. According to retributive justice theory, the way to restore balance after crime is to establish guilt and administer punishment (Zehr, 1999). There is an assumption in retributive justice that rules are more important than the harm done, and the state, rather than the victim, is the primary stakeholder in justice (Zehr, 1999). The dominant legal system displays a “conflict between adversaries, the offender in opposition with the state, rules and intentions outweigh outcomes and one side wins while the other side loses” (Zehr, 1999, p.

134). The victim's experience of the crime is used at the disposal of the state, and thus when the state wins, the emotional and physical healing of the victim is not the end goal. Extensive research has shown consistently that what a victim most wants after crime is different from what the formal justice system assumes is important for him/her (Strang et al., 2006). Restorative justice theory and practice have become effective complementary, and at times, alternative approaches to assist victims, offenders, and communities in the healing process after the experience of crime.

Within the scope of restorative justice studies, "the greatest challenge relates to learning more about the nature of the micro-dynamics of the restorative process" (Doak, 2011, p. 451). Much research has yielded useful insights about the needs of victims, offenders, and communities. Yet, it is unclear how restorative justice programs serve to "transform emotions and relationships" for victims and offenders (Doak, 2011, p. 451). Also, numerous studies have been dedicated to evaluating the effects of restorative justice practices on offenders; yet far fewer studies have been specifically devoted to understand victim impact. Many studies have indicated high satisfaction and restitution rates for victim participants, yet there is a dearth of research that highlights how restorative justice works in practice for victims (Choi et al., 2012). Bazemore and Green (2007) contended that specifically the field of restorative justice now needs "theoretical development on victim impact" in order to create the most robust and effective programs (p. 296). At the time of this study, there was no existing theory that described the learning process experienced by adult victims volunteering in a restorative justice program. This research study attempted to address a gap in the literature by exploring the impact of a restorative justice program on victims' processes of learning and growth after the experience of crime.

Purpose of the Study

This qualitative case study explored the process of learning used by victim volunteers participating in an established restorative justice program designed to foster healing for those impacted by crime. The focus of this study was to describe how the victim volunteers of Bridges To Life, a restorative justice organization in the southwestern part of the United States, were impacted while participating in the program. Grounded theory methodology was used to explore and describe the impact of the learning process experienced by victims.

Research Questions

This study was guided by the following research question: How does the learning process impact victim volunteers within a restorative justice program? Specifically, the study sought to explore these three subquestions:

- How does the victim make meaning from the volunteer experience?
- How does the victim's understanding of justice change throughout the volunteer experience?
- What changes in behavior does the victim recognize, as a result of participating in the restorative justice program?

Theoretical Framework

A theoretical framework undergirds the study by giving context and placement within relevant existing knowledge. This study examined how crime victims used a restorative justice program to develop further understanding about their victimization experience. The concept of restorative justice varies across a multitude of practices and programs used throughout the world, yet there is a core set of values, principles, and goals that ground this theory. The theory of

restorative justice provides an alternative way to conceptualize and respond to wrongdoing, thus this theory was the framework for this study.

Values within restorative justice. The underlying values of “interconnectedness” and “respect” are fundamental to the theory of restorative justice (Zehr, 2002, p. 35-36). In order to practice restorative justice theory in a way that is true to the intention of the principles, it is necessary for the values of interconnectedness and respect to be present. The theory of restorative justice asserts that because human beings exist within a “web of interconnected relationships,” when one aspect of the web is disrupted, many feel the affect (Zehr, 2002, p. 35). In accordance with valuing the interconnected nature of humanity, restorative justice supports respect for all human beings, “even those who seem to be our enemies” (Zehr, 2002, p. 36). Interconnectedness and respect require that a balanced concern for all parties be present in order for justice to be served.

Principles of restorative justice. Within scholarship and practice, it is recognized that the theory of restorative justice is defined by three principles: (a) focus be placed on repairing harm, (b) stakeholder participation, and (c) transformation of community and government roles (Bazemore & Green, 2007; Zehr, 2002). Unlike the conventional justice system, which views crime as an offense against the state, restorative justice defines crime as harm to people, thus interpersonal relationships are greatly impacted by crime. Because crime impacts people, relevant stakeholders (i.e., victims, offenders, and community members) must have meaningful opportunities to participate in the justice process. Participatory opportunities then motivate the community and government potentially to transform roles and responsibilities to increase capacity and create an effective response to crime.

Goals of restorative justice. There are many outcomes that can result from restorative justice programs, yet there are three primary goals that serve as umbrellas for programmatic outcomes: (a) to enable stakeholders to participate in the justice process; (b) to make justice more healing for victims, offenders, and communities; and (c) to reduce the likelihood of future criminal offenses (Zehr, 2002, p. 37). The outcomes of restorative justice work to repair harm and to address the complex needs of the stakeholders involved. Depending on the program, tailored plans can be made that meet the specific needs of the victims and the offenders. Victims and offenders are given opportunities to heal after the crimes and can be more successfully reintegrated into the community. In alignment with these goals, many restorative justice programs throughout the world monitor increased victim satisfaction during the justice process and the declining recidivism rate that occurs for offenders.

Definition of Terms

The following definitions will provide a common understanding of terms that will be used throughout the study:

Crime victim: a person who suffers direct or threatened physical, emotional, or financial harm as a result of crime and may include the immediate family members of a minor, an incompetent person, or a homicide victim, and someone previously designated by a homicide victim to make decisions for such a victim (Office for Victims of Crime, 2014).

Learning: a process that brings together cognitive, emotional, and environmental influences and experiences for acquiring, enhancing, or making changes in one's knowledge, skills, values, and worldviews (Illeris, 2004).

Offender: a person who has been found guilty of the commission of conduct that causes social harm and that is punishable by law (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2011).

Restorative justice: a process to involve, to the extent possible, those who have a stake in a specific offense and collectively to identify and address harms, needs, and obligations, in order to heal and make things as right as possible (Zehr, 2002).

Retributive justice: a form of justice committed to the following three principles: (a) that those who commit certain kinds of wrongful acts, paradigmatically serious crimes, morally deserve to suffer a proportionate punishment; (b) that it is intrinsically morally good—good without reference to any other goods that might arise—if some legitimate punisher gives them the punishment they deserve; and (c) that it is morally impermissible intentionally to punish the innocent or to inflict disproportionately large punishments to wrongdoers (*Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 2014).

Overview of Research Design

This instrumental case study investigated the phenomenon of the victim volunteer experience in a restorative justice program. Since the study sought to investigate the personal experiences and process of meaning-making for each participant, qualitative inquiry was the methodological choice for this study. Creswell (1998) stated that qualitative research “is an inquiry process” that explored “a human or social problem,” whereby the researcher “builds a complex, holistic picture, analyzes words, reports detailed views of informants, and conducts the study in a natural setting” (p. 15). Since this study explored the perceptions of a group of victim volunteers within one specific restorative justice program in order to draw generalizations about the overall victim experience, the instrumental case study approach was appropriate (Stake, 2005).

Merriam (2009) defined a case study as “an in-depth description and analysis of a bounded system” (p. 40). Specifically, this is an “instrumental case study” because the particular program, Bridges To Life, was examined to “provide insight” into the impact restorative justice programs have on victim volunteers (Stake, 2005, p. 445). The bounded system was the unit of analysis that defined the case; thus it was possible to combine other types of research techniques (i.e., grounded theory) with a case study design (Merriam, 2009). Grounded theory research is particularly useful when exploring questions about process and how a phenomenon develops over time. Because this study was exploring the learning process and meaning-making schemas of victims participating in a restorative justice program, grounded theory methodology was most applicable. The victim volunteer work is inherently social, involving shared storytelling, victim/offender dialogue, as well as group and interpersonal critical reflection. Thus, grounded theory methodology guided this study as it engaged with each of these types of data in an effort to explore adequately the process of learning used by victim volunteers.

Setting of the Case

This research study was conducted in connection with Bridges To Life, a nonprofit organization founded in 1998, that provides a faith-based restorative justice program throughout Texas. The organizational mission of Bridges To Life is to “connect communities to prisons in an effort to decrease the recidivism rate, reduce the number of crime victims, and enhance public safety” (Bridges To Life, 2013, p.3). The spiritual mission of Bridges To Life is to “minister to victims and offenders in an effort to show them the transforming power of God’s love and forgiveness” (Bridges To Life, 2013, p. 3). The facilitation of the restoration process for victims and offenders is achieved through dialogue, storytelling, and critical reflection during the completion of a 14-week faith-based curriculum. The goal of the curriculum is to provide

“structure and focus” that all participants can use to make “significant changes in their thinking” (Bridges To Life, 2013, p. 2). John Sage, the founder of Bridges To Life, asserted that the “journey toward peace requires radical change” that involved “transformation of heart, mind and habits” (Bridges To Life, 2013, p. 2). This study explored how the learning process of victim volunteers was impacted while participating in the 14-week program.

Significance of the Study

Through reader transferability, this study was significant to different groups of people facing similar conditions. Shields (2007, as cited in Merriam, 2009) asserted that the strength of qualitative research was that it “accounts for ideological, epistemological and human difference,” thus leaving room for “paradoxes and acknowledging that there are no simple answers” (p. 13). The research findings offered insight to individuals working to understand the complexity of overcoming adversity and victimization. Findings can be beneficial to restorative justice organizations seeking to foster growth and transformation for victims, offenders, and community stakeholders. Merriam (2009) contended that case study had “proven particularly useful for studying educational innovations, evaluating programs and informing policy” (p. 51). Restorative justice program administrators will gain further insight into the phenomenon of the restorative learning process as a result of this study. Additionally, victims, offenders, and community members can better grasp how to benefit from and be of greater service while participating in a restorative justice program through the application of this study. Specifically, within restorative justice scholarship, there is a dearth of empirical research that illuminates how the restorative process actually works for victims (Bazemore & Green, 2007; Doak, 2011; Kenney & Clarimont, 2009). Education, criminal justice, sociology, and psychology scholars

will gain insights from this study as they seek to understand the learning process facilitated by participants in a restorative justice program.

Chapter 2: Review of Literature

The following literature review will (a) provide an overview of the needs of victims after the experience of crime; (b) summarize the principles and theoretical background of restorative justice as an intervention for crime victims; (c) review the research that describes how restorative justice programs address the needs of crime victims; and (d) explain what research is still needed to understand how restorative justice programs impact victims.

Victim Needs

In the past decade, the conventional criminal justice system has faced “enormous” scrutiny “for its failure to recognize” the emotional and psychological needs “of those affected by it, including crime victims” (Wemmers & Cyr, 2005, p. 528). The costs of crime are rarely calculated to include their full impact on those affected. “While criminal justice records must identify each offender arrested in a case, there is no imperative record of each victim affected”; thus, there is not an official measure of victims who do not contact police or where identification is tangential, e.g., a spouse or children impacted by a burglary (Strang, Sherman, Mayo-Wilson, Woods, & Barak, 2013, p. 33). The government, for example, estimates crime costs that include property damage, health services, and victim support services, yet there is only a “crude estimation” of the emotional toll that is entailed in victimization (Strang et al., 2006, p. 281). There is no calculation for the effects on victims, which can include debilitating fear of the offender repeating the crime, anger and desire for revenge, as well as general loss of a sense of community and distrust for other people (Strang et al., 2006). “Since the 1980’s, victimologists have recognized the risk” that individuals face within the criminal justice system to incur “secondary victimization” (Wemmers & Cyr, 2005, p. 528). When working with the criminal justice system victims have reported feeling not supported or properly acknowledged by

prosecutors, police, and legislators, among others (Parsons & Bergin, 2010; Wemmers, 2002). Professional protocols and agendas from criminal justice entities can amplify victim suffering, as they are not designed to offer the sensitivity that victims need after experiencing trauma. Often what the public perceives victims want during the prosecution and sentencing of offenders is not in alignment with “victim needs or preferences” (Strang & Sherman, 2003, p. 16). In order to best meet the challenges of those impacted by crime, it is necessary to understand the most common needs as expressed by victims. Victimologists describe six basic needs that victims have after experiencing crime: (a) the need for information, (b) help with practical affairs, (c) participation in the justice process, (d) material reparation, (e) protection, and (f) emotional support and restoration (Strang & Sherman, 2003; Wemmers, 2002).

Information. The need for information about the developments and progress in one’s case is the most commonly reported need expressed by victims (Ten Boom & Kuijpers, 2012; Strang et al., 2006; Strang & Sherman, 2003; Wemmers, 2002). After experiencing a crime, victims want to know what they can expect and what their role will be as their case proceeds. Wemmers (1996) reported that 80% of all crime victims interviewed in her study wanted to be notified about the progress and advancements in their case. Likewise, in Ten Boom and Kuijpers’ (2012) systematic review of research that assessed victim needs, the need for information occurred in several studies in the form of “information from the police,” as well as “the need for information about preventing revictimization” (p. 163). Research has also shown that at the beginning of their case victims express a high level of satisfaction because they themselves supply an important source of information and evidence for the prosecution, thus the police are attentive to their needs (Shapland, Wilmore & Duff, 1985). Further along in the justice process, victim satisfaction declined as communication and exchange of information with

criminal justice agents and parties diminished (Shapland et al., 1985). The more contact victims had with criminal justice authorities the greater their satisfaction throughout the case (Shapland et al., 1985). Given the bureaucratic nature of the criminal justice system, victims can often be treated as the “forgotten party” and are only notified of developments when they are needed for offender prosecution purposes (Zehr, 2002). On many occasions victims enter the criminal justice process unfamiliar with the law, yet fail to employ a lawyer to look after their interests because of the heavy financial burden. If authorities do not provide victims with information, they will not know what to expect or what has happened in their case. Lack of information can lead to the development of secondary victimization, as well as heightened emotional trauma experienced by the crime.

Practical assistance. Immediately after experiencing crime, victims need help resolving practical matters and issues that arise. The types of practical assistance that victims need include help repairing broken property; help obtaining childcare so that a parent can visit the police station and serve as a witness; help obtaining transportation; help completing legal and insurance forms; and help replacing stolen documents and items (Wemmers, 2002, p. 44). Ten Boom and Kuijpers (2012) reported that victims of violence and surviving relatives of homicide victims were found to have specific practical needs. For victims of domestic violence, the need for employment counseling, financial education, and temporary housing were identified in their systematic review of research (Ten Boom & Kuijpers, 2012). Surviving relatives of homicide victims can request crisis management assistance, such as a dependable person to manage home affairs, deal with communicating with employers and schools, and guidance on how to handle the media (Ten Boom & Kuijpers, 2012). Depending on the county in which the crime occurs,

victim support services may assist with these needs. For victims with physical, mental, or financial vulnerabilities, meeting these practical needs can pose a greater challenge.

Participation. Many studies report that victims want to participate in criminal justice proceedings, but feel discouraged or neglected (Kelly & Erez, 1997; Shapland, et al., 1985; Strang et al., 2006; Wemmers, 2002). Victim advocates argue that victimization can reduce individuals' sense of autonomy, and part of the restoration process requires that personal power be returned. In order for personal power and autonomy to be returned to the victim, some advocates suggest that victims should have active roles in sentencing and decision-making power during the justice process (Zehr, 2005). Opponents of active participation argue that victims already carry a heavy burden and having active decision-making power could risk secondary victimization (Shapland, 2000). Making victims responsible for the judicial response to their victimization could potentially add to their logistical and emotional burdens. Wemmers & Cyr (2004) discovered that victims preferred more passive roles in justice proceedings, including being consulted and invited to attend the trial, yet not required to partake in sentencing decisions. Whether victims prefer active or passive participation in the criminal justice process is fairly subjective and dependent on the crimes committed.

Material Reparation. For victims, material reparation after crime has both practical and symbolic value (Wemmers, 2002). The practical value of material reparation gives financial relief, especially for victims of property crime, who often suffer the most immediate financial damage. The symbolic value of material reparation reflects the recognition that the victim suffered losses and rightfully deserves compensation, which must be acknowledged in order for justice to occur. Ways of obtaining symbolic compensation can include receiving sincere apology and/or partial payment from the offenders actively taking responsibility for the damage

done. Shapland (1986) asserted that symbolic compensation was emotionally significant to the victims and did not require full material reparation from the offenders; even partial compensation can be deeply meaningful to the victims. Apologies or expressions of remorse from the offenders have been shown to assist victims with ongoing healing (Shapland, 1986; Strang & Sherman, 2003).

Protection. Experiencing crime can leave people to feel especially vulnerable, unsure and anxious. In numerous studies, victims asserted their desires to recover their sense of security after being victimized (Ten Boom & Kuijpers, 2012; Bazemore & Green, 2007; Strang et al., 2006; Zehr, 2002). Research has identified that victims are actually at a greater risk of being revictimized after the first experience of a crime (Office of Crime Detection & Prevention, 1998). Additionally, victims fear meeting the offenders again in the future and suffering retaliation (Wemmers, 2002). Victims of violent crime, in particular, have more frequently expressed the need for protection and for law enforcement to administer effective preventative measures to guard against a repeat offense (Ten Boom & Kuijpers, 2012). Victims also worry about judgements from family, friends, and the general public, thus favoring to stay private about their experiences. Generally, victims often question the ability of the criminal justice system to offer future protection and to control the cycle of crime (Wemmers, 2002).

Emotional support and restoration. The need for emotional support and a caring individual with whom to talk were two of the most cited victim requests in Ten Boom and Kuijpers (2012) systematic review of literature. Victims experience many different emotions after enduring a crime and working through the criminal justice process. Often the public views violent crimes as the more emotionally costly for victims, but the severity of the offence is actually not a good indication of the emotional impacts on the victims (Wemmers, 2002).

Previous research has shown that property crimes, like burglary, can have intense emotional impacts on victims (Shapland, Wilmore, & Duff, 1985; Umbreit, 1995). One way of coping that many victims and survivors of crime use is referred to as the “why-me syndrome” (Maguire, 1991). In an effort to look for information and to understand what happened, victims blame themselves or constantly question why they specifically were targeted in the crimes. The “why-me syndrome” is a way for victims to make meaning from the experiences. Research has shown that victims need time to express their feelings, tell their stories, and be affirmed by others in order to experience emotional restoration (Johnstone, 2002; Umbreit, 1995; Zehr, 1999). The severity and bereavement associated with the crimes can cause victims’ emotional recoveries to take months to several years (Wemmers, 2002).

Retributive Justice as a Response to Victim Needs

The conventional criminal justice system has important strengths that work to preserve due process for citizens and to adjudicate crimes with fairness. Yet there is growing acknowledgment of the system’s limits and failures (Zehr, 2002). Victims, offenders, and community members often feel that conventional retributive justice does not adequately meet some of their most dire needs. Many feel that the conventional process of justice can deepen societal wounds and conflicts, rather than contribute to peace or healing within a community (Zehr, 2002). In response to the victims’ movement of the 1980s, the criminal justice system has created better facilities for victims in court, provided more access to counseling, supplied modest compensation for some crimes, and enforced minor innovations in court procedures to enhance victim involvement (Strang & Sherman, 2003). Although there have been reforms throughout the past couple decades, the conventional retributive justice system’s priority is to punish offenders rather than heal victims, thus victims’ needs will always be subordinate (Johnstone, 2002).

Complementary justice programs and initiatives may be the remedy to assisting the conventional retributive justice system with meeting the needs of victims.

Therapeutic jurisprudence. Victim advocates emphasize the necessity for additional research-based programs to assist with the restoration of crime victims. Wexler and Winick's (1996) model of "therapeutic jurisprudence" and Sherman's (2003) model of "emotionally intelligent justice" are examples of the "growing movement to recognize the impact of legal intervention on the emotions of victims, offenders, and communities" (Wemmers & Cyr, 2005, p. 528). "Therapeutic jurisprudence is the study of the role of law as a therapeutic agent" (Wexler & Winick, 1996, as cited in Wemmers & Cyr, 2005, p. 529). Originating in the field of mental health law, "therapeutic jurisprudence views legal rules, procedures, and roles of legal actors as social forces that can produce therapeutic or antitherapeutic effects on the people involved in legal proceedings" (Wemmers & Cyr, 2005, p. 529). Because crime victims may be favorably or adversely affected by their experiences in the criminal justice system, "therapeutic justice calls for the study of consequences of the justice system in order to identify whether the law's antitherapeutic effects can be reduced, without subordinating due process" (Wemmers & Cyr, 2005, p. 529).

Emotionally intelligent justice. Emotionally intelligent justice reflects the five elements of emotional intelligence as proposed by Goleman (1998): (a) self-awareness (knowing one's internal states, preferences, resources, and intuitions); (b) self-regulation; (c) motivation; (d) empathy; and (e) social skills (skills that bring about desirable responses in others). Emotionally intelligent justice utilizes central tools, interventions, and programs for helping offenders, victims, communities, and officials manage each other's emotions in an effort to minimize harm

(Sherman, 2003). According to Sherman (2003), restorative justice was an example of “emotionally intelligent justice.”

Restorative justice. Around the world over the last 40 years, there has been an emergence of practices involving mediated encounters among victims, offenders, and community members that discuss the offending behavior and the reparation the offenders are to make to the victims, as well as the community. The professionals involved in the development and organization of these mediating encounters sought an intellectual framework to umbrella these practices and their effects; the result was the concept of restorative justice. Advocates of restorative justice believe that the traditional criminal justice system is characterized by confrontation and vengeance, which preclude the sensitivity necessary to address the needs of victims. Restorative justice programs give emphasis to victim participation and empowerment through the employment of victim-offender mediation, victim-offender encounters, peacemaking circles, neighborhood accountability panels, and family group conferencing. Restorative justice advocates believe these programs better serve the complex practical and psychological needs of victims (Umbreit, Coates, & Kalanj, 1994; Wemmers & Cyr, 2005; Zehr, 1999).

Armstrong (2013) contended that restorative and retributive theories “occupy similar theoretical positions” (p. 364). Both restorative and retributive justice were “predicated on the theories of moral autonomy and derive their authority from the offense committed rather than from any consequentialist justifications such as deterring future offenders” (Armstrong, 2013, p. 364). Yet, “while both restorative justice and retributivism have been described as distributive theories of justice, it appears that there are several incompatible aspects in need of further exploration” (Armstrong, 2013, p. 364). Specifically, it was questioned whether reparation could exist as a form of punishment. Restorative theorists asserted that the outcomes of restorative

justice could not be classified as punishment, because the central intention was reparation to victims (Walgrave, 2002). That intention to repair victims separated restorative justice actions from those found in the retributive justice system. Retributive theory focuses on the committed offense, and the state is obligated to “inflict punishment in proportion to the criminal offense” out of respect for the criminals’ role “as autonomous, moral agents” (Armstrong, 2013, p. 364).

Kathleen Daly (2002) asserted that studies that compared restorative justice with the conventional retributive justice system were too simplistic and questionable. Daly (2002) contended that in order to expand the popularity of restorative justice, advocates painted a “dichotomous and oppositional picture of justice forms whereby restorative justice trumps retributive justice” (p. 72). By creating a dualism between two forms of justice, the complexities of those concepts were misrepresented. Daly’s (2002) contention was that a primary aspect of conventional retributive justice was adjudication for a crime, whereas restorative justice programs only handled aspects of sanctioning. The adjudication process had the potential to be difficult for crime victims, as they were often fearful and overwhelmed by criminal justice procedures, specifically, giving court testimony and being cross-examined (Herman, 2003; Daly, 2002). Because adjudication was not part of the restorative justice process, there was a fundamental difference between conventional retributive justice and restorative justice (Daly, 2008, p. 136). Restorative justice usually necessitated that the offenders plead guilty before the cases could be handled using restorative tools or approaches. Hence, restorative justice programs dealt only with offenders who had accepted responsibility for their actions and thus shame had been removed from the victims (Daly, 2008, p. 136). The restorative justice process had greater therapeutic potential for victims, because the accused had already accepted responsibility, which enabled the victims to begin the process of restoration (Daly, 2008, p. 137). A thoughtful

assessment of retributive and restorative justice does not require an adversarial relationship between these concepts; rather these forms of justice can be complementary in an effort to serve a greater range of purposes and individuals.

Despite altruistic intentions and growing popularity, the primary challenge for restorative justice advocates is empirically to prove mediated encounters between victims and offenders actually work as restoration. Choi, Gilbert, and Green (2013) examined the perspectives of participants in a victim offender mediation program and found “some patterns of marginalization of victims” during the mediation process (p. 128). It was reported that victims were not given adequate preparation, were occasionally pressured by mediators to behave in positive ways despite wanting to express anger, and were sometimes “intimidated by offenders and/or their families” (Choi et al., 2013, p. 128). The researchers contended that those problems were “partly due to misunderstandings regarding the application of restorative justice values and principles,” thus indicating that there was “a gap between the guiding principles of restorative justice” and the “actual practices on the ground” (Choi et al., 2013, p. 128). Most of the practices described as restorative justice have not been subjected to controlled field tests, and how exactly the victims benefit from the restoration process is not yet fully understood (Strang et al., 2013). For practitioners developing restorative justice programs, it is imperative to consider “developing systematic review processes” and to supply sufficient “trainings and monitoring” so as to ensure victim sensitivity and consistency with “restorative justice theory, values and principles” (Choi et al., 2013, p. 128).

Restorative Justice Principles

This section of the literature review will provide an overview of the principles of restorative justice. The purpose of this section is to gain greater knowledge of the concept of

restorative justice prior to being presented with the research on programs that are used as tools for victim restoration. The modern use of the term restorative justice “refers to a broad range of practices, all of which define justice as an attempt to repair the harm a crime has caused, rather than inflicting harm on an offender” (Strang et al., 2013, p. 7). Scholars and practitioners advocate using a principle-based definition of restorative justice, so that the concept “is not restricted to a particular initiative or program but is applicable to any intervention or process with certain characteristics” (Bazemore & Green, 2007, p. 294). A principle-based approach to understanding restorative justice also allows for multidimensional measurement, as well as continuous evolution and adaptation of practice for diverse structural and cultural contexts (Bazemore & Green, 2007). Three broadly based principles illuminate the response to crime and harm used within the field of restorative justice: (a) the principle of repair, (b) the principle of stakeholder involvement, and (c) the principle of transformation in community and government roles (Bazemore & Green, 2007, p. 295-296). This section helps to supply context for the restorative justice studies that reveal program results and outcomes for victims.

Principle 1—Repair. Within the field of restorative justice, the principle of repair states that “justice requires that we work to heal victims, offenders, and communities that have been injured by crime” (Bazemore & Green, 2007, p. 295). Restorative justice views crime as harm to people and to interpersonal relationships (Strang, 2002; Zehr, 2002). This conceptualization places emphasis on the harm experienced by the victims, rather than emphasis on a violation against the state mediated by rules and laws. Within the framework of restorative justice, a concern for the victims’ needs is the first step toward obtaining justice. “The primary goal for any restorative intervention is to repair, to the greatest extent possible, the harm caused to victims, offenders, and communities who have been injured by crime” (Bazemore & Green,

2007, p. 296). Restorative justice recognizes that specific obligations result from harm, thus offenders' accountabilities and responsibilities are emphasized. Within the legal system, offenders are accountable for their crimes through the distribution and acceptance of punishment. Restorative justice requires that offenders be accountable for their crimes by understanding the impact and consequences of their behaviors. Offenders have the concrete and symbolic responsibilities to "make things right as much as possible" (Zehr, 2002, p. 33). Connected to the offenders' obligations to "make things right" is the communities' obligation to care for the general welfare of its members. In order to achieve justice "in a restorative way," stakeholders hold offenders accountable "not by asking them to 'take punishment,' but rather by ensuring that they take responsibility through acknowledging their part in the harm" and then make "amends to their victims and the community" (Gilbert, Schiff, & Cunliffe, 2013, p. 47). To repair harms of the offenders and communities, it can be necessary to address the root causes of crime in an effort to facilitate healing, responsibility, and prevention.

Principle 2—Stakeholder involvement. The principle of stakeholder involvement is centered "on the goal of maximizing participation" for the victims, offenders, and communities during "the decision-making related to the response to crime" (Bazemore & Green, 2007, p. 296). Engaged stakeholders share information to help decide what justice requires in each specific case. Stakeholders can share information through actual dialogue mediated among one another or indirect exchanges can occur through the use of surrogates. In an effort to cultivate restoration, "victims, offenders, and communities should have the opportunity for involvement in the justice process as early and as fully as possible" (Bazemore & Green, 2007, p. 296). This practice facilitates inclusivity and collaboration among relevant stakeholders as compared to the retributive justice process (Zehr, 2002). According to restorative justice theory, an effective

response to harm includes two essential components: (1) “a non-adversarial, dialogue-based, decision making process that allows stakeholders to discuss the harm done to victims, while considering the needs of all participants; and (2) an agreement for going forward based on the input of these stakeholders about what is needed to repair the harm to the persons and community harmed” (Gilbert et al., 2013, p. 47). Allowing stakeholder participation in the justice process gives greater potential to experience a “restorative encounter” that fosters input from the victims, offenders, and communities, so as to address their direct interests and needs (Bazemore & Green, 2007, p. 296).

Principle 3—Transformation in community and government roles and relationships. The principle of transformation in community and government roles and relationships requires a reassessment of roles and responsibilities among these stakeholders (Bazemore & Green, 2007). To promote justice, “the government is responsible to preserve a just order and foster a community that establishes a just peace” (Bazemore & Green, 2007, p. 296). There are two primary goals implied by this principle: (a) “attempt to move forward with systematic change in criminal justice agencies and systems in order to empower community decision-making and the assumption of responsibility in the response to crime and harm,” and (b) “rebuild the community capacity needed for an effective informal response to crime and harm” (Bazemore & Green, 2007, p. 296). Because many communities and individuals have been denied the ability to exercise skills of informal social control and mutual support, the justice system has assumed more of this responsibility, causing communities to lose their capacity to respond effectively to crime (Bazemore & Green, 2007). Gilbert et al. (2013) asserted that “justice takes on a markedly different appearance when applying restorative principles”; instead of “marginalizing victims and offenders,” it empowers and focuses on healing harms to right the

wrongs that caused by crime (p. 48). This principle with its associated goals and outcomes works to bring greater equality and empowerment for all impacted by crime.

Restorative justice principles in practice. Literature indicates that the two most common practices based on the three core restorative justice principles are nonadversarial decision-making processes and restorative group conferencing (Bazemore & Schiff, 2005; Bazemore & Umbreit, 2001). These practices generally fit within four program models: “victim-offender encounters/mediation, family group conferencing, neighborhood accountability boards, and peacemaking circles” (Bazemore & Green, 2007, p. 292). Each of these practices and program models reflects the three principles (i.e., repair, stakeholder participation, and community and government transformation) that define restorative justice theory. Victim-offender mediation is the most abundantly researched of all program models. This mediation technique facilitates dialogue between the victims and offenders with the guidance of a trained mediator. During the mediation, stakeholders can discuss the offense, share significant stories, answer questions, and construct their own approach to achieving justice (Bazemore & Umbreit, 2001). Jacobson, Wahlin and Anderson (2012) assert that “mediation is built on an ideological perspective that is expressed in restorative justice” which contends that “dialogue has the power to restore dignity and self-regard to the victim and offender, thereby providing benefits to the broader society” (p. 230). While engaged in a mediation the victim can “work through, repair and integrate the emotional effects of the offence” and the offender is able to “apologize and redeem him/herself” (Jacobson et al., 2012, p. 230). A victim-offender encounter is similar to a mediation, because it involves meeting face-to-face or through written discourse with offenders; however, the victims do not meet with their own offenders, but with “surrogates” who are offenders who have committed similar crimes. Family group conferencing, neighborhood

accountability boards, and sentencing circles are similar to victim-offender mediation, but include other relevant stakeholders (i.e., victims' families/friends, offenders' families/friends, and community members). The reason to include other relevant stakeholders in these program models is to emphasize the importance of offender accountability and community repair. The practice of restorative justice has gained popularity within the past few decades, and these types of programs can now be found throughout the world.

Theoretical Background of Restorative Justice

Theoretical conceptions of restorative justice impact lack formal theories that explain victim benefit or consequence; previous theory building has been heavily focused on offender benefits and recidivism (Strang et al., 2006). Previous studies provide detailed discussions about the benefits of restorative justice as a whole, yet nuanced theoretical frameworks that explain why restorative justice should be expected to benefit victims are absent from most of the literature (Strang et al, 2006). Strang et al. (2006) posited that two theories, which went beyond the realm of criminology, supply “plausible rationales” to describe why positive outcomes might result when crime victims participated in restorative justice programs (p. 285). The theories that Strang et al. (2006) proposed as explanations were derived from the field of psychology and sociology. First, cognitive behavioral therapy research “suggests that victims can benefit from extended deconditioning discussions of their prior trauma in safe and controlled environments” (Strang et al., 2006, p. 285). Next, the theory of “interaction ritual” within the field of sociology “predicts that emotional energy arising from a successful restorative justice conference will have positive benefits for victims by restoring their identity and sense of self-worth” (Strang et al., 2006, p. 285). Lastly, it is the researcher’s own supposition that within the field of adult education the theory of transformative learning as described by Mezirow (1991) also could offer

a plausible rationale for predicting the outcome of the victim experience while volunteering in a restorative justice program. Transformative learning theory asserted that when an adult experienced a “disorienting dilemma,” such as crime victimization followed by restorative justice practices, there was the potential to have a “perspective transformation,” which could expand prior meaning schemes resulting in a change in basic worldview and capacities of the self (Mezirow, 1991).

Cognitive behavioral therapy. Research states that cognitive behavioral therapy may be one of the most helpful interventions to attend to the emotional damage that results from victimization (Strang et al., 2006). Therapy that involves repeated exposure to anxiety-provoking stimuli has been shown to reduce the posttraumatic stress symptoms of crime victims (Angel, 2005). Within cognitive behavioral therapy literature, there is a hypothesis that explains that “fear is a cognitive structure” that can be reduced by “deconditioning memories of the trauma and associating” past memories with safe settings (Strang et al., 2006, p. 285). Foa and Meadows (1997) contended that exposure to the feared stimuli within safe settings promoted the reduction of posttraumatic stress symptoms by (a) reminding victims that the anxiety of the trauma was not equivalent to experiencing it again; (b) learning that anxiety did not remain constant in the presence of the feared situation or memory, but rather decreased over time; and (c) experiencing anxiety or PTSD symptoms did not lead to loss of control (Strang et. al. 2006, p. 285).

