

Constituting Restorative Justice:  
A Case Study Exploring Volunteers' Experiences of Meaning

by

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### **Author's Declaration**

I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis. This is a true copy of the thesis, including any required final revisions, as accepted by my examiners.

I understand that my thesis may be made electronically available to the public.

## **Abstract**

Restorative Justice (RJ), a model for responding to crime that focuses on addressing harm and restoring the relationships between victim, offender, and community, has gained legitimacy as an effective alternative to lengthy court procedures. As other researchers and RJ theorists have noted, core to restorative justice programming is the inclusion of community members, whether as facilitators in victim-offender conferences, as supporters for offenders in re-entry support circles, or as representatives of community harm in larger sentencing circles. Relying on community volunteers to implement RJ processes has the potential to ensure a core RJ value of increased community involvement in responding to harm and offers a practical mode of supporting this unique response to crime. Despite the value placed on volunteer involvement, the experience of the volunteers who engage with these programs is a significantly understudied aspect of the RJ movement. This research explores the volunteer experience at one of the longest operating RJ programs in North America. Drawing on 16 interviews with volunteers and staff, as well as 35 hours of observation, this research looks at how volunteers frame meaning within RJ and the insights their experience provide about the nature of RJ more broadly. This study traces how volunteer experiences highlight the process by which community members find meaning within RJ through witnessing and sharing narrative of impact, the allure of an RJ when conceived of as an alternative to other models of conflict resolution, and the embedded power relations within the RJ process. As such, it re-centers major debates of the RJ field within the experience of community facilitators and provides significant insights into how RJ is constituted within the volunteer experience.

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## **Dedication**

For those who volunteer with Restorative Justice;

Imagining and creating a just community.

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## **Chapter 1**

### **Introduction**

In 1974, two teenagers went on a drunken rampage through the small town of Elmira, Ontario. They slashed tires, broke fences and smashed windows on 22 different properties. Instead of going to jail, their parole officer suggested that as part of their sentence they be required to meet with their victims. The judge agreed and sentenced them to talk face to face with the people they had harmed, learn the impact of their actions, and then work to restore the damage – setting legal precedent for what would become a global reform movement in criminal justice labeled Restorative Justice (RJ). Following this case, their parole officer worked with local community members to develop an agency, the first of its kind, that could facilitate future conferences between victims and offenders (which they labeled victim-offender mediation) and support more restorative responses to crime. Today that agency, relying on over 200 community volunteers, provides services to more than 14,000 individuals each year.

Restorative Justice (RJ), an approach for addressing crime that is grounded in understanding and responding to harm, has developed since that legal case in 1974 as a global critical and community-based reform movement to the criminal justice system<sup>1</sup>. In response to what scholars and citizens see as a dehumanizing and ineffective criminal system, RJ presents an alternative model for addressing conflict that focuses on restoring relationships and repairing harm. Grounded in values of democratic participation, community decision making, and

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<sup>1</sup>While this thesis follows contemporary RJ scholarship in citing the 1974 court case in Elmira as the origin of modern RJ practices in North America, restorative models of justice have emerged globally, both prior to and post the Elmira case. Scholars such as Abril (2010), Cunnen (2004), Froestad and Shearing (2007), and Miers (2007) address the globalized context and varied origins of current RJ practices.

prioritizing healing over retribution, RJ provides a holistic model for responding to harm and crime that offers hope to victims, offenders, and impacted community members.

Alongside this reform movement, a robust field of scholarship on RJ has emerged to endorse, critique, and empirically examine RJ models and practices. Within this field of scholarship, the effects of RJ on participants (victims, offenders, community members), the varied roots and traditions of RJ, and the scope of RJ's potential for reforming or transforming criminal justice systems have received much attention. The literature, however, has placed less focus on the experience of RJ for those who facilitate and support such programs; excepting the reflective works of facilitator advocates such as Mark Umbreit and Marilyn Peterson Armour, (2010) or the critical theorizing of scholars such Albert Dzur (2003). In particular, RJ scholarship has failed to address the lived experience of volunteer facilitators, who provide most of the labor required to run RJ programs – at least in North America – and play an integral role in realizing the community-based theoretical critique that RJ offers the criminal justice community. RJ literature, thus, has an important blind spot in regards to understanding the lived experience of its volunteer facilitators, which, like all scholarly focuses, has implications on its application.

This study aims to address that discrepancy. As the following background chapter illustrates, the inclusion of volunteers in the RJ process is not only central to RJ theory, but also in it providing effective and cost-effective RJ programs. As such, understanding the experience and role of such volunteers is crucial for RJ scholarship. Additionally, volunteer facilitators engage with RJ without expectation of financial or other compensation. As such, their commitment to RJ is based on ideological or personal convictions about RJ's significance and potential. Their voluntary contribution of unpaid labor to this reform movement illustrates how RJ has value to individuals not otherwise engaged in the criminal justice system - namely to

those other than criminology professionals or program participants. As such, volunteers have a unique subjectivity within RJ. In investigating their experience, as opposed to those of paid RJ facilitators or scholars, there is the potential to gain insights into how community members value RJ and the meanings they attribute to it as a reform movement and form of intervention. As RJ continues to expand and challenge entrenched criminal justice systems, understanding the values and meanings RJ can provide is essential to advocating for, and offering critical perspectives on, its potential as a reform movement.

### **Research Question**

This study focuses on the Elmira-based organization mentioned above, which is often referenced within RJ literature as the birth place of modern RJ in North America, as a case study for examining the experiences and perspectives of RJ volunteers. A case study offers the opportunity to examine a phenomenon within its localized context. In this study, I investigate how volunteers experience and understand meaning in restorative justice within the context of the longest operating RJ program in North America. This study asks:

*How do volunteers conceive of their engagement with RJ and their roles within RJ proceedings?*

*What are the processes through which meaning is constructed for volunteers?*

*What insights do volunteer perspectives offer about the nature of, and potential for, RJ?*

In asking how volunteers conceive meaning – in their identities, their motivations, their volunteer experiences and their understanding of RJ – this thesis explores a) the avenues and processes through which volunteers come to see and experience meaning in RJ, b) the constituted nature of those meanings, and c) how volunteer conceptions of meaning provide

unique insight into existing debates within RJ scholarship. I carried out this exploration through a qualitative inductive study including interviews with 16 participants and near 40 hours of observation of volunteer training and support nights.