Restorative justice programs give victims the unique opportunity to meet with offenders in safe and structured settings. During those opportunities, victims often had the chance to tell offenders their stories and to ask questions about their crimes. Through those mediated encounters, victims “may extinguish their fear by repeatedly confronting people” involved in the type of trauma they

experienced, yet with safety “far from the fearful place where the event occurred” (Foa & Meadows, 1997; Rothbaum & Foa, 1999, as cited in Strang et al., 2006, p. 285).

The other aspect of cognitive behavioral therapy that is relevant to restorative justice conferences and victim-offender encounters is the opportunity for victims to gain understanding about “their lack of responsibility for the crimes” (Strang et al., 2006 p. 285). In an effort to make sense of the “shocking and disruptive” experience, victims often “attribute blame for the offense at least partially to themselves” (Gehm, 1990, as cited in Strang et al., 2006). “Victims may attribute this blame for no other reason than believing they were specifically targeted because they showed some sign of vulnerability” (Strang et al., 2006, p. 285). When victims assign themselves blame, they are able to recreate plausible stories and frame the meaning of the crimes based on their own guilt or mistakes. For some victims, the fact that they were the subjects of random acts of violence in an unpredictable and chaotic world lacks meaning and disrupts understanding. Restorative justice initiatives give victims opportunities directly to ask offenders questions to understand the crimes. Through restorative conferencing, the victims are able to realize that they were not specifically targeted or responsible for the crimes. Cognitive behavioral therapy research contends that “reassurance appears to be a crucial component in reducing stress symptoms” (Strang et al., 2006, p. 285).

Interaction ritual. Research reveals that one outcome that can be experienced by victims participating in restorative justice programs is increased empathy for the offenders (Zehr, 2002). Through conversation and mediation, the victims are able to hear aspects of the life stories of the offenders and to gain greater understanding about their present circumstances. For victims who are never able to dialogue with their offenders or learn about their life stories, misunderstanding can lead the victims to see their perpetrators as “monster[s]” (Strang et al., 2006, p. 286). The

restorative justice mediated process of exchange of perspectives between victims and offenders is an example of interaction ritual (Collins, 2004). The definition of interaction ritual comprises social encounters that display four distinct characteristics:

(1) people are physically in each other's presence and hence influenced by proximity; (2) there is a clearly defined boundary around who is participating in the ritual and who is not; (3) all participants knowingly focus on a common purpose; and (4) the participants share a common emotional mood, referred to as an "entertainment" experience. (Collins, 2004, as cited in Strang et al., 2006, p. 286)

According to Collins (2004), restorative justice programs provided encounters that were likely to be successful interaction rituals when high intensity emotions and all elements of the theory were present. A successful interaction ritual created "long-term boosts in emotional energy" that could "in turn manifest in feelings of self-confidence, elation and initiative in action" (Strang et al., 2006, p. 286). "Emotional intensity" was particularly important, rather than simply "the content" of the restorative justice experience, because the "emotional contagion" could move from negative to positive, thus connecting all participants together in a "commitment to shared morality" (Strang et al., 2006, p. 286).

The act of apology is a "symbol of group solidarity" that further demonstrates the interaction ritual (Strang et al., 2006, p. 286). When victims perceive the apologies as sincere, symbolic restitution between victims and offenders can be achieved. Sincere apologies can help victims to regain their sense of self-respect and empowerment. The emotional energy that is created by a successful interaction ritual can give victims the ability to regain "cognitive mastery over their emotions," thereby "replacing conditioned fear with rational sympathy" with empathy for the offenders, who often also had backgrounds of victimization (Strang et al., 2006, p. 286).

Transformative learning theory. The andragogical theory of transformative learning, specifically the psychocritical approach established by Jack Mezirow in 1978, provides an

additional theoretical framework for the victim experience in a restorative justice program.

Transformative learning theory incorporates ideas from a wide variety of sources, yet the basis of the theory is most strongly rooted in “humanistic psychology and philosophical humanism” (Elias & Merriam, 2004, p. 140). Mezirow (1991) contended that all human beings had instinctive drives to make meaning from their daily experiences. Given the constancy of change and the lack of permanent truths, it was not possible to be guaranteed of what was known or believed. As all people entered adulthood, a collection of meanings, beliefs, and values that resulted from socialization made up their schemes of meaning making (Mezirow, 1991, 2000). Yet, many of those schemes of meaning were inadequate to make sense of our ever-changing world, and it becomes necessary to devise a more critical worldview. Therefore, adult learning required an interpretative process in which we made decisions “that may result in confirmation, rejection, extension, or formulation of new beliefs or meaning schemes” (Mezirow, 1991, p. 35).

The experiences that drive transformational learning are disorienting and can be stressful or painful, as they often cause adults to question the very core of their existence (Mezirow, 1997). The transformation of a perspective can occur slowly with cumulative transformed meaning schemes realized over time or can be immediate (epochal) caused by an acute personal crisis such as victimization, death of a significant other, divorce, sickness, or a natural disaster (Mezirow, 1996). Mezirow defined transformative learning as follows:

The process by which we transform our taken-for-granted frames of reference (meaning perspectives, habits of mind, mind-sets) to make them more inclusive, discriminating, open, emotionally capable of change, and reflective so that they may generate beliefs and opinions that will prove more true or justified to guide action. (Mezirow, 2000, pp. 7–8)

Transformational learning leads to actually changing how we think, which is different from informational learning that leads to “extending already established cognitive capacities” (Kegan, 2000, p. 48). Restorative justice programs offer victims opportunities to experience

transformational learning through guided curriculum and mediated conferences that foster creating new meaning schemes that are more reflective of victims' lived experience, which now must accommodate the violence of crime. At the time of this study, there was an absence of research and literature that connected transformational learning to the experiences of victims participating in restorative justice programs.

Restorative Justice Programs as Victim Intervention

From the beginning of the victims' movement in the 1980s, the criminal justice system has been scrutinized for its failure to meet the complex needs of victims. The concept of "secondary victimization" was introduced into criminology, psychology, and sociology literature to describe how victims' suffering could be "exacerbated" by their experiences with the criminal justice system (Wemmers, 2002, p. 47). Victim advocates, scholars, and practitioners now consider restorative justice to be a complementary, and sometimes alternative, approach to meeting the needs of crime victims (Strang et al., 2013; Wemmers, 2002; Zehr, 2005). This section will synthesize the findings of past research studies that offer evidence to describe how restorative justice programs impact victims. Currently there is little research within the field of restorative justice that specifically focuses on the experience of victims (Strang et al., 2013). There are a considerable number of studies that empirically identify aspects of the offender experience, especially the ways in which restorative justice alters offender behavior and recidivism rates. Thus, the limited amount of victim-centered research reveals that restorative justice programs affect victim volunteers by providing (a) access to information, (b) voluntary active participation, (c) practical and symbolic compensation, (d) a nuanced understanding of protection, and (e) focused attention on emotional needs.

Access to information. Despite efforts from national and international agencies to develop standards that can provide victims access to information, research concludes that victims report feeling inadequately informed throughout the progression of their cases (Brienen & Hoegen, 2000; Parsons & Bergin, 2010). Multiple studies have reported that one of the main reasons why victims chose to participate in restorative justice programs was to gain further access to information about their crime (Umbreit, 1994, 1995; Umbreit, Coates, & Vos, 2004). Strang's (2002) interviews with victims revealed that within the context of restorative justice programs, victims acquired more information about their cases than received through other outlets.

Despite that, victims have overall positive responses to the information they receive while participating in restorative justice programs, Strang (2002) warned that it was important for programs to give victims reasonable notions of what knowledge would be shared. Previous studies indicated that ten percent of victims did not have their desire for information adequately met while participating in restorative justice mediation (Morris, Maxwell, & Robertson, 1993). Blanchette's (1996) study of mediation conferences concluded that 25% of victims were disappointed by the lack of information regarding expectations and procedures. Thus, practitioners should be aware that an overly idealistic estimate of likely outcomes and inability to properly explain the restorative justice procedures could lead to victim disappointment.

Voluntary active participation. Restorative justice advocates claim that the opportunity for victims to have a more active participatory role in their cases fosters restoration (Johnstone, 2002; Zehr, 2005). Yet there is debate within many fields (e.g., psychology, sociology, and criminal justice), because victim involvement in the criminal justice system poses many potential setbacks and challenges. Based on previous research, it is not fully evident to what extent victims

desire an active role in either the decision-making of their cases or dialogue with offenders. The level of participation that victims desire is subjective and dependent on aspects of the crimes and on the disposition of the offenders.

Zehr (2005) contended that the adjudication process of the retributive justice system did not offer the opportunity for victims to participate actively, whereas restorative justice offered enhanced opportunities for communication and shared understanding. Zehr (2005) asserted that the act of punishment alone could not fulfill victims' needs, whereas reparation and refocusing on what the victims had lost because of the crimes could offer greater victim satisfaction. There are few studies conducted that used random assignment to groups, thereby allowing the researchers to attribute observed differences between court and restorative justice mediation experiences. Strang's (2002) empirical study compared groups that participated in court-only adjudication with those who participated in both court and a restorative justice conference. Strang's findings suggested that victims who attended the restorative justice conference in addition to court, experienced higher satisfaction and were pleased by the opportunity to participate actively.

Past studies with designs that are post-test only are not sufficiently sophisticated to show causal relationships between the active participation offered in restorative justice programs and victim satisfaction. Thus, any observed differences in levels of satisfaction for victims who participated in restorative justice programs cannot be attributed to the intervention with scientific certainty (Wemmers, 2002). Because participation is completely voluntary, it is possible that victims who choose to participate in restorative justice programs have specific life outlooks or personality qualities that may affect how they heal from the crimes. Previous studies indicated that when victims had more positive experiences with criminal justice professionals handling

their crimes, they were more likely to also report better experiences during victim-offender mediation (Wemmers, 2002).

Lastly, offering victims the opportunity for active participation also runs the risk of making victims feel pressure to participate, thus hindering their restoration process. Past research indicated that victims could report feeling pressure to participate in mediation conferences, especially when the offenders were minors (Choi et al., 2011). Despite the possibility that restorative justice programs run the risk of adding pressure to victims, many advocates believe that great benefit is added by giving victims more opportunities to participate actively in the criminal justice process. Strang et al. (2013) indicated that the effect of restorative justice conferencing on victims' satisfaction with the "handling of their cases is uniformly positive as are several other measures of victim impact" (p. 5).

Material and symbolic compensation. Helping victims receive material or symbolic compensation after the experiences of crime is central to many restorative justice programs. Research shows that receiving compensation is also one of the main motivations for victims to participate in restorative justice programs (Aersten & Peters, 1998; Umbreit et al., 1994). Despite that restorative justice programs assert the importance of compensation to victim restoration, a limited number of victims report receiving financial reparation after the crimes (Wemmers, 2002). Many crimes reported to the police are not solved (especially property crimes), thus there are no offenders from whom the victims can request funds be reimbursed. When the offenders are prosecuted, depending on their financial means, they may be unable to pay the victims the full amount that was stolen. Yet, studies indicate that even partial financial compensation from offenders can be deeply meaningful to victims, often more meaningful than full repayment by a third party insurer (Wemmers & Cyr, 2005). Studies have also shown that one of the most

important aspects of victim compensation is follow-up activities to make sure that restorative justice project leaders monitor compliance by offenders. If offenders do not follow the terms that were established in the restorative justice conference, this can result in “secondary victimization” for the victims. Previous studies have shown that victims’ priorities tended to shift from the desire to receive financial compensation to more symbolic emotional reparation as restorative justice programs moved more deeply into the curriculum and the mediation continued (Wemmers, 2002).

Increased satisfaction regarding protection. Victimologists have expressed concern about the possible negative impact that can result when victims participate in restorative justice programs where they are given the opportunity to interact with offenders (Choi et al., 2013). There is the chance that restorative measures that allow victims to confront offenders can cause greater fear and desire for protection (Van Camp & Wemmers, 2016). Additionally, victims may be insulted by the suggestion to participate in mediation, because the damages caused by the crimes are not fitting for a restorative justice intervention (Van Camp & Wemmers, 2016).

In response to these concerns, advocates assert that victims have the ability to gain greater understanding and alleviate irrational fear through humanizing restorative justice experiences. Nevertheless, advocates recognize that certain victims (i.e., those still suffering with critical physical and/or psychological trauma) may not be good candidates for restorative justice programs. Additionally, offenders chosen to participate in restorative justice programs must meet particular criteria to be considered eligible to interact with victims. In order for offenders to take part in a restorative justice program, they must have taken responsibility for their crimes and should be seeking restorative outcomes. Aersten and Peters (1998) asserted that professionals leading restorative justice programs had a responsibility to protect the victims, and mediation

should not even be suggested if victims do not seem ready to meet their offenders. Umbreit et al. (1994) stated that crime offender accountability was important to victims, thus offenders who did not show adequate remorse for their crimes should not be considered to participate in restorative justice programs.

There is a substantial body of research that shows victims' satisfaction with the criminal justice process increases as professionals (i.e., police and prosecutors) work to obtain restitution. Victims have been shown to appreciate "candid information" and "concerns about letting victims down should not be used as an excuse to avoid consulting them" about the development of their cases (Wemmers, 2002, p. 52). Research shows that victims appreciate assistance from criminal justice professionals and restorative justice program leaders, as it provides increased understanding about their cases and can heighten feelings of security.

Focused attention on emotional needs. One outcome of restorative justice programs is providing focused attention to support the emotional needs of victims during the criminal justice process. Regarding the restorative effects, several studies report that victims positive coping and healing mechanisms after participating in restorative justice programs (Umbreit, 1994, 1995; Wemmers & Cyr, 2005). Unfortunately, many restorative justice studies that describe victims' positive emotional experiences use designs that make it impossible to assign causality. Exceptions are the studies by Strang in 2002 and 2004, and Strang et al. in 2006, whereby randomized control trials were used to show causal outcomes for victims who participated in mediation conferencing.

Strang's studies, which took place in Australia and the United Kingdom, reported victims' reduction in fear, decreased desire for vengeance, and emotional restoration through the perception of sincere apologies. Victims experienced a reduction in fear, as only 5% of victims

interviewed after mediation conferencing believed their offenders would repeat the offenses on them; likewise, only 35% of restorative justice conference victims believed the offenders would repeat their offenses on another victim, as opposed to 55% of court-trial-only victims who believed the offenders would commit more crimes (Strang et al., 2013, p. 37). Strang et al. (2013) asserted that an underestimated aspect of victimization was the “personal anger victims sometimes feel toward their offenders, which in the case of violent crime, may be translated into a desire to physically harm them” (p. 42). Studies by Strang et al. (2013) showed that 45% of violence victims who only participated in court trials said they would harm the offenders if given the opportunity. Whereas, only 9% of violence victims desired vengeance after participating in mediation conferences (p. 42). Restorative justice conferences could successfully assuage feelings of vengeance, which added to the emotional restoration of the victims. “Perhaps the most significant factor in emotional restoration” in Strang’s studies was in relation to how victims benefited from receiving apologies from the offenders (Strang et al. 2013 p. 38). Approximately 90% of victims in Strang’s studies desired apologies from their offenders; of the victims who participated in restorative justice conferences, 72% did receive apologies, compared to 19% of court-only assigned victims (Strang et al. 2013, p. 38). Additionally, victims who participated in restorative justice conferences were much more likely to perceive the apologies as sincere. Those findings confirmed that “courts often neglect the non-material dimensions of victimization, while restorative justice conferences are moderately successful in delivering the emotional restoration that victims seek” (Strang et al., 2013, p. 39).

Despite these positive findings, restorative justice programs are not meant to replace victim support services, as not all victims prefer to utilize restorative justice practices. Generally, victims of violent crime are less likely than property crime victims to participate in restorative

justice programs. While most studies report that victims experience positive outcomes and emotions after mediation, some victims report feeling worse (Wemmers, 2002). Victims can experience “enhanced fear, depression, distress, and unresolved anger”, which can lead to secondary victimization (Wemmers, 2002). Morris et al. (1993) found that victims “sometimes remember the feelings that occurred at the time of the offence; 10% of their sample desired more support from restorative justice professionals” (as cited in Wemmers, 2002, p. 50). There is the potential for interacting with offenders to re-open closed wounds for the victims. Thus, several restorative justice advocates and practitioners emphasize the importance of “follow-up counseling” for victims, as well as adequate preparation for victims and program leaders (Wemmers, 2002, p. 51).

Conclusion: Restorative justice as a victim intervention. Based on this review of research, it can be concluded that most victims who voluntarily participate in restorative justice programs can benefit across a limited number of dimensions: (a) increased access to information, (b) opportunities for active participation, (c) material and symbolic compensation, (d) increased satisfaction regarding protection, and (e) focused attention on their emotional needs. Based on the empirical research of Strang (2002), property crime victims preferred restorative justice conferences as an added component to the conventional criminal justice process. Research revealed that restorative justice practices corresponded well with the overall needs of property crime victims (Strang, 2002). Victims of violent crime were not as likely to participate in restorative justice programs. Yet, studies showed that victims of violent crime could greatly benefit from the cognitive reframing and therapeutic storytelling components of restorative justice programs (Strang et al., 2006, Strang et al. 2013; Zehr, 2005). Research also suggested that even if victims of violent crime did not meet face-to-face with offenders, other alternatives

(i.e., exchange of letters or videos) could assist in their ongoing healing (Wemmers, 2002).

Increased feelings of safety, decreased desire for vengeance, and greater ability to receive a sincere apology are all examples of the ways that victims of violent crime, as well as property crime victims, can benefit from restorative justice.

The gaps within restorative justice literature. Within restorative justice literature, there is a dearth of research that elaborates and clarifies the victim experience. Although the concept and practice of restorative justice grew out of the victims' movement, within the past 40 years significant research has been directed at the offender experience. Many empirical studies exist within the field of restorative justice that illuminate the restorative effect for offenders, especially in the area of recidivism. Based on this review of literature, there are three obvious gaps in victim-focused restorative justice research, which reappear continually in most articles: (a) there is a lack of rigorous empirical studies that can directly link victim impact with restorative justice practices; (b) research is needed to describe the therapeutic healing process of restoration experienced by victims, because it is not yet fully understood why these programs work; and (c) studies that decipher best practices for victims are lacking. This section of the literature review will further explain these three gaps in the research.

First, more research is needed that explains the effects of restorative justice interventions on victims. Existing literature does not supply evaluations that can be used effectively to compare programs in terms of the degree to which they meet victims' needs (Choi et al., 2013; Ten Boom & Kuijpers, 2012; Wemmers, 2002). Additionally, a majority of studies that describe how victims are impacted by restorative justice programs do not use randomized samples or comparison groups that allow for pre-testing, as well as post-testing (Strang, et al., 2013; Strang et al., 2006). Uncertainty remains about the primary causal factors, as well as specific

interventions, that are most responsible for producing victim satisfaction. Therefore, it is not possible to say whether positive results appear because restorative justice programs are effective or because the conventional criminal justice process is greatly lacking when considering victim needs (Bazemore & Green, 2007).

Next, empirical studies are needed that illuminate the dynamics of the therapeutic restorative process that can occur for victims while participating in restorative justice programs. Bazemore, Elis, and Green (2007) asserted that within the past decade restorative justice research has made significant advances by demonstrating positive impacts on outcomes such as recidivism and victim satisfaction; the next challenge for researchers is to understand “the how and why” of those processes (p. 369). Previous research had failed to dissect the various components of victim satisfaction and victim healing that were unique to restorative justice programs, such as face-to-face encounters between victims and offenders, as well as restorative group conferencing (Bazemore & Green, 2007). Harris, Walgrave, and Braithwaite (2004) contended that developing a greater understanding of the emotional dynamics, especially the construction of empathy between victims and offenders, was necessary within restorative justice research. By mapping the emotional processes that were fostered in restorative justice interactions, researchers could better understand what was necessary to foster greater forgiveness and reconciliation between adversaries. Harris et al. (2004) recommended that researchers facilitate restorative justice participant observation, including rigorous qualitative observations, to complement quantitative data in order to better understand those complex emotional processes.

Bazemore and Green (2007) contended that future restorative justice research regarding process should extend to include the development of theory:

Although there has been some limited discussion among researchers about theories that might explain the success of restorative encounters in reducing reoffending and achieving other positive offender outcomes (Bazemore, 1998; Bazemore & Schiff, 2004; Braithwaite, 2002; Hayes & Daly, 2003; Maxwell & Morris, 2003), there have been few efforts to test competing theories and little if any theoretical development on victim impact. (p. 296)

Without a theory-building and theory-testing agenda, it will not be possible to replicate the most efficient and robust restorative justice programs. Bazemore and Green (2007) argued that to advance policy and practice in response to victim needs, it was necessary to identify “measurable dimensions of restorativeness and methods of using these dimensions to effectively gauge the strength and integrity of these interventions” within restorative programs (pp. 296–297).

Lastly, because most of the previous restorative justice research has been dedicated to comparing restorative justice practices with the conventional retributive justice system, there are few evaluations that identify best practices within categories of restorative programs (Bazemore & Green, 2007; Choi et al., 2013; Wemmers, 2002). More studies are needed that identify which restorative practices offer the greatest benefit to victims, offenders, and communities. Shapland (2014) asserted that “it has been difficult to follow the growth and type of restorative justice possibilities because in-depth evaluations have been relatively rare and surveys of their availability have been even rarer” (p. 113). By identifying best practices, the cost-effectiveness of these programs can be measured and potentially used as an alternative or valuable complement to conventional retributive justice.

Summary

This literature review fulfilled four purposes: (a) provided an overview of the needs of crime victims; (b) summarized the principles and theoretical background of restorative justice; (c) supplied a review of the literature that describes how restorative justice programs are used as victim intervention; and (d) presented the gaps in current restorative justice research. Based on

this literature review, it is contended that a study is needed to explore the impact of the learning process experienced by victim volunteers within a restorative justice program. The next section of this proposal will explain the methodology used to explore the victim learning process.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Introduction

Research involves a process that generally consists of three steps: (1) pose a question, (2) collect data to analyze the question, and (3) present an answer to the question (Creswell, 2008, p. 3). Engaging in research can contribute to the knowledge base of a field, improve practice within a discipline, and assess the value of an approach or measure within a specified setting. Creswell (2008) referred to researchers as “bricklayers who build a wall brick by brick, continually adding to the wall and, in the process, create a stronger structure” (p. 4).

Both quantitative and qualitative research utilize akin elements, yet how the researcher employs each step of the process differs. A defined framework for each research tradition is used to guide practitioners through conducting, organizing, and analyzing research. Charmaz (2014) posited that a grounded theory methodology should:

(1) Begin with inductive data; (2) invoke strategies of going back and forth between data collection and analysis; (3) use comparative methods; and (4) keep the researcher interacting and involved with the data and the emerging analysis. (p.1)

This methodology section will assert design soundness by addressing how the researcher attended to those four topics.

This instrumental case study was an exploration of the learning process used by victim volunteers participating in a restorative justice program designed to foster healing after experiencing crime. The central research question that guided this study was: How does the learning process impact victim volunteers within the restorative justice program? The study explored three subtopics, including the development of the victims’ understanding of justice; the changes in behavior recognized by the victims; and how the victims made meaning from the restorative justice volunteer experience.

Rationale for Qualitative Research

The justification for the methodological approach used in this study was derived from the central research question. Qualitative researchers “ask questions about people’s understandings, experiences, and sense-making activities, and situate these questions within specific contexts” (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009, p. 47). Because I sought to explore the impact of the learning process on victims volunteering in a restorative justice program, a qualitative approach was appropriate.

Merriam (2009) asserted five defining characteristics of qualitative research:

(1) the focus of research is on meaning and understanding, (2) the researcher is the primary instrument of data collection and analysis, (3) the process is inductive, (4) the overall design is emergent and flexible in response to the changing conditions of the study, and (5) the product of the inquiry is richly descriptive. (pp. 13–16)

In alignment with these five characteristics, I (a) acquired an in-depth understanding of the meanings and perceptions of participants; (b) was responsive and adaptive while committing to the dynamic play between researcher and participant; (c) worked toward the creation of theory grounded in the observations and intuitive understandings obtained in the field; (d) recognized that variables are unknown beforehand and thus discovered during data collection and analysis; and (e) relied on the experiences of crime victims as they told their stories in their own words.

A qualitative research methodology was further appropriate for this study because within the scope of restorative justice scholarship, research is needed that illuminates the micro-dynamics of the restorative process (Doak, 2011). Marshall and Rossman (2006) asserted that qualitative research “elicits tacit knowledge and subjective understandings and interpretations,” thereby delving “in depth into complexities” with a focus on “process-oriented questions” (p. 53). There is a dearth of research that explains how restorative justice programs serve as a

catalyst toward healing for crime victims (Choi et al., 2012). This study worked to understand the inner experience of participants, to determine how meanings were formed, and discovered, rather than tested, using predefined variables (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). By using a qualitative method, I acquired an understanding of meanings and perceptions of participants conducted in a setting where complexity operated over time and multiple versions of reality were collected, thereby the learning process for crime victims was illuminated.

Case study. In order to understand how the restorative justice organization, Bridges To Life, impacted the learning process of victim volunteers, this study utilized a case study research strategy. Merriam (2009) defined a case study as “an in-depth description and analysis of a bounded system” (p. 40). By focusing on individual lived experience using in-depth interviews, observation, participant writings, and other forms of data, the meaning schemas used by participants were captured. A case study is a strong methodological approach because of the “detail, complexity and use of multiple sources to obtain multiple perspectives” derived during the research process (Rossman & Rallis, 2003, p. 104).

By exploring a single bounded system (i.e., an event, process, organization, group, or individual), in-depth understanding about a larger phenomenon can be realized. Specifically, this study was an “instrumental case study,” because a particular restorative justice program, Bridges To Life, was examined to supply insight about how victims were impacted (Stake, 2005, p. 445). The thickness of description acquired within a case study empowers the reader to interpret the applicability of the findings to another setting. Rossman and Rallis (2003) contended that “one case study may, by analogy, shed light on, offer insights about, similar cases” (p. 105). The learnings generated in this study could prove to be applicable to other victims seeking methods to restore meaning and promote healing after experiencing crime.

Grounded theory. Merriam (2009) stated it was possible to combine other types of research techniques (i.e., grounded theory) with a case study design. Likewise, Charmaz (2014) asserted “grounded theory methods can complement other approaches to qualitative data analysis, rather than stand in opposition with them” (p. 16). Grounded theory is a specific research methodology where the investigator is the primary instrument of data collection, the analysis is inductive aiming to derive meaning, and the purpose is to build theory from the data (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). This research study attempted to create a theory grounded in the data describing the process of learning used by adult victims volunteering in a restorative justice program.

Like other qualitative research, grounded theory research is an emergent process, rather than the product of a single research question logically and deductively placed within a study.

Charmaz (2003) explained the particular strengths of grounded theory as follows:

- (a) strategies that guide the researcher step by step through an analytic process, (b) the self-correcting nature of the data collection process, (c) the methods’ inherent bent toward theory and the simultaneous turning away from acontextual description, and (d) the emphasis on comparative methods. (p. 271)

The grounded theorist began the data collection process with an initial research question, yet as the research process unfolded, deeper analytic questions arose from the data. To convey accurately the process of meaning-making described by participants, the grounded theorist moved where the data took her.

Developing a theory is a complex activity whereby the researcher must be continually cognizant of the reflexive nature of the research process. Corbin and Strauss (2008) asserted that “concepts and theories are constructed by researchers out of stories that are constructed by research participants who are trying to explain and make sense out of their experiences, both to the researcher and to themselves” (p. 10). The theory arose from a “set of well-developed

categories (dimensions, concepts) that are systematically interrelated through statements of relationships” explaining a particular phenomenon (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 55). Grounded theory research is particularly useful when exploring questions about process and how a phenomenon develops over time. The end product of this qualitative study was an interpretive theory that emerged from the data illuminating the victim experience volunteering in a restorative justice program.

Specifically, a constructivist grounded theory design was utilized in this study. The preeminent constructivist grounded theory scholar, Kathy Charmaz, “chose the term ‘constructivist’ to acknowledge subjectivity and the researcher’s involvement in the construction and interpretation of data” (2014, p. 14). The social contexts, shared viewpoints, and interpretive understandings between the researcher and study participants are emphasized within a constructivist grounded theory methodology. Charmaz (2008) contended that “constructivist grounded theorists focus on what and how questions” differing from “objectivist grounded theorists who aim to answer why questions” rooted in positivist philosophy (p. 398). Relativity and reflexivity were woven throughout the research process, and knowledge was viewed as located in time, space, and situation so as to account consciously for the researcher’s construction of emergent concepts (Charmaz, 2003). The victim volunteer work is inherently social, involving shared storytelling, victim/offender dialogue, as well as group and interpersonal critical reflection. Constructivist grounded theorists view action arising within socially created situations and social structures, rather than research practices being separated and abstracted from the research site or process (Charmaz, 2008).

A constructivist approach to grounded theory recognizes that human beings do not find or discover knowledge, so much as construct or make it. Human beings “invent concepts, models or

schemes to make sense of experience and continually test and modify these constructions in light of new experience” (Schawndt, 1998, p. 237). Thus, the aim of the researcher is to construct a theory that reassembles the meaning-making process of the subjects’ lives. Because the “social world is always in process, and the lives of research subjects shift and change as the circumstances and they themselves change,” the constructivist grounded theorist recognizes the product of analysis is “more like a painting than a photograph” (Charmaz, 2003, p. 270).

Setting of the Study

This study took place in the southwest of the United States, where the organization, Bridges To Life, was formed. John Sage, the founder of Bridges To Life, was victimized by crime in 1993 when his sister was brutally murdered (Bridges To Life, 2013). Sage gained deep empathy for all crime victims and offenders while working to forgive the man and woman who murdered his sister (Bridges To Life, 2013). During the process of healing, Sage recognized the toll his sister’s murder took on his life, and the lives of everyone else in his family, her friends, and the community (Bridges To Life, 2013). As a consequence, he founded the Bridges To Life organization in 1998.

Bridges To Life is a faith-based restorative justice program that works to provide a healing process to victims of crime, as well as prison inmates. The goal of the Bridges To Life program is to bring peace to victims and offenders by providing an opportunity for all to tell their stories in the context of spiritual principles (Bridges To Life, 2013). The primary mission “is to connect communities to prisons, to reduce the recidivism rate (particularly resulting from violent crimes), reduce the number of crime victims, and enhance public safety” (Bridges to Life, 2013). The program aims to help offenders understand the impact of their actions on their families, the

families of their victims, their friends, and the community at large, and to facilitate the process for building peace within themselves, with God, and with others (Bridges To Life, 2013).

In alignment with the central tenets of restorative justice, Bridges To Life endorses the following concepts:

(1) Respecting the inherent worth, dignity and value of every human being, (2) Recognition of the connectedness and interdependence of all people, (3) Understanding that strength lies in diversity, not just similarities, (4) The belief that all people have the capacity to: hope for and work for that which is better, make healthy and loving decisions, draw upon a reservoir of strength and resiliency to overcome adversity, and live peacefully. (Bridges To Life, 2013, p. 6)

Bridges To Life serves victims and offenders who have experienced a unique meaning-making experience and can articulate their conscious experience. This meaning-making process provides an alternative to experiencing a type of justice that is not largely neglected in the retributive system of justice.

The structure of the Bridges To Life program involves a team of volunteer facilitators who lead a group of approximately 30 to 80 offenders per tri-annual session, working in small groups through a faith-based process rooted in the principles of restorative justice. Volunteer facilitators, victims, and offenders meet for a 2 to 3-hour session each week for 14 weeks. Each 2-hour meeting follows a specified curriculum and textbook that addresses specific themes such as responsibility, accountability, forgiveness, and reconciliation. During the 14-week curriculum, offenders meet with crime victims who provide presentations about their experience of victimization. Program facilitators, victims, and offenders engage in open dialogue during the small group weekly meetings and have opportunities for reflection using structured journal entries and study questions.

Participants

Participants were purposefully selected from the group of Bridges To Life victim volunteers in the southwest part of the United States. All victim volunteers who participated in this study completed the 14-week Bridges To Life restorative justice curriculum and process. The original purposeful sample included 11 victim volunteers. Those participants were selected based on a variety of demographics, including both male and female representation, as well as variation in type of victimization and length of participation in Bridges To Life. Participants were selected on the basis that they could grant access to a particular perspective of the phenomena under study.

After the initial data collection stage, theoretical sampling was used to identify 5 additional participants for this study. Second interviews were also conducted with 2 participants from the original purposeful sample. According to Charmaz (2003), theoretical sampling represented a defining property of grounded theory, which relied on comparative methods. Theoretical sampling is different from conventional sampling, because it is responsive to the data instead of being established prior to the collection and analysis process. The responsiveness of theoretical sampling allows for openness and flexibility. Grounded theory methodology requires that analysis begin immediately after the first day of data collection. Corbin and Strauss (2008) explained the theoretical sampling process:

Data collection leads to analysis. Analysis leads to concepts. Concepts generate questions. Questions lead to more data collection so that the researcher might learn more about those concepts. This circular process continues until the research reaches the point of saturation; that is the point in the research when all the concepts are well defined and explained. (p. 145)

The goal of this sampling procedure was to refine ideas, not increase the size of the original sample. Through theoretical sampling, the conceptual boundaries of the study were identified and the fit and relevance of categories were specified (Charmaz, 2003).

I established rapport and access with a gatekeeper of Bridges To Life who gave verbal approval to conduct the study. Participants of the study were invited by an e-mailed letter (Appendix C) and also received a Letter of Consent (Appendix B), which was signed and returned to me upon their acceptance to participate.

Researcher's Role

This research interest emerged from both my personal and professional experiences. While obtaining academic degrees in philosophy, psychology, and communication, I developed a fascination with the process of identity construction. This study fits within the scope of my main existential desire, which is to understand how identity continually transforms through experiences of adversity. Additionally, I am passionate about social justice research and inquiring into topics that help address equality, peaceful means to conflict resolution, individual rights, and collective good, with the goal of reducing human suffering. I seek deeper understanding of how to use adverse life experience and personal transformation to create peace and raise collective consciousness.

According to Merriam (2009), within qualitative methodology the researcher is the primary instrument for data collection and analysis. The researcher realizes that “understanding (analyzing and interpreting) and representing (interpreting and writing about)” are learned, as well as filtered, through “her own personal biography that is situated in a specific sociopolitical, historical moment” (Rossman & Rallis, 2003, p. 11). Striving for objectivity and eliminating bias and subjectivity is not required when conducting qualitative research; rather, what the researcher

does with bias and subjectivity is important. To help limit her bias, the researcher practiced reflexivity by taking memos during data collection and analysis. Reflexivity allowed the researcher to closely examine the experience of being the human instrument. Rossman and Rallis (2003) referred to reflexivity as an “interactive and cyclical phenomenon,” where the researcher was open to the interplay of fact and opinion, as well as “etic and emic perspective” (p. 50). I consciously contemplated and reflected on my reactions while listening to the unique voice of each participant. I listened and re-listened to the recorded interviews of participants, privately reflected, took memos, and rigorously analyzed data abiding by the ethical requirements of the research process.

Data Collection and Procedure

To adequately understand the case of this study, multiple sources of evidence were collected within the framework of qualitative technique. This study explored the impact of the learning process experienced by crime victims volunteering within a restorative justice program. I worked to understand the experiences, perceptions, and meaning-making processes that participants utilized when engaged in the restorative justice program. For this case study methodology, I collected interviews, observations, and documents.

Interviews. I conducted semi-structured, intensive interviews. The interview technique was adopted because it fosters flexibility and sensitivity between participant and researcher. Smith et al. (2009) asserted that a qualitative research interview was “often described as ‘a conversation with a purpose’; the purpose is informed, implicitly, by the research question” (p. 57). The aim of the interview was to provide an opportunity for participants to tell their own stories in their own words.

Charmaz (2014) contended that a constructivist grounded theorist conducted an interview recognizing the following:

What participants do not say can be as telling as what they do say. A constructivist perspective differs from the conceptions of the interview as either a mirror of reality or a mere account served up to answer a question. A constructivist approach views interviews as emergent interactions in which social bonds may develop. Hence this approach attends to mutuality. In this sense, the interview becomes more than a performance. Instead, it is the site of exploration, emergent understandings, legitimation of identity, and validation of experience. (p. 91)

Constructivist grounded theorists give attention to both the situation and construction of the interview process. The researcher gathered information from the explicit content of the interview while noting the subtleties of the interviewer-participant relationship.

The cooperative nature of interviewing can create challenges for the researcher. Interviews allow participants to share deeply personal information, yet this can be uncomfortable, and some participants are unable consciously to understand their own behavioral patterns. Thus, I conversed with participants with openness and curiosity. Marshall and Rossman (2006) contended, “the most important aspect of the interviewer’s approach is conveying the attitude that the participant’s views are valuable and useful” (p. 101). Thus, as I posed questions, the conversation was respectful and affirming.

I interviewed each participant using open-ended questions. Prior to the interview, participants gave written permission to audio record and transcribe interviews to ensure validity. Upon completion of the study, all audio recordings and transcripts were destroyed. I followed up with most participants to conduct member-checks, which allowed the participants to comment on tentative interpretations of the data.

Observation. Observation is a fundamental method of data collection within qualitative inquiry. Observation includes the “systematic noting and recording of events, behaviors and

objects in the social setting” chosen for the study (Marshall & Rossman, 2006, p. 98).

Observation provides valuable data that takes place in the setting where the phenomenon naturally occurs and thus provides a firsthand encounter versus a secondhand account, as obtained in the interview (Merriam, 2009). What to observe in the natural setting is driven by the researcher’s purpose and questions for the study. Elements that I examined while observing were the physical setting, participant activities, interactions, conversations, body language, and use of language, as well as what was not said or done. Of equal importance to observe were my own behavior, reactions, and affect on the scene.

While collecting information in the social setting, I assumed the stance of “participant as observer.” During the data collection process, I volunteered as a facilitator in the Bridges To Life program. In that role, my observer activities, which were known to the group, were subordinate to the researcher’s role as participant (Merriam, 2009). That immersion in the setting offered me an active membership role where I encountered reality as the participants did, as well as directly learned from my own experience (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). Charmaz (2014) advocated for the researcher to engage in the “participant as observer” stance:

Through our methods, we first aim to see this world as our research participants do – from the inside. Although we cannot claim to replicate their views or reproduce their experiences in our own lives, we can try to enter their settings and situations to the extent possible. Seeing research participants’ lives from the inside often gives a researcher otherwise unobtainable views. (p. 24)

I recorded my observations through the use of a fieldwork journal, which described “detailed, non-judgmental, concrete descriptions” of what occurred during the data collection process (Marshall & Rossman, 2006, p. 98).

Fieldwork journal. To record the data from the observation period, I utilized a fieldwork journal. I took detailed notes when in the social setting. Upon leaving the setting, I immediately

recorded observations in a format that allowed me to find desired information easily. I noted the time, place, participants present, and purpose of the observation.

To account for the reflective component of the observation field notes, I employed a heuristic journaling process. Heuristic inquiry, from the Greek word “discover,” implies the tacit knowing of unarticulated knowledge that comes from experience, leading to “hunches” that drive the questions people articulate (Rossman & Rallis, 2003, p. 25). I monitored identification with the focus of the inquiry, self-dialogue, intuition, and internal frame of reference (Moustakas, 1990). Heuristic research technique “illuminates the researcher’s understanding of the phenomenon under study” and “can bring about the discovery of new meaning to extend the researcher’s experience, or confirm what is known” (Merriam, 2009, p. 44). Moustakas (1990) asserted, “the self of the researcher is present through the process” of journal writing and has the ability to understand the phenomenon with increasing depth, while also experiencing “growing self-awareness and self-knowledge” (p. 9). I created an outlined structure (Appendix E) to add ease and structure when interpreting and cataloging each entry in the heuristic journal.

Documents. Whereas interviews and observations are strategies that address the study’s research question, documents are usually produced for reasons not in connection with the research study; thus they do not have the same limitations (Merriam, 2009). Documents are not subject to the eccentricities of human personality and cooperation, rather they are ready-made sources of written, visual, digital, and physical material relevant to the research study. Types of documents used in this research study were official records, newspaper accounts, government documents, photographs, and videos that were in existence prior to the research at hand (Merriam, 2009). When collecting documents, I assessed the authenticity and nature of the documents, then developed a system for coding and cataloging the data. Data derived from

documents provided descriptive information, verified emerging findings, advanced new categories, enhanced historical understanding, tracked changes, and deciphered developments (Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

Protection of Human Subjects

With qualitative methods, the researcher is the instrument and thus is privy to the personal and private information of study participants. To conduct the study with regard and respect for participants, I abided by a set code of ethics. I obtained written permission from all participants who were part of the purposeful sample. All participants received an invitation e-mail that articulated the research objectives. Prior to conducting interviews with participants, I obtained approval from the Institutional Review Board at the University of the Incarnate Word. After participants returned a signed letter of consent, I scheduled interviews. Within the letter of consent, the participants were given the right to withdraw from the study at any time, and were notified that the interviews would be recorded and transcribed. Member checks were used to confirm that transcription was accurate according to the perception of the participants. To protect all participants, I kept confidentiality by assigning pseudonyms to the individuals. While conducting the study, I made research objectives and intentions clear to participants. Upon completion of the study, I destroyed all audio recordings and transcriptions.

Data Analysis

This data analysis section describes the systems that were used to report, discuss, and give meaning to the study's findings. Corbin and Strauss (2008) stated that data analysis required "taking data apart, conceptualizing it, and developing those concepts in terms of their properties and dimensions in order to determine what the parts tell us about the whole" (p. 64). Most qualitative research analysis utilizes the strategy of simultaneous data collection and analysis, as

well as inductive coding and memo writing. Bryant and Charmaz (2010) asserted that grounded theorists engaged nine research actions that distinguished theirs from other types of qualitative analysis:

1. Conduct data collection and analysis simultaneously in an iterative process
 2. Analyze actions and processes rather than themes and structure
 3. Use comparative methods
 4. Draw on data (e.g., narratives and descriptions) in service of developing new conceptual categories
 5. Develop inductive categories through systematic data analysis
 6. Emphasize theory construction rather than description or application of current theories
 7. Engage in theoretical sampling
 8. Search for variation in the studied categories or processes
 9. Pursue developing a category rather than covering a specific empirical topic.
- (p. 364)

Grounded theorist researchers distinctively set themselves apart from qualitative studies that remain primarily descriptive by including these nine criteria in the process of data collection and analysis.

In grounded theory, the pivotal link between collecting data and developing an emergent theory is the act of coding. Coding allows researchers to define what is occurring in the data and grapple with what it actually means. Charmaz (2014) stated that by carefully attending to coding, the researcher began “weaving two major threads in the fabric of grounded theory: generalizable theoretical statements that transcend specific times and places and contextual analyses of actions and events” (p. 113). Coding occurs in stages. Charmaz’s method of constructivist grounded theory captured actions and processes by using gerunds as codes, instead of thematic statements. Coding for actions reduces the researcher’s tendency to code for types of people, which could create one-dimensional individuals rather than being open to the variation happening in the data (Charmaz, 2014). Line-by-line initial coding with gerunds generated as many ideas as possible inductively from the data, thereby doing the necessary analytic work before adopting extant

theories or making conceptual leaps (Charmaz, 2014). While conducting initial coding, the researcher also utilized constant comparative methods to establish analytic distinctions and make comparisons at each level of analytic work (Charmaz, 2014). I compared interview statements and incidents within the same interview, as well as among different interviews throughout the analysis process.

During the data analysis process, I conceptualized from the data, which is a central component of grounded theory methodology. Charmaz (2014) contended that approach is different from traditional qualitative methods, which yield findings based on rich descriptions of participant quotes and observations. To conceptualize the impact of the restorative justice program on crime victims, I analyzed data while continually asking myself the following questions: What is happening in the restorative justice program? What are the participants trying to do while they volunteer? What explains their changing thoughts and behaviors? (Charmaz, 2014). Throughout the data collection and analysis process, I used the constant comparative method to reassess the data against the emerging categories along with their associated properties.

The next stage, focused coding, enabled me to pursue a selected set of central codes from the study's dataset. The focused coding stage required making decisions about which initial codes were important and contributed most to the analysis. Engaging in focused coding brought me further into the comparative process. By comparing focused codes within and among the participants' interviews, I was able to decipher which codes had greater analytic power and could be promising tentative categories (Charmaz, 2014). Lastly, I evaluated tentative categories, defined their properties, and specified the relationships among them.

Along with coding the data, I recorded memos during the various stages of analytic development. Memos were lengthier and more complex than the remarks made in the fieldwork journal. Theoretical notes that provided insight about my thoughts on events and stages in the study, as well as methodological notes about procedural aspects of the research, were recorded within memos. Memo writing helps a researcher (a) to grapple with ideas about the data, (b) to set an analytic course, (c) to refine categories, (d) to define the relationships among various categories, and (e) to gain a sense of confidence and competence in their ability to analyze the data (Charmaz, 2003, p. 263).

Trustworthiness and Credibility

To ensure the findings of this study are trustworthy and credible, my competence and ethical conduct will be elaborated in this section. Rossman and Rallis (2003) posed five strategies to help establish a trustworthy and credible study: (a) the study is conducted intensively over a period of time; (b) interpretations and emergent findings are shared with participants; (c) what is discovered and reported is intimately linked to participant experiences; (d) the question or issue is triangulated by utilizing several data sources, methods, and/or theories; and (e) the research stance is one of humility, reflecting the conditional and approximate nature of knowledge (p. 67).

To ensure that this study met the standards of ethical and credible conduct, I committed to a thorough practice of internal validity by using the methods of adequate engagement in the data collection process; member checks; rich, thick descriptions; triangulation; reflexivity; and an audit trail. To demonstrate prolonged engagement, I was present with participants in the study setting and immersed in the data for a long enough time to reach saturation within the findings. To rule out the possibility of misinterpreting the meaning of participants' communication, I

relied on member checks to achieve respondent validation. The rich and thick descriptions, which were derived from the data, ensured an accurate portrayal of the complex meaning-making process occurring within the phenomenon. By using multiple strategies of data collection (interviews, observation, documents), I achieved triangulation within the data, thus corroborating evidence to support the findings. Heuristic journaling within the fieldwork journal, as well as memos, helped to establish my commitment to reflexivity and provided the substance of the audit trail. Those strategies provided the framework to affirm that this study was trustworthy and credible.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to explore the process of learning used by victim volunteers participating in an established restorative justice program designed to foster healing for those affected by crime. The focus of the study was to analyze how the victim volunteers of Bridges To Life, a restorative justice organization in the southwestern part of the United States, were impacted while participating in the program. Three subquestions guided the data collection process of the study: (a) How does the victim make meaning from the volunteer experience, (b) How does the victim's understanding of justice change throughout the volunteer experience, and (c) What changes in behavior does the victim recognize as a result of participating in the restorative justice program? Fifteen Bridges To Life crime victim volunteers and one staff member were interviewed for this study. Data was collected using interviews, observations, and a review of documents.

Qualitative Data Analysis

A qualitative research method was used for this study, because I sought to investigate the personal experiences and process of meaning-making for each participant. This study explored the perceptions of a group of victim volunteers within one specific restorative justice program, thus the instrumental case study approach to qualitative research was appropriate (Stake, 2005). The findings in this study produced an "in-depth description and analysis of a bounded system" (Merriam, 2009, p. 40).

Within an instrumental case study, it is possible to combine other types of research techniques (i.e., grounded theory) to explore a phenomenon. Grounded theory methods "can complement other approaches to qualitative data analysis" and are particularly useful when

exploring questions about the process of how a phenomenon develops over time (Charmaz, 2014, p. 16). Because I explored the learning process and meaning-making schemas of crime victims, grounded theory methodology was most applicable for data collection and analysis. Specifically, constructivist grounded theory methodology was used, so as to “acknowledge subjectivity and the researcher’s involvement in the construction and interpretation of data” (Charmaz, 2014, p. 14).

Purposeful sampling was used to collect the first round of interviews with 11 participants. Interviews were audiotaped and transcribed verbatim by a contract transcriber and by me, then coded line-by-line using gerunds. Focused codes were assigned and clustered after line-by-line coding and re-listening to the 11 interviews. Upon recognizing gaps within specific connections among focused codes, I used theoretical sampling to re-interview two participants and to conduct interviews with four new victim volunteer participants and one Bridges To Life staff member. During the second round of interviews, I discussed the emerging analysis with participants, which was consistent with grounded theory methods. Descriptive and conceptual memos were written and analyzed while moving through the various phases of data analysis. Memoing and diagramming were also used to make connections among codes and progress into the conceptual development phase.

Throughout the data collection process, I also observed participants giving their victim testimonies and participating in the Bridges To Life curriculum on-site. During one 14-week session, I participated as a volunteer in the Bridges To Life program in order to understand more deeply the volunteer experience. Although the researcher “cannot claim to replicate” participants’ views or “reproduce their experiences,” it is “possible to enter their settings and situations to some extent,” thereby viewing the experience “from the inside” and gaining access

to “otherwise unobtainable views” (Charmaz, 2014, p. 24). I documented the observations using a fieldwork journal. Observations and interviews were corroborated through newspaper accounts and court documents. Because I was the main instrument of data collection and analysis within qualitative research, reflexive heuristic journals and an audit trail of raw data were kept throughout the research process.

The Interview Strategy

I conducted semistructured interviews about the following subjects: (a) the emotional and physical experience of crime victimization, (b) the motivations for volunteering in a restorative justice program, (c) the experiences within the restorative justice program, and (d) the behavioral and emotional outcomes of volunteering. Interviews lasted from 2 to 3 hours and were gently guided to allow the participants to construct their own narratives and move in spontaneous, yet relevant, directions. Most interviews were conducted one-on-one and in person. Three interviews were carried out with participants who elected to conduct the interviews alongside a significant other (i.e., spouse or parent) who was also a victim volunteer participating in the study.

Demographic Overview

Participants’ demographic information is described in this section in order to provide the reader with brief overviews of the participants and their experiences with Bridges To Life. The experiences of participants are described with greater depth in the interpretive theory section of this chapter.

The variables selected to describe all participants were age, type of crime, relationship to offender prior to victimization, date of crime, and start date of Bridges To Life volunteerism. All participants interviewed for this study were victims of violent crime and currently were volunteers for the Bridges To Life program. Table 2 shows the participants’ descriptive statistics.

Table 2

Participants' Descriptive Statistics

| No. | Pseudonym | Age | Type of Crime | Relationship to Offender | Date of Crime | Start Date of BTL Volunteerism |
|-----|-----------|-----|--|--------------------------|---------------|--------------------------------|
| 1 | Amanda | 67 | Rape | Unknown | 1974 | 2006 |
| 2 | Bryan | 63 | Vehicular Assault | Unknown | 2000 | 2003 |
| 3 | Emily | 40 | Sexual abuse | Known | 1982 | 2011 |
| 4 | Marie | 76 | Murder (daughter) | Unknown | 1986 | 2001 |
| 5 | Frances | 76 | Sexual abuse | Known | 1955 | 2007 |
| 6 | Robert | 74 | Murder (son was offender) | Known | 1995 | 2003 |
| 7 | Diana | 69 | Murder (son was offender) | Known | 1995 | 2003 |
| 8 | Kate | 49 | Murder (daughter) | Unknown | 2008 | 2006 |
| 9 | Claire | 63 | Aggravated assault | Unknown | 1996 | 2003 |
| 10 | Jim | 76 | Vehicular assault, Manslaughter (parent) | Unknown | 1996 | 2005 |
| 11 | Susan | 75 | Vehicular assault, Manslaughter (parent) | Unknown | 1996 | 2005 |
| 12 | Natalie | 62 | Manslaughter (parent) | Unknown | 2006 | 2006 |
| 13 | Elizabeth | 53 | Murder (sister-in-law) | Known | 2013 | 2015 |
| 14 | Sarah | 22 | Murder (aunt) | Known | 2013 | 2015 |
| 15 | Karen | 62 | Murder (parent) | Known | 1984 | 2016 |
| 16 | Janet | 55 | BTL staff | N/A | N/A | 2001 |

Table 3 shows a tabulation of the participants' descriptive statistics.

Interpretive Theory: Therapeutic Restorative Justice

The interpretive theory that emerged in this analysis is termed therapeutic restorative justice. The theory offered a theoretical understanding of the way crime victims were impacted by their restorative justice volunteerism. Bridges To Life is a *therapeutic* intervention, because participants described their volunteerism as being “like therapy,” at times “a replacement for therapy,” thus a significant source of their ongoing healing. Three categories make up the interpretive theory: (1) fragmentation, (2) evaluation, and (3) integration. Each category consists

of numerous properties, which are defining attributes that delineate the conceptual boundaries of the category. The interpretive theory proposed that the impact Bridges To Life had on victims was a psycho-social learning process. Victim volunteers described moving through three linear phases of learning (i.e., fragmentation, evaluation, and integration) on their journey toward healing. The psychological component related to participants' emphases on the emotions, thoughts, and behaviors of self. The social component related to the crime victims' learning that occurred in interpersonal contexts, which was inherently tied to relationships and human connections.

Table 3

Tabulation of Participants' Descriptive Statistics

| | Participants |
|--|--|
| Age | Average age 61 Between 22 and 76 years |
| Gender | 13 women (including BTL staff member) 3 men |
| Type of offense | 2 physical assault 10 murder/manslaughter 1 rape 2 sexual abuse |
| Direct or indirect victim | 5 direct 10 indirect |
| Relation to offender prior to victimization | 7 known 8 unknown |
| Time between crime and BTL volunteer start date | Average years 14 Between 3 months and 52 years |
| Years of BTL volunteerism | Average years 10 Between 1 and 16 years |

The first category, fragmentation, represented the first phase of learning and had two properties: (a) being alienated by retributive justice system, which was shown through the victims' sense of insufficient justice and meaning; and (b) experiencing prolonged suffering in

the form of physical and emotional pain, and social isolation. Victims described how they felt directly after the experiences of crime. Participants used phrases like “vulnerable,” “numb then infuriated,” “helpless,” “not listened to or valued,” and “alone.” Normal ways of behaving and thinking, along with social relationships, broke down as a result of the traumatic grief brought on by the crimes. In the fragmentation phase of learning, victims described inability to contain comfortably the experiences of crime victimization within their pre-existing meaning schemas or sense of self.

The second category, evaluation, represented the second phase of learning and had two properties: (a) assessing a productive response, and (b) reclaiming meaning through restorative justice. During the evaluation phase, victims assessed what meaning could be made from the crime experiences and what responsive actions would assist in their healing. After becoming aware of restorative justice, either through their own research or a trusted source, victims chose to volunteer for Bridges To Life.

The third category, integration, represented the third phase of learning where victims had begun participating in the Bridges To Life program. Based on the data from participants in this study, integration referred to the ability to contain more comfortably the full range of one’s experiences, thoughts, and behaviors, from both the past and present (Richo, 1991). During the integration phase, victim volunteers described five properties that made up their experiences: (a) affirming common humanity through shared dialogue, (b) constructing and proclaiming a meaningful life narrative, (c) challenging and reframing dysfunctional ways of thinking and being, (d) taking off the mask to promote change and fulfill purpose, and (e) discovering and accepting a new normal. Figure 1 depicts a representation of the interpretive theory, therapeutic restorative justice.

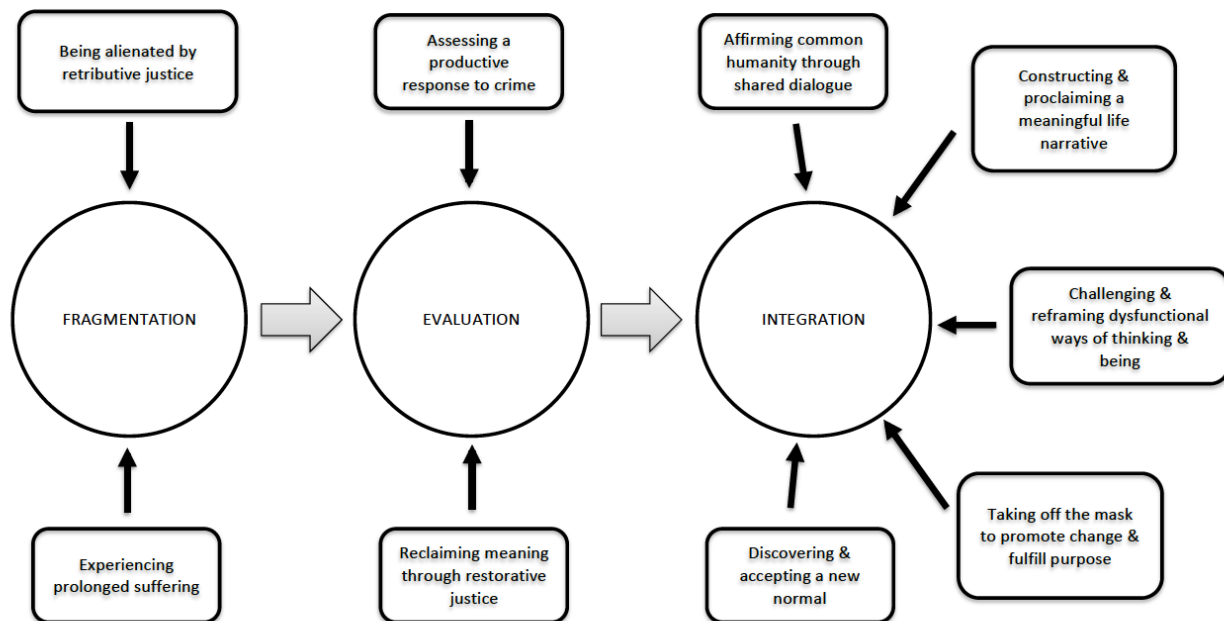


Figure 1: Interpretive theory with categories and properties.

The following sections of this chapter will explain the interpretive theory, therapeutic restorative justice. Detailed quotes from participants will be used to explain the interpretive theory. Within the retributive justice system, the voices of victims are secondary to the state, thus victims' voices often go unheard. Victims' stories and descriptions of their experiences were the predominant source of data used to develop the interpretive theory, thus their voices were central and vital to the presentation of findings in this study.

Category 1: Fragmentation. The category fragmentation represented the first phase of learning that victim volunteers described experiencing. Based on the data from participants in this study, fragmentation referred to an inability to contain comfortably the experience of crime victimization within their pre-existing meaning schemas and sense of identity. A fragmented sense of meaning and identity occurred directly after the crime experiences, and depending on the victim, could continue for months to several years after the crimes. Victims described lacking understanding about the crimes despite the cessation of court and sentencing procedures. There

were two main properties that defined the conceptual boundaries of fragmentation: (a) being alienated by retributive justice in the form of insufficient meaning and justice, and (b) experiencing prolonged suffering that was physical, emotional, and socially isolating. Within the category of fragmentation, there was no linear sequence of emergence for the properties or subproperties. A particular property could be present at any point in the experience of participants. Likewise, properties interacted, such that the presence of one could trigger the emergence of another. For example, a participant described feeling emotionally “weak” after her offender was let out on parole, which triggered nightmares, loneliness, and a “deep sense of injustice” from the crime. Figure 2 depicts a representation of the category fragmentation, with its associated properties and subproperties.

Being alienated by retributive justice system. All 15 victims interviewed in this study described a state of alienation after completing the court and sentencing procedures in the retributive justice system. The alienation manifested as feelings of insufficient meaning and justice after the crimes.

After the completion of court procedures in the retributive justice system, victims reported feeling as though justice was not distributed in equal measure to the pain caused by the crimes. The lack of justice made it difficult for victims to ascribe meaning that would allow for peace or healing after the crimes.

Janet, the Bridges To Life staff member who was interviewed in this study, provided a thorough description of the lack of healing that she witnessed victims experience during her 16 years working as a regional coordinator. Prior to Janet working for Bridges To Life, she worked as a staff member within the Victim Services Division of the Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ). Janet supplied credible insight because of the juxtaposition of her experience in

Victim Services versus Bridges To Life. She was able to see first-hand how victims felt throughout court proceedings and in their response to sentencing.

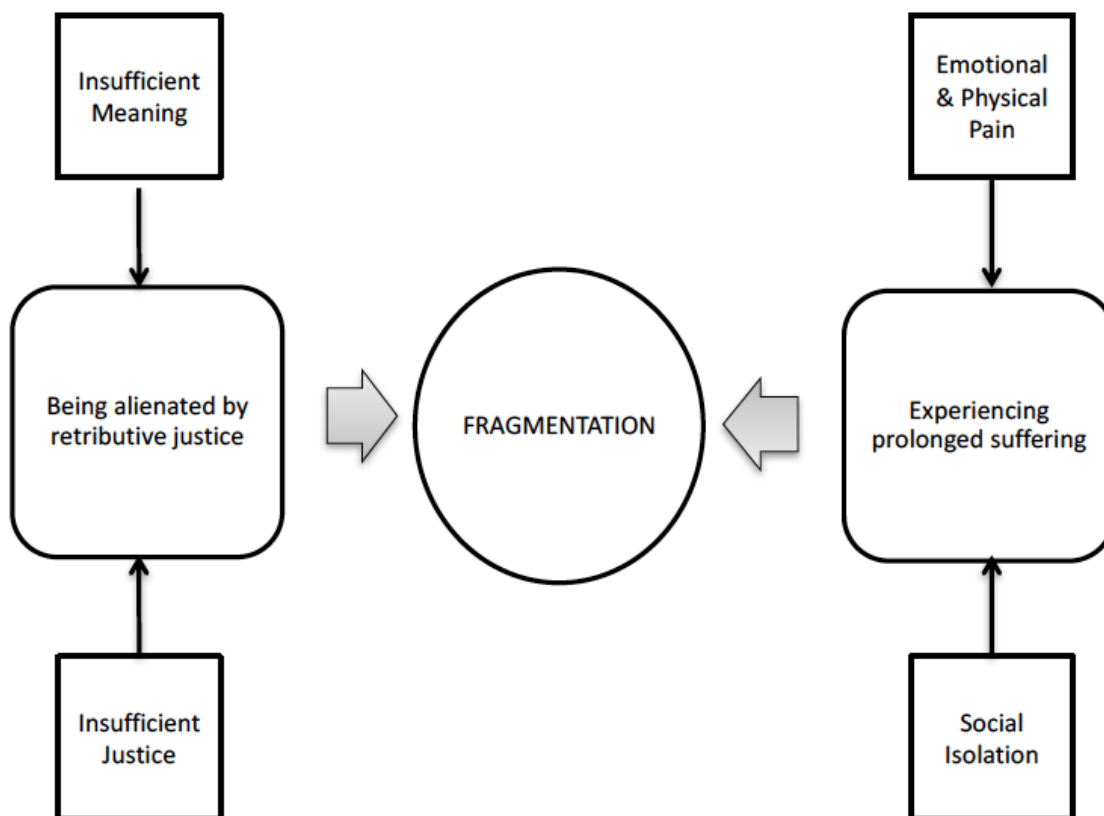


Figure 2: Category of fragmentation with associated properties and subproperties

Janet: What I saw from the justice side of things, working in Victim Services was, although the victims come to court, they are segregated, they are separated out. They're in there to testify, but it's really the state of Texas against the offender; it is not about the victim. And the victim isn't even encouraged or allowed in anyway, although they are allowed to address the offender to make a statement, a Victim Impact Statement, they are not allowed to say, "Why did you do this? Why?"

Janet described how the emotional and psychological needs of victims often go unaddressed in criminal justice agencies. The requirements of the state are sovereign and the victim's desire for information, participation, and restoration can be neglected. Since the 1980s, with the growth of literature focusing on victims' needs, research has shown that a variety of

common legal practices can actually heighten or prolong the trauma of the original crimes (Campbell & Raja, 1999; Herman, 2003; Orth, 2002). The most significant obstacle for victims can be the absence of understanding and closure after experiencing violent crimes. It would seem that victims could obtain closure after their offenders had been sentenced. Janet explained the opposite; after the verdict was declared, victims were still left with the harmful effects of the crimes and the dilemma of not knowing how to go about repair.

Interviewer: When you were working in Victim Services, what were some of the most significant challenges you saw victims face after experiencing a crime?

Janet: I would say, initially, it was when the offender was prosecuted and found guilty; the victim was still left holding the bag. It didn't bring that closure or that healing that they thought they were going to get. The victim thought that once the court said, "Guilty" and "This is the punishment," the victim would somehow have some kind of victory. And instead, what would happen is they were still left with their murdered child or the effects of the crime. And so that guilty verdict didn't change anything. It just makes you go, "Oh" ... you know? And then if the punishment wasn't enough or was enough ... and so they are still left with that anger, and that pain, and the ache, and wondering, "Why, why me? Why, God?" There is just a big hole left there that they thought was going to be filled up. I think the biggest problem is, in that courtroom, the victim is left with nothing still. They think they are going to walk away feeling better and they don't. Over and over this happens.

The lack of closure and insufficient repair that Janet described was evident in Kate's experience of the retributive justice system. Kate was 46 years old and had been a Bridges To Life volunteer for 10 years. She began volunteering for Bridges To Life in 2006 in order to understand more about addiction, because some of her family members struggled with drugs. When Kate began volunteering, she was not a crime victim, but a faithful Christian who wanted to enrich her understanding by volunteering in prisons and talking to offenders about drug addiction. In 2008, while away at college, Kate's daughter was tragically murdered by a maintenance man who worked at her apartment complex. The ripple effect of her daughter's murder was felt throughout her entire family. Kate and her husband, who had been married for

28 years, divorced and lost their family home. Despite the extensive loss that Kate experienced, she continued to volunteer for Bridges To Life.

Interviewer: Do you feel that justice was done after the trial?

Kate: No, justice was not done. I am often shocked from doing Bridges, what a sentence would be for a man who was caught with drugs, large amounts of drugs, versus someone who killed someone, like myself whose daughter was murdered; almost the same sentence, maybe 5 years less. I don't have a need or a desire to put out the emotional effort to fight the justice system, to scream out there. But, he is gonna get out and be rebuilding his life, and my daughter is forever dead. So I forever don't get that opportunity. And I am starting to realize no one will ever really understand that until they are walking that road. So, I have to take this right smack dab back to the heart, right back to humanity, and I have to release that and give that to God. And again, the justice system does not really care about that—they care about, I think, case wins, like “our county, our state won, we did this prosecution,” you know?

Kate's experience in the retributive justice system was common among victims whose family members had been murdered. Armour (2002b) asserted that covictims of homicide often described “having no right to know” important information related to the case and feeling like they “had no right to have justice done” (p. 376). After enduring the state's lengthy procedures and complicated protocols, covictims of homicide might end up with an unjust verdict. Kate described the lack of fairness she felt during the trial and how the offender's sentence could not sufficiently account for the amount of suffering that she and her family endured after losing her daughter.

Interviewer: Do you think that after your daughter was killed, could there be anything that would have made you feel that justice was done?

Kate: Yeah, I would have felt a little better if he would have got life; I would have. You know, I am suffering through this life, and even though I am suffering through this, I like to think that, well, I have freedoms. I would not want him to have his freedom; I would want him to suffer through it, his whole life [starts crying]. And without a malicious, malice, awful, hard, hateful, evil heart—yes, he should suffer through the rest of his life—I am. But, he is not; he will get a second half of his life, and any amount of suffering he does, let's face it, it will not be the same. How could it ever be the same? And that is so big and so infuriating, but I understand that this was just about getting the case solved; do it low-key, so it doesn't disrupt the local college, you know?