To facilitate these qualitative investigations into meaning, this study applies a symbolic interactionist approach, which stresses how meaning is based in human interaction and constructed within social contexts. Guided by the work of Adele Clarke (2005) on situated analysis and adaptations of grounded theory, I use an inductive methodology to base the theoretical analysis in the meanings as expressed by study participants. To that extent, the language and framing used within this thesis mirrors, whenever possible, the words used by volunteers engaged in RJ in the case study setting. The inclusion of lengthy quotations and volunteer narratives both helps to center this study in the volunteers' experience as well as illustrate how they understand and conceptualize their experience and the nature of RJ. As such, this study applies the assumption posited by Patricia Ewick and Susan Silbey (1998) in *The Common Place of Law* that "the stories people tell about themselves and their lives both constitute and interpret those lives; the stories describe the world as it is lived and is understood by the storyteller"(p. 29). Listening to and analysing the narratives volunteers share provides a glimpse at how they see meaning in RJ and understand their identity within the RJ context.

Through its novel approach to the study of RJ, this sociological study speaks directly to the fields of law and society and criminology. Specifically, this study offers a discussion on how RJ, as a reform movement, is constituted through the lived experience of its facilitators. As Ewick and Silbey (1998) argue, "social structures, while they confront us as external and coercive, do not exist apart from our collective actions and thoughts as we apply schemas to make sense of the world" (p. 44). Building upon their observation, this thesis argues that RJ does

not exist apart from the experiences and narratives through which its participants and facilitators make sense of it. As such, this thesis exposes how volunteers' lived experiences of RJ provide insight into key debates within the field. Central to the literature is the question of RJ's role as an intervention (focused on addressing individual harms) or reform movement (that challenges the values and processes of the criminal justice model). Within this framework the literature debates prioritizing restorative processes over restorative outcomes, as well as the limitations and potentials of RJ for social transformation. In focusing on the lived experience of volunteer facilitators, this thesis reinvigorates those debates and examines how they are constituted within the experience of RJ itself.

## **Outline**

The thesis begins with background and methodological chapters that provide relevant information on both volunteers within RJ and the context and practice of this study, followed by three analytical chapters which explore significant themes that emerged throughout the research and analysis. To contextualize and foreground the study, the background chapter lays out the history of RJ and the major debates within RJ scholarship, as well as the role volunteers play within its context. It also examines existing theoretical frameworks and literature that address volunteer engagement within RJ and sets up the ontological assumptions of Symbolic Interactionism (SI) applied in this study. The methodology chapter then addresses the specific context of this case study, including its grounded theory methodology and the measures employed to achieve truthful and ethical research practices. This chapter justifies the case study nature of this research, as well as the site selection, and the embedded limitations of such an approach. It likewise addresses the methods used in data collection and analysis, attending to reflexivity in relation to my role as researcher and author.

The following three analytical chapters draw on volunteer experiences and narratives to illustrate three main themes: the process through which volunteers adopt their volunteer identity, the significance volunteers place on the impact of their work when discussing meaning, and the tensions volunteers experience in their engagement with RJ. Although each chapter offers different theoretical insights, they all speak to the constituted nature of meaning within RJ and identify unique contributions that volunteer perspectives provide for the field of RJ research. Throughout these three chapters, I draw on key insights of constitutive criminology and constructivist sociology, which stress the interplay between human agency and constructed social systems and structures. I reference the works of Adele Clarke, Herbert Blumer, Stuart Henry, Dragon Milovanovic, Michel Foucault, Victor Turner, and other social and critical theorists, and through the lens of volunteer reflections, bring them into conversation with RJ theorists, such as John Braithwaite, John Bazemore, Kathleen Daly, Meredith Rossner, George Pavlich, Mark Umbreit, Howard Zehr, and others.

In chapter three, “Volunteer as advocate: The emergence of identity,” I trace the shifts in subjectivity that occur as individuals engage in the process of adopting a volunteer identity at the organization under study. Drawing on SI and sense-making theories of involvement and ethnographic theories of liminality, this chapter illustrates how the subject identity of RJ volunteer is constituted through their engagement with, and understanding of, RJ. While the particular subprocesses discussed within this chapter are unique to the agency under study, the chapter illuminates how conceptions of identity within RJ both depend on, as well as inform, conceptions of RJ more generally. As such, the experience of the volunteers at this agency, who link their role of facilitators of RJ to advocates on behalf of RJ, illustrates how their

understanding of RJ as an alternative model construes their understanding of their role as facilitator advocates on RJ's behalf.

Chapter four, "Impacts of RJ: Volunteer narratives of motivation, meaning, and values," focuses on the significance volunteers place on the impact, or outcome, of their volunteer work when discussing their conceptions of motivation, meaning, and values within RJ. By relying primarily on participant narratives and discussions, I illustrate how meaning for volunteers is interwoven within their experiences, their understanding of RJ, and the organizational context in which they engage. In highlighting how volunteers understand impact as central to their experience, this chapter challenges RJ scholarship to center the experiences of participants and facilitators when defining and discussing RJ theory.

In chapter five, "Power Relations in RJ: Experiences of tension in embodying empowerment", I address the places of tension volunteers experience in their engagement with RJ. This chapter uses Foucauldian notions of power to examine how volunteers frame the empowering dynamic they see in RJ, as well as their struggles in fully adopting this dynamic. In analyzing their experiences and observations of personal challenges in embodying empowerment, as well as more structural ones, this chapter provides insights into the potential, and challenges, inherent in RJ's capacity for reforming imbedded social structures.

The conclusion ties the three analytical chapters together with a discussion on how RJ, when seen through the experiences of its volunteers, exemplifies the politics of constituted criminology. As discussed by Henry and Milovanovic (2000), constitutive criminology exposes the harmful nature of social constructions around justice and demands a politic that seeks to reconstruct "a less harmful world" (p. 272). The experience of RJ volunteers provides insights into the relevancy and struggles of RJ, as well as its potential — and perhaps its challenges —



for constituting an alternative vision of justice. As such, my hope is that this work provides *sensitizing concepts* (in the tradition of Herbert Blumer) along which RJ scholarship can explore means to continue its transformative and reconstituting work.