The covictims of homicide interviewed in this study described feeling “invisible” and “without a voice” when working with criminal justice agencies. Armour (2002a) stated that “because murder is a crime against the state,” covictims of homicide “often become bystanders whose needs are secondary to the state’s concern for fairness and justice in apprehending, trying, and convicting the murderer” (p. 110). Because of the distinct challenges that covictims of homicide faced, which included traumatic grief and a lack of trust in people and institutions, the most promising interventions included structured self-help groups and restorative justice initiatives (Armour, 2002a). The pairing of retributive justice procedures and restorative justice programs could better meet the multidimensional psychological and emotional needs of crime victims.

Similar to Kate’s discontent with the retributive justice system was Emily’s experience. Emily was 40 years old and was sexually abused by her cousin when she was a small child. Many years after her abuse, she found out her cousin was abusing other children in the family. She spoke out and sought justice through criminal prosecution. Her decision to speak out caused tension in her family, as some family members blamed her for the crime despite her being a child and her victimizer being 10 years older than she was. Emily’s cousin was convicted in 1995, which was the same year that the Victim Services Division was created. She stated that “for some reason her information fell through the cracks” and no one from Victim Services reached out to her. Because she had no relationship with Victim Services, she was not notified when her abuser was let out on parole. Coincidentally, she found out her abuser was released when a neighbor told her he was “back in town;” in fact, he was near her home and was violating his parole by staying in her county. Emily described the retributive justice system as being very difficult to navigate, which led to her feeling revictimized.

Interviewer: When your offender got out on parole and you saw him, you said, “It took everything away from me in a moment.” Could you explain what you mean?

Emily: I felt like my soul had just been sucked out of me. I felt like a little girl. I felt like everything that I had done to be productive, to be strong, to be independent, he took it away. I felt completely vulnerable again. I felt violated again. And all those memories came back. And, I didn’t sleep that whole weekend.

And so I called the police and I told them that he’s, you know, “He’s a sex offender. He’s not supposed to be here.” They wouldn’t help. “How do we know that there’s not a more recent document?” they said. And I said, “Why don’t you just pull his record?” You know, I didn’t know how it worked, and they’re, like, “Well, there could be a more recent record ...” And I was, like, “Can you just go over there and ask him for ID? Identify him. Make a record of it so that it is documented that he was here in this county?” And the police officer’s, like, “Well, that’s a violation of his civil rights. We can’t just go over there and ask him.” So I’m thinking, “What the hell? Again? This is happening again?” And I’m like—“I have proof.”

So, I felt completely alone. And I did not want him to see my children. My eldest daughter looks exactly like me, and I’m just so worried that if he sees her, you know, it’s going to excite him and he’s going to remember. And I know I can’t help that.

I felt weak. And I felt completely vulnerable and completely helpless. He did that in those five seconds. He took away my security again.

Emily’s retelling of her experience showed that the effects of victimization did not end after the victimizers were prosecuted and served their sentences. Likewise, there were many logistical impediments that victims faced when trying to understand and navigate the progress of their cases and the whereabouts of their victimizers upon release. Research has shown that the “acts of disrespect” between criminal justice authorities and victims can “compound the feelings of injustice from the crime” and “intensify the perception that the world is not fair or just” (Armour & Umbreit, 2008, p. 413). Emily’s lack of support upon seeing her victimizer on parole, led her to seek help from Victim Services. Finding a safe and responsive community to obtain supportive guidance and information can be a challenge for victims of crime.

The participants, Robert and Diana, also expressed the lack of healing they experienced after moving through the procedures of the retributive justice system. Robert and Diana

represented a different side of victimization; their son was in prison for committing a crime when he was 17 years old. Occasionally, family members of offenders choose to volunteer with Bridges To Life, as they too consider themselves victims of the devastating effects of crime. By volunteering for Bridges To Life, offender family members are able to bring their voices into the prison to show offenders how their crimes impact their families. Robert and Diana's descriptions of the emotional tolls they experienced after the crime were very similar to the covictims of homicide interviewed in this study. Their son's actions were unexpected, as they were a middle-class family that had no previous exposure to criminal activity. Robert and Diana's young son was involved in a crime that resulted in the death of two teenagers. Their son drove a car to a nearby home where the confrontation and crime took place. He did not exit the vehicle during the crime, so was not in the home when his accomplices chose to shoot and kill the teens inside. Their son was sentenced to two life sentences for his role in the crime. Because of their son's choices, Robert and Diana's life radically changed, and the ripple effects of the crime persisted in most aspects of their life at the time of this study. During his son's trial, Robert developed a deep anger, which he described as impeding his healing for years, for the judge and prosecutor.

Interviewer: Can you talk about why you felt anger toward the prosecutor? Could you talk about what specifically you were angry about: the charge, or did you feel like the judge and prosecutor lacked empathy?

Robert: They put me on the stand that October. Judge Davis [pseudonym] was the one that was the judge—and he was, since we didn't have a jury, he had the flexibility to ask questions. And he was really very demeaning to me, and our pastor, who testified as well.

But I think a lot of it stemmed from what they took away from me. They took my son away from me. And they took him away for such a long time. And there didn't seem to be any sense in the way that they handled it.

You know, as I went through the pre-sentencing meetings, there was an anger that began to develop towards them [the prosecutor and the judge], and what they were taking away from me, and potentially the way they were handling it. And then ultimately that day in

court when it just didn't seem like he listened to anything that we had to say. And the way he dealt with things on the stand.

And then, like I said, it probably took him 30 seconds, literally, at the most to decide the sentence. And during that time, he wasn't even necessarily listening to what we had to say. He was talking to people on the side. And it didn't matter what was presented on our part; he knew where he was going. And then when he said two life sentences, that was the ultimate thing.

Despite that Robert and Diana were indirect victims, in that their young son was the offender in a murder case, their descriptions of insufficient justice and meaning after the trial were similar to the other victims interviewed in this study. They felt "voiceless" throughout the justice process, and after the verdict was decided, they felt "broken" as though their lives were "in a blur." Robert described wanting to engage in the "forgiveness process" because of the negative feelings he harbored for the judge and prosecutor. Robert and Diana were left not knowing how to repair the wounds that the crime inflicted on their family, friendships, and community. They had to seek other sources of support through church, self-help groups, and the Texas Inmate Family Association (TIFA) in order to heal the psychological and emotional scars of the crime.

Janet, Kate, Emily, and Robert's descriptions were reflective of the additional 12 victims interviewed in this study. Their stories showed how victims lacked sufficient justice and meaning after experiencing crimes. Within the retributive justice system because crime is viewed against the state, the victims can become forgotten parties. Those victims described feeling not adequately heard, as though their needs were not sufficiently acknowledged. Victims expressed a fragmented understanding about the retributive justice experience and an inability to reconcile how the crimes fit within their pre-existing meaning schemas or sense of identity.

Experiencing prolonged suffering. The second property of fragmentation is the experience of physical and emotional pain, as well as social isolation. Literature has shown that

the painful effects of crime for victims are far reaching and can include physical injury (minor to severe), psychological effects (i.e., fear, anger, guilt, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder), social effects (i.e., changes in victims' lifestyles), loss of trust (in society, people, and institutions), financial loss, and perceived risk of future victimization (Shapland & Hall, 2007). The fifteen crime victims interviewed in this study were all victims of violent crimes that resulted in physical injury, emotional pain, or death of a family member.

Emotional and physical pain. All of the victims interviewed for this study described aspects of physical and emotional suffering experienced after the crimes. Even though the victims in this study experienced different kinds of violent crimes (i.e., sexual abuse, assault, or covictims of homicide), many of their descriptions of suffering were similar. The victims interviewed described physical pain, shock, denial, depression, vengeful thoughts, obsessive thoughts, nightmares, and a loss of control, among others.

One participant, Bryan, was struck by a drunk driver while he was walking beside the road on his way to work in the morning. Bryan's life greatly changed after the crime as his physical injuries were extensive and required many surgeries. He lost gross motor ability in one of his arms and one of his legs; he also required reconstruction of multiple organs in his torso. The physical changes that his body underwent after the crime caused him to live with constant physical pain. In addition to the physical suffering, Bryan felt anger, bitterness, and a desire for revenge.

Interviewer: Can you tell me about how you felt and what you were thinking about after the crime happened?

Bryan: I didn't really feel nothing, because I was in a coma for 45 days. Well, when I first got hurt, I was in the hospital from June to September, then I was in the rehab for 13 months, and then I was in a head injury group for another 8 or 9 months before I made it out on my own. When I came out of that, there was a lot of pain, a lot of anger and

bitterness. That was the pain speaking and not me. I was always wanting to get even, because I was in so much pain.

Interviewer: Get even with her, the drunk driver?

Bryan: Well, anybody, but especially her at that time [laughs]. It was the worst I have ever been hurt. I am still in pain 24/7 now.

Similar to Bryan, Natalie's life was also impacted by a drunk driving accident. While on her way to pick up her grandson from a school festival Natalie's mother was killed in the middle of the day by a drunk driver. Natalie described experiencing intense emotional suffering after the loss of her mother.

Interviewer: After the crime happened, what kinds of thoughts and challenges were occurring in your life then?

Natalie: Well, I think a big part of it was that it was such a surprise and was so overwhelming. And, I remember several days afterwards almost a bipolar kind of feeling. One moment I would just feel on top of the world, and the next minute I would feel down in the dumps ... Like when I drove, I would drive over onto the side of the road and come back; it was really dangerous actually. There was a term that seemed to explain what I was feeling called, "Driving While Bereaved." I thought, "Oh my goodness, yes," because there were so many times I was just thinking and thinking and thinking; 24/7 I couldn't turn off what happened, and I would just pull out into traffic without even realizing a car was coming. Nobody ever hit me and that was really amazing; they all, like, dodged around me, but it was really scary. Part of it was I just felt obsessed about knowing the details, I mean so much so that I know I overdid it.

The victims interviewed in this study expressed continually thinking, at times obsessively, about the details of the crime. In particular, victims whose family members had perished because of crimes might experience traumatic grief, which was "characterized by shock that induces a wide array of both physical and emotional responses that stimulate the sympathetic nervous system and the shattering of basic assumptions about the world" (Armour, 2002a, p. 110). Despite having the offenders prosecuted, victims were left with many unanswered questions, which confounded their ability to find meaning, as well as exacerbated physical and emotional hardships.

During her interview, the participant Amanda described the emotional suffering she experienced after being raped. While working at a neighborhood gas station and convenience store, Amanda was robbed by a man and woman. The man who robbed Amanda's store took her to the back room to rape her as the female accomplice stood watch at the front of the store. Throughout the traumatic process, which included notifying the police, going to the hospital, and attending the court proceedings, Amanda chose to not tell her family about the crime. After the rape, Amanda explained that she was embarrassed and lost the feeling that she could have control over her own life.

Amanda: During everything, I didn't want to tell my family what was going on. I was embarrassed as hell.

Interviewer: How old were you?

Amanda: Twenty-five. Just turned 25.

Interviewer: And why did you feel embarrassed? Could you talk a little bit about that?

Amanda: Yeah, I can. It's something I incorporate into my speech [Bridges To Life Testimony] today. I thought that I could take care of myself. I thought that I was in charge of my life. I guess I had kind of a John Wayne idea. And I found out that day that I was not in charge of my life. That anybody could take that feeling of being in charge away from you if they decided to.

Amanda's assertions illustrated how a person's sense of boundaries and understanding of social order was disrupted by crime. The violation of boundaries altered Amanda's personal equilibrium, such that it was difficult for her to restore a state of psychological balance. During her interviews Amanda described being unable to shop comfortably in stores because of fear the store would be held up and the possibility that she could be raped. She also thought she could hear her offenders' voices or sense their presence after she went back to work or while out in public. Her roommate would often tell her that she would cry out while sleeping because of the

constant nightmares she suffered after the crime. She described wanting to seek revenge after the crime because of her embarrassment, sense of isolation, and loss of control.

Amanda: I began to think in terms of eliminating the fact of this from the planet and then committing suicide. So I spent a lot of spare time thinking. There was a list of 13 or 14 people I was going to kill and then commit suicide.

Interviewer: Why did you want to kill them?

Amanda: I just wanted to wipe out the fact of what happened. And anyone who knew about it. That's how you erase a fact. By eliminating everybody who knows. Parts of the thought process were very rational, and parts were not. It was part and parcel to being so embarrassed and traumatized.

The experiences of Bryan, Natalie, and Amanda revealed aspects of the physical and emotional suffering that the victims in this study described in their interviews. In addition to the initial crisis reaction to the crimes, victims described the long-term stress reactions that could manifest as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), which was multidimensional and ongoing (Young, 1993). Long-term stress reactions for crime victims are also often intensified by additional violations from society and institutions (Young, 1993).

Social isolation. Along with physical and emotional pain, the victims interviewed for this study experienced a sense of social isolation after the crimes. Participants often revealed experiences of being hurt or offended by family or friends, because they lacked the capacity to understand the victims' feelings and needs. Likewise, participants described feeling stigmatized by the crimes, because they were atypical experiences among their close social network. The feelings of social isolation contributed to the ongoing long-term stress reactions that made it difficult to work through the psychological effects of the crimes.

Within the population of Bridges To Life volunteers, occasionally family members who had experienced the same crimes would volunteer together. Elizabeth was 53 years old and was the mother of Sarah, who was 22 years old; both women decided to start volunteering together in

2013. The crime that motivated their desire to volunteer involved Elizabeth's brother-in-law (Sarah's uncle) who killed both his first and second wives to collect life insurance money. After the two suspicious accidents, he was tried and convicted of first-degree murder and sentenced to life without parole. Unbeknownst to Elizabeth, her brother-in-law also maintained a life insurance policy on her, which led her to believe that she could have become his third victim. Elizabeth and Sarah were covictims to homicide and quite intimately knew the murderer, thus they felt deeply betrayed and manipulated. Elizabeth also articulated feeling "survivor's guilt" and a desire to "not forget" the two women who died at the hands of her brother-in-law. Their experiences of victimization led them to want to volunteer for Bridges To Life in order to make meaning from their experiences and to create further purpose after the deaths of their family members. While experiencing the loss of their family members, they described feeling socially isolated in their grief:

Elizabeth: I used to want people to understand me, to get a sense what I am going through, like "Do you not realize that I am carrying along with work and my life, but I am going through something so painful?" This will be with me for the rest of my life. It is an unfair expectation to think that I can put this on somebody else to carry this with me ... it just isn't going to happen, except for like Sarah or very few people. Even some of my very best girlfriends never ask me, like, "How are you doing?" It is so weird.

Sarah: Yes, none of my friends ask me about the crime.

Elizabeth: Yeah, I have found this with grief. What happens in this society—and I learned this in a seminar on grief—is for about the first 2 months, people are really paying attention to you. Everybody is bringing you meals and sending you cards; they are checking on you. But 2 months is about it; they don't want you to talk about it anymore; they don't wanna bring you soup anymore; they want you to move on. But for some people, it is going to take years. Grief comes in so many different forms.

All of the victims interviewed in this study described how some of their friends and family members did not live up to their expectations when they needed social support. Victims described feeling like the people who they most expected to support them, abandoned them or

didn't show patience and understanding in their time of need. Those behaviors from friends and family made the participants in this study feel less secure, and at times, ostracized because of the crimes. The sense of isolation was magnified by insensitive responses and superficial remarks that were communicated from social support networks, as well as people who were supposed to be trained to handle such crises (i.e., police, chaplains, hospital employees). Perceptions that the world is not fair and is unjust have been shown to produce "lowered self-esteem," "depression, despair," and "self-degradation" for crime victims (Armour & Umbreit, 2008, p. 413). Secondary victimization during interactions with the criminal justice system and other institutional entities can aggravate long-term stress and trauma reactions for victims.

Similar to Elizabeth and Sarah's sense of social isolation, Robert and Diana lost many friendships and experienced changing family dynamics after their son participated in a tragic crime that took the life of two teenagers. Robert and Diana believed that they were "serving time with their son" and feeling socially isolated was part of their victimization experience.

Diana: I think I literally believed for these first 2 years that our son was in jail—I don't even know if I remember—we just walked in a blur. Because every day something new was happening. And, so we were not capable of being friends to people. Somebody else had to be our friend.

Robert: I think the thing that she points out that's important is that we're serving time with our son. And if you look back over the years, probably outside of the people in prison ministry, to be honest with you, if you look at the people that we've shared this with, it is probably a dozen maybe on the outside, because you have no idea what they're going to do and what their position is going to be and where they will go with it.

And many of those friends that we had before the crime, they are now maybe are acquaintances that we see periodically. Very rarely will they ever even ask about our son. In fact, over the years I struggled with my mom and dad; they've not seen their grandson. My dad died about a year ago, a little over a year ago. And he has not seen his grandson since that court date we had in 1996. And Mom hasn't seen him since then as well. They can't cope, for whatever reason.

Some victims interviewed in this study described not only being socially isolated, but also feeling that people were purposefully deceitful or deceptive. Emily, who was sexually abused by her cousin, described being very hurt by her mother who sided with the victimizer and chose to help him with court proceedings, and money for bail. Emily's mother also obstructed future justice proceedings by being evasive and not fully honest with the police. The heightened vulnerability that crime victims felt after the crimes made it easier for people to take advantage of their emotions and psychological sensitivity.

In addition to losing friends and feeling disconnected from family members, Robert was convinced he also lost his job because of his son's crime. Robert described being unable to control his standing in his community, as it was impossible to eliminate the judgments that now disconnected him from the support networks on which he once relied.

Robert: So we worked through the changing relationships. And it is very rare for people that even know about our son to even ask about him.

I'm almost convinced—I ended up working for the School District for about the last 18 years, and I worked for Region VI [pseudonym] for about 9 years before that. And I'm almost convinced that the reason that I was demoted and ultimately lost my job at Region VI was because of this crime. Because my boss knew about it, and I kind of felt, you know, that he did not want that associated with this deal.

Loss of trust for other people and institutions is a prevalent outcome of violent crime victimization (Armour & Umbreit, 2008; Strang & Sherman, 2003). Increased feelings of vulnerability and mistrust are correlated to the level of stress and intrusiveness associated with a crime (Strang & Sherman, 2003). Amanda, who was raped, expressed a diminished ability to trust people after the crime. During her interviews, Amanda described the lack of sensitivity she felt from executive management at her workplace. Despite that she was raped while at work, Amanda's employer did little to assist her with the financial and emotional toll of the crime, and instead, added to her feelings of isolation, injustice, and betrayal.

Amanda: For years and years, for most of my working life after the crime, I did not tell people about being raped. I found out fairly early on that some people's only use for having knowledge about something like this is to have a weapon to screw you with. An awful lot of people aren't interested. And, you know, they think, "Don't bother me. Oh, no, I don't want to talk about that." You know? And so you keep it in. People think, "I don't think I can handle that." Well, the fact is, nobody who ever became a victim did it because they thought they could handle that. It got dumped on them. And I don't like being a victim. That was part of my desire for revenge—I wanted to eliminate the whole thing. That's another way to put it anyway. I would rather, still, be in charge of my own life. So I have not through the years made much habit of talking to anybody about what happened that day.

All of the victims interviewed in this study described social isolation, increased vulnerability in social spheres, and feeling stigmatized by the experiences of crime. Victims described feeling as though some of their friends and family were no longer trustworthy or made little effort to connect sincerely. The trauma associated with the long-term stress reactions of crime made it challenging to maintain relationships or trust institutions. Those disappointing social experiences made victims feel as though their relationships and the meaning associated with those relationships were no longer valid or reliable. Victims expressed social anxieties that arose from disorientations to their personal meaning schemas and sense of safety that existed prior to the crime.

The category, fragmentation, describes the impact that crime has on the individuals interviewed in this study. Each victim revealed aspects of the acute and long-term physical and emotional suffering, along with social isolation, endured after the crime. The systems of meaning and safety that once helped provide personal stability and psychological equilibrium were described as no longer credible given the disorienting impact of the violent crime. While the retributive justice system was able to satisfy the state's needs for prosecution and justice, the victims were left feeling alienated and lacking healing.

Category 2: Evaluation. The second category that emerged from the data in this study was evaluation, which described the second phase of learning for crime victims volunteering in the Bridges To Life program. After the crime occurred, victims described self-reflecting and seeking resources to figure out what to do next to make meaning from their experience. The category of evaluation has two properties: (a) assessing a productive response to crime, and (b) reclaiming meaning through restorative justice. Figure 3 depicts a representation of this category, evaluation, and its associated properties.

Assessing a productive response to crime. Victims described periods of time after the crime in which they sought answers or courses of action to find meaning. Depending on the victims' individual experiences, that period of assessment and evaluation could take months to several years. Some victim participants were aware of the educational, psychological, and faith-based resources available to them after the crime, but some were not. If victims were knowledgeable about restorative justice, then the time spent assessing a productive response was relatively short, because they knew early on that there were resources available.

For half of the victims in this study, it took several years to assess the meaning of the crimes in order to understand what responses would aid in their healing. One factor that inhibited the victims in this study from finding productive responses was because their crimes occurred decades ago (i.e., the late 1950s through the early 1990s), when there were not as many victim-centered resources available. During the time that victims spent assessing meaningful responses to the crimes, participants described self-reflecting in the form of prayer or journaling, reading self-help books about crime victimization and grief, attending faith services or self-help groups, and seeking out help through victim services.

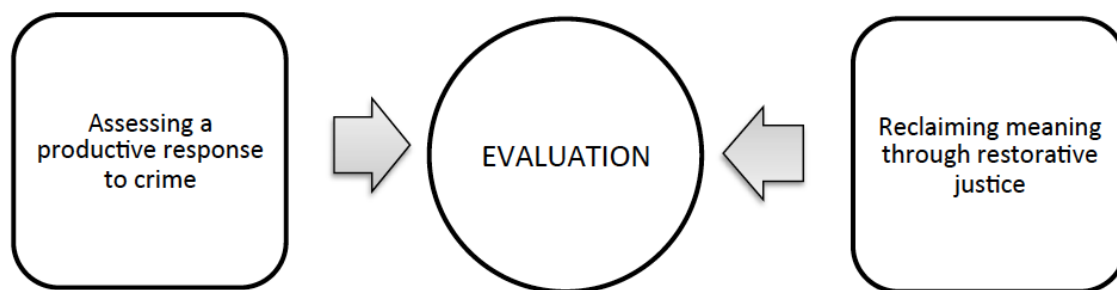


Figure 3: Category of evaluation with associated properties.

Frances was 76 years old and had been sexually abused by her uncle from the age of 10 through her early teens. When she was 15 years old, after listening to a sermon at church about adultery, she was compelled to tell a family friend about the molestation, only after to find out that her uncle had also been abusing her younger sisters. Her uncle was imprisoned, and Frances and her sisters were removed from their home and placed in child protective services for 1 year, until law enforcement could prove that her parents had no knowledge of the abuse. When Frances was in her early twenties, her uncle wrote a letter to her family pleading for someone to visit him in prison, as he was sick and near death. Frances' parents harbored ill feelings for her uncle and refused to visit him in prison. Frances and one of her sisters chose to go visit their uncle out of compassion and to see if by chance he would apologize and explain why he abused them.

Interviewer: Could you talk about what it was like to visit your uncle in prison?

Frances: I don't remember much detail about the visit. The only thing I remember was when we walked in, he looked at us and said, "Why am I here?" He looked

dumbfounded. We didn't know what to say. He didn't apologize, because he honestly didn't remember what happened. I felt so sad for him that day. That feeling of sadness and compassion just went all over me, after he asked that question, "Why am I here?" I was shocked that he didn't know. He was 18 years older than my dad. He had been through World War I; maybe something happened to him during the war. That experience of visiting him in prison has stayed with me forever.

Frances' visit with her uncle, paired with her spiritual faith motivated her to start writing to prisoners in jail. Over the past few decades, Frances chose to be an active volunteer in multiple prison ministries and even legally adopted a woman with whom she formed a motherly bond while doing prison ministry. Frances' experience was an example of the complex, inherent relationship that existed between a crime victim and the offender. For decades, Frances continued to try to find or create meaning from her victimization experience. Writing to prisoners and volunteering in prison ministry gave her a sense of purpose and an outlet for the compassion she felt toward her uncle.

Interviewer: Could you describe what led you to want to start writing to prisoners and doing prison ministry?

Frances: Well, it came from Matthew 25, "When I was hungry, you gave me something to eat. I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink. I was a stranger and you invited me in. I needed clothes, and you gave them to me. I was sick and you took care of me. I was in prison and you visited me." Then it goes on to say, "Anything you did for one of the poorest of these brothers and sisters, you did for me." That is my scripture and that is why I do what I do in the prisons. The two times I visited my uncle before he died, it made me feel so sad for him and all the people who are imprisoned. I was brought up in the church and this scripture has been with me all my life.

The support entities that Frances sought out during the evaluation phase of learning were mainly faith-based. She described seeing a psychiatrist directly after the crime, but found the experience to be more confusing than helpful. By attending church, reading scripture, and praying, Frances was able to feel "more peace" about the crime.

Similar to Frances, Marie yearned for a nonviolent and altruistic way to find meaning after experiencing crime. Marie's daughter was tragically abducted, raped, and murdered by two

young teenage men with whom she was trying to help fix a flat tire on the side of the road.

During her interview, Marie, who was now 76, described the experience of assessing the response to her daughter's murder and her journey toward meaning. After her daughter was killed, Marie decided to go back to school to earn graduate degrees in psychology, which led to her to finding restorative justice as a means to healing. Marie described how she felt directly after the murder, as well as how her feelings and thoughts about crime shifted over time.

Interviewer: Could you describe how you felt after the crime and what led you to restorative justice?

Marie: You go from being numb and just disbelieving, and then being just devastated in grief, and then being in limbo. And so it was a horrible time. So to have school to look forward to really helped me a lot. And to have that to focus on, that was really meaningful.

But I found what I was ultimately looking for when I found restorative justice. I didn't know the name of what I was looking for. I just knew that I was looking for something and that I'd been looking for, ever since that first year. My daughter was killed late in 1986. Sometime in 1987, I began to think in terms of the fact that so much of the system was violent. And, punitive. And I thought, "You know, it seems to me like there's enough suffering already. Why are we wanting to make things more violent?" We talked about it in a victims' group I went to, about making the system worse, you know, more punitive. And I can't tell you why that felt so wrong to me. Maybe I had just seen it as God's grace, because I can't explain it any better than that. So I began to look for something.

About the time I finished my master's degree and I started teaching psychology in community college, that's about when I began to really get in touch with what I was looking for, because a young woman named Susan Smith had killed her kids. And my students wanted to do the most awful things to her. My students asked me what I thought about all of it. I knew they didn't care what I thought; they wanted to tell me what they thought, so I just put it back to them. They started talking about all the horrible things they would do, to make her suffer the ways her children suffered, and all this stuff.

And I thought, "You know, we human beings are just so violent." None of us were doing that to her, but we were sure having a really good time talking about the violence we wanted to inflict on her. So I thought, "We are violent. It's not just what we do. It's what we think and what we say. Human beings are just violent in a lot of ways." So I began to really continue to think in terms of something nonviolent. And so my mind was really open to that. I think it was in the next year or so I found restorative justice. And started reading restorative justice books.

All of the victims interviewed in this study found restorative justice organizations by way of trusted sources (i.e., friend, pastor, victim services provider) or through their own research. No victim interviewed in this study was offered restorative justice through the court. That lack of distributed information is unfortunate, because research has shown that “when done properly, restorative justice practices outperform criminal justice proceedings in meeting victims’ concerns for insight, voice, fairness, and as a result have a therapeutic value” (Van Camp & Wemmers, 2016, p. 416). Only 3 of the 15 victims interviewed found Bridges To Life through a Victim Services provider. Often victims are not referred to restorative justice entities, because there is no systematic distribution of information. Criminal justice agencies may think they are shielding victims from possible distress by not discussing options like victim-offender mediation or programs that provide a victim offender encounter (Van Camp & Wemmers, 2016). Each of the participants in this study expressed an eager desire to create meaning and make their experiences purposeful, which led them to seek out other methods, like restorative justice, to help repair the pain caused by crime.

Marie articulated in her interview that there was an inherent relationship that existed between victim and offender after a crime had been committed. Addressing that complex relationship was an essential component to Marie’s healing.

Marie: There’s a relationship between the victim and offender that exists, whether you want it or not. Once that crime has been committed, whatever it is, there’s a relationship that exists. And unless you really address that, as the offender and as the victim, in a way that’s healing for you, that offense will essentially will go on, and on, and on, in your life, and in your head and in your feelings. I’ve seen victims and offenders that are far from healed. They’re probably not going to be unless something different happens; they will be feeling the strong effects of that forever and ever in negative ways. Obviously, a murderer that takes away the life of a person, that changes everybody. But ultimately, way down the road, it doesn’t have to continue to ruin everybody. It doesn’t have to continue on and on and on; the ripples don’t have to be constantly destructive.

While assessing a meaningful response to her daughter's murder, Marie actively sought ways to become involved in restorative justice programs and education. Restorative justice provided Marie with an opportunity to complete victim offender mediation with her daughter's killer, where she was able to ask questions about the crime and to gain further understanding.

Robert, whose son went to prison for murder, described going through a period of self-evaluation after the crime. Similar to Frances, the church and faith-based entities served an "instrumental" role for Robert and Diana after the crime.

Robert: After the crime, I looked at kind of three things that I think we could have done as a family. We could have literally just turned our back on things and been eaten up with what had occurred. Perhaps we could have become depressed, and how are we going to live with ourselves, and how are we going to go on? I think we could have turned our back on our son and said, "Your choices, your mistake, and you live with them." Or the third thing is that we could have, said, "Hey, he made a choice. He is our son. We're going to stick with him." And that was a choice that we made, to stick with our son.

Then I'll look at that. I say, "Okay, what am I going to do? I've got to look at my life and what am I going to do to change my life, to get back on a track?" So I kind of talk about a self-exam, going back and looking at myself as a husband, and maybe some of the shortcomings I had as a husband in terms of being there for my wife, being a part of the family, in more ways. As a father, was I there to do the things that I needed to do? Maybe too much time was spent at work and on gaining power and prestige and position. Was that a bigger part of my life than it needed to be? And then as a leader, I might have been successful as a leader of the family. But, certainly not as a spiritual leader, I dropped the ball significantly. I did not do that enough for my family. And ultimately, we have to live with the tragic consequences that occurred in 1995. It's going to be with us forever.

And then I have to deal with the anger and the bitterness. There was a lot of blaming, I believe, on my part towards Diana [his wife] and, to some extent, back towards me. Been a better mother. Been a better father. A lot of that in terms of what we dealt with. And how was I going to deal with that. I had to get past that.

So I think some things then began to happen, was transformation in looking at my life. The church helped us get back on track; begin to make changes in our life. I began to re-establish a relationship with Christ through some help of some friends that met with Diana and I. They talked us through things and got us back on track in terms of how we wanted to live our life with Christ being an integral part of it.

The evaluation phase of learning for Robert involved assessing how to respond to his son's crime and how to make meaning from the tragic experience. To this day, 22 years after the crime, Robert and Diana visit their son in prison every other week. Robert and Diana chose to "stick with their son" and receive assistance from their church in order to repair the emotional wounds caused by the crime. Both Robert and Diana were active volunteers in many social justice organizations, including Bridges To Life.

All of the participants interviewed in this study described a period of time that was used to assess a productive response to the crime. Upon recognizing that court procedures and protocols would not supply the healing they needed, they sought other networks of support for information and opportunities.

Reclaiming meaning through restorative justice. A majority of the participants interviewed in this study (14 out of 15, 93%) found Bridges To Life after being approached by a trusted source (i.e., friend, pastor, or Victim Services employee) who supplied personal information about the program. The resources that victims used to assist them during that evaluation phase of learning consisted of faith organizations (i.e., church and religious groups), educational institutions (i.e., colleges and universities), self-help groups (i.e., Mothers Against Drunk Driving, Alcoholics Anonymous), and the Victim Services Division of the Texas Department of Criminal Justice. Victims chose to become Bridges To Life volunteers for various reasons, yet all mentioned wanting to make the crime experiences serve a purpose. Victims described wanting to be able "help others" by telling their stories and by "sharing their truth." When approached to become volunteers, victims were given an opportunity to visit the program to make sure it would be a "good fit" for them. Victims described "falling in love" with the

program and “being in awe” with how the offenders were receptive to the curriculum and learning experience.

Natalie was an example of a crime victim who was aware within months of the crime that restorative justice would be helpful to her healing. At the start of the pretrial, prior to the offender being sentenced, Natalie started volunteering for Bridges To Life. A Victim Services employee told Natalie that Bridges to Life would assist in her healing after her mother was killed by a drunk driver.

Interviewer: What motivated you to begin volunteering with Bridges to Life?

Natalie: Well my description at the time was that it felt like my insides were bigger than my outsides, and it was just ... this stuff was just bursting out. And Bridges to Life gave it a focal point that I could move toward, and boy, did I ever need a focal point.

Similar to Natalie’s timely realization that Bridges To Life would help bring healing, Elizabeth and Sarah (mother and daughter) expressed how their eagerness to make meaning led them to start volunteering with Bridges To Life. Elizabeth and Sarah learned about Bridges To Life through a trusted source within months of the crime experience. Sarah happened to meet an employee from Victim Services while working as a waitress at a local restaurant. Sarah and the restaurant patron made conversation for a while and realized that they shared the experience of being impacted by crime. After that unique and seemingly destined meeting, Sarah and Elizabeth were extremely curious about restorative justice and felt like it could be an opportunity for impactful service. They considered their volunteerism with Bridges To Life as “God-ordained” and a “divine appointment.” By interpreting that chance meeting with the Victim Services employee as being “driven by God,” they were able to assign great significance to the start of their volunteerism.

Interviewer: Could you talk about what motivated you to begin volunteering?

Elizabeth: I just really wanted to make some meaning out of what happened. There was just something about volunteering that just made sense to me. It felt good. It felt right. This experience could not just go away and die; it has to be used for something good. Just immediately I knew I just wanted to do it. It didn't take me anytime to decide; just immediately I felt like this is God, this is a divine appointment. I felt like God was drawing us into something bigger than we understood.

Sarah: I guess it was this hard-to-explain-drive that felt right. It was just driven, or God-ordained ... I was longing for people to hear my story, I guess that is a better way to put it. I am in a generation that didn't care to hear my story and I felt very alone. And I finally found a program where other victims were telling their stories and people were listening. I think that really drew me, because I was feeling so alone at that point. Just, I wanted to be heard. That was a big aspect.

Many of the victims interviewed in this study (8 out of 15, 53%) discussed their faith as a primary resource for guidance during the evaluation phase of learning. Robert and Diana's faith and involvement with church was "instrumental" in their deciding how to work toward healing in their family and become involved in restorative justice programs.

Robert: After the crime, I felt at that point that there was more taking than giving in our lives. And if we were going to make some of those changes that I wanted in our life, I needed to give more than I was taking. So the church was instrumental in that. I think that began to move us closer to Christ, back more with the church. And we began to give back to the church. We got involved in prison ministry, and ultimately, Bridges To Life.

A desire to give back and "be of service" were common expressions used by the participants in this study. Emily was approached to become a Bridges To Life volunteer after she served on victim impact panels for the Victim Services department. She described being reluctant to join Bridges To Life, but after visiting the program, she could tell that the offenders were truly empathizing with the victims' stories.

Interviewer: Could you tell me how you found out about Bridges To Life?

Emily: I contacted an employee from Victim Services. At that time, my intentions were to help other victims. At first, I was a little reluctant to join Bridges To Life, but I heard one the speakers at the prison, and he was so powerful in his words, and I just saw the reaction and felt the energy in the room. I could tell that the offenders that were in prison really connected with him and were empathic to his experience. I thought, "Okay, I will give it a shot." I did a couple of sessions, and I just fell in love after that.

The evaluation phase of learning can involve different unique steps for each victim, yet all participants in this study described assessing meaningful responses to crime and then choosing to participate in Bridges To Life as an essential part of their healing. All victims utilized multiple community resources (i.e., church, colleges, self-help groups, and Texas Department of Criminal Justice Victim Services) to understand how to move forward after the crimes. Their motivations for choosing to volunteer were complex, yet all victims discussed the importance of trying to make the crimes have purpose beyond tragedy and loss.

Category 3: Integration. The third category is integration, which describes the third phase of learning. During integration, victims were active participants in the Bridges To Life program. Based on the data from participants in this study, the term integration referred to victims' abilities to contain more comfortably the full range of their experiences, thoughts, and behaviors from both the past and present (Richo, 1991). Integration is not about denying past experience or eliminating unhealthy thoughts or behaviors; rather, it is the capacity to contain more fully and accept oneself and one's experiences (Richo, 1991). During this phase, learning is ongoing such that negative thoughts, feelings, or experiences do not dissolve; yet, there is movement toward a more peaceful existence (Richo, 1991). All 15 victims interviewed in this study said one outcome of participating in Bridges To Life was experiencing "more peace." The category of integration has five properties that define its conceptual boundaries: (a) affirming a common humanity through shared dialogue, (b) constructing and proclaiming a meaningful life narrative, (c) challenging and reframing dysfunctional ways of thinking and being, (d) taking off the mask to promote change and fulfill purpose, and (e) discovering and accepting a new normal. No linear sequence binds these five properties of integration; instead these properties can emerge at different times during victims' volunteer experiences. Likewise, these properties interact with

one another, such that the emergence of one can bring about the presence or reoccurrence of another. Figure 4 depicts a representation of the category integration, its associated properties and subproperties.

The next section will describe each of the five properties of integration using relevant descriptions from study participants.

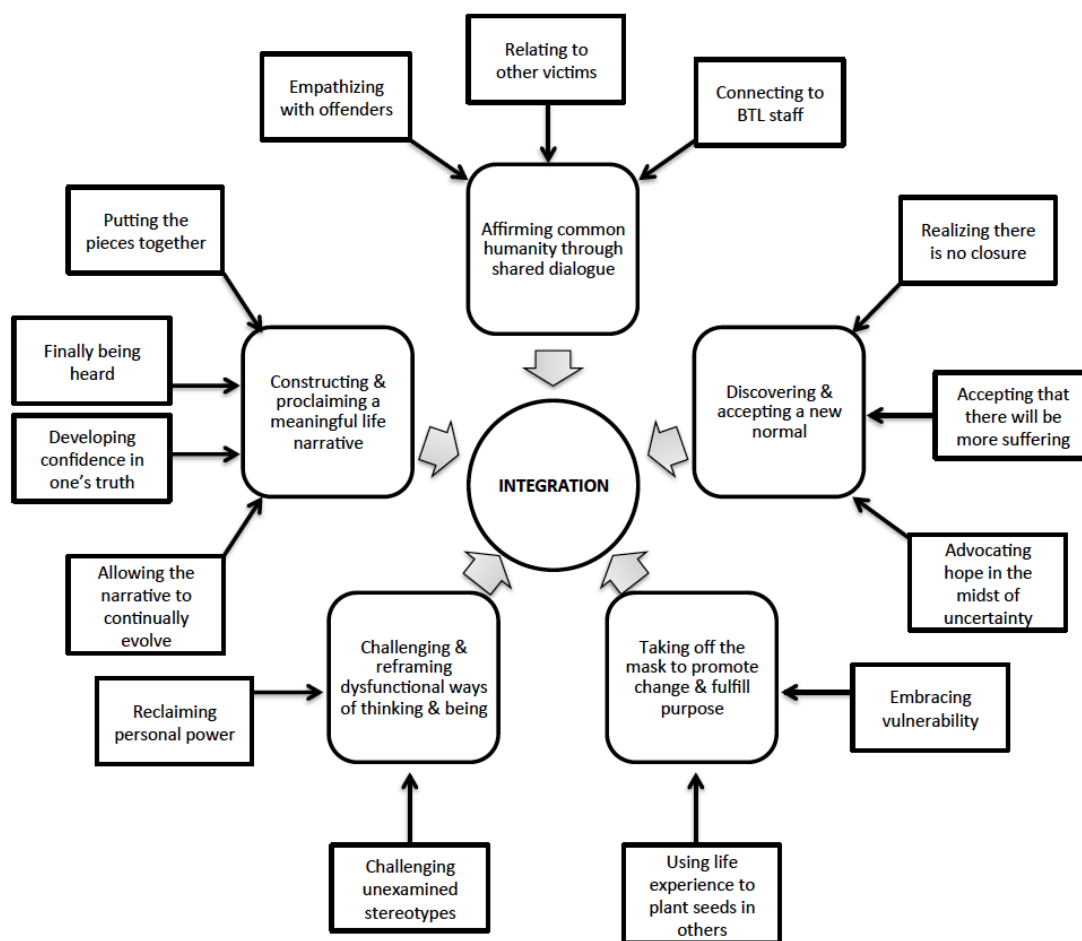


Figure 4: Category of integration with associated properties and subproperties.

Affirming a common humanity through shared dialogue. The curriculum and teaching methods of Bridges To Life are designed to be social, so as to create human connection among program participants. All of the victims who participated in this study had served as facilitators

for small groups of offenders during the 14-week Bridges To Life program. The small groups consisted of 8–15 offenders who were often facilitated by at least one crime victim and another “free-world volunteer” who had not been victimized by crime, but joined prison ministry because of his/her faith or career background (i.e., was a therapist, teacher, church leader). The small groups had assigned readings each week from *Restoring Peace: Using Lessons From Prison to Mend Broken Relationships* (Blackard, 2010) and study guide questions that focused on weekly topics including crime and conflict, storytelling, faith, responsibility, forgiveness, restitution, and reconciliation, among others. Small group members and facilitators also had assigned biblical readings each week that corresponded to the specified topic in the course curriculum. In the small groups, which met for 90 minutes to 2 hours in a prison education room, victims had an opportunity to discuss meaningful concepts, to ask reflective questions, and to connect with other crime victims, Bridges To Life staff, as well as offenders. The members of each small group stayed the same throughout the entire 14-week curriculum; thus offenders and victims had an opportunity to spend time genuinely with one another.

In addition to completing the course curriculum together, all members of the small groups had designated meeting days during the 14 sessions, to share their personal life story for 30 to 45 minutes with the other group members. When telling their life stories, offenders had an opportunity to explain their background and the circumstances that brought them to prison; likewise, victims were able to describe the details of their victimization and to articulate the ripple effect of the crimes. Tears were shed, alongside deep pensive moments of relating, and joyful bursts of laughter were shared during the small group meetings. By dialoguing with others in the small groups, victim volunteers were able to ease feelings of social isolation, be vulnerable in a safe setting, speak authentically about their experiences, and affirm their common humanity.

Affirming common humanity through shared dialogue has three subproperties: (a) relating to other victim volunteers, (c) connecting to Bridges To Life staff, and (c) empathizing with offenders.

Relating to other victim volunteers. When victims discussed what thoughts and feelings were most present after the crimes, the inability to feel fully understood by family and friends was common. Bridges To Life provided a space for victims to share their pain with one another and to learn from each other's experiences.

Kate, whose daughter was murdered while away at college, explained how Bridges To Life gave her an opportunity to talk about issues that family and friends often could not tolerate. Because Bridges To Life brought together people from many diverse backgrounds and life experiences, Kate was also able to discuss topics that were complex with a group of people who could speak from their authentic life experiences.

Interviewer: In what ways do you feel like the Bridges To Life program was helpful?

Kate: I feel like you cannot discuss certain issues in your life to just your closest friends or family. Family is intolerant after a while, and closest friends have no concept or understanding, so Bridges To Life was a group of people that it was safe to go there, to talk about it. And I cannot emphasize it enough, it was astounding to me, because it was like it dealt with addiction, with crime, with all of it. I mean, it's fascinating in a sense. So, I felt like you could vent, you could talk, you could be open, you could be real.

Within families and circles of friends, talking about painful events does not necessarily establish community. Families can reject members who "air dirty laundry" or speak about their pain in a way that holds others accountable or makes others uncomfortable (Van der Kolk, 2015).

Likewise, friends can easily lose patience after hearing about the same grief or hurt multiple times. Van der Kolk (2015) asserted that victims of trauma could "often withdraw" or feel like they needed to simplify their experience to an "edited rote narrative" so as to not feel "rejected"

or betrayed by family or friends (p. 246). Finding supportive communities where people can share their authentic trauma and grief in safe places was essential to healing and recovery.

Similar to Kate, Natalie, expressed how Bridges To Life brought together groups of people who shared common personal struggles, so that a victim did not have to “explain yourself” or feel alone in his/her experiences.

Natalie: When you’ve had a big experience like when my mother died, one thing I find is that I am so attracted to other people who have had big experiences too, because you don’t have to explain anything. In Bridges To Life, you don’t have to explain anything. That is part of what I found so hard after my mom was killed, that no one understood. And it was good that they didn’t understand, because it meant that they hadn’t had these painful experiences. But they did and said things that I found deeply disturbing, because I wanted and needed support, and they were not capable of giving it, because they couldn’t understand what I needed.

The ability to be honest, open, and authentic led some participants in the study to describe Bridges To Life as their “counseling.” For victims, the act of naming and acknowledging how they have been hurt, then describing how the crimes still had impacts on their current life predicaments were essential to feeling more “at peace.”

Research has shown that “feeling listened to and understood changes our physiology; being able to articulate complex feelings and have our feelings recognized, lights up the limbic brain and creates an ‘aha’ moment” (Van der Kolk, 2015, p. 234). Sarah, who was a covictim of homicide, described how helpful it was to talk about the current events happening in her life within her Bridges To Life small group.

Sarah: I absolutely experience more peace; I mean it is my counseling. Like we were saying, I would not have made it through this summer nearly as well without Bridges. God knew I absolutely needed my counseling, which is Bridges. I really think people need a group or person to share their challenges with, and that is Bridges for me. There are times that I think if I didn’t have that small group to share things with, I would feel so alone. It helps me release things. I am able to get advice. It is talking and really listening to others. I think you get so much peace. The positive adjectives just go on and on. The program is useful in every facet of my life.

By connecting to other victims in the small groups, participants also articulated being part of a “common human bond.” Sharing stories of overcoming suffering and adversity helped victims feel like they were part of a larger eternal human experience. The Bridges To Life curriculum provided a linguistic conceptual foundation to articulate transcendent feelings and storylines regarding the human experience (i.e., encountering painful crime and conflict could lead to virtue, forgiveness, and reconciliation). In the small groups, victims were able to hear how other people have been victimized, in ways that were sometimes almost incomprehensible, yet were able to keep on living with joy, purpose, and personal empowerment.

For victims who struggled with the forgiveness process, Bridges To Life offered them a place to learn from others’ struggles with forgiveness. The Bridges To Life curriculum emphasized the value of forgiveness by dedicating 1 week of the curriculum to teaching about the forgiveness process. Amanda, who was raped, found great value in connecting to other crime victims who were able to move through the forgiveness process.

Amanda: One of the big advantages I see for victims participating in Bridges to Life is almost everybody who works with Bridges To Life, and it’s probably because of the nature of the program, who’s a victim has been able to forgive. When you’re working in the program, you hear all kinds of stories about really bad things that have happened to people. And it’s not at all unusual for someone to say, “How can you forgive that guy for doing that?” Everybody is apt to think you’re a freak, because you can forgive people who victimized you. With Bridges To Life, you find other freaks, and you get some reassurance that you’re not all that weird. Other people who have been badly victimized can also forgive. It’s the people who haven’t been there—who have never been a victim of crime—who can’t understand why you were able to forgive.

The participant, Karen, also stressed the value of forgiveness teachings in the Bridges To Life program. Karen’s mother was murdered by a young man who was her mother’s neighbor. Karen’s mother had a very amicable relationship with the young man, as she would often allow him to borrow her car, assisted him with his taxes, and often let him use her phone when he was without one. When the young man’s girlfriend left him, he got very upset, went to a bar, and took

some pills that a patron at the bar gave him. Under the influence of the drugs the young man murdered Karen's mother and stole her car. Karen's mother was killed in 1984. Since that time, Karen participated in a victim-offender mediation with the murderer. In the mediation, he told Karen that he had no recollection of the crime because of the drugs he took, yet he apologized multiple times for "killing the nicest woman he ever knew." Both Karen and the offender have since participated in the Bridges To Life program. Volunteering in Bridges To Life helped Karen to appreciate differences among people and gain greater empathy.

Karen: While volunteering in Bridges, the main thing I have learned is that everyone deserves peace, forgiveness, and a second chance. Also that everyone has a story that if shared can benefit others. I have gained more empathy and understanding for other people. I also found I can care for people who have a different background from my own.

Engaging in dialogue, exploring difficult questions, and sharing strategies to overcome challenges were just some of the useful tools provided by the Bridges To Life small groups. The participants in this study emphasized the value of relating to other victims in order to assist each other in the process of healing.

Connecting to Bridges to Life staff. In addition to relating to other victims, participants also described benefitting from the connections formed with Bridges To Life staff members. Each 14-week program was led by a regional coordinator who communicated with the volunteers throughout the duration of the program. The Bridges To Life regional coordinator who participated in this study, Janet, worked for the program for over 16 years and had a background that made her uniquely sensitive to issues related to crime. Janet's husband had struggled with drugs decades ago, which gave her first-hand experience with the criminal justice system. When speaking with Janet, it was clear that she had deep empathy for both offenders who were struggling, as well as the victims who were impacted by offenders' harmful choices. Rich life experiences coupled with profound commitments to faith were deeply valued traits among

Bridges To Life staff. The organization worked to find employees who had backgrounds that made them particularly empathic to crime victims and offenders.

The participant, Susan, developed a strong bond with her assigned Bridges To Life regional coordinator, as they spent many hours traveling to different prison units together. Susan's mother was killed in a drunk-driving accident. Susan and her husband, Jim, were also in the vehicle that was struck by the drunk driver. The injuries they incurred from the accident required months of rehabilitation to gain mobility and fully recover. Nine years after the accident, they started volunteering for Bridges To Life. Susan and Jim described the value of forming connections with the Bridges To Life staff and volunteer facilitators.

Susan: I like the interactions with the other facilitators. I really enjoy my friendship with Michelle [the regional coordinator, pseudonym]. We have done a lot of miles together, literally. Picking her up from Austin [pseudonym] and going to Waco [pseudonym] and back, it's a long drive. We start at 3 in the afternoon to get home at 11:30 at night ... She's just a good friend, at this point in time, she has just evolved into a really good friend. I can talk to her about anything ... Yeah, we just have really good deep conversations. She's just one of those special, special friends. And it comes up partially with just who she is, but the rest of it is the contact. Because lots of people have a good relationship with her, but when you really have an opportunity to just sit in the car for miles and miles.

Jim: They are soul companions. What is different is the staff of Bridges To Life are not employees first. They are all ministers; they are using their position to minister and do their ministry work. It just feels like God's handprint is all over the program.

Susan: It is like that with all the volunteer facilitators. They are just neat folks, and we're all just kind of making our way, you know. And we can share our experiences and, there's just something that connects us.

The Bridges To Life staff assisted victim volunteers by taking genuine interest in their experiences in the program. The staff's interest and care for the victim volunteers was shown by occasionally calling or e-mailing just to check and make sure the victims were having positive experiences in the program. The regional coordinator would also organize carpools for volunteers, so as to assist with the difficulties of driving to far off prison units. Often the

assigned carpools provided additional time to engage in thoughtful dialogue among victims and people who truly cared to hear about their experiences. All of the victims who participated in this study mentioned benefiting from the relationships they formed with their regional coordinators and the executive staff of the Bridges To Life program.

The participant, Emily, formed a significant bond with her regional coordinator, Patricia. Similar to Janet, Patricia's background was rich with experience, and she often provided advice and an open-ear to victims who volunteered in her region.

Emily: Bridges To Life taught me how to be more vulnerable. In the program, I finally allowed myself to be vulnerable with others. In the past, if I had a healthy relationship, I would self-sabotage, because "healthy" was not normal for me.

And Patricia [pseudonym, Bridges To Life regional coordinator] helped me identify that. It took a long time for me to believe that I deserved to be loved the right way. And that I deserved happiness, no matter what I did in the past. I still deserve dignity and respect. And that's part of the vulnerability, because, well, I, for so long, I felt, "Well, I deserve this for all the bad things that I've done." And that's just not so. I finally started to question what am I teaching my kids? And what am I teaching others?

I mean, we don't realize what an impact we have on people. You know, when they say people might not remember what you said, but they'll always remember how you made them feel. And I want to try to make people remember that I made them feel good. And I have to be vulnerable to do that.

During her interview, Emily emphasized the important role that Patricia played in her volunteer experience. Patricia's willingness to listen and provide advice helped Emily to employ the teachings of the Bridges To Life program in her life. The staff of Bridges To Life purposefully built connections with the victim volunteers and assisted in their healing.

Empathizing with offenders. In addition to relating to other volunteers and connecting to the Bridges To Life staff, the participants in this study described empathizing with offenders in the program. Victim volunteers described the offenders in their small groups as "surrogates," which helped them to better understand their victimizers. Victim volunteers were able to ask

offenders questions about crime and the experience of imprisonment. Offenders also offered apologies to victims, which, although they were not the same as receiving apologies from their victimizers, were still able to foster emotional restoration.

Because the Bridges To Life program was conducted in prisons, victims were also able to see firsthand the reality of offenders' lives. The participants interviewed for this study emphasized that it was helpful to see the actual conditions where offenders resided and to understand more clearly the day-to-day activities of prisons. Often, in popular culture, prisons can be represented in ways that are unrealistically comfortable, thus hindering victim healing. The face-to-face interactions with offenders helped to alleviate fear and misunderstanding that stifled victim healing.

The participant, Claire, described how volunteering with offenders helped her to stay empathic and not become "cold" after being victimized. Claire was assaulted while parking her newly purchased vehicle in the driveway of her home. The assault was completely unexpected, as Claire lived in a new neighborhood and was not exposed to such acts of violence. The young man who shot Claire was participating in a gang initiation, had followed her to her home, and was trying to steal her new car because it had no identifiable license plates. After the assault, Claire experienced an elevated level of fear and anxiety because of the attack. She mentioned struggling to feel safe while alone, and still 3 decades after the crime, does not feel secure parking her car while alone in a large parking garage. Despite the fear through which Claire had to work, she felt thankful for the chance to grow and learn from the crime. Claire articulated that the crime "softened" aspects of her personality and made her more comfortable being "vulnerable," especially with offenders.

Claire: I just think the whole Bridges To Life program is healing. Just listening to their [the offenders'] stories, you come to realize they have pain and horrors in their lives as

well. You know what it really does to me—part of sharing stories back and forth—is that when you hear other people’s stories, maybe yours doesn’t feel so bad.

To me, it helps to hear the other stories, to hear their stories and to be able to be compassionate and empathic enough to care about these people who have done harm to other people. I know that my soul is still good; it is still okay. I am still able to care and forgive and love. And you know, I have to tell you before the shooting, I had come to a place in my life where I just was kind of cold. I almost think like I didn’t know how to feel or love or show people that I cared. I don’t know exactly how to explain it, but there is nothing more comforting than knowing that I have empathy. I don’t ever want to get to that point where I feel like I have just gone cold again, where life is just a day in, day out chore.

Listen, when I sit there and I can cry with the men [the offenders], I mean they bring tears in my eyes when I sit there and hear some of the things they have been through and the pain, you know, the loss for them. They put themselves there, don’t get me wrong. They are there because of the choices they have made, and I do not condone their choices. But I care about them. To hear when they lose a parent or a sibling and they can’t be there and the guilt just racks them. It is hard to watch them experience that pain.

Volunteering and having the face-to-face interactions with the offenders in Bridges To Life motivated Claire to reconnect with the young man who was imprisoned for shooting her. The young man who shot Claire had apologized for his actions and had told her that he had “grown and changed while in prison.” Her offender communicated that he participated in multiple prison ministry programs and was committed to learning from his past mistakes. Over the past 5 years, Claire cultivated a friendship with her offender and communicated with him on a monthly basis.

The 15 participants in this study emphasized how helpful it was to listen to the offenders’ stories. All offenders in the Bridges to Life program were required to tell their life stories in the small groups during the 14-week session. Offenders wrote journal entries about their life stories, then shared their stories with the other members of the small groups. By sharing life stories with the offenders, the victims in this study described being able to gain more perspective about their own suffering. Sharing their own stories of suffering allowed victims to open more fully to the

suffering of others. Placing suffering and trauma into perspective affirmed the victims' understanding that they were part of a common human experience.

The participant, Frances, was a victim of sexual abuse. For the past 8 years, Frances had been a dedicated volunteer with Bridges To Life. Listening to offenders' life stories was one of the most meaningful aspects of the program for her.

Frances: I love sharing the stories. I love to hear other people's stories.

Interviewer: Why do you like hearing them?

Frances: Because it makes my story feel like nothing. Nothing happened to me compared to all these people that have told their stories and all the horrible, horrible things that have happened to them. Mine was nothing compared to that.

Interviewer: And when you are hearing those stories, what kinds of thoughts go through your mind?

Frances: It hurts my heart. It hurts my heart deeply. I pray and realize I am not the judge. There is only one judge and that is God. I am just as big of a sinner as anyone else is, so I try to not judge. I do get into that sometimes, but I try very hard to not be judgmental of anybody or anything they do or say, because I am just as human as they are and I could be doing the same thing.

Frances echoed sentiments that were expressed by many participants in this study: sharing stories and empathizing with others' pain helped victims feel affirmed in their humanity.

Opening through dialogue and storytelling diminished feelings of loneliness and meaninglessness that were outcomes of participants' crime victimization. By engaging in shared storytelling, Frances was also able more fully to forgive her uncle for abusing her and her sisters. Listening to the testimonies of other victims and offenders helped Frances find the strength to forgive.

Frances: I could have never forgiven my uncle if it hadn't been for Bridges To Life.

Interviewer: What aspect of the program helped you with forgiveness?

Frances: I had learned about the forgiveness process in the past, but I knew I couldn't bring myself to do that because of what he [the offender, her uncle] had done to me and my sisters. But after being in Bridges To Life and hearing the other ladies [the offenders and the victims] and their stories, I knew I had to forgive him. Because other people were able to forgive the people who hurt them, and their stories were much worse than mine. Through this program I found the strength, and I finally was able to forgive.

The participant, Marie, articulated the powerful healing that working with offenders in the Bridges To Life program gave to her life. Marie had been a Bridges To Life volunteer since the first program started 16 years ago; she was one of the first volunteers asked by the executive director to join the program. After Marie's daughter was violently murdered in 1986, she taught college courses in prisons, participated in a victim-offender mediation with one of her daughter's murderers, and became a dedicated Bridges To Life volunteer. Marie was 76 at the time of our interview, so she volunteered less now and only occasionally participated in the small group dialogues. Her description of conversing with the offenders illuminated how victims were able to affirm their common humanity while volunteering in the program.

Marie: I don't always stay for the small group meetings when I go to give my testimony, but I did last week ... I had one of the most powerful experiences in that small group that I've had in 15 years. And, it was just, it was magical in so many ways. Magical from the standpoint of spiritual. The guys [offenders] were so sweet to me. You know, they were just so incredibly sweet to me, and that was just deeply affecting to me, of course, you know. How can you not be appreciative?

But I heard so many good things said, so much obvious thought, intelligent and reflective thought. I was just super, super impressed. It was just profound, an incredible gift from God to be there in the small group that night. And so I'm just really grateful. So my experience is that it is a gift for me. It is a gift I give myself. By the grace of God, I have that in my life.

I remember once reading that Mother Teresa was asked once, "How can you live, you know, you who grew up in a upper middle class or upper class home in England? How can you live in the slums in the dirt and filth of the streets of Calcutta? How can you do that?" And she said, "Oh, my dear, I get to look into the face of Jesus every day." And that's how I feel. It's stronger at times than other times, but I feel like I do the Bridges work because it opens the possibility of that to me. And, and that's, that is my experience. They bring healing to me.

And so, I know they [offenders] think I come in there for them. I know that. And they're always grateful and sweet and admiring and all this kind of stuff. But I do that because they give to me. And sometimes they give me so much that it just overflows, you know. I'm just—My cup overfloweth.

Connecting to other victims, Bridges To Life staff members, and offenders was described as “healing” for the participants of this study. By facilitating dialogue and working through the *Restoring Peace* curriculum in the small groups, participants in this study felt less isolated and alone in their experiences of crime victimization. Victims were able to affirm their common humanity through the shared dialogue that was a vital learning component of the program.

Constructing and proclaiming a meaningful life narrative. One of the most powerful therapeutic tools within the Bridges To Life program is the opportunity to construct one's life story, and then to proclaim it to an audience of attentive listeners. All of the victims who participated in this study had told their stories of victimization during the Bridges To Life large group meeting times, which occurred prior to volunteers and offenders breaking up into separate small groups. During each weekly session, all victims were given 30 minutes to tell their life stories to an audience of approximately 60 to 80 people (about 60 offenders and 20 volunteers), then were able to answer 15 minutes of questions from the audience.

The process of intentionally creating a narrative story from one's life events has been shown to impact recovery when grieving from loss and healing from trauma. Research has shown that making meaning from loss or trauma draws heavily on the human capacity to utilize narrative processes. Psychological studies have suggested that both narrative parsing and the process of organizing our experiences according to a beginning, middle, and end are rooted in our biology and our behavior as social animals (Davis, Wohl, & Verberg, 2007). The penchant for narrative activity can be observed on “neurophysiologic levels,” as the “storying” of events “appears to be anchored in brain structures” that process “episodic memories,” which are then

“consolidated into larger autobiographical memories subject to dynamic reconstruction over time” (Rubin & Greenberg, 2003). While recovering from trauma and overcoming grief, people who develop narratives about their experiences “fare better” and “grieve in a less debilitating fashion” than individuals who are unable to make sense of the disorienting experience (Davis et al., 2007). Thus, constructing the pieces of one’s life story into a coherent narrative and being able to proclaim that story to empathic and attentive listeners can have a therapeutic impact on crime victims. The property, constructing and proclaiming a meaningful life narrative, has four subproperties: (a) putting the pieces together, (b) finally being heard, (c) developing confidence in one’s truth, and (d) allowing the narrative continually to evolve.

Putting the pieces together. For many of the victims interviewed, the first time that they intentionally created narratives that integrated their past and present experiences was while volunteering for Bridges To Life. Jim and Susan, who were victims of a drunk driving accident that resulted in the death of Susan’s mother, talked about how helpful it was to construct their stories in preparation for their Bridges To Life testimony.

Susan: It was when we started preparing to tell our story that we really first put it together. We had not, well we would talk a little bit about pieces, but we had never actually just sat down and tried to tell a narrative, or even think through a narrative. I know that sounds strange, but that’s something we had never done, so—and just in the process of preparing to tell the story in the program, it was very helpful. It was very helpful, very healing, and continues to be that way.

The drunk driving accident that killed Susan’s mother occurred in 1996, so in the 9 years between her mother’s passing and the start of their Bridges To Life volunteerism in 2006, they had not intentionally crafted a narrative retelling of the traumatic experience. That finding was common among the victims interviewed in this study; many allowed decades to pass before consciously sitting down and trying to construct a narrative. There were many reasons why that absence of a meaningful story could persist. Victims mentioned that it was difficult to talk about

past trauma because of the emotions that were then relived. Additionally, without an audience to hear one's story, there might be no reason to parse through the facts of the crime. Yet, once victims were actually asked by Bridges To Life staff to create meaningful narratives for audiences, it was unanimously articulated as a worthwhile exercise.

Jim and Susan described looking through pictures and finding visual artifacts from the wreck to present to the audience of offenders who listened to their stories. The visual materials that they presented, along with their heartfelt retelling, created stronger emotional and cognitive affects within the audience. Jim and Susan hoped that by telling their stories to men and women who were imprisoned for drunk driving, perhaps it would spur the offenders' abilities to use more self-discipline and not repeat the mistakes that put them in prison.

The participant, Kate, who was a covictim of homicide, described how she constructed her story in a way that would most impact offenders. She mentioned that it was helpful for her to listen to other victims telling their stories, so that she could see what was and was not effective for the audience.

Interviewer: When you first told your story, how did you construct it? For example, did you write it down or did you speak from your heart?

Kate: I spoke from my heart, and I did an outline. To this day, I really stick to my 25-minute outline. I don't really care to give a ton of detail. I will give the really hard-core stuff, just for the sake of time. For the sake of, I hear other victim stories—that is another type of mentoring thing in Bridges To Life—being able to hear and learn from other victims' stories. You know my daughter is a beautiful person to me, telling everyone exactly how she is so beautiful. You know you kind of get where you save your breath and you realize, "Who has a 20-year-old daughter?" People raise their hands, and they all think their daughters are beautiful. "You know my daughter was murdered." That cuts to it, gets right to it. It's like that saves a lot of time. Too much talking is not really good, in my opinion. The facts speak for themselves.

Kate's description of how she constructed her narrative and how it changed over time, depending on what she found most impactful about other victims' stories, emphasized the social

nature of storytelling. The interpretive activity of “storying” experience does not occur in an “intra-psychic” or subjective vacuum. Rather research contends that recovering from grief and trauma is embedded in processes that are “written, spoken, and nonverbally performed in exchanges with others” (Neimeyer, Klass, & Dennis, 2014, p. 486). Premature or traumatic death, which fittingly described Kate’s loss of her 20-year-old daughter, can cause a deeper search for significance and more paralyzing grief symptoms (Currier, Holland, & Neimeyer, 2006). Neimeyer et al. (2014) argued that “mourning, draws heavily on narrative processes to establish meaning of the deceased’s life and death,” which can then be shared with the larger social world (p. 487). Proclaiming personal accounts of grief can “constitute a form of social action” that can fulfill broad cultural, political, or religious intentions and consequences, thereby serving a purpose beyond solely managing difficult emotions (Neimeyer et al., 2014). Making meaning by constructing a coherent account of loss and trauma may thus be dependent on a supportive social environment that includes responsive and engaged listeners. Bridges To Life provided an audience of approximately 60 offenders each 14-week session to listen attentively and learn from the victims’ narratives.

Finally being heard. The majority (13 out of 15, 86%) of the victims interviewed in this study had been volunteers in the Bridges To Life program for over 5 years; thus they had been able to give their victimization testimonies many, many times. Research indicates it is essential for mental health providers to help people who have experienced trauma find a language whereby they can communicate their pain (Van der Kolk, 2002, p. 389). This prescription of using words to substitute action as a way to resolve the symptoms of trauma first originated with Freud and the development of talk therapy (Van der Kolk, 2002). Ultimately, the goal of speaking about one’s trauma promotes symptom reduction and helps victims to realize that

speaking about trauma is not equivalent to living it. Talking about one's trauma allows victims to put events into perspective and relive aspects without feeling helpless.

The Bridges To Life regional coordinator, Janet, provided insight as to how victim volunteers benefited by telling their stories of victimization.

Interviewer: Could you tell me what you believe some of the most essential learning tools are within the Bridges To Life program?

Janet: A victim telling their story over and over and over again. They get to the point where they feel like they have finally been heard.

So many times, they say, "You don't know how bad this hurts"... they tell family and they tell friends, and after just a few short times, people are like, "Oh, I have already heard this before," not meaning to, but the victim knows they have already heard it before.

To be able to come back to their story—a lot of times they will say to me, "I know you've heard my story before, but ..." I will say, "No, you have a whole new group of people who have never heard it before." Everyone in Bridges To Life is there because they want the victim to be able to tell their story. I will say, "They want to hear your story again."

Victims who don't get to do that still have that need. That need can turn into cancer or acid in their body, because they have got to get it out. That is where therapy can help, because you can tell a therapist over and over and over, but you're paying for that. You're paying a lot of money for that, and you're telling the same person the same thing. And in Bridges To Life, you're telling different people each 14-week session. It is fresh and new; they haven't heard it and they want to hear it. You get to change the story according to what is happening in your life at the time. It is beautiful, and the victims deserve that.

Janet's assertions are further supported by recent psychological studies, which report that making meaning by way of retelling a constructed narrative lessens the symptoms of complicated bereavement (Coleman & Neimeyer, 2010; Neimeyer et al., 2014). Coleman and Neimeyer (2010) found that sense-making through the creation of a narrative in the early months of bereavement predict higher levels of well-being 18 to 49 months in the future.