## **Chapter 2**

### **Background**

To understand the context of volunteer experiences engaged in restorative justice work, it is important to begin with a background on restorative justice and a literature review of related research. Restorative Justice (RJ) is a broad concept that applies to a variety of holistic focused justice practices developed in recent decades as a response to critiques of the criminal justice system. Instead of focusing on establishing guilt and applying punitive measures, restorative justice takes a broader approach to crime that addresses the needs of victims, offenders, and the community. In this chapter I describe, in brief, the history of RJ, particularly within Canada and as it relates to my research site, as well as some of RJ's core values as articulated by RJ practitioners, theorists, and scholars. I then approach the topic of volunteer engagement in RJ by discussing the role volunteers serve within RJ, current volunteerism research and theory, and the existing research on RJ volunteers. I conclude this section by locating my own study within the fields of volunteering and restorative justice.

### **Restorative Justice as an Approach**

RJ is an approach to conflict resolution that focuses on the relationships involved and the trust that has been broken between the participants. It seeks to address the harm caused by a criminal act, focusing on offender accountability and ways to “restore” the relationship between the offender and the larger community (Zehr, 2005). For many scholars and theorists, RJ also goes beyond responding to crime to create a “vision of a holistic change in the way we do justice in the world” (Braithwaite, 2003a, p. 1). As such, RJ is defined as both a process in which to respond to harm and a value system that distinguishes it from traditional punitive justice (Braithwaite & Strang, 2001). To approach RJ requires examining its history, values, and programs and processes, as well as existing empirical research on the topic.

Canada has a unique history with restorative justice. Cited as the origin of the modern RJ movement, formal RJ programs that work within the criminal legal system started in Canada in the 1970s (Roach, 2000). Today, RJ programs in Canada include community based initiatives, both Indigenous and Settler<sup>2</sup>, as well as restorative sentencing guidelines championed by Parliamentary committees and the Supreme Court (Roberts & Roach, 2003).

The first legal case involving victim-offender mediation took place in Ontario in 1974, which developed into the first Victim Offender Reconciliation Program in North America; the same organization serves as the field site for my research. (Umbreit & Armour, 2010).

Empowered by the above legal case, community RJ programs develop throughout the 1980s and 1990s in Canada and the United States. Throughout this process, First Nations communities in Canada, along with Indigenous peoples around the world, began to advocate for and revitalize their traditional justice systems. Within Canada, Indigenous community justice initiatives have contributed to and shaped the RJ movement substantially (Roberts & Roach, 2003). In 1992, restorative circle sentencing, in which the community participants in and supports an offender through the sentencing process, became an accepted procedural process in criminal cases with First Nations communities in Canada. The Supreme Court of Canada formally embraced RJ values in 1999. The case of *R v. Glaude* encouraged a “restorative approach to sentencing” in cases affecting Indigenous peoples.

Today, RJ forms a core component of the Canadian justice system. As explained by criminologists Jeffery Myer and Pat O’Malley (2005), it contributes to Canada’s more “balanced” approach to penal trends in recent decades (as compared to other English-speaking

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<sup>2</sup> Settler is used in this thesis to denote Non-Indigenous peoples and communities existing within colonial settlements on traditional territories of Indigenous peoples. See Lorenzo Veracini (2010) and Patrick Wolfe (1999) for a brief introduction to settler concepts.

settler countries such as Australia and the United States, which have adopted more retributive models), in which Canadian policy attempts to walk the line between punishment and rehabilitation.<sup>3</sup> However, because of Canada's unique history with RJ and the inclusion of restorative goals within its sentencing guidelines, there is concern that RJ in Canada may be overly influenced by retributive concerns or co-opted by the crown as a means "to widen the net of social control" (Roberts & Roach, 2003, p. 238). As such, RJ scholars note the importance of prioritizing principles and values when evaluating if a program or process should be labeled as restorative.

### ***Restorative Justice Values***

A significant amount of RJ scholarship is dedicated to understanding the values and principles that define the movement. Scholars note that RJ is more than a criminological argument, but is instead a normative criminal justice theory (Braithwaite, 2003a; Dzur, 2007). As such, the moral grounds and values of RJ are often more important to its advocates than its effectiveness and efficiency. However, as Gerry Johnstone and Daniel Van Ness (2007) note in their introduction to the *Handbook of Restorative Justice*, 'restorative justice' "appears to have no single clear and established meaning, but instead is used in a range of different ways" (p. 6).

For RJ practitioner and theorist Howard Zehr, restorative justice is a profound paradigm shift in how we conceive of justice. In his major work on the subject, *Changing Lenses*, Zehr (2005) contrasts restorative values, goals, and processes to the punitive systems which currently guide our criminal justice model. Zehr is criticized for establishing a stark dichotomy between

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<sup>3</sup> Whether Canadian practice continues to walk the line between punishment and rehabilitation that Myer and O'Malley (2005) argue exists within Canadian criminal policy is much debated. Dawn Moore and Kelly Hannah-Moffat (2005) note that many nominally rehabilitative practices are implemented with punitive intentions, and this research illuminates how volunteers in RJ perceive the punitive focus within the Canadian justice system.

restorative and retributive justice models, and as such always defining RJ by what it is not, instead of what it could be (Woolford, 2009).

Criminologist John Braithwaite (2003) argues that RJ is about “struggling against injustice in the most restorative way we can manage” (p. 1). For Braithwaite (2003, 2000), RJ is a pragmatic strategy that pursues a more democratic experience by prioritizing citizen empowerment in responding to injustice in all forms, including crime and violence, but also social injustices such as poverty, racism, and sexism (Braithwaite, 2003b). To that extent, restorative justice theorists put forward what Braithwaite names as a “confusion of values” which can be prioritized differently given the context of the injustice or conflict to which RJ is responding (Braithwaite, 2003a, p. 8). The core values that Braithwaite (2003) argues must be realized within RJ processes include: non-domination, empowerment, respectful listening, equal concern for all stakeholders, accountability, and respect of fundamental human rights.