The participant, Kate, described the events of her life that she included in her Bridges To Life testimony. Detailing the ripple effects of her daughter's murder was important to Kate, because the crime greatly changed her life. She wanted to emphasize how an offender's actions could change the course of a victim's family, home life, and career. Bridges To Life supplied Kate an opportunity where her story could finally be heard and recognized by offenders.

Kate: I don't want to beat them [offenders] up, but they have to see the reality. Because this man killed my daughter, and I lost my intact family. I lost my husband after 28 years. I lost my beautiful home. I had to give everything up and sell it all and went through a divorce. I lived in an RV just to cope, just to like, just exist. People don't realize the loss. I don't sit around and talk about it. Those around me saw it. They were awe-struck that I would live through this ... It is hard when your life is disrupted, when you totally lose your life, like you lose your child, you lose your husband, you lose your house—that is loss. It's my story; my life mattered; it matters now.

By telling her story and teaching offenders the ripple effects of their actions, Kate was able to make purpose from her tragic loss. While collecting data as a participant-observer in the Bridges To Life program, I observed Kate telling her story to the offenders. The prison education room was completely silent as she spoke. Some offenders in the audience became emotional as Kate retold the events of her life. It was obvious her story was able to foster compassion from those listening, given the empathic facial expressions throughout the audience. Constructing a meaningful narrative not only helped Kate integrate her past and present experiences, but also gave her an opportunity to teach offenders the consequences of their actions.

The participant, Jim, also emphasized that an essential aspect of proclaiming his story in Bridges To Life was being able to help teach offenders the ripple effects of crime. Jim and his family were struck by a drunk driver while they were coming home from a family vacation at a state park. Their family van held three grandchildren, Jim, his wife Susan, and Susan's mother. Jim was the driver of the van and was pinned in the vehicle for several hours after the accident. He was airlifted from the accident, and his recovery required months of rehabilitation. The many

surgeries he endured after the accident forced him to change aspects of his career as a college professor. The beginning of his career was largely focused on research, yet after the wreck, he felt his attention span was not as strong and the heavy concentration demands of research were now too difficult. Jim expressed in his interview how many times he had told his story to offenders in Bridges To Life; he felt it allowed him to finally be heard, and it served an important purpose.

Jim: It was very tender for a lot of years, even in 2005 when we went to tell it. I added up, I probably shared it 100 times now. And I told her [Susan, his wife], I said, “You know this is not nearly as emotional. I’ve shared this in nine different prisons about 100 times.” So, it’s different. And I say, “Why do I come and do this? You know nobody pays me to do this; I come on my time and come do it. I do it because I think God may be able to use this to help you change your life [the offenders]. I don’t come for sympathy, and I’m not looking for sympathy. I’m not coming to blame. I’m coming to share the consequences of actions.”

Both Jim and Susan did not like referring to themselves as “victims,” because they felt like “survivors” after the car accident. During their 10 years volunteering in Bridges To Life, Jim and Susan had run into offenders after being released from prison. They revealed in their interview that one ex-offender said he “never drank and drove again” after hearing their testimony.

Developing confidence in one’s truth. In addition to the therapeutic exercises of piecing together a meaningful narrative and finally being heard, part of what victims enjoyed about telling their stories was the chance to share their insights with offenders. Telling their testimonies was a teaching opportunity that provided a platform to develop confidence in one’s truth after experiencing victimization. Janet eloquently described how a victim volunteer developed confidence in her perspective while speaking in front of an audience of offenders.

Janet: You know I thought about a girl one time who told her victim testimony. She was in a parking lot, and a guy walked by and grabbed her purse. She sort of was trying to get her purse back, and the guy was running toward her swinging her purse. Well she thought the guy was throwing her purse back at her, so she reached out to grab her purse, but he was actually running to jump into a get-away car. While she was reaching out, her arms

got tangled inside the purse handles, she was like half inside the get-away car, and they sped off with her hanging outside of the car. It was just horrible. Well after she would tell her story to the offenders, one of the questions she often would get is, “Why did you reach out to grab the purse?” It was always a question. It was so frustrating for her, because she was like, “Well, it was my purse. Why wouldn’t I go after it? Why am I wrong because I went after my purse!” The question continued to come up every time after her victim testimony. Finally she got angry and said, “IT WAS MY PURSE, I HAD EVERY RIGHT TO GO AFTER MY PURSE” [exclaiming loudly]. So it was helpful for her to go through it and get confidence in what happened.

It was helpful for her to tell her story and answer people’s questions. It was funny to see; well, it wasn’t funny. It was amazing to see that the question kept coming up, and then she finally was like, “No, I was not the criminal. I had every right to go after my purse.” She needed to be asked that question 50 times before she could process it. She finally screamed out, “IT WAS MY PURSE.” Because she was always questioning herself, “Why did I do that dumb move? There wasn’t even any money in my purse.” By telling her story and being asked questions, she finally processed what happened and why she did what she did. It was beautiful to finally see her shift like that.

Janet’s description showed how victims in the Bridges To Life program gained confidence in their truths by telling their stories and answering questions from the offenders. Telling their stories to large audiences required vulnerability, and at times the victims’ interpretations of events were either affirmed or contested. When the interpretation was contested, it gave victims a chance to reflect on their understanding and either reframe their thoughts or fortify their interpretation. All of the victims interviewed for this study mentioned how useful it was to take questions from the audience after telling their stories. Answering questions gave the victims an opportunity to self-reflect and explore ideas about which they had not thought before.

When Jim told his story he emphasized two important insights that helped him understand the purpose of his family’s car accident.

Jim: Well, what I try to do when I finish telling my story is come back to two points. One is the question that I had for God right before the wreck, which was, “You gotta explain this to me?” Well about 3 months after the wreck, an answer formed in my mind, which was the answer I was looking for. The answer was “My grace is multiplied.” And that gets a lot of kind of questioning looks when I say that during Bridges To Life. Let me explain. It depends on how you see God. The God that I have is not a God that stops people from doing what they want to do; he gives us free will. He will let you drive, get

drunk and drive, and whatever. He did not put his hand down to stop that wreck. So the consequences of our decisions ripple to lots of other people; they don't just stay with us ... But what we have found is we would not be in prison ministry were it not for this accident. My whole career changed. It's entirely different, but there is much good. There were so many people that reached out to us and helped us. We couldn't do anything for ourselves. God uses these great tragedies, if we submit, to become ministries and blessings. And I say trust that. If you take your suffering and submit it to God, he'll take whatever is your greatest tragedy and he will use it to his Glory and to yours.

Susan: I tell them, "He takes your miseries and turns them into ministries."

The act of constructing and proclaiming his victim testimony to the group of offenders allowed Jim to assimilate the car accident into his existing self-narrative and personal spirituality. Jim's victim testimony helped him to restore a level of coherence to his life story, which was greatly altered by the many effects of the accident, including the death of his mother-in-law and his own physical injuries. Jim's narrative construction further clarified his beliefs about God's omnipotence, omniscience, and benevolence. The victim testimony provided Jim a chance to share his spiritual insights with the offenders, while simultaneously re-teaching them to himself.

Similar to Jim, Kate also emphasized the vital role of God and faith while mourning the loss of her daughter and living with the ripple effects of the crime.

Interviewer: When you are shaping your story, is there something that you really want to emphasize, because you are sharing it with a group of offenders?

Kate: Yes, I want them to know how much one choice [begins to cry], when I tell it, I just want them to know that one choice, one dark moment, changed my life forever and theirs. That is it. It is not rocket science. And how my faith got me through it. You know a lot of people are mad at God, and they are angry. And, I get it, except to tell everyone, I never got mad at God. I couldn't afford it; I couldn't afford the energy or the effort. And so, God got me through it, and He still gets me through it every day.

Kate's victim testimony helped her to process the events of the loss and its significance in her life, while contending with the questions of why it occurred and what it meant for her future. Relying on God was instrumental during Kate's mourning process, hence why she felt it was pivotal to show offenders that no matter how deep one's loss, God can "get you through it."

Constructing and proclaiming a meaningful narrative helped Kate to develop confidence in her truth.

Allowing the narrative continually to evolve. Often when telling their stories, victims would integrate past and present experiences, so that their narrative consistently changed depending on what was currently happening in their lives. By allowing the narrative continually to evolve, victims were establishing congruent senses of self and identity that integrated changing life experiences.

The Bridges To Life regional coordinator, Janet, described how victims allowed the narrative continually to evolve as they volunteered over the course of the year.

Janet: Eventually, the victim is also able to integrate other areas of their life into the story—like now they add in their divorce or their kid is on drugs. It is no longer about the murder anymore; everybody finally knows how bad that hurt. But every now and again, they can go back to talking about the crime and speak about how bad it still hurts. It just validates their pain, you know, and they need to be able to do that again, and again, and again.

Because profound pain, trauma, and loss can confound and change the self-narrative used to organize one's identity, Janet stressed to victims openly to integrate past and present events into their Bridges To Life testimony. According to Neimeyer et al. (2014), personal identity could be seen as “narrative achievement” whereby “our sense of self is established through the stories we tell about our lives, the stories others tell about us, and the stories we enact in their presence” (p. 488). After a disorienting event, like loss of a loved one, the basic plot themes of one's identity can be challenged; hence why others witnessing the retelling of one's self-narrative can create an affirmation that solidifies a person's sense of self.

The participant, Kate, described how the story she told during Bridges To Life was an ever-evolving testimony.

Kate: When I tell my story, it's always different. The timeline is correct; the facts are there. But I sometimes, I notice that it's how I feel at that time and what I'm going through. It's absolutely unbelievable in the 8 years I've been doing this, speaking about my daughter's murder, how it changes depending on what's going on in my life. I never thought I'd be at this point where I'd be open to doing a victim-offender mediation or offer to do that. Huge transformations have happened in my life while I have been volunteering.

Declaring her narrative to the Bridges To Life offenders gave Kate an opportunity to self-reflect, gain understanding about the events of her life, and see how her thoughts and behaviors changed over the years. Through the construction and proclamation of the self-narrative, victim volunteers were able to reestablish senses of continuity in their lives and identities, despite the seismic changes that occurred because of the crimes.

Challenging and reframing dysfunctional ways of thinking and being. The participants in this study described questioning and exploring one's thoughts, feelings, and behaviors while volunteering in the Bridges To Life program. Victims challenged and reframed dysfunctional ways of thinking and being, while completing the course curriculum during each of the 14-week sessions. The course curriculum required self-inquiry when reading the book, *Restoring Peace*, and answering self-reflection questions in the program manual. The act of constructing a meaningful narrative, presenting it to an audience, and answering audience questions also spurred reflective thinking. Likewise, the small group dialogues, and even carpooling to the prison with other volunteers, provided opportunities to question opinions, thoughts, and behaviors. The participants articulated the value of challenging and reframing dysfunctional ways of thinking and being, when detailing how they were able to explore unexamined stereotypes and to reclaim personal power. Thus, the property, challenging and reframing dysfunctional ways of thinking and being, has two subproperties: (a) challenging unexamined stereotypes, and (b) reclaiming personal power.

Challenging unexamined stereotypes. Because the Bridges To Life program was conducted in prisons, victims were able to see firsthand the reality of offenders' lives. The participants interviewed for this study emphasized that volunteering in the prison helped to correct stereotypes and misinformation presented in popular culture. Those types of connections and interactions with offenders helped to alleviate fear and misunderstanding that stifled victim healing.

Volunteering with offenders helped Marie to reach new conclusions about crime and justice. After her daughter's murder, Marie taught college courses in a prison, which led her to participate in a victim-offender mediation with one of the young men who murdered her daughter. Marie has been a dedicated volunteer with Bridges To Life since the start of the program 16 years ago. In her interview, Marie described the connection between feeling and thinking: if our thoughts are not based on accurate facts, then our feelings can be misguided and unproductive. By going into the prisons and forming connections with offenders, Marie was able to overcome unhelpful stereotypes and ways of thinking about crime that impaired her healing.

Interviewer: Can you explain why you think that working with offenders is so healing?

Marie: Part of it, quite frankly, is seeing the reality of their lives. You know, our feelings to a great degree are based on how we think about something, our cognition. So, if you as a victim's family member think that an offender is laying up in prison, living off the fat of the land, and in a country club existence watching big screen TV all day long, that's going to cause some resentment in you. But if you go into prison and you see the reality that is their lives, that is not the truth of their existence.

So, I think that seeing the reality of their lives, that's part—That's not the most important part—but that's part of what was healing for me. Seeing how remorseful so many of them are. There are a lot of stereotypes that I've not found to be true.

In all the times that I've taught—and I taught 8 and a half years overall, and I've done Bridges work, like, over 15 years—I've only had one guy tell me that he was innocent of the crime he was in prison for. So that stereotype that they all say they're innocent, I've not found that to be true. And they're all hard and mean and would do anything to get over on you. I'm sure that's true of many people who are in there. But it's true of many

people who are not behind bars as well. So I have not found that to be true either. The majority of my students and so many of the men have talked about that in Bridges; they're very remorseful, in time, with the right evoking of it.

You see, that's what I love about Bridges. I think Bridges softens all of us, both offenders and victims; it takes those sharp corners away from us, and makes us more beautiful. And I just think that's just part of the grace of the program.

By comparing the facts of what an offender's existence and behavior actually looked like, with her assumptions and stereotypes that were driven by mainstream popular culture, Marie was able to reframe her thoughts. The outcome of reframing her thoughts was described as "softening," and "tak[ing] away those sharp corners," thereby making her "more beautiful." The way that restorative justice (i.e., victim-offender encounters while she taught in prisons, victim-offender mediation, and Bridges To Life) impacted Marie was to foster "compassion" and "openness". In the fragmentation phase of learning, which characterized the first few years after Marie's daughter was murdered, she described herself as "devastated with grief" and "numb." After engaging in restorative justice work, Marie explained that her basic personality and character were the same, but it elicited and evoked the "best parts of herself" to "manifest." She said that restorative justice "called out things in me that might have been there, but were buried" and "there are a lot of things about me now that are better and deeper." Marie described the experience of her daughter's death as evoking "transformative grief" that helped her to grow in ways that fostered more "openness" in her thinking and being.

The participant, Claire, also described benefiting from challenging the stereotypes she had about crime, prison, and "the mentality of making bad choices." After Claire was shot multiple times by a young gang member trying to steal her car, she went to a therapist to try to gain understanding and "closure." In her interview, Claire stated that her therapy sessions eventually dwindled, because Bridges To Life satisfied many of the healing elements she hoped

would come from professional counseling. Claire described Bridges To Life as “replacing therapy.” Talking with offenders in Bridges to Life helped answer many of the questions she had after the crime.

Claire: When I went through this whole program, it was the first time that I was starting to understand my offender. And I didn’t necessarily have anyone in my small group that had done the same offense as what was done to me, but for me it was helpful to understand the mentality of making bad choices. So it began to help me. I felt better going to the prison and sitting, talking to the offenders, and them talking to me. They understood more of the criminal mind, and it was helpful for me to ask them questions. So even though their crime wasn’t the same, it is still those thought processes; they are still the same kinds of bad choices. So it just got to the point where I didn’t need to go to therapy anymore. The offenders helped me answer the questions I was seeking in therapy. I kept going to counseling for a while after that, but it dwindled down to like once every month or every other month, then it became just as needed.

One way of understanding how Bridges To Life served as a therapeutic intervention for crime victims was the richness of self-inquiry that was fostered in the program. The program design, curriculum, and in-depth dialogue gave volunteers ample opportunity to explore their previously unquestioned mindsets and beliefs. The small group meetings that occurred between offenders and victims were described as venues for abundant self-inquiry. Kate described how a conversation with an offender in her small group “switched her life” and changed her way of thinking, which led to a different approach to managing the devastation of her daughter’s murder.

Kate: What I did encounter is that a murderer was in my group, and I never experienced that before until after my daughter died. And that was really profound for me. I mean it shook me to my core, because I was like, “Wow, what do I do here. Is this a game? I mean, what do I do?” Because you could hear a pin drop during the small group meeting, everybody was so worked up over my story, and they knew that the gentleman sitting next to me had murdered someone—he actually mutilated someone. And the other offenders knew that, but I didn’t know that. So I was raging and angry about the man who killed my daughter, who was never sorry. I never got to know why he—what happened and why—we never got to know the motive to this day. And to make a long story short, that man helped me—that man in my small group who killed someone.

He told me one very profound and simple thing: “The man who killed your daughter isn’t sorry and probably won’t be for years.” I couldn’t believe what I heard. He said, “All the man who killed your daughter cares about is surviving prison life.” I was like, “Whoa!” That shut down that intense need to rage and have anger. So his comment totally did that for me. I just thought, “Well, what I have to do is wait.” I couldn’t believe how profound that was; it switched my life. I took it as an instant relief of, “I am wasting my time and energy on my rage, because the man who killed my daughter is not even thinking about me. He is not even giving a thought to me, because he is only thinking about surviving prison.” It switched my life from raging so bad on the offenders, to, wow, this is a pretty powerful program, to now I am dealing with self-pity.

By dialoguing with the offenders in the small group and then self-reflecting about her experience, Kate was able to move past some of her feelings of rage. The participants in this study who felt intense anger described moving from raging emotional states to more calm states of mind after volunteering.

Reclaiming personal power. Victims described how Bridges To Life helped them develop the strength to improve their circumstances and lead a more self-determined existence. During the fragmentation phase of learning, victims described feeling “powerless” and “without a voice” because crime altered their perceptions of control and order. While volunteering, victims were able to identify their sources of powerlessness so that they could reclaim their sense of personal power.

Emily, who as a young child was sexually abused by her cousin, explained in detail how, after engaging in self-inquiry during the Bridges To Life program, she became more accountable, and ultimately more empowered. Emily’s description of her experience in Bridges To Life not only showed the usefulness of challenging and reframing dysfunctional ways of thinking and being, but also summarized how victims moved through the learning process of fragmentation, evaluation, and integration.

Emily: It took me many, many years to realize that I was giving him [the offender] power. I really wasn’t strong, like I thought I was, because I was physically strong on the outside and could mask it very well. But I hadn’t dealt with the real issues, so that’s what

Bridges To Life did—it helped me deal with the real issues. While we’re doing this program, and I’m facilitating with the offenders, you know, we answer the same questions in the curriculum. And although maybe we are not answering what crime we’ve committed, there are plenty of offenses that I’ve committed. And I have to take a look at myself and say why was I being so cruel to people and why was I just being so mean. Because I—that was the power I was trying to take from people.

In her interviews, Emily described struggling with rage and anger throughout her childhood and young adulthood. Emily witnessed her father, who struggled with drugs, commit many acts of violence in front of her and her siblings. Handling difficult situations by releasing anger through violence or hurtful words was commonly demonstrated to her as a child. Emily referred to this way of handling conflict and discomfort as “street justice,” “rooting for the underdog,” and “an eye-for-an-eye, tooth-for-a-tooth mentality.” As a young adult, Emily had to challenge those ways of thinking and being, because they were no longer useful to her. Now as a mother of young daughters, Emily described being unable to heal and “not dealing with the real issues” while she employed that “street justice” mentality.

Interviewer: When you talk about feeling angry and feeling like you were being mean, what kind of “mean” are you speaking of? The reason I ask is because it seems that you noticed changes in your behavior. So can you talk specifically about how you changed?

Emily: Oh, yeah. It’s embarrassing, but, I mean, it’s true. I would humiliate people just because I could with words. I was just making excuses left and right. Nothing was my fault.

I mean, an elderly couple they were going down the wrong way of a road. They were trying to do a turnaround, and they ended up coming through the yield. And they almost hit me and my children. And I get out of the car, and I start punching the window. This elderly lady, she’s just, you know, terrified, and I don’t see anything wrong with that. I think it’s totally appropriate behavior, because you are risking my children’s lives. And so now this is what I do to fix the problem ... And here I am going ballistic, because no one’s going to hurt my kids—And part of that, I know, is the fear of and just reacting to what happened to me as a child. But at a certain point, I can’t use that excuse. Because I could have been more rational. But I was so consumed in anger and revenge and just my distorted idea of justice.

And I—Basically I was continuing the cycle of violence, in a different fashion, but it took, I’m telling you, decades for me to realize that. And Patricia [the Bridges To Life

regional coordinator] is such a sweetheart, but she's direct and she's just going to tell you like it is. And that's the kind of person I am. So when finally I could trust her and she's asking me to dig deep, that was pretty scary, you know, because then you really have to look at yourself, like the raw you.

So, when you start telling those stories and sharing those things in the small groups. The offenders they call us volunteers out, too. It's not a one-way street.

The offenders in Emily's small group served as a mirror for her to look at her previously unchallenged ways of thinking and reacting. Emily described the offenders in her group as sometimes reminding her of her father. She empathized with the offenders' ways of using violence to solve problems and saw how she was taught similar ways of thinking and being. Her father had served time in prison, and Emily felt like his absence made it more possible for her cousin to abuse her and her siblings. She often articulated to offenders how important it was for them to serve their sentence and not repeat the same mistakes so that they could be active participants in their household and protect their families, especially their young daughters. As Emily pushed the offenders to reach new realizations, they likewise pushed her come to new conclusions about the crime and "soften" her heart.

Emily: It's just funny, because people kept saying, "Have you forgiven him, you know, forgiven my offender?" That was the most annoying question I had for so many years. And I'm, like, "No, I haven't forgiven him." And, you know, just really holding on to that grudge. And Patricia [Bridges to Life regional coordinator] kept saying, you know, "Forgiveness is not about accepting what happened or saying that it's okay. It's really about not having the hate in your heart."

And I could not conceive that analogy. I couldn't. It just didn't make sense to me. And little by little, just hearing other people's [offenders' and victims'] stories, and interacting with the offenders. And then we would debrief, you know, and we would talk about things in the car on the way home from Bridges To Life. And we're out in Waco [pseudonym]. So it's, like, you know, 45 minutes, 1-hour drive each way, so Patricia, the other volunteers, and I, had plenty of time to talk about stuff while carpooling to and from the prison.

And then one day, it was just, like, I started thinking about it. And I was, like, "You know, I haven't had those nightmares in a really long time." And then I started thinking about my offender, and I didn't have the same hate. I didn't have any hate. I mean, as a

matter of fact, I was, like, praying that he would do well. And I do want him to do well, because I don't want him to hurt another child. And I want him to get help, too.

And that's when I knew what true forgiveness was. Because—And it really was such, you know, the proverbial block off, the weight off your shoulders. That's exactly what it felt like. I mean, when I realized, "You know what? I don't hate him." I really felt so relieved.

And then it made it easier to stop being so mean, or being so picky, and just being so angry all the time. And I just had a different perspective on life. While in Bridges is when I started really looking at myself, holding myself more accountable.

We all make mistakes. We all make poor choices. So when I do make those choices, I'm not holding him accountable anymore. That's me. That's my mistake—I am holding myself accountable. And I know it is just purely me, and it's up to me to make it right. And so, that's what I've been trying to do. And it's a happier life that way. It really is.

Emily's description of her learning process showed how engaging in self-inquiry was woven through each facet of the Bridges To Life program. The curriculum, small group dialogue, and mentorship from staff, as well as volunteers, helped Emily integrate the tragic experiences of her past with her present existence. The outcome of Emily's devotion to reframing dysfunctional ways of thinking was increased personal power and accountability that led to a more enjoyable life.

Dealing with the aftermath of crime by questioning one's thoughts and choosing solutions that bring more peace to one's existence was described by Choi, Green, and Kapp (2010) as a facet of "empowerment." The authors contended that experiencing crime could be an opportunity for "empowerment or at least possibly serve as a foundation for further empowerment as life goes on" (Choi et al., 2010, p. 272). The Social Work Dictionary refers to empowerment as "the process of helping individuals, families, groups and communities increase their personal, interpersonal, socioeconomic, and political strength and develop influence toward improving their circumstances" (Barker, 2003, p. 74). Bridges To Life gave participants opportunities to challenge and reframe dysfunctional ways of thinking and being, in order to

assist victims in reclaiming their personal power. Because the devastating effects of violent crime could leave victims feeling powerless and unable to exercise control, the Bridges To Life curriculum and staff worked to identify sources of powerlessness so that victims and offenders could make choices by using more self-determination.

Claire described how, over time, she changed her relationship to alcohol while volunteering for Bridges To Life. For years after her violent assault, she described using alcohol as a way to help “numb” the fear and pain that were residual effects of the crime. She also explained that it was important to her to be sincere and committed to the Bridges To Life program, so as not to present herself falsely to the offenders.

Claire: We all do things that we are not proud of ... like drinking, and not that I am a saint, but I do have a drink every once and a while. But I was at the stage of drinking quite a bit when I started Bridges. I literally, and I am not kidding, would go to Bridges and then get back at 10:00 p.m. and go meet my friends at the bar. Not that that's a good thing, but I was doing that still. But over the years, as I found myself going in and talking to the men about drinking and drugging, the more I quit drinking. And it got to the point where I felt so guilty every time I was out and if I drank and drove ... I couldn't, well I just felt horrible. So I think just over a fairly short period of time, over about 2 or 3 years, I kind of quit drinking. Occasionally I will still have a drink, but I never drink and then drive a car.

After hearing the stories, you just think, how can I go in there and be such a hypocrite telling them [the offenders] not to do it and then going out and doing it. And that is really when I started to feel differently. So, yeah, Bridges reestablished for me that we need to be real. We can't say it and not do it. I am not calling myself a hypocrite; I was just very human. And I struggled not with a drinking problem as an alcoholic, but as a drinking problem to just bury the pain a lot. I did that off and on for many years. Once I got to Bridges, that struggle just kind of came to an end. It was so much easier. It kind of helped me get through that struggle. It is not that I am against drinking, but it is not just that important to me anymore. It did change me in a lot of ways, because I think it does strengthen me, as I hear myself talk and as I hear the feedback from the men [the offenders].

Dialoguing with the offenders and teaching the curriculum of the Bridges To Life program helped Claire exercise more control and power over her behavior. During her volunteerism, Claire was able to increase her capacity to make useful changes in her life. The

victims interviewed in this study all shared stories of dealing with the aftermath of crime in a more proactive and empowered way during the course of their volunteerism.

Sarah and her mother, Elizabeth, volunteer for Bridges To Life together and expressed in their interviews how much they enjoyed discussing new insights with one another. Sarah and Elizabeth did not facilitate the same small group, because Sarah, who was 22 years old, preferred not to have her mother's presence change her dynamic with the male offenders. The mother and daughter pair explained that after every Bridges To Life meeting, they eagerly met up and talked about what they learned during the volunteer session. Because Elizabeth's brother-in-law, who committed two murders over the course of 17 years, presented himself as a trustworthy caretaker, part of Elizabeth's healing involved self-reflecting on her relationship to men.

Sarah: A new realization that my mom and I discovered is that there is this correlation with her and men who betray her. From her father to her brother-in-law, boyfriends... she just never felt protected. It is like this need to want to be protected by men.

Elizabeth: I was balling when Sarah brought that up to me ... I was like, "Oh, my gosh, why am I drawn to that? ... What is it about me that lands me with men like that? ... Why can't my goodness be loved? Why is my goodness something to be taken advantage of rather than cherished?" That has been my big thing. I want a man to not see that as an angle, like "I can easily manipulate and deceive this woman."

Sarah: And there are some men in the prison who have been manipulative. So it is just so helpful to come to new awarenesses when telling our story. It is also useful to be able to find a theme that reoccurs in our lives ... We often go, "Wow! I just got this while sitting in group or while telling our story." You realize that you tend to be a certain way. It is just so much self-growth.

Elizabeth expressed in her interview that volunteering with male offenders in Bridges To Life gave her an opportunity to think about her past relationships with men and to practice strong, healthy boundaries. By reframing dysfunctional ways of thinking while volunteering, Elizabeth had been able to alter unproductive ways of being that she associated with her crime victimization.

Elizabeth: I have been a pleaser all my life. I always wanna please the man without sticking up for myself or being a strong person. So now I can be around these guys [the offenders] and I don't have to be hard on them, I don't have to embarrass them or call them out. I just know inside I am not going to give into them, they are not gonna find this weakness in me, where I will take a note or a gift, something that would jeopardize my position in this program. I really needed to grow in this way; it is actually a big thing for me, because I have been a pleaser and it has brought me a lot of pain. I didn't recognize when I wasn't standing up for myself enough to the men in my life. It's a beautiful thing for me to develop this strength now where I can gently guide these guys without embarrassing them, without giving into them. I am able to say, "I care about you too, I wish you the best. I am going to pray for you." You are able to leave on a very positive note, and they are able to maintain respect for your boundaries and your limits, even though they may not agree and they wish that I would have crumbled. It just gives me more strength; I can spot manipulation quicker. I believe Bridges has helped me walk with another level of confidence. I have developed a protection over my own heart and my own stability; that has been a big factor for me.

Participants advocated the teachings and methods in Bridges To Life, because they were practical and applicable to real life challenges. While volunteering, victims were able to reframe their states of mind to feel more worthy and competent. The victims in this study described mental and behavioral changes that enabled them to lead more self-determined lives, despite the devastating effects of crime.

Taking off the mask to promote change and fulfill purpose. The fourth property of integration is taking off the mask to promote change and fulfill purpose. The phrase "taking off the mask" was used by Jim, a victim volunteer, to describe the authenticity and vulnerability that are required effectively to engage and work with offenders in the Bridges to Life program. The 15 victims interviewed in this study volunteered by giving their victim testimonies and facilitating small groups of offenders through the 14-week curriculum. In both capacities, as victim testimony speakers and as facilitators, the victim volunteers played active leadership roles that were based on being vulnerable and honest about their life experiences. By "taking off the mask" and allowing experiences of crime and trauma to be openly articulated, victim volunteers were able to inspire other participants, especially offenders, in the program.

The property, taking off the mask to promote change and fulfill purpose, was conveyed by two subproperties: (a) embracing vulnerability, and (b) using life experience to plant seeds of change in others. Victim volunteers articulated that they felt like their openness and vulnerability served a purpose, because they were able to help offenders arrive at new realizations, which could ultimately decrease their likelihood of committing more crimes and returning to prison. Promoting change in offenders gave victim volunteers an enriched sense of personal purpose, as they believed they were helping decrease the cycle of crime.

Embracing vulnerability. Victims articulated that in order to be effective facilitators of Bridges To Life small groups, it was necessary to embrace vulnerability and “be real” while giving their testimonies and conversing with offenders. Victims served in a unique leadership capacity, because they reflected how offenders should engage the curriculum and activities of the program. The victims described that real personal change and transformation occurred only when they were open, honest, and vulnerable about their life experiences and personal struggles. Because the victims wanted to provoke change and transformation within the offenders, they personally strived to demonstrate openness, vulnerability, and honesty.

During her interviews, Kate described her method when facilitating a small group of offenders through the program curriculum. Kate placed great emphasis on being “real” and “vulnerable” in order positively to engage offenders and get the most benefit out of the volunteer experience.

Interviewer: When you’re facilitating, is there a particular frame of mind or philosophy that you use?

Kate: Yes, I do not want to be preachy, teachy, or a counselor, I do not want that, and I am not that. I keep it personal; I keep it about me. And during each question or week or topic that we are studying, I keep it about me.

I think vulnerability is being in the raw. Being real in the moment is effective. It's not pretentious; it's being very factual without being dramatic. People sometimes don't like that realness; they don't like it and it's too much; it affects them too much. I'm vulnerable and it can be perceived as a weakness, but it's not. It's not a weakness. So I'm just openly grateful that I'm still vulnerable and can be open and real. It's not like this is all second nature for me. I choose to be open and I choose to be real about it, because Bridges To Life is a safe place to do it, and because I feel that the offenders are also opened. They want to do this program; they're here by their own free will, so I'm going to invest my time and my heart into it. They need to invest their time and heart into it or it's not going to be effective.

Kate emphasized the importance of “keeping it personal,” because when dialoguing in a small group about vulnerable life experiences, “nobody likes a know-it-all.” In Bridges To Life, there were two types of facilitators, those with a background that included crime victimization, and those who were “free-world volunteers” who participated because they felt passionate about restorative justice or prison ministry. Kate mentioned in her interviews that occasionally facilitators who did not have a background that included the experience of crime victimization “think they know it all.” Other victims interviewed for this study (11 out of 15, approximately 73%) echoed Kate's sentiments regarding “know-it-all” facilitators who volunteered in Bridges To Life, but lacked the sensitivity to honor the victims' or offenders' life experiences. For Kate, that potential to be placed in a small group with a “know-it-all” facilitator who did not have a background of victimization was the greatest hindrance to her healing in the Bridges To Life program; it was the one aspect of the program that she did not like. Hence, embracing vulnerability was not only a behavior and state of mind that victims enacted as examples to offenders, but also to other volunteer facilitators. All of the victims and the Bridges To Life staff member interviewed for this study emphasized the importance of “being real,” “being vulnerable,” and speaking from one's personal experience in order to create a “safe place” where offenders, victims, and free-world volunteers could learn from the program.

The participant, Jim, also referred to “realness” and “vulnerability” as necessary aspects of effective leadership in the program. Jim explained his leadership methods in his small group by incorporating a biblical reference. Jim stressed that “taking off the mask” was a requirement of “getting past the false self” and being in communication, not only with each other, but with God.

Jim: Let me take you back to Genesis 3, God creates Eden, he creates man and woman, puts them in the garden, and he says, “You could do anything except eat of the tree of knowledge of good and evil.” So God turns his back. Now God comes back that evening and is walking in the garden and where are they? They’re hiding. They hide from God, that is a human condition, and until you let the mask down, you have hidden from God. He’s out there looking for you; he’s saying, “Where are you?” “I’m not coming out.” [Laughs]. “I’m naked. I can’t come out. I can’t reveal myself.” [Laughs again]. I think for all of us getting past that false self is the challenge.

The false self is the mask that we use to hide from ourselves and God and others. When you let that mask go, it is scary; it is vulnerable. But then suddenly you’re back in communication and you’re open and you’re not playing games.