For Kent Roach (2000) punitive and retributive responses to crime fail to address the primary issues in a conflict, which is the broken trust in the relationships between victims, offenders, and communities. The distinguishing factor of RJ, alternatively, is a relationship-based approach to crime and conflict. Ted Wachtel and Paul McCold (2001), in their argument for restorative applications outside of the criminal justice setting, highlight RJ principles that prioritize collaborative relationships in response to harm. These include fostering awareness, avoiding scolding and lecturing, involving offenders actively, accepting ambiguity, separating the deed from the doer, and seeing “every instance or wrong-doing and conflict as an opportunity for learning” (p. 128).

Key to the restorative justice movement is a bottom-up approach in responding to crime in which, as Howard Zehr and Harry Mika (1998) argue, “the justice process belongs to the

community” (p. 53). Building on Nels Christie (1977) argument that reclaiming conflict out from under state control creates potential for building more resilient communities, RJ advocates for increased community involvement in the justice process. For Zehr and Mika (1998), in order to seek healing and “put right wrongs,” restorative processes must address the needs of victims and offenders, prioritize participation and dialogue, be mindful of outcomes, and belong to the community.

While there is consensus among RJ scholars that community is a central component of restorative justice, defining this community is a more challenging task. McCold (2004b) focuses on including “communities of care,” or what Umbreit, Coates, and Vos (2004) describe as social networks, as participants within the RJ process. Others focus on including the broader community in facilitating and supporting the process (Coates, 1981; Rossner & Bruce, 2016; Umbreit et al., 2004). Belonging to the community for Zehr and Mika (1998, p. 53) requires that:

- 1) Community members are actively involved in doing justice;
- 2) The justice process draws from community resources and, in turn, contributes to the building and strengthening of community; and
- 3) The justice process attempts to promote changes in the community both to prevent similar harms from happening to others, and to foster early intervention to address the needs of victims and the accountability of offenders.

Regardless of the debate on certain definitions, Micheala Keet (2010) notes that the “potential for collaborative solutions” underpins much of restorative justice theory (p. 101). RJ values involve a focus on harm rather than rules, equal concern and support for victims and offenders, and are based in respect for all parties (Umbreit & Armour, 2010). For most RJ theorists and practitioners, this includes making healthy reintegration of both victims and offenders into the broader community a primary focus. Successful reintegration requires accountability, in that the offender accepts responsibility for their actions (either as precondition for or a result of participating in RJ) and agrees to work to repair the harm caused by the actions,

as well as community support to meet needs (Crocker, 2016; Gerkin, 2012; Rossner & Bruce, 2016; Zehr & Mika, 1998).

Albert Dzur (2009) summarizes the values of restorative justice as a “democratic experiment attempting to encourage greater public knowledge of criminal justice, more widespread responsibility for crime control, and ultimately less punishment in the form of incarceration” (p. 281). As noted, this democratic experiment is based on values of respect, inclusion, participation, and empowerment. As illustrated below, programs that provide restorative justice seek to embody these values in their processes and structures.

### ***Restorative Justice Programs***

RJ programs often use a facilitated dialogue or group conference process to bring multiple stakeholders in a criminal event into conversation about how to repair the harm the event has caused. They can function at multiple levels within the criminal system, mainly at the pre-sentencing, post-sentencing, and re-entry stages (Bazemore 2014, Zehr 2005). The most well-known forms of RJ in North America are facilitated dialogue between victim and offender (victim offender mediation or victim offender reconciliation) and the indigenous practices of sentencing or justice circles. Restorative programs have also been expanded to apply to other aspects of addressing the harm of a criminal event, such as restorative parole boards (particularly in Vermont, USA) family-group conferencing (in New Zealand), and re-entry support for offenders (Bazemore, 2014; Umbreit & Greenwood, 1999; Umbreit & Peterson Armour, 2010; Wilson, Huculak, & McWhinnie, 2002). Such RJ programs that focus on addressing harm and repairing relationships have developed along with RJ theory over the past half a century.

As RJ theory centers on the value of increasing community involvement within the justice processes, RJ programs, though functioning at many levels of Canadian society, tend to

be community-based, or at least to rely on significant community participation (Dhami & Joy, 2007). Programs vary in how they define community and consequently in the extent to which they engage community participation, though, as discussed earlier, most theorists emphasize community involvement. Involving community members makes sure that “the voice of the community is heard” and that the process is grounded within the community setting (Umbreit & Armour, 2010, p. 57). While RJ programs include community members in a variety of ways, inviting community volunteers to participate in and facilitate RJ programs is a common model RJ initiatives use to insure that community is a part of the process (Rossner & Bruce, 2016; Umbreit et al., 2004). Understanding the efficacy of these programs, as well as the experience of participants who engage and facilitate them, is important to RJ scholarship.

### ***Restorative Justice Research***

This study fits into a large history of existing scholarship on restorative justice. The majority of RJ research focuses on its impact, particularly on recidivism and participant satisfaction (London 2011; Von Hirsh et al. 2003). Research indicates that RJ can reduce the likelihood of reoffending as well as improve victim satisfaction and healing, with significantly lower costs than traditional criminal court proceedings (Umbreit and Armour 2010; Von Hirsh et al. 2003; Wong et al. 2016). Recent meta-analyses have found that restorative justice practices have been successful at reducing recidivism in youth (Kuo, Longmire, & Cuvelier, 2010; Wong et al., 2016). Other studies have shown RJ methods effective with adult offenders, including in instances of violent crime (Umbreit, Vos, Coates, & Brown, 2003). RJ assessment often includes the non-traditional indicator of participant satisfaction, a measure that is rarely assessed during traditional court proceedings (Dzur, 2007). Studies on participant satisfaction show increased



victim satisfaction among those who participate in RJ processes compared to those who do not (Braithwaite & Strang, 2001; Kuo et al., 2010).

However, restorative justice is not immune to criticism. More critical scholarship notes that RJ is aspirational in its approach to justice and that practice does not always live up to theory (Daly, 2003; Von Hirsh, 2003). Some scholars express concerns over RJ's ideological grounding, such as the merging between RJ and community justice movements, co-option by the state, and uncertainty in definitions (Archibald & Llewellyn, 2006; Doolin, 2007; Dzur, 2003; McCold, 2004a). However, there is also a recognition that state support and collaboration across reform movements is necessary to build effective and responsive restorative civil societies (Braithwaite & Strang, 2001; Karp, 2004).

As research continues to show the successes of RJ at meeting its goals, and often with less cost and more success than the traditional criminal justice system (Kuo et al., 2010; Wong et al., 2016), more research on program development is needed to explore critical questions about how RJ values hold up in practice (Rossner, 2011). Building empirical research that explores the experience of engaging in RJ in order to clarify or refine RJ theory and arguments is essential. Such research includes studies focused on community involvement within RJ processes and, in relation to this project, on volunteers engaging in RJ work.

### **Volunteers in Restorative Justice**

Volunteers serve many roles in the RJ process, including as facilitators, surrogate victims when actual victims are unwilling or unable to participate, and community stakeholders in larger sentencing or re-entry circles (Dhami & Joy, 2007; Rossner & Bruce, 2016; Umbreit & Greenwood, 1999). Involving community members in the RJ process has many functional benefits. These include increased efficacy of the process by assisting the offender to understand

the impact of their behaviour and transform their attitude related to the criminal event, empowering and strengthening the local community, and providing a form of moral education for the community that reaffirms and modifies normative standards for behaviour (Braithwaite, 2003a; Olson & Dzur, 2004; Rossner & Bruce, 2016; Umbreit et al., 2004). There is also financial incentive to using volunteers in RJ process, as RJ programs often have significant budgetary constraints and volunteer engagement allows programs to reduce costs (Umbreit et al., 2004; Umbreit & Peterson Armour, 2010).

While volunteer engagement is important to both the programs and values of RJ, empirical research on the volunteer experience in RJ is limited. In the following literature review I note only a handful of empirical studies on the subject. This study adds to a growing body of research that applies broader volunteerism theory to the specific context of RJ.

### ***Volunteer Research and Theory***

Research on volunteerism is multi-disciplinary and multifaceted. Volunteer research is designed to address two related concepts; the concept of participation in community life, and the practical application of recruitment and retention for volunteer work. Studying volunteering allows researchers an avenue in which to approach longstanding questions of why and how humans engage in helping activities (Musick & Wilson, 2008). Volunteering research hopes to understand the societal aspects that impact who engages, and how they engage, in prosocial behaviors (psychology) and solidarity (sociology) (Lindenberg, Fetchenhauer, Flache, & Buunk, 2006). Research addresses various questions, such as the definition of volunteering, who volunteers and why, the process of volunteering, and even if volunteering is a socially valuable activity (Hustinx, Cnaan, & Handy, 2010).

Marc Musick and John Wilson (2008) isolate two main theoretical perspectives within research on volunteers: a subjectivist approach that prioritizes the individual's motivation in determining volunteer participation, and a societal approach that assumes a rational actor negotiating an exchange of resources. These two perspectives are adopted in sociology, where volunteer research focuses on socialization (subjectivist) and socio-demographic factors (societal), and in psychology where it focuses either on rational choice and exchange theories, which seek to understand what benefits people acquire from their volunteer work, or on motivational theories that conceptualize "functions" volunteer work serves for volunteers (Lindenberg et al., 2006). Both theoretical frameworks have been criticized for neglecting the human dimensions of self-determination and meaning-making that shapes volunteer behaviour (Güntert, Strubel, Kals, & Wehner, 2016; Wilson et al., 2002).

A less common, third theoretical approach in volunteer studies applies a constructionist or symbolic interactionist (SI) lens in an attempt to understand the meaning making process by bridging the questions of motivation, values, and socialization. Volunteerism scholars Hustinx, Cnaan and Handy (2010) argue that motivational accounts for volunteers are a "part of a larger set of cultural understandings, that is, as an expression of certain values and beliefs" (p. 421). Similarly, organizational socialization research includes a body of literature focused on sense-making, or the "interactive, intersubjective process in which individuals create agreed upon meanings for experiences through communication" (Kramer, 2010, p. 14).

Approaching volunteerism from a sense-making, or SI, framework addresses the critique of the subjective and societal frameworks as it focuses on the process of meaning creation. In SI, meanings are not seen merely as part of the initiating or causation factor (as they are in functional volunteerism), or as a neutral link between actions (as they might be in rational choice

theory). Instead, SI sees meanings as derived from social interaction as well as internally interpreted by each individual actor. To that extent, meaning is not seen as an inherent component to the “thing that has meaning”, nor is it a result of the actor’s internal psychology, but arises in the “process of interaction between people” (Blumer, 1969, p. 4). Thus, the meaning of action for a volunteer is grounded both in the subjective experience of the individual and the context in which that individual acts.

### ***Volunteer Research in RJ***

Research on volunteers in restorative justice fits within these broader traditions of volunteer research. Two main approaches exist within empirical research on volunteers in RJ: quantitative surveys of volunteers within or across programs (Crocker, 2016; Karp, Bazemore, & Chesire, 2004; Souza & Dhami, 2008) and qualitative case-study research that focuses in depth on one particular agency (Dhami & Joy, 2007; Keet, 2010). The majority of these studies apply the subjectivist framework discussed by Musick and Wilson (2008). A handful include more societal queries about the socio-demographic break down of RJ volunteers. As noted above, understanding the experience of volunteers in RJ is a rather new and unexplored area of research. To date, insights on volunteer engagement with RJ emerge from both empirical research and theoretical scholarship.

An initial line of inquiry is explored by studies which ask questions geared toward understanding how volunteers assign motivations for engaging in this work (using a functional volunteerism theory), with a specific focus on the role of values in motivation (Dhami & Joy, 2007; Souza & Dhami, 2008). Alternatively, additional studies engage how volunteers conceptualize and interact with core RJ values (Crocker, 2016; Karp, Bazemore, & Chesire, 2004.; Keet, 2010). An additional body of theoretical scholarship addresses what Hustinx et al.