So to me, that is what Bridges to Life accomplishes. Because they [offenders] see victims become vulnerable and share, with no thought of gain from it. The offenders listen to other offenders and realize they are a lot alike. They think, “That story is worse than mine.” And so it frees them up to begin to take off the mask. And a lot of them go there, and the result is amazing, when they do. As long as they keep that mask up and play games, they can put up the false self. I told them, “If you play these games, you’re losing.” The more you can let it down and can be honest, the more you will gain. As Jesus put it, “Unless you’re willing to give up your life, you’re not fighting for it.”

In his interviews, Jim articulated that “taking off the mask” and “letting go of the false self” was “at the heart of true ministry work.” Jim’s use of scripture to give validity and credibility to his ideas about leadership in the program was another common trait among victims interviewed for this study. Fourteen of the 15 victims interviewed (93%) talked about their personal faith as an essential influence for how they approach speaking, facilitating, and teaching in the Bridges To Life program. Victims were inspired to be open and vulnerable, because their

spiritual belief systems advocated that “realness” to be manifested in order for transformation and change to occur.

According to Jim and other victims interviewed, Bridges To Life was an effective program that was able to decrease crime because it assisted offenders in the self-examination process. The participants recognized that Bridges To Life was unique, because it fostered a type of openness among volunteers, offenders, and staff that was rare in ministry or nonprofit volunteer programs. Victim volunteers served an essential and necessary role in fostering the process of “letting go of the false self,” because they led by example. The victims interviewed in this study described embracing vulnerability to “take off the mask” so that they could effectively connect and inspire the offenders in the program. The process of “taking off the mask” was not abstract or theoretical; instead, Jim described that as “deeply practical.” Each topic in the 14-week program built up to “letting go of the false self,” such that by the time the program graduation ceremony occurred, many offenders were able more earnestly to confront the reality of their behavior and the changes that needed to be made in their lives.

Using life experience to plant seeds of change in others. By articulating their victim testimonies to offenders and dialoguing in small groups, victims sensed that they were reducing repeat offenses and helping end cycles of crime in their communities. The phrase “planting seeds in the hearts of offenders” was how the participant, Kate, described the sense of purpose she derived from her Bridges To Life volunteerism. Research has shown that when offenders graduate from the Bridges To Life program, the recidivism rate is below the Texas average (Bridges To Life, 2013). The victims interviewed in this study were aware of the reduced recidivism rate for offenders who completed the Bridges To Life program; thus victims felt their service helped reduce crime.

Touching the hearts and minds of offenders through victim testimonies was one way that victims experienced a sense of purpose in the program. The participants interviewed for this study shared stories of how offenders told them they were impacted after hearing their victim testimonies. Emily, who was sexually abused by her cousin, explained that offenders would often confess their own stories of being molested after hearing her testimony.

Emily: I didn't realize that speaking about my story to strangers was going to make that kind of impact. But it did. Because almost for the first year—and it was mostly men [the offenders] would—They would approach me after my testimony and say, “You know what? I have never told this to anyone. You're the first one I want to share it with.” And they would tell me that they were also abused and molested. And so there's something good, there's something really good about this program.

When offenders confessed their traumatic backgrounds to the victim volunteers, it helped the victims to feel as though they were bringing healing to the offenders. Likewise, when victims shared shameful experiences, they described feeling more self-acceptance and confidence. Victims believed that if offenders were able to be honest and open about their experiences it would aid them in their healing and they were less likely to commit more crime.

Karen, who was a covictim of homicide, also shared how, after telling her story in Bridges To Life, offenders often told her that their story was similar. Karen explained that what she enjoyed about those interactions with offenders was feeling that she helped them to “see things differently.”

Karen: After I told my story for the first time, men [the offenders] came up to tell me their story that was similar, in that their mom or dad had been murdered. They told me how my story really touched them. As difficult as it is to stand up in front of others, I saw that my story could help others. I'm not sure there is a part I enjoy about telling my story except knowing that it might touch someone or cause them to see things differently.

When offenders confessed their experience of victimization to victim volunteers, it helped the volunteers to feel less isolated in their suffering. The participants of this study emphasized that it was helpful to gain perspective about their crime experience by listening to the “horrible

experiences” that offenders also faced in their lives. While victims said it was sometimes difficult to hear the suffering that offenders experienced prior to going to prison, it also helped create connection and affirmed their common human struggle.

Kate also expressed that by telling her story, the offenders might “see life differently,” which ultimately “serves the greater good.”

Kate: All of the men in prison, they have a heart and they have a soul. And it is not up to me to save all their hearts and souls. It is only up to me to tell my story and plant a seed in their heart and soul. By the power of the holy spirit, maybe they will see life differently, because that is for the human greater good.

That is the way I see it. Not everyone wants to put forward the effort to do that. And to do the thing that I just said requires so much effort and time and energy that I get why some people don’t wanna do it, except I believe in it so much that I feel like that is why I do this program.

Victims emphasized in their interviews that participating in Bridges To Life required effort and dedication. Participants said that at times it was difficult to make their volunteerism a priority because of the many other obligations in their life (i.e., work, school, family), yet the sense of purpose they derived from their volunteerism made it worthwhile.

Connected to helping offenders “see differently,” victim participants described how their volunteerism could “impact the overall situation of crime.” Amanda stressed the importance of preventing more victims from “going through” what she experienced.

Amanda: I think one of the things you get is the feeling that you can impact the overall situation of crime in our society. That’s a major draw. Nothing will change the past. You can learn more about it and ... like I finally figured out that I was a little bit too mad at my victimizers. But ultimately having an impact to prevent other people going through this. That is what got me into Bridges to Life. You realize, “Hey, here’s somebody who has been hurt about as bad as you have, and they are trying to ease society’s pain and prevent other people from suffering.” Hey, that’s a worthwhile goal. That’s part of the balance I’m talking about. We can’t fix the past, but we can modify the future.

In her interview, Amanda recognized that the retributive justice system could not fully rehabilitate offenders; similarly retributive justice was unable to provide her the healing she

desired after being raped. The way that Amanda felt she could make purpose and meaning from her victimization was to help offenders recognize the ripple effects of their actions while volunteering in Bridges To Life.

Marie also expressed that by volunteering in Bridges To Life, she and other victims could assist in the prevention of crime. By helping “offenders,” “victims,” and “the community,” she considered her volunteerism to be “fully restorative.”

Marie: I like the idea of the victims and the offenders working together to heal one another ... I think that a lot of the victims in the beginning thought that we could do something good for them [the offenders], to help them come out and not commit crimes again. And so by doing that, we helped prevent more victims. And I still think that that’s one of the most important things that Bridges does; it prevents more victims. And so, I see it as work that is fully restorative. It is about the victims, it is about the offenders, and it is about the community. It serves all three. And so I think it is some of the most important work that you can do in prison.

During her interview, Marie emphasized that although she volunteers to be of service to offenders, she was able to benefit greatly emotionally from the program. She recognized that helping offenders in the Bridges To Life program provided her with a sense of personal purpose that had been very healing after the loss of her daughter.

Claire described how victims helped offenders “use their conscience in a way that they weren’t able to before.” Because Bridges To Life supplies 14 weeks of face-to-face interactions between crime victims and offenders, the relationships that were formed could become profoundly meaningful.

Claire: Who would think that they [the offenders] would care if people came in there and talked to them about what happened to them, but it really works. I remember one of the very first groups that I had, there was this guy and his mother cooked meth in the kitchen from the time he was little bitty—so he was going to get into drugs, then he started stealing to get drugs, so he was breaking and entering. And he would tell me how he would keep himself very focused on what he was stealing and not look at anything personal in the house, and that was how he managed to do it. And the night that he was graduating, he said, “Ms. Claire, I will not ever be able to break into anybody’s house and not see your face.” So it is like when you hear them say something like that, you’re like,

“Wow.” When you are able to impact them where they use their conscience in a way that they weren’t able to before, where they can’t block it out because you have hit them personally enough to where they are never going to forget what you said or what you did, then you think “Gosh, this really works.”

Claire described the significance of volunteering out of “love,” without any need for material compensation. She felt that offenders were particularly moved by the victims’ volunteerism, because there was no compensation for their time spent ministering in the prisons or the distance traveled. Given that some offenders did not have families or friends who visited them, Claire expressed that the care and “love” she gave to offenders while volunteering served an important purpose.

Claire: I think one of the biggest things I have noticed that the guys [offenders] have said to me along the way is when they find out that we don’t get paid to do this; we are volunteers, and we do the driving on our own. I just say, “No, I don’t get paid. We just come here because we love you.” They are like, “Wow,” because I think so many of them don’t have anybody that loves them and would do that for them. I think that impacts them more even than maybe anything else.

At the time of her interview, Claire had been a dedicated volunteer in Bridges to Life for over 10 years. She expressed that upon her retirement, she would like to become part of the Bridges To Life staff, because the program had been so impactful for her. In the process of her volunteerism, she was able to move from “living in constant fear” of her offender, a gang member who shot at her in order to steal her car, to now monthly communicating with him as he served out his prison sentence. Over the past decade while volunteering in Bridges To Life, Claire applied to participate in a victim-offender mediation with the young man who shot her. Upon reaching out, Claire and her offender began regularly communicating and formed a friendship. She had such a strong relationship with her offender that he referred to her as a “second mom.” The teachings and experiences she acquired while volunteering with Bridges to Life enabled Claire to experience a transformation of emotions and feelings for her offender.

When victims volunteered in the Bridges To Life program, they were able to “take off the mask” and embrace their vulnerability, which provided an enriched sense of purpose that assisted in their healing from the traumatic effects of crime. All 15 victims interviewed in this study believed that their work in the program reduced recidivism, thereby preventing the cycle of violence within society.

Discovering and accepting a new normal. The fifth property of integration is discovering and accepting a new normal. The phrase “a new normal” was an expression used by Bridges To Life victim volunteers during the research interviews. Discovering and accepting a new normal was in juxtaposition to “going back to the way things were before the crime,” “obtaining closure,” or “becoming fully healed.” After experiencing the disorienting effects of crime, aspects of the victims’ lives fundamentally changed, and the results required discovering and accepting new outlooks on life, or “a new normal.” The assumptions and beliefs that were commonplace before the crime, such as “having control over my own life” and “being able to reasonably predict the future,” no longer accurately described their experiences. The subproperties of the new normal that victims described were (a) realizing there is no closure, (b) accepting that life will include more suffering, and (c) advocating hope in the midst of uncertainty. Those pronouncements helped victims gain clarity about what was reasonable to expect from life and became a set of dependable affirmations, while the illusions of permanence and predictability faded after the crime. Volunteering in the Bridges To Life program supplied a stabilizing mechanism to assist in the discovery and acceptance of a new normal.

Realizing there is no closure. Victims described in their interviews that the concept of closure was not possible to achieve after being traumatized by crime. The participant, Claire,

expressed that “there was no door to close,” and thus the real dilemma was learning to live with the effects of the crime.

Claire: For the first few years, I was trying to find, you know, answers—you’re trying to find the light at the end of the tunnel. I guess, now I know there really is no closure, because things like this never go away. So you know, closure is like closing a door, and there is no door to close. It is a matter of learning to live with it, and coming to peace with it, and it becoming part of you.

In her interviews, Claire described that Bridges To Life was an essential tool in helping her “come to peace” with the crime. Through her work with offenders in the program, Claire was able to “feel useful” and “make something good come from the experience of crime.”

The participant, Sarah, also expressed that there was no resolution after a family member had been murdered. Victims in this study expressed that healing was an emergent and continuous process that lasted throughout one’s lifetime.

Sarah: Learning to heal is an everlasting thing. We are broken and perfectly sewn, but we are never actually healed. I don’t believe time heals all wounds; time helps all wounds. You’re never fully healed; you just learn to live with the new normal of life. You just learn to adjust to the new normal of life now, and you’re not healed. It is not a broken thing, but it is okay to not be healed fully. Like my mom said, the survivor’s guilt gives her a drive; it is maybe a blessing to strive and have a passion to go forth and help. If we were fully healed, why would we continue seeking help? Why would we continue to try to help others? There is goodness in not being fully healed.

The participants in this study echoed Sarah’s sentiments as they too articulated the “drive” for meaning and truth that developed after being victimized. Both the covictims of homicide and the victims of violent crime described intense desires to use their experiences to educate and help others. By living in ways that recognized the significance of what was lost, the victims were able to make something come from their suffering.

Accepting that there will be more suffering. In the interviews, participants described realizing that suffering was a natural part of human existence after being victimized by crime. Because victims experienced ripple effects throughout their lives after the crimes, they expressed

acceptance that life would likely entail further suffering. The 14-week face-to-face interactions with offenders, who told personal stories of tragedy and despair, also reinforced the natural occurrence and acceptance of suffering throughout one's lifetime.

An aspect of discovering a new normal for Sarah was accepting that her life would include more suffering in the future. She described that because someone was a crime victim, that did not "exempt from more suffering." The way that Sarah made meaning from her pain was to use it as motivation to work toward "virtue" and to be of service to others. Volunteering in the Bridges To Life program gave Sarah a foundation to discover a new normal and make meaning from the suffering she had experienced.

Sarah: Honestly as scary as it is, I feel like my suffering is just getting started. I am only 22 and have been through a lot. I think to myself I wonder what else I will have to endure in this life. I don't wanna seem pessimistic, but I know my pain and suffering is not over. I remember a friend who told me that after her dad died, she thought she was exempt from more pain, but not too far after, her mother then died. I just never forgot that. You get this feeling like maybe you will be exempt from more pain, after you've experienced something very severe, because we are constantly comparing ourselves to others. We thought we would be exempt from more pain after my parents' divorce, but then the murder happened. We thought we would be exempt from more pain after the murder, but then my sister got addicted to drugs. Life is always continuing and changing. We are never exempt from the pain of life.

The participants in this study described becoming more cognizant of the "naturalness" of suffering as a part of the human condition. The victims' suffering made them more aware and actively attuned to the suffering of others. Because participants were more aware of others' suffering, they described their personality becoming "more open" or "softer" and "more compassionate" than before the experience of crime.

Kate articulated that she still experienced a lot of suffering because of the immense loss she endured after her daughter's murder. One aspect of her suffering was consistently struggling with joy and purpose. While volunteering in Bridges To Life, Kate expressed that she was able to

feel a sense of purpose from her volunteerism, yet the magnitude of loss made it difficult to be grateful or feel joy. One of the offenders in Kate's small group questioned why she was unable to overcome her emotional pain and "live with joy." Despite being "taken off guard" by the offender's insensitivity, Kate used the offender's comments as an opportunity to self-reflect to explore why she lacked joy and still questioned her purpose.

Kate: I noticed that they [the offenders] have enough guts and sense to call you out on some things. And this one gentleman was like, "You just don't live in joy." I thought, "Well, who do you think you are telling me I should live in joy, after all I've been through?" I got kind of irritated and let him know it.

And then I was again thinking and pondering on that and I thought about my life and it was pretty sad, because I was not living in joy. It's very hard work to really, really be grateful for a lot of the loss. I don't even think that's a great way to say it, or a good way to say it. I've lost a lot. I mean, I've really lost a lot. People have their homes they can hide and be comforted in; mine is gone. Both my homes are gone; all my stuff is gone. My marriage is gone of 28 years. My child is gone. And then when I hear an offender try to tell me, "You need to get some joy. You are not living." And so, I take it personal.

I recognize I should have some more joy in my life, really just for the simple reason—and this is very careless to say it this way—but for the simple reason that Jesus saved me, and that he has given me the Holy Spirit who is all about joy and overcoming and restoring life and being fulfilled, having a purpose. And I've been struggling with my purpose. I've been struggling with that. I still sort of struggle; I do struggle with that. I'm undermining that, but I really struggle with that. So what is my purpose? Why am I still living? What is the joy in this life? I don't love this life. That's been a challenge that has come up in a couple of Bridges To Life projects, and it's still a challenge today.

Kate's description of struggling with purpose after so much loss was an example of the ongoing long-term effects of crime and trauma. The participants in this study realized that "closure" or returning to the state of being before the crime was not possible; instead, they described adjusting and reconciling to the new normal of life. Accepting that there will be more suffering and recognizing that pain is a natural part of the human experience were manifestations of "the new normal."

Advocating hope in the midst of uncertainty. Despite the lack of closure and acceptance of continued suffering, victims often spoke about hope in their interviews. All 15 victim participants described the importance of developing practices and activities that cultivated hope. The activity that all victims commonly cherished was service work, “being able to give” more “than you take.” Being of service to others helped participants to feel hopeful, even when confronted with the uncertainty of the future. Participating in activities that cultivated hope gave participants a sense of independence and self-governance that contrasted the unpredictability of the world.

Robert and his wife, Diana, described how they experienced hope despite the uncertainty of their son’s future. Throughout their interview Robert and Diana expressed their ardent dedication to service work and ministry. “Giving back” to their community and cultivating a “relationship with Christ” were instrumental in their discovering “a new normal.”

Robert: I really believe becoming involved in the ministry and the people that are involved in the ministry, and being able to give rather than take, I think that has been instrumental in helping us heal.

I mean, it still hurts. Like my wife shared, you know, you can see the emotions she goes through. While I may be a little bit more outwardly not showing it, you know, I’ll hear a song or I’ll drive around the neighborhood and see the things that have changed and my son’s not going to be able to enjoy those things; they’ve passed him by. And the uncertainty of where he’ll be at our age. You know, will we see him again outside of prison?

With changing legislation, it was not clear when Robert and Diana’s son would be released from prison, and if they would be alive upon his release. Robert, who was 74, mentioned the sadness and frustration of this possibility in his interview. His son was sentenced as a teenager and had spent his entire adult life imprisoned. Tolerating uncertainty and ambiguity were requirements of Robert’s “new normal.” Despite that frustrating uncertainty, Robert and Diana found purpose in helping offenders find hope in the midst of their similar hardships.

Robert: And I think all that helps us get by is through Christ, through the ministry itself. Because I think we have a real hope. And, we don't know what that hope will be.

So I think all of those are things that we walk through, that we've been doing for the last 21 years. And I think our ability to share some of that and for those men [the offenders] to see that, whether it be in Kairos [another prison ministry] or Bridges to Life, I think there's truly an opportunity for us to help them. For them to heal as we have healed.

And perhaps if they [offenders] see hope in us, maybe they'll see hope in themselves. And know when they leave and go back outside that razor wire, there is an opportunity for them to start a new life and have a new hope as well.

Similar to Robert's ability to tolerate uncertainty, Kate explained that the Bridges To Life program provided an opportunity to restore her hope and work toward peace. Kate believed that "the good" that could come out of her "daughter's death" was the restoration of hope and peace provided by her volunteerism.

Kate: The Lord spoke to my heart and said this is the good that I need to try to understand. This is the good that's going to come out of my daughter's death. So it's a restoration of hope, I really believe that, that's what this program represents, a restoration of hope. And it's humanly possible if you're willing to put forth the effort. It's spiritually possible to overcome, to not keep reoffending or re-victimizing. I do feel stronger, like it really made me realize I've come a long way in 8 years. I'm grateful for that.

I would like to emphasize that this is all about working hard towards hope and peace. Peace in the human heart, a life, and humanity. That's Biblical and so there's effort in trying to work at making peace. In this world, that's what I talk about with my family is working at making peace, come to peace in yourself and your heart, and hopefully it goes into the community and it just spreads.

The Bridges To Life program helped victims restore hope and feel more peace while growing in their faith. The participants in this study articulated that after crime there was the potential to gain new virtues that grow out of tragedy. All participants expressed having hope and being dedicated to service in the midst of facing challenges.

Sarah: I just feel like thank God there is a program that can teach me how to gain virtue and grow from my pain. I love that quote in the Bridges To Life training manual that says, "Through pain and suffering new virtues are created." So in this pain and suffering, Bridges is helping me have hope and become more virtuous. Going through this program and learning how to be self-aware and then constantly applying that to my daily life.

Like Jesus said, “If you hear my word and do nothing with it, it is like building a house on sand.” Absolutely the program helps you build your house on a firmer foundation, a foundation made of rock.

Sarah’s sentiments regarding the worth of the Bridges To Life program were echoed in the other 14 interviews. All victims expressed a strong devotion to the principles of restorative justice and the program curriculum. Not only were victims dedicated to Bridges To Life, but they “trusted” and “believed in” the values of “hope,” “peace,” “nonviolence,” “forgiveness,” and “reconciliation,” which were espoused by participants and staff. Through their volunteerism, victims were able to advocate hope in the midst of uncertainty.

As participants described, discovering a new normal included the realization that there was no closure, accepting that life would include more suffering, and advocating hope in the midst of uncertainty. Those new declarations of reality left space for the randomness and unpredictability of life, while also normalizing suffering. Upon letting go of the illusion of permanence and predictability, victims were open and compassionate to the suffering of others and believed in the potential for human transformation and change. The participants of this study lived the principles of restorative justice and continued to be of service for the greater good of humanity.

Summary of the Findings

The interpretive theory that emerged in this analysis was termed therapeutic restorative justice. The theory offered a conceptual understanding of the way crime victims were impacted by their restorative justice volunteerism. Three categories (i.e., fragmentation, evaluation, and integration) were described, and the strategies victims used for ongoing healing were identified and elucidated. Each category represented a phase of learning that participants described in their interviews. The movement between categories was linear and was a reflection of the

chronological sequence of thoughts and actions that victims described occurring after the crimes through their present-day volunteerism in Bridges To Life. The interpretive theory proposed that the impact Bridges To Life had on victims was a psycho-social learning process. The psychological component related to participants' emphases on the emotions, thoughts, and behaviors. The social component related to the crime victims' learning that occurred in interpersonal contexts, which were inherently linked to relationships and human connections.

Figure 5 depicts the interpretive theory.

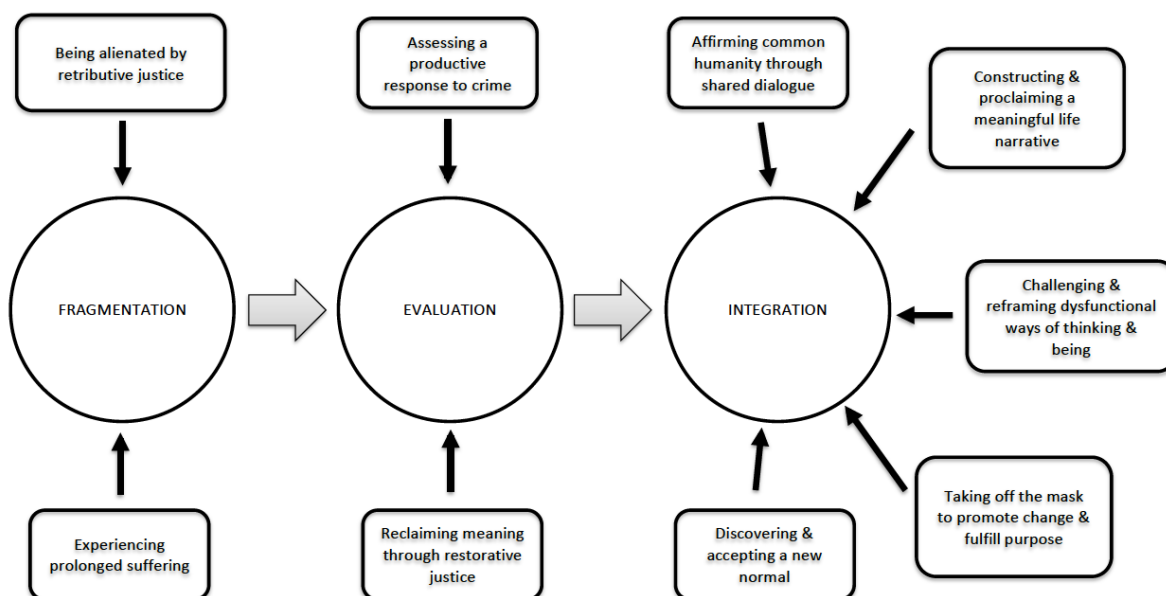


Figure 5: Interpretive theory with categories and properties.

The first category, fragmentation, represented the first phase of learning, which occurred directly after the crimes and could continue for several years, depending on the experiences of the victims. Two properties defined the conceptual boundaries of the fragmentation phase of learning: (a) being alienated by the retributive justice system, which was conveyed by victims' sense of insufficient justice and meaning; and (b) experiencing prolonged suffering in the form of physical and emotional pain, and social isolation. During that phase of learning, victims

described their normal ways of behaving and thinking, along with their social relationships, breaking down as a result of the traumatic grief brought on by the crimes.

The second category, evaluation, represented the second phase of learning and had two properties: (a) assessing a productive response to crime, and (b) reclaiming meaning through restorative justice. Participants evaluated how to make meaning from their victimization during that phase of learning. After completing their own research or being approached by a restorative justice advocate, victims chose to volunteer for Bridges To Life. Victims were motivated to volunteer because of the possibility that it could aid their ongoing healing.

The third category, integration, described the third phase of learning where victims had begun participating in the Bridges to Life program. During integration, victims described an increased ability to contain more comfortably the full range of their experiences, thoughts, and behaviors, from both the past and present (Richo, 1991). Five properties conveyed the conceptual boundaries of the integration phase of learning. Those properties also reflected the strategies victims used to aid their ongoing healing: (a) affirming common humanity through shared dialogue, (b) constructing and proclaiming a meaningful life narrative, (c) challenging and reframing dysfunctional ways of thinking and being, (d) taking off the mask to promote and fulfill purpose, and (e) discovering and accepting a new normal. While volunteering in Bridges To Life, victims increased their personal capacity to embrace their past and present experiences, which in turn supported greater self-acceptance, hope, and peace.

Chapter 5: Discussion

Introduction

This chapter will supply a summary of the findings, followed by an interpretation of the results, which is organized according to each research question. Practice and policy implications for restorative justice programs and practitioners working with crime victims will also be considered in this chapter. Finally, the limitations of the study and suggestions for further research will be articulated.

According to Merriam, “the case study offers a means of investigating complex social units consisting of multiple variables” that are “anchored in real-life situations” (1998, p. 41). This case study worked to illuminate the complexity of the experience of 15 victim volunteers, and one staff member, in the Bridges To Life restorative justice program. An interpretive theory, therapeutic restorative justice, that was comprised of three categories and numerous associated properties emerged in the analysis of this research. The strategies victims used to assist in their ongoing healing were also identified within the interpretive theory.

Interpretation of the Findings

The findings of this study showed that the research questions were answered during the data collection and analysis process. The central research question of this study was, How does the learning process impact victim volunteers within the restorative justice program? This study had three subquestions: (a) How does the victim make meaning from the volunteer experience, (b) How does the victim’s understanding of justice change throughout the volunteer experience, and (c) What changes in behavior does the victim recognize, as a result of participating in the restorative justice program? Interpretations of the findings for each research question will be linked to current literature within this section of the chapter.

Central research question. The central research question of this study is, How does the learning process impact victim volunteers within the restorative justice program? The impact of the learning process can be understood by examining the outcomes participants described in their interviews, specifically when victims spoke about the integration phase of learning. The psycho-social learning process is represented by the interpretive theory, therapeutic restorative justice, which consists of three categories (i.e., fragmentation, evaluation, integration) and numerous properties. Each category depicts a phase of learning that participants described. The impact of the learning process was identified by the outcomes that appeared in the integration phase of learning, where victims were active participants in the Bridges To Life program. During integration, victim volunteers described increased abilities to contain more comfortably the full range of their experiences, thoughts, and behaviors from both the past and present (Richo, 1991). Outcomes of integration were (a) decreased feelings of social isolation and stigma from the crimes; (b) the creation of meaningful life narratives that aided with positive coping; (c) a reduction of dysfunctional ways of thinking and being, which led to reclaiming personal power; (d) increased honesty and open communications that fostered self-acceptance, (e) elevated feelings of control and purpose, with regard to eliminating destructive cycles of crime; and (f) acceptance of new life outlooks, “new normals,” that reconciled the dissonance of beliefs from before and after the crimes.

To understand how victims were impacted by the learning processes, Jean Piaget’s concepts of schemas, assimilation, and accommodation are useful. Despite that Piaget’s work largely focused on the ways that children learn about the world, the processes of assimilation and accommodation also provide a way to understand how adults cope with traumatic and stressful experiences (Joseph, 2011). Schemas are the cognitive models, also known as the building

blocks of knowledge, that enable human beings to create mental representations of the world (Wadsworth, 2003). Assimilation is the process by which an individual uses an existing schema to take in new information about objects or situations (Piaget, 1952). The process of accommodation occurs when the existing schemas do not adequately apply to a new object or situation; thus it is necessary to modify assumptions and schemas (Piaget, 1952). After the devastating and disorienting experience of crime, victims utilized the process of accommodation, because there were shifts in participants' assumptive meanings in order to achieve congruence with the new trauma-related information (Joseph, Murphy, & Regel, 2012). Learning throughout life is a balancing act between assimilation and accommodation. When balance was obtained, Piaget referred to that as equilibrium (Piaget, 1952). When new information or situations cannot fit into existing schemas, the cognitive process is in a state of disequilibrium. The outcomes that participants experienced in Bridges To Life arose through the process of accommodation, such that their schemas of meaning were modified to cope adequately with the trauma and stress caused by crimes. By adopting new schemas of meaning through the process of accommodation, victims experienced a variety of positive outcomes that were fostered by the Bridges To Life volunteerism experience.

The curriculum and design of the Bridges To Life program utilize the foundational principles of andragogy, thus supplying an apt learning environment for adult participants to use the accommodation process to develop schemas of meaning. Within the Bridges To Life program, victims are able to be responsible for the facilitation of the small groups, and open dialogue about one's life experience is vital to the effectiveness of the program. Theorists contend that adult learning is problem-centered and must have immediate relevance to one's personal life (Knowles, Holton, & Swanson, 2005). The participants interviewed in this study

asserted that the practical tools and lessons taught within the Bridges To Life program were directly applicable to the issues and concerns they had after the crimes. The Bridges To Life program is designed to foster adult learning; it is not clear that the founders of the program knew the foundational principles of andragogy, but nonetheless the teaching methods are aptly constructed for the adult learner.

The psycho-social learning process that was cultivated in the restorative justice program enabled victims to experience a variety of positive outcomes. Participants described feeling like they “belonged” in the program because it “affirmed their worth” and “common humanity.” The feelings of social isolation and stigma caused by the crimes were decreased as a result of their restorative justice volunteerism. The process of creating life narratives reinforced positive coping strategies, such that victims were able to ascribe significance to the lessons learned from the crimes or remember individuals lost because of the crimes. Research supports the use of life narratives to aid with positive coping after trauma. Creating coherent narratives have been shown to lower levels of posttraumatic stress for bereaved and victimized populations (Meichenbaum, 2006; Tuval-Mashiach et al., 2004). Multiple components of the Bridges To Life curriculum (i.e., shared dialogue, reflection questions, journal writing, the *Restoring Peace* text, narrative storytelling) helped participants reduce dysfunctional ways of thinking and being, which led to feelings and experiences of personal empowerment. Victims identified sources of powerlessness in their lives and used self-awareness to change aspects of their behavior to experience more “peace” and “hope.” The shared dialogue in the small groups enabled participants to embrace their vulnerability and communicate openly about their life experiences. Weekly honest and open communication in the small group meetings led to increased self-acceptance. Finally, victims described discovering and reconciling with “a new normal” while in the program. The

experiences of crime forced victims to surrender the illusions of control, order, and permanence. The restorative justice volunteerism aided victims in developing different sets of assumptions and reliable truths about the world. The new outlooks that victims developed helped them to cope more aptly with the ripple effects of crime.

These findings correspond to other studies that articulate the ways that victims are positively impacted by restorative justice initiatives. Previous studies emphasized how restorative justice programs helped meet victims' needs after the experiences of crime (Armour & Umbreit, 2011; Poulson, 2003; Shapland & Hall, 2007; Sherman & Strang, 2007; Strang et al., 2013). The unique contribution of this study was the emphasis on restorative justice as a therapeutic intervention. Bridges To Life supplied a therapeutic environment where victims could work toward emotional restoration by engaging in continual self-inquiry, reconstructing their life story, and reclaiming personal power. The learning process used during their Bridges To Life volunteerism, specifically the phase of integration, increased victims' abilities to contain more comfortably the full spectrum of their experiences, thoughts, and behaviors from both the past and the present (Richo, 1991).

Subquestion one. The first subquestion of the study was, How does the victim make meaning from the volunteer experience? Victims made meaning from the volunteer experience on both intrapersonal and interpersonal levels. The utilization of those two levels of making meaning showed that victims used a blend of personal construct theory (Kelly, 1963) and social construct theory (Gergen, 2011) while engaging in the restorative justice program. Personal construct theory suggests that an individual's personality is composed of various mental constructs through which reality is viewed and events are interpreted (Kelly, 1963). Personal mental constructs are active creations for each individual and are based on his/her previous

experiences and observations of the world (Kelly, 1963). Social construct theory suggests that knowledge, including knowledge of the self or personal meaning, is a process that involves co-creation with others (Gergen, 2011). Victim volunteers in the Bridges To Life program made meaning by engaging in continual self-inquiry that was fostered by shared dialogue and narrative storytelling with other participants in the program.

The interpretations of these findings are correlated to Armour's (2003) study, which investigated the meaning making process used by co-victims of homicide. Armour's phenomenological study included interviews with 38 family members of homicide victims to understand how they engaged in the practice of making meaning after the crimes and during the bereavement process. Armour concluded that co-victims used a combination of personal construct theory and social construct theory in order to reconstruct their meaning schemas. While this Bridges To Life case study did not solely focus on co-victims of homicide, 8 of the 15 participants in this study were co-victims of homicide; hence, the correlation with Armour's findings.

During the interviews, victims described a fragmented state of existence directly after the experience of crime, which could last months to many years. In that state of fragmentation, the victims' schemas of meaning were challenged. Victims described needing to reconstruct their understanding of personal vulnerability, control, justice, order, and purpose after the disorienting affects of crime. Upon progressing into the evaluation phase of learning, victims assessed how to reconstruct their beliefs and assumptions about the world. All of the victims interviewed in this study chose a path of meaning making that was grounded in action and performance. Specifically, participants chose the proactive approach of volunteer service in order to rebuild their schemas of meaning and to explore the inherent relationship between victims and offenders.