(2010) would label the critical aspect of volunteer research, such as the benefits or limitations of using a volunteer population when facilitating restorative justice programming (Dzur, 2003; Dzur & Olson, 2004; Olson & Dzur, 2004). Research that seeks to adopt a symbolic interactionism or process-based approach to understanding volunteer engagement in RJ has largely been neglected.

Studies focused specifically on motivations for volunteers engaging with RJ stress the significance of personal values. Karen Souza and Mandeep Dhani (2008), from their 2003 research on RJ volunteers in British Columbia, note that values and community concern are significant motivations for RJ volunteers and theorized that RJ volunteers are motivated out of a desire to enact or express their values and to give back to their community. Keet (2010) also noted that connecting with their community was a key motive for volunteers at the RJ program she studied in Saskatchewan. The theorizing of Mark Umbreit and Marilyn Armour (2010) echoes these findings; they see community volunteers as motivated out of a passion for RJ values, a desire to build safer neighborhoods, or a commitment to seeing offenders successfully re-enter society. Alternatively, Susan Olson and Albert Dzur (2004), argue community members engage in RJ programs for a variety of reasons, including fear of becoming victims, to reaffirm social norms violated by criminal events, and to improve a community's ability to respond to crime.

Focusing more specifically on the values of RJ volunteers, a second line of inquiry on RJ volunteers evaluates the extent to which volunteers adhere to the stated values of RJ theory. In their research, Karp, Bazemore, and Chesire (2004) examine the values and opinions of community members in the Vermont restorative probation boards. Keet (2010) presents a case study on a community justice committee in Saskatchewan in which she addresses the role the

volunteer community plays in maintaining the RJ values within the organization. Likewise, Dianna Crocker (2016) discusses the extent to which volunteers (and staff) in Nova Scotia hold values associated with RJ. These studies note the importance of addressing how RJ volunteers understand the values behind RJ work and provide a framework for addressing the interaction between values, motivations, and meaning in understanding volunteer engagement with RJ. They also touch on the tensions between stated RJ values and embodied practice that resonate within this study as well.

A process-based research approach that looks at meaning making among RJ volunteers has mostly been neglected. In their research, Souza and Dhimi (2008) note that volunteers were often recruited through personal relationships and as such they theorized that an individual's social network and method of exposure to RJ may influence their decision to volunteer. Likewise, Dhimi and Joy's (2007) observations on program development for community RJ programs discuss the recruitment process for volunteers through one-on-one conversations and the challenges around training volunteers, but does not link these aspects to meaning and values. Inversely, in her work on an RJ program in Saskatchewan, Keet (2010) does note the importance of volunteer engagement in embodying the meaning and values of RJ, but does not investigate the connection values and meaning have to motivations or the sense making process more specifically. Each of these studies discuss values, motivations, and meaning as separate from recruitment and training.

The closest research on volunteers in RJ has yet come to adopting an SI or sense-making approach that holds values, motivations, and meaning in conjunction is within the works of Eric Claes (2016). Claes (2016) argues that motivation for volunteers is related to meaningfulness, or the importance of working on projects of worth, and that restorative justice volunteers that he

included in his research see great worth in their volunteer work. In their work, Karp, Bazemore, and Chesire (2004) note the potential link between values and motivational accounts, and specifically suggest that future research on RJ should explore community members' "motivation for participation and factors influencing their ongoing commitment in greater depth" (p. 504).

### **This Study**

In my study I build on the work of RJ scholars noted above by using a grounded theory and symbolic interactionist (SI) framework to focus on how volunteers involved in RJ discuss meaning, values, and motivation. Thus, while my research draws from the theoretical perspectives within the study of volunteerism and the insights from previous research and scholarship on volunteers in RJ listed above, my primary goal is to explore how volunteers discuss the meanings of, and the processes by which volunteers assign meaning to, their engagement with RJ.

This research focuses on how volunteers in RJ navigate their volunteer identity and experience. As noted above, to approach understanding the lived experience of volunteers, where they find meaning in their work, and how they communicate that meaning to others, I use a grounded theory methodological approach. SI enables the inductive approach in grounded theory methodology by providing ontological and epistemological rationale for focusing research and theory development on the meanings that research participants highlight (Clarke, 2005). Similar to the works of Keet (2010) and Dhimi & Joy (2007), this research uses a case-study approach of one RJ agency, though with a much closer focus on how volunteers articulate meaning.

The value in doing this form of research is multi-faceted. It provides an opportunity to build on the work of other research on RJ volunteers and explore understudied aspects such as

the role of organizational socialization on volunteer meaning making, as well as the interconnectedness of values, meaning, and motivations in how volunteers in RJ discuss their experience. However, not only does this research provide an opportunity to explore the lived experience of RJ volunteers, but also to understand the tensions and realities that give meaning to engaging as community members in a restorative justice framework more broadly. As community engagement is central to restorative justice philosophy, this work provides much needed insight into how community members may find meaning in engaging in RJ.

The goal is not to build a grand theory through which community members are exposed to and find meaning in engaging with RJ practices. As I discuss further in relation to my methodology, I instead seek to recognize the situatedness of knowledge and the consequent limitations (Clarke 2005). As such, I hope to build *sensitizing concepts*, as Blumer discusses them, from volunteer experiences which “suggest directions along which to look” at community engagement in RJ (Blumer, 1969, p. 148). In the same spirit, the literature and theoretical underpinnings of restorative justice and volunteer research addressed in this chapter form the sensitizing concepts along which directions I approach this study of volunteer engagement in RJ.



## **Chapter 3**

### **Methodology**

To understand the concept of volunteer engagement in restorative justice (RJ), I conducted an in-depth, qualitative study of volunteers at one community RJ program. I approached this setting as a case study, allowing me to study the phenomenon of volunteer engagement with RJ by exploring it in a specific context (Baxter & Jack, 2008). Case studies are specifically useful in posing “how” and “why” questions in instances where the boundaries between the phenomenon and the context are unclear (Baxter & Jack, 2008). By selecting one agency from which to approach the topic, I could pay closer attention to situational factors, such as organization identity and culture, that impact meaning for volunteers (Lamont & White, 2005).