This proactive way of living and making meaning could enable participants to take back some of the power and control that they lost after the crimes. Volunteering in a restorative justice program enabled victims to be personally in control of obtaining information and creating restoration. Research has shown that the process of meaning making can provide a mechanism for coping with stress, reconciling dissonance in experience, and achieving inner resolution (Frankl, 1959; Neimeyer, 2000).

When victims began volunteering in the Bridges To Life program, meaning making was grounded in action and occurred on both intrapersonal and interpersonal capacities. Intrapersonal meaning making consisted of engaging in self-inquiry, constructing a life narrative, and reframing dysfunctional ways of thinking and being. Interpersonal meaning making consisted of proclaiming the life narrative to an audience, facilitating small groups through the program curriculum, and engaging in shared dialogue with Bridges To Life volunteers, staff, and offenders.

Since meaning making occurred at both the intrapersonal and interpersonal levels, that revealed that victims utilized a blend of personal construct theory (Kelly, 1963) and social construct theory (Gergen, 2011) to reconstruct their understanding of themselves and the world. Victims displayed personal construct theory, because they made sense of their environment by assigning specific meanings to stimuli and events. Participants' assigned meanings were evident in the phrasing and stories they used to explain their beliefs during interviews, as well as their constructed life narratives. Victims displayed their use of social construct theory while discussing the impact of the dialogue in the Bridges To Life small groups. It was evident that the victims' meanings and reality were constructed through social meanings that were manifested through their interactions and relationships with others (i.e., offenders in the Bridges To Life

program, family, and friends). Through continuous self-inquiry that was stimulated by shared dialogue, storytelling, and curriculum materials, victims were able to make meaning from their volunteer experience.

Subquestion two. The second subquestion was, How does the victim's understanding of justice change throughout the volunteer experience? The victims in this study described a view of justice that went beyond retribution and punishment. When discussing their views of justice, victims described nuanced definitions that were most in alignment with universal ethical principles and an ethics of care, versus a social contract. Participants' nuanced views of justice were most evident when they described empathizing with offenders, challenging prison stereotypes, being dedicated to the forgiveness process, and reducing cycles of crime.

The retributive justice system did not meet the psychological restorative needs of victims. Victims described feeling secondary to the states' procedures, protocols, and agendas. At times, victims described feeling alienated, voiceless and neglected in the criminal justice system. Those experiences expressed by the participants in this study are common, as previous research similarly found that victims were discontent because they did not have a legitimate role in the processing of their case (Parsons & Bergin, 2010; Shapland & Hall, 2007; Strang & Sherman, 2003). The lack of information and consultation increased victims' feelings of powerlessness and inability to control the outcomes of their cases. Because victims were unsatisfied by the emotional restoration supplied by the retributive justice system, they sought definitions and experiences of justice beyond mainstream social systems or contracts. The search for justice motivated most victims to reexamine their spirituality as a source to provide understanding. In addition to gaining clarity from their spirituality, victims chose nonviolent and action-oriented ways to seek justice by volunteering in Bridges To Life.

While volunteering in Bridges To Life, victims had an opportunity to explore the complexities of the criminal justice system and the mindsets of criminals. Volunteering gave victims a chance to dialogue with offenders and see the reality of their lives in prison. Through open, honest dialogue and storytelling, victims were able to gain more empathy for offenders participating in the program. Victims were also able to see that many prison stereotypes were not true, especially the idea that offenders were not remorseful for their crimes. Often, victims described receiving surrogate apologies from offenders who participated in the Bridges To Life program. Offenders' apologies and expressions of remorse assisted the victims in the forgiveness process. Most of the victims (14 of 15, 93%) interviewed in this study said that they forgave their offenders and did not wish them revenge or harm.

Connections between conceptions of forgiveness and justice are presented in literature. When victims are able to articulate their views of forgiveness, it can serve as a reflection of their views of justice. Enright, Santos, and Al-Mabuk (1989) identified six stages of justice that correspond to stages of forgiveness development. Table 3 shows the stages of justice and forgiveness development. Some victims described being unable to forgive their offenders until they started volunteering for Bridges To Life. While volunteering, they were able to gain perspective about the crimes and realized that many other victims experienced deep suffering, yet were able to forgive. Those stories of forgiveness nurtured compassion and empathy in volunteers who struggled with rage and revenge, ultimately motivating them to let go of the anger they had toward their offenders and to forgive. The process of forgiveness, in a counseling context, requires time adequately to explore the complexities and meanings of the traumatic event (Knutsen, Enright, & Garbers, 2008). Research has concluded that counseling programs designed to foster forgiveness have statistically stronger outcomes if the duration is at least 12

weeks long (Baskin & Enright, 2004). Because the Bridges To Life program is 14 weeks, and many victim volunteers participate for multiple 14-week sessions, there is time adequately to explore the concept of forgiveness and its relation to justice. When asked to define forgiveness, participants in this study articulated that forgiving did not mean accepting the injustice of the crimes; rather it was a way to foster inner-peace and promote a love for humanity.

Table 3

Stages of Justice and Stages of Forgiveness Development

| Stages of Justice | Corresponding Stages of Forgiveness |
|--|--|
| Stage 1 Heteronomous Morality. I believe that justice should be decided by the authorities. | Stage 1 Revengeful forgiveness. I can forgive someone who wrongs me only if I can punish him to a similar degree to my own pain. |
| Stage 2 Individualism. I have a sense of reciprocity that defines justice for me. If you help me, I must help you. | Stage 2 Conditional or Restitutional Forgiveness. If I can get back what was taken from me, then I can forgive. |
| Stage 3 Mutual Interpersonal Expectations. Here I can reason that the group consensus should decide what is right and wrong. | Stage 3 Expectational Forgiveness. I can forgive if others put pressure on me to forgive. I forgive because other people expect it. |
| Stage 4 Social System and Conscience. Societal laws are my guides to justice. I uphold laws to have an orderly society. | Stage 4 Lawful Expectational Forgiveness. I forgive because my philosophy of life or my religion demands it. |
| Stage 5 Social Contract. I am aware that people hold a variety of opinions. One usually should uphold the values and rules of one's group. Some nonrelative values must be upheld regardless of majority opinion. | Stage 5 Forgiveness as Social Harmony. I forgive because it restores harmony or good relations in society. It is a way of maintaining peaceful relations. |
| Stage 6 Universal Ethical Principles. My sense of justice is based on maintaining the individual rights of all persons. People are ends in themselves and should be treated as such. | Stage 6 Forgiveness as Love. I forgive because it promotes a true sense of love. Because I must truly care for each person, a hurtful act on her part does not alter that sense of love. This kind of relationship keeps open the possibility of reconciliation and closes the door on revenge. |

Note. Adapted from Enright, Santos, and Al-Mabuk (1989). Copyright 1989 by *The Journal of Adolescence*. Adapted by permission.

The participants in this study described their views of justice as universal ethical principles that value people as ends in themselves. The motivation for volunteering in Bridges To Life was an outgrowth of participants' desires to care for each person, no matter their background or what malevolent acts they may have committed in their pasts.

Enright, Santos, and Al-Mabuk's stages of forgiveness development were influenced by Kohlberg's stages of moral development (1981). There are criticisms of Kohlberg's stages of moral development that are important to articulate, because they offer a different interpretation of the participants' views of justice and ethical development. Feminist scholars (Gilligan, 1982; Noddings, 1984) contended that Kohlberg's moral theory presented a view of human nature that was flawed by its lack of gender neutrality and complexity. Kohlberg's theory assumed that human nature was objective, rational, and individualistic, which are often qualities associated with a more masculine voice and experience. Gilligan (1982) and Noddings (1984) argued that human beings were "embodied" and thus "defined by our life circumstances," which included our gender, race, and culture and socioeconomic status (Rowan & Zinaich, 2003, p. 50). Because we were embodied, the traditional masculine emphasis on objectivity was softened in Gilligan's (1982) interpretation. Human beings were also emotional and predisposed to a wide range of feelings that influenced our choices; hence, we were not simply rational creatures devoid of sentiment (Rowan & Zinaich, 2003). Also, humans were deeply social and motivated to be in connection with other people in families and communities. Since we were driven by our social nature, the drive of individual well-being above social well-being, as conveyed in Kohlberg's theory, was reduced in Gilligan's feminist theory of ethics.

The alternative presented by Gilligan (1982) is called the "ethics of care" approach and asserted that women tended to think in ways that were more concentrated on "relationships and

cooperation” (Rowan & Zinaich, 2003, p. 50). While men tended to make decisions that were more “competitive and individualistic,” women “look for ethics as a way to establish the means by which relationships can be furthered and enhanced” (Rowan & Zinaich, 2003, p. 50).

Noddings extended Gilligan’s feminist approach in her 1984 work entitled, *Caring*. Two principal human interests served as the basis for Noddings’ interpretation of ethical development. The first was what Noddings called “natural caring,” which was the natural inclination to be considerate of others, especially close friends and family. The second principal human interest was our “vision of best self,” which were the actions and behaviors associated with being a good and virtuous person in regard to one’s relationships with other beings (Noddings, 1984).

This feminist interpretation of ethical development is another way to make sense of how victims’ understanding of justice changed throughout the volunteer experience. A majority of the participants in this study were women (13 of 16, 81%). In participants’ interviews, it was clear that relationships and human connections were of paramount importance to their ability to make meaning and reconcile a new sense of self after the experience of crime. Gilligan (2014) articulated that human beings were “responsive” and “relational beings” that were “born with a voice and with a desire to live in relationships” (p. 90). She went on to say that “within ourselves, we have the requisites both for love and for citizenship in a democratic society” yet, our “capacities can be encouraged and developed” but also “traumatized or stunted” (p. 90). Feminist ethics works fittingly in connection with the philosophy of restorative justice, such that when a violent crime occurs, the logical starting place of healing is through building caring and empathic relationships among stakeholders. Some victim volunteers articulated their feelings for the offenders as demonstrations of “love.” One participant said in her interview that she volunteered because “It feels so good to love these people [offenders]. It just feels right to give

them love despite how they have hurt others in the past.” Those expressions of good will and care for humanity correspond to both a universal ethic of justice, as well as an ethics of care. It is not clear if that understanding of justice was an outcome of victims’ volunteerism, yet it was clear that Bridges To Life fostered conceptions of universal ethical principles, forgiveness, and caring in all participants.

Subquestion three. The third subquestion was, What changes in behavior does the victim recognize, as a result of participating in the restorative justice program? Victims reframed dysfunctional ways of thinking and being that resulted in reclaiming personal power over their behavior. Participants also described embracing vulnerability while volunteering in the program, which helped them to communicate with more honesty and openness.

Previous research has indicated that empowerment is an outcome for victims that participate in restorative justice programs (Choi et al., 2010; Van Wormer, 2004). Empowering victims is a process that begins with helping them to develop feelings of personal power. Because crime causes feelings of powerlessness that can be devastating to one’s psyche, helping victims feel powerful is critical to the foundation of empowerment (Choi et al., 2010; Van Wormer, 2004). During Bridges To Life volunteerism, crime victims were able to dialogue face-to-face with offenders in a controlled and safe environment; this allowed victims to be much more in control than when serving as witnesses in trials. Victims were able to ask offenders questions and gain clarity about the mentality used to justify crime. The victims interviewed in this study expressed how helpful it was to ask offenders questions, especially if they committed similar crimes as the victims endured. While those experiences were sometimes challenging for the victims, the participants felt that the opportunity to hear the offenders’ stories and opinions was worthwhile and helpful to their healing processes. Part of the reason victims experienced

that interaction as helpful was because it was in such controlled environments where victims were able to exert their influence on the offenders. Participants described “imparting lessons and teachings” onto the offenders or “planting seeds of change in their hearts.” The Bridges To Life program curriculum and design helped restore victims’ feelings of power and influence, so that they could impact offenders and reduce cycles of crime.

The increased feelings of power and control that resulted from Bridges To Life volunteerism built a foundation for the victims to make changes in their lives. Four participants in this study described being able to overcome feelings of anger, rage, bitterness, and revenge that impacted their relationships and abilities to feel at peace. Three participants described forming more healthy relationships to alcohol during the course of their Bridges To Life volunteerism, such that they no longer used it as an emotionally numbing substance. Four participants described being unable to work through the forgiveness process until they started volunteering. There is empirical evidence that suggests forgiving someone for substantial injustices and releasing feelings of anger or bitterness can be regulating to negative emotions and can restore psychological health (Baskin & Enright, 2004; Enright & Fitzgibbons, 2000; Hansen, 2002; Ripley & Worthington, 2002). All victim volunteers described practicing more self-awareness and personal responsibility as results of their Bridges To Life service. Participants often commented in their interviews that they noticed “incredible transformations” in their lives throughout the course of time that they volunteered in the program. The *Restoring Peace* curriculum, construction of life narratives, and shared dialogue helped victims to identify the sources of powerlessness in their lives so that they could redefine themselves with more positivity and self-determination.

The other essential tool that helped victims move from a place of powerlessness to empowerment was having a community of people to support them in the process. During the fragmentation phase of learning, victims described feeling socially isolated and stigmatized because of the crimes. Research suggests that having a supportive social environment is an important component for traumatized populations to engage effectively in the empowerment process (Choi et al., 2010; Gutierrez, 1994; Gutierrez, GlenMaye, & DeLois, 1995). While volunteering in Bridges To Life, participants were introduced to many other people who had backgrounds of similar victimization experiences. Volunteering in a community that was caring, nonjudgmental, and wise with experience helped victims to embrace being vulnerable so that they spoke and lived with more honesty and openness. Embracing vulnerability gave victims more confidence to take risks in challenging situations and to seek out purposeful experiences. Participants recognized significant changes in their behavior, specifically using greater self-awareness in various aspects of their lives, that enabled them to feel more empowered and less controlled by the crime.

Practice and Policy Implications

The purpose of this research was to explore the process of learning used by victim volunteers participating in an established restorative justice program designed to foster healing for those affected by crime. Clarifying and expanding knowledge about the learning process used by victim volunteers can inform policies, professional practices, and theories that are relevant to victimized populations.

The property, being alienated by retributive justice, appeared early and reoccurred often in the data collection and analysis process. The 16 total participants interviewed in this study echoed the sentiments articulated by Zehr, “[C]rime is devastating because it upsets two

fundamental assumptions on which we base our lives: our belief that the world is an orderly, meaningful place, and our belief in personal autonomy” (2005, p. 24). Thus, the over-arching implication of this research is the need for a new paradigm of justice that includes victims as significant stakeholders, in equal proportion to offenders and the community.

The paradigm of justice that has received extensive consideration from theorists and scholars, with research that now covers multiple continents and three decades, is restorative justice. Several studies have indicated that when restorative justice is coupled with retributive justice, victims’ needs for information, participation, emotional restoration, apology, and meaning are more adequately fulfilled (Shapland & Hall, 2007; Strang & Sherman, 2003; Van Camp & Wemmers, 2016; Wemmers, 2002). This study adds to the body of research that demonstrates how restorative justice is able to address adequately the concerns and needs of victims. By marrying retributive and restorative justice, the cycles of crime and suffering can be reduced, as one victim attested in her interview, “The ripples of crime do not have to be constantly destructive.”

Recommendations for practitioners working with crime victims. This study provides insights for practitioners and social institutions that work with crime victims. Specifically, the conclusions gleaned from this research give clarity to the multidimensional needs of victims, show the importance of providing victims access to restorative justice, and demonstrate the necessity for more widespread development of restorative justice initiatives.

The research illuminated the multidimensional and complex needs of crime victims. Practitioners and social institutions that interact with victims should be made aware of the unique needs of this population so as to develop policies and protocols that respond with sensitivity and compassion. The 15 victims in this study possessed resolute desires to make meaning and

proactively respond to the crimes. Thus, practitioners need to ascertain opportunities and arenas where victims can proactively make meaning and find purpose. Practitioners should also recognize the interplay of the intrapersonal and social dimensions of healing in the aftermath of crime. Interventions that foster personal reflection, shared dialogue, storytelling, and interpersonal connections among people with similar experiences can offer restoration for crime victims.

The victims interviewed in this study acquired information about restorative justice through trusted sources (i.e., friends, pastors, teachers, victim services employees) or by way of their own research. None of the victims interviewed were told about restorative justice through the court or retributive justice entities (i.e., police, lawyers, judges). More widespread dispersion of available restorative justice programs is needed within social institutions and among practitioners who work with crime victims. Because restorative justice initiatives offer the potential to assist victims with their ongoing healing, victims should receive information about what programs are available in their communities and what they can expect if they choose to participate. By offering clear and complete information to victims in an open and nonthreatening manner, victims can make more informed choices about how to go about healing in the aftermath of crime. Research has shown that victims would like to know about restorative options sooner rather than later, and they would rather decline a restorative justice offer than not be educated about the option to participate (Shapland, Robinson, & Sorsby, 2011; Van Camp, 2014). Providing victims restorative justice information can help them to feel empowered and can restore a sense of control (Wemmers, 1996; Wemmers & Cyr, 2005). Van Camp and Wemmers (2016) supported the recommendation that a direct, outreach-oriented, and personalized approach to information and education about restorative justice assisted victims as they navigated the steps

toward healing after crime. This study demonstrated that restorative justice initiatives could complement judicial proceedings and offer therapeutic potential to victims.

Given the therapeutic potential of restorative justice, further development of programming and initiatives in diverse communities is also needed. Programs that supply victim-offender encounters, or community circles that bring victims and relevant social institutions together to engage in purposeful dialogue, can assist in the ongoing healing of individuals and communities impacted by crime. Social institutions and practitioners need to assist in the development of restorative justice initiatives that meet the complex needs of victims.

Recommendations for restorative justice programs. Despite that this was a case study and it is difficult to make generalizations that apply to the entire spectrum of restorative justice initiatives, the findings in this study have important implications for restorative justice program development. The victims interviewed in this study emphasized the therapeutic value of victim-offender encounters that are sustained long enough to develop empathy and connection among participants. Participants also asserted how helpful it was to construct and share life narratives with offenders. Finally, because restorative justice programs work with traumatized populations, the participants in this study also stressed the importance of sufficient training for volunteers.

This study demonstrated the therapeutic value of victim-offender encounters that occurred for sustained durations. Bridges To Life is a unique restorative justice program, because it brings together victims and offenders who meet in small groups for 14 weeks. The sustained interactions among victims and offenders allowed for empathy and connection to develop. By engaging in dialogue with offenders, the victims' needs for information, restoration, and apology were often better fulfilled while volunteering in the program. Victims expressed overcoming incorrect stereotypes about crime and offenders, while building more empathy and affirming a

sense of common humanity. It is recommended that restorative justice initiatives consider the great worth and therapeutic value of creating longer programming that allows for shared dialogue among participants.

Based on the findings, constructing and proclaiming life narratives among victims and offenders were two of the most impactful and therapeutic elements of the Bridges To Life program. During the 14-week program, victims had an opportunity to construct and proclaim their life stories and experiences of victimization to offenders. During the small group meetings, offenders were also able to share their life stories with the other members of their group, including victim volunteers. When victims proclaimed their life stories and told offenders how the crimes impacted their lives, they were able to feel “finally heard.” Constructing a self-narrative is a form of making meaning after trauma and bereavement, which has been shown positively to impact coping strategies and reduce posttraumatic stress (Joseph, 2011; Neimeyer & Thompson, 2014). Sharing life narratives helped victims to feel as though their stories could also benefit the offenders. Communicating the ripple effects of the crimes had the potential viscerally to affect the offenders, such that they would be less likely to repeat the same crimes upon release, thereby preventing more victims in the future. Often, after victims revealed their life stories to offenders in the program, the offenders offered surrogate apologies, which assisted the victims in the forgiveness process. Likewise, when offenders shared their life narratives with victims, the victims were able to gain perspective about crime and obtain affirmation of the offenders’ common humanity. Thus, storytelling is a recommended tool within restorative justice programming because of the proven therapeutic value for victims and offenders.

The victims interviewed in this study emphasized the importance of sufficient training for restorative justice volunteers who do not have backgrounds that include victimization. In the

Bridges To Life program, occasionally victims felt that other volunteer facilitators in the small groups lacked the necessary empathy and compassion effectively to facilitate discussion.

Participants expressed concern that volunteers in the program did not have the training necessary to attend to the emotional needs of victims or offenders, who also often had backgrounds that included traumatic victimization. An essential component of the Bridges To Life program was sharing stories of trauma and violence, then engaging in emotional dialogue about crime-related topics. Research indicates that professionals and volunteers who work with crime victims can suffer from “compassion fatigue” or “secondary traumatic stress” (Salston & Figley, 2003, p. 169). When working with individuals who have experienced trauma, it is important to realize that a compassionate interaction demands recognition of our own limitations to relieve pain from others (Salston & Figley, 2003). Victims interviewed in this study expressed that occasionally volunteers offered too much advice without sufficient knowledge or would pose questions in a prying and uncaring tone. It is possible that volunteers who are not sufficiently trained to work with victims were demonstrating compassion fatigue, thereby lacking the adequate skills, patience, or emotional balance to work properly with traumatized populations. Compassion fatigue and secondary trauma can be avoided or their effects ameliorated by seeking regular supervision and proper training (Salston & Figley, 2003; Valent, 1995; Yassen, 1995). The importance of social support, self-care, and proper training are stressed throughout the literature that educates practitioners or volunteers working with traumatized groups. This study validates the need for proper training and education for volunteers in restorative justice programs, because working with traumatized populations requires skillsets and supervision so as to avoid secondary victimization of victims or secondary traumatization of volunteers.

Conclusions

This section of the chapter will provide conclusions about restorative justice as a therapeutic intervention for crime victims. The limitations of the research study will also be discussed. Finally, the promising areas of future research will be described.

Restorative justice as a therapeutic victim intervention. In this research study, the 16 total participants described their Bridges To Life volunteerism as therapeutic intervention. By engaging in the program, the victim volunteers described positive experiences that aided in their ongoing healing. In fact, most victims asserted that their restorative justice volunteerism was “the most healing” of any intervention that they tried after the crimes. Similarly, victims described their restorative justice volunteerism as “replacing therapy” or serving as the “most effective therapy” because of the ongoing healing it fostered in their lives. Given the many positive outcomes described by victims in this study, restorative justice offers victims and traumatized populations positive coping tools potentially to restore hope and peace in one’s life after the devastating effects of crime. These findings assert the importance of restorative justice programs working in alignment with the retributive justice system to best meet the needs of victimized populations.

Limitations of the study. This was an exploratory, instrumental case study, and further research is needed to understand fully the micro-dynamics of the learning processes used by victims volunteering in restorative justice organizations. The study was limited by the fact that the qualitative findings cannot be generalized beyond the sample of Bridges To Life victim volunteers who participated in this research or the sociohistoric time when they were interviewed. The sample in this study was composed of primarily female, Anglo-White participants. Thus, the sample cannot be considered representative of the ethnically diverse

populations that are most impacted by violent crime. Finally, because of practical difficulties, it was not possible to access victims who had negative experiences volunteering in the Bridges To Life program or who chose to end their volunteerism prior to completing the 14-week curriculum. It must be acknowledged that victims who ended their volunteerism early and chose no longer to participate in the program would have offered meaningful perspectives to the study.

Future research. Additional studies are needed to clarify how culturally diverse crime victims reestablish schemas of meaning and justice while participating in restorative justice programs. Specifically, it would be purposeful to compare the learning processes used by victims in other types of restorative justice programs with the findings of this study. It is not yet understood if other restorative justice programs offer similar therapeutic values to what Bridges To Life participants articulated. Previous studies suggested that restorative justice initiatives, especially victim offender mediation, assisted in meeting victims' needs for information, participation, emotional restoration, material reparation, and apology; yet, the capacity for long-term therapeutic value is not clear. Thus, longitudinal research that details the ongoing healing capacity of victims volunteering in restorative justice programs is also needed.

Another important area of research to explore is the relationship between victims participating in restorative justice programs and the potential for posttraumatic growth. The victim volunteers interviewed in this study described experiencing increased emotional and psychological resilience that led to heightened feelings of empathy and personal empowerment. Current literature in positive psychology and posttraumatic stress indicates that people can transform and flourish as a result of coping with stress. The study of posttraumatic growth originated about 2 decades ago and has the capacity to alter greatly practitioners' ideas about trauma, such that trauma does not have inevitably to lead to a damaged psyche or dysfunctional

thinking and living. Studies have revealed that positive change is reported in 30 to 70 percent of survivors of various traumatic events (Linley & Joseph, 2004). The struggle and coping that occur in the wake of trauma can lead to growth in the form of personal, philosophical, and relationship changes (Joseph, 2011). Trauma survivors have described various positive outcomes that resulted from their coping, including finding new inner strengths, becoming more compassionate, living with a newfound sense of what is truly important, and placing greater value on human connections (Joseph, 2011). Researching the links between restorative justice and posttraumatic growth could enable theorists and practitioners to design programs that assist traumatized individuals to develop more positive coping strategies. If posttraumatic growth is an outcome of restorative justice initiatives this association could provide victims an enhanced understanding of their own resiliency and capacity for transformation.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Institutional Review Board Approval



10/28/2015

Jacquelyn Poplawsky
502 S. Post Oak Ln., Apt. 101
Houston, TX 77056

Dear Jacquelyn:

Your request to conduct the study *Learning to heal: The impact of a restorative justice program on crime victims* was approved by expedited review on 10/28/2015. Your IRB approval number is 15-10-019. Any written communication with potential or current subjects must be approved and include the IRB approval number. Electronic surveys or electronic consent forms, or other material delivered electronically to subjects must have the IRB approval number inserted into the survey or documents before they are used.

Please keep in mind these additional IRB requirements:

- This approval is for one year from the date of the IRB approval.
- Request for continuing review must be completed for projects extending past one year. Use the **IRB Continuation/Completion form**.
- Changes in protocol procedures must be approved by the IRB prior to implementation except when necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to the subjects. Use the **Protocol Revision and Amendment form**.
- Any unanticipated problems involving risks to subjects or others must be reported immediately.

Approved protocols are filed by their number. Please refer to this number when communicating about this protocol.

Approval may be suspended or terminated if there is evidence of a) noncompliance with federal regulations or university policy or b) any aberration from the current, approved protocol.

Congratulations and best wishes for successful completion of your research. If you need any assistance, please contact the UIW IRB representative for your college/school or the Office of Research Development.

Sincerely,

Ana Wandless-Hagendorf

Ana Wandless-Hagendorf, PhD, CPRA
Research Officer
University of the Incarnate Word IRB

Appendix B

Subject Consent to Take Part in a Study of the Impact of a Restorative Justice Program on Crime Victims

University of the Incarnate Word – Interview and Observation Consent Form

DocuSign Envelope ID: 5EB55F82-57F9-479D-80FA-1DFECA5488DC

LEARNING TO HEAL: THE IMPACT OF A RESTORATIVE JUSTICE PROGRAM ON CRIME VICTIMS
Consent to Participate in a Research Study
 University of the Incarnate Word

Principal Investigator : Jacquelyn Poplawsky - Organizational Leadership in Dreeben School of Education, University of the Incarnate Word
 Phone : 210-627-3277
 Email : jacquelyn@poplawsky.net

You are being asked to take part in a research study because you have volunteered with the Bridges to Life restorative justice program that is designed to foster healing for those affected by crime. The researcher wants to understand the process of learning used by victims who are volunteering in a restorative justice program

If you decide to take part, the researcher will schedule you for either/or both interviews and observations. Your time and assistance are highly appreciated. The interview time will range from 60-120 minutes in duration. Depending on your experience, you may be asked by the researcher to participate in a second interview. During the interview the researcher will audio record the questions and responses – data will be stored on a digital recorder and will be destroyed after the study is completed. Observations will take place during the fall Bridges to Life project. Your signature below indicates that you understand the conditions and agree to participate in this research.

Participation is voluntary. You can withdraw from the study at any time for any reason without penalty, and it will not affect your future status at Bridges to Life. The researcher does not guarantee that participants will benefit from taking part in this study.

Participants are not expected to encounter any risk, and confidentiality of participation in this research is guaranteed by using a pseudonym for anonymity. Everything the researcher learns from you in this study will be confidential and cannot be identified with you. If the study results are published, your real name will not be identified in any way.

Please contact the researcher by telephone or email, listed above, if there are any questions concerning your participation in this study.

The Institutional Review Board (IRB) at the University of the Incarnate Word has reviewed this study and permitted its development. For further questions about your rights as a research participant, please contact the UIW IRB, Office of Research and Development at (210) 805-3036.

You will be given a copy of this form to keep. Continuing with the interview and observations indicates your consent to participate in this research project.

If you completely understand the expectations and rights of participants in this study, all of your questions have been answered to your satisfaction, and you are willing to participate in this study please sign and date this consent form in the space provided. To sign this consent form, you must be 18-years old or older by today's date.

Participant Name

Participant Signature

Date

Researcher Signature

Date

University of the Incarnate Word
 IRB Approved
 Application No. 15-10-019

Appendix C

Letter to Potential Study Participants

LEARNING TO HEAL: THE IMPACT OF A RESTORATIVE JUSTICE PROGRAM ON CRIME VICTIMS

Letter to Potential Research Study Participants University of the Incarnate Word

To Potential Study Participant:

My name is Jacquelyn Poplawsky. I am a doctoral student in Organizational Leadership at the University of the Incarnate Word (UIW) in San Antonio, Texas. My dissertation research will explore the process of learning used by crime victims who volunteer in the Bridges to Life restorative justice program.

I would like to invite you to participate as a participant in this research. You will be invited to participate in face-to-face interviews at one of the Bridges to Life volunteer locations. The interview will take approximately 60-120 minutes of your time. Your time and effort for participating in this study are highly appreciated. Additionally, the researcher would like to conduct participant observations for the fall Bridges to Life project.

Although aggregated results will be reported in the dissertation, individual identity and data will remain confidential, and only the principal researcher will have access to all the information gathered. Anonymity in this research is guaranteed. The data will be destroyed upon completion of this study. You are free to withdraw from the research at any time without any penalty. If you have any concerns or would like to have more information about the research, please feel free to contact the researcher. I would appreciate the opportunity to discuss my study further with you.

Thank you very much for your participation.

Sincerely,

Jacquelyn Poplawsky
Email: jacquelyn@poplawsky.net
Telephone: 210-627-3277

Appendix D

Permission to Study Bridges To Life Participants

----- Original Message -----

Subject: Research Project with Bridges To Life

From: [REDACTED]

Date: Tue, August 25, 2015 11:50 am

To: jacquelyn@poplawsky.net

Jacquelyn,

This email is to inform you and others that you do have our permission to do the following:

1. Use the name of Bridges to Life in your study
2. Interview Bridges to Life volunteers
3. Observe Bridges to Life volunteers at the designated regional prison units, subject to security clearance by each prison, such process facilitated by the BTL Regional Coordinator.

We look forward to reviewing the results of your study.

John Sage
Founder/Executive Director
Bridges To Life
john@bridgestolife.org

Appendix E

Instruments Used for Data Collection

Interview Guide

1. Tell me about how you came to volunteer for Bridges to Life?
 - a. What was going on in your life then? If you recall, what were you thinking then?
2. Could you tell me about your thoughts and feelings after the crime happened?
 - a. As you look back on your experience, are there any other events that stand out in your mind? Could you describe each one? How did you respond to these events?
 - b. What types of challenges, if any, have occurred in your life since the experience of victimization?
 - i. What helps you to manage these challenges? Could you tell me what you think is the source of these challenges?
 - c. How, if at all, have your thoughts and feelings about the justice system changed since the crime?
 - d. What positive changes, if any, have occurred in your life since experiencing victimization?
3. What types of things have you done while volunteering with Bridges to Life?
 - a. What kinds of challenges, if any, have you experienced while volunteering? How did you learn to manage these challenges?
 - b. What kinds of positive experiences have occurred during your volunteerism?
4. What do you think are the most important ways to go about healing after experiencing a crime? How did you discover (or create) them?
 - a. After having these experiences, what advice would you give to someone who has been victimized?
5. Is there something that you might not have thought about before that occurred to you during this interview?
 - a. Is there something else you think I should know to understand the experience of victimization better?

Observation Guide

| The Element | What to look for |
|-----------------------------------|---|
| 1. The physical setting. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Describe the physical environment. • How is space allocated? What objects, resources, technologies are in the setting? |
| 2. The participants. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Describe who is in the scene, how many people, and their roles. What brings these people together? • Who is allowed here? Who is not here who would be expected to be here? • Further, what are the ways in which the people in this setting organize themselves? Do people change how they are organized, if so why? |
| 3. Activities and interactions. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is going on? Is there a definable sequence of activities? • How do the people interact with the activity and with one another? How are people and activities connected? • What norms or rules structure the activities and interactions? |
| 4. Conversation. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is the content of conversations in this setting? Who speaks to whom? Who listens? How do people show they are listening? • Quote directly and summarize conversations. Note key phrases or terminology that is consistently used. Note silences and nonverbal behavior that add meaning to the exchange. |
| 5. The researcher's own behavior. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How is the researcher's role, as a observer participant, affecting the scene? • What does the researcher say and do? What thoughts does the researcher have about what is going on? |

Heuristic Journal Entry Guide

1. What was the topic(s) and/or focus of the volunteer session?
2. What preparation (reading, reflecting, note-taking, etc.) was done prior to the volunteer session?
3. What intuitive feelings or thoughts about the topic occurred prior to the volunteer session?
4. What were the expectations for the volunteer session?
5. Recollect and summarize the events, thoughts and emotions experienced while volunteering.
6. Did any challenging occurrences take place during the volunteer session? If so, write about these occurrences in detail. Specify if and how they were overcome.
7. Did any positive occurrences take place during the volunteer session? If so, write about these occurrences in detail.
8. What questions arose during or grew out of the volunteer session? If questions were answered, how were they answered?
9. Did any conclusions or lessons develop during the volunteer session?
10. What intuitive feelings or thoughts were experienced after the volunteer session?