I used a constructivist approach based in grounded theory methodology that focused on the volunteers’ experiences and voice, without imposing a specific theoretical framework at the onset of the study. To study volunteering from a perspective of symbolic interactionism involves investigating the process by which a volunteer assigns meaning to the act of volunteering, including the engagement in social interactions and internal interpretation. As such, a SI framework accounts for both the individual actor (subjectivist perspective), as well as the context in which meaning is inferred and actions exist (societal approach). Pairing this perspective with a grounded theory methodological approach creates “process-oriented or narrative theories that seek to understand how people volunteer, that is, to conceptualize the complex nature of volunteering as well as the way it unfolds as a process over time and in interaction with its environment” (Hustinx et al., 2010, p. 412). My research consisted primarily of qualitative semi structured interviews with volunteers and agency staff and participant observation of volunteer orientation and trainings.

In response to Adele Clarke's (2005) critic of the lack of reflexivity within traditional grounded theory, I find it essential to note my positionality as a researcher. As a white, cisgender woman in my mid-twenties I approached, discovered, and interpreted how volunteers made sense of their experience in a particular way. Coming from a constructivist paradigm with, as Norman Denzin and Yvonna Lincoln (2008) describe it, "a relativist ontology (there are multiple realities), a subjectivist epistemology (knower and respondent co-create meaning), and a naturalist (in the natural world) set of methodological procedures," I sought to develop an understanding (of many possible) of how volunteers discuss and experience meaning in restorative justice (p. 31). As is common among constructionist qualitative researchers, I designed my methodological choices to establish trustworthiness, as opposed to positivistic notions of accuracy (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008). According to Cynthia Lietz, Carol Langer, and Rich Furman (2006), "trustworthiness is established when findings as closely as possible reflect the meanings as described by the participants" (p. 444). I used a variety of iterative research strategies, including researcher reflexivity, prolonged engagement, multiple sources, and peer debriefing (Clarke, 2005; Lietz et al., 2006; Shenton, 2004; Tracy, 2010), in order to prioritize the meaning participants attributed to their RJ experiences.

### **Research Setting**

I chose to conduct my research at the Community Justice Initiatives (CJI), which operates throughout the Waterloo Region. As CJI is the direct agency offshoot of the 1974 Elmira Case, which set the legal precedent for restorative justice in North America, I found it a strategic location in which to study volunteer engagement in RJ. CJI has operated for 45 years and is currently supported by over 200 volunteers. They offer volunteer run RJ programs at the pre-sentencing, post-sentencing, and re-entry level (including Victim Offender Reconciliation

Programs (youth and adult), Family Group Conferencing, Elder Mediations, Neighbourhood Disputes, Support Groups for individuals in custody, and Circles of Support for those returning from custody). More personally, as a researcher and student of restorative justice, I had come across discussion of the Elmira Case, a 1974 vandalism case in which the parole officer's suggestion that the offenders meet with their victims and work to repay damages was included in their sentence, as the origin of modern restorative justice processes in North America in a variety of texts on the subject (London, 2011; Umbreit & Peterson Armour, 2010; Zehr, 2005). I was intrigued to examine how this legacy as the origin story of RJ across North America is maintained and understood at a local level.

A limitation of case study and interpretivist research is understanding the applicability of the results gathered to other settings. Because such studies do not rely on assumptions of "generalizability," but prioritize context specifics, critiques rightly question how such findings can be applied outside of their specific setting. Two arguments exist within the interpretive tradition to respond to such critiques: transferability and generic social processes. Transferability relates to the ability for such knowledge to be relevant to other, similar contexts, whereas generic social processes provides a framework in which different activities can be compared across contexts.<sup>4</sup>

## **Participants**

I interviewed 16 participants involved in providing RJ programs through CJI. Most participants were volunteers, although I also included three CJI staff members in my sample. The

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<sup>4</sup> To this extent, it is essential to note that CJI has developed one narrative of RJ and that their narrative exists within an often unacknowledged racial and colonial framework. The reality that most of my participants, and I too, are settlers on this land embeds itself in how we see and communicate meaning in this restorative justice work. Indigenous or other localized communities engaging in RJ would have very important elements to add to this perspective. This tension is addressed briefly within the third analytical chapter on power relations within RJ, however more future research should address indigenous experiences of RJ, specifically where related to the dynamics of volunteering within RJ and how those compare to settler experiences.

volunteers participated in two of CJI's programs, either as volunteer mediators and or as supporters for women during incarceration and/or during re-entry. A few volunteers had experience with both programs. The staff included worked with volunteers regularly and provided helpful information on organizational structure and volunteer roles, as well as more general information about volunteer engagement at CJI. I also interviewed a single volunteer from a sister agency to CJI. This volunteer expressed interest in being included when we met at CJI peer support/training event where I was present. Her inclusion in the study helps to illustrate the transferability of my results, as well as to explore potential points of tension between the case study population of CJI volunteers and RJ volunteers more broadly.

I also observed close to 50 participants during CJI training events. This group included current volunteers, staff trainers, and interested community members. At least four of these participants also participated in interviews. The majority of participants were women. Some were students, others worked full time, and a few were retired. Some identified as religious, some spiritual but not religious, others were adamantly not religious. Most participants discussed some form of higher education, a larger portion of which noted having completed a graduate certificate or masters program. Almost all participants identified as white. The sample included participants new to CJI as well as others who had been involved for a couple of years, and some with over a decade of experience volunteering.

### **Data Collection**

As my focus is on volunteer engagement in RJ, my primary data collection method relies on in-depth qualitative interviews with the volunteers themselves. However, to get a holistic picture of volunteer engagement with CJI, I also collected data through interviews with staff responsible for volunteer coordination and from participant observation of volunteer

orientation and training. During this process I also attended an undergraduate conference on Restorative Justice at which CJI staff were among the presenters. This conference provided an opportunity to place CJI in the broader RJ framework in their community and observe non-volunteer community members conceptions and critiques of the organization. Using multiple data sources from a variety of angles helps to establish the trustworthiness of my results, allowing for “rich complexity of abundance” from which to develop my analysis (Tracy, 2010, p. 841). Specifically, using different forms of data collection provides a more comprehensive picture of the phenomenon and allows for “triangulation”, in which the strengths and limitations of different data collection methods complement each other (Lamont & White, 2005).

Data collection took place over five months, a process of prolonged engagement that allowed me to immerse myself into the culture at CJI and develop familiarity with their organizational identity, as well as provide time for an iterative process of data collection and analysis in line with the principles of grounded theory, which I discuss below (Lietz et al., 2006). In using an iterative approach to reframe my research questions and process, data collection incorporated the early stages of analysis. Having data analysis and data collection occur concurrently is typical of case study methodologies in which the researcher is immersed in the context under study (Baxter & Jack, 2008).

### ***Ethical Considerations***

Prior to and during my data collection and analysis, I considered the ethical implications of my work. The *Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans* (2014) identifies respect for persons, concern for welfare, and justice as the core principles of ethical research. To insure compliance, I pursued and received ethics clearance through a University of Waterloo Research Ethics Committee (ORE#22383). However, from my

perspective as a constructivist researcher, navigating research ethics with integrity requires more than simple compliance with an ethics review process.

Engaging in research on RJ, a process focused on harm, responsibility, accountability, and relationship, also creates space in which to reflect on how the process of research can embody harm or work to build accountability. I did not take lightly the power granted to me as researcher to translate and represent participants expressions of meaning and the responsibilities therein. The relationship between researcher and participant has the potential to create a power imbalance in the creation of knowledge. As such, I applied a variety of techniques to insure that participants were respected and that their narratives and conceptions of meaning were centered throughout the data collection, analysis, and writing process.

To address each persons' autonomy, participants in my research received information related to the nature of my research and were given the opportunity to ask questions prior to providing consent to participate. I had hoped to supplement my qualitative data with demographic information on CJI's volunteer population more broadly but was prevented by ethical considerations related to autonomy as CJI does not maintain aggregated data on volunteer engagement. Instead, I was limited to published material about CJI's volunteer base, such as the statistics on new volunteers and volunteer hours noted in their annual newsletters.

I worked to retain anonymity of individual participants throughout my research to the best of my ability. As such, I did not include identifying factors (such as name and age) in the transcripts of my recorded interviews and use pseudonyms generated by a random name generator when discussing individual responses in my written work. Due to the nature of the case study, participants were informed that others at CJI might be able to identify them by context. Most participants expressed no concern about this possibility. However, at the request of certain

individual participants, I provided the opportunity to review direct quotations prior to publication.

As an agency, CJI was informed of the risks and benefits of participating in this study and were presented with the option of remaining anonymous in written and published material. As the case-study model of this research isolates CJI to carry the burden of research, the benefits of findings should also apply most closely to that organization. To benefit most from the research, CJI preferred not to remain anonymous on grounds that maintaining transparency as an organization was instrumental to their mission. Instead, they requested summaries of critical material and themes prior to publication. In keeping with their wishes, I refer to their organization by name within this thesis and they will receive copies of all publications that arise from this study. While they have agreed not to request that any information be censored, providing them with advanced knowledge of what is to be published allows me to respect the burden that research places on them as an agency. As an ethical practice of research, I seek to respect participants wishes when they do not impinge on my ability to protect the privacy and requests of other participants.

### ***Access and Immersion***

My data collection began through a process of immersion into CJI organizational life and relationships building with influential gatekeepers. Along with conducting research on CJI's publicly available material, I also examined recent news stories on CJI's impact in the community. With the support of a mentor, I was introduced to a CJI board member who facilitated my introduction to CJI directors. The support of a board member for my research provided me with initial access, and my first phone call with a director involved clarification of my research goals and suggestions on how to accomplish my data collection at CJI. I was

encouraged to focus initially on a specific program at CJI (Community Mediation Program), which due to breadth of their work would hopefully provide me with a more focused example of volunteer engagement in RJ. As the research progressed, I then expanded my focus to include volunteers who participate in a second program that supports women during incarceration and re-entry, allowing me to explore volunteer experiences in two different programs at CJI.

The director connected me to a program director, with whom I worked to achieve clearance for observations of trainings and begin the recruitment process of my interviews. As I became more present and known at CJI, I was invited to observe other agency settings, such as a team meeting of the mediation staff and a peer-support training for existing volunteers, and an annual general meeting. This immersion process into my case setting assisted me in developing familiarity with the culture of CJI, one strategy for establishing trustworthiness advanced by Shenton (2004). This also facilitated the iterative process of my research, as I was able to refine my research goals and questions to the context of CJI more specifically and approach my interviews and observations with a better understanding of the process and culture at CJI.

Throughout this process I became aware of the possible tensions between my expectations as researcher and the hopes and expectations of CJI as an institution. I continued to have conversations throughout the research and analysis process with CJI staff about how my research could benefit their organization and work, while still allowing me to maintain critical distance as a researcher. As my understanding of the agency and my respect for them grew throughout this process, I focused on peer debriefing with my supervisor to facilitate reflexivity as I allowed my growing relationship with CJI to guide the iterative process of data collection.



### *Qualitative interviews*

The majority of my data collection took place in interview settings. Throughout my research process, I conducted 16 formal interviews, lasting between 40 minutes to 90 minutes in length. These formal interviews were audio recorded for accuracy with permission from the interviewees and then transcribed by me at a later date. All interview participants were provided with information about my research and gave informed consent to be included in this study (Appendix A). Other, informal interviews, took place during breaks within or following participant observation sessions, which I documented by hand to the best of my ability and transcribed as soon as possible after the event.

I recruited interview participants using referral and snowball method. Initially the program coordinator connected me with a volunteer coordinator, and then sent separate email requests to the mediation team staff and volunteer listserv explaining my research and asking about their willingness to participate (Appendix B and C). As the recruitment process continued, I asked CJI staff to encourage more volunteers with whom they work to participate in interviews. Other CJI volunteers expressed interest in participating after learning about my research at training sessions where I was participant observer or from other volunteers.

Snowball sampling tends to increase the willingness of participants to divulge personal information as having been validated by someone they know enables the participants to share with me more intimately with more confidence (Lamont & White, 2005). Snowball sampling also facilitated the iterative process, as it allowed me to seek out volunteers that could explore different perspectives and tensions that became visible when seeking to understand volunteers' engagements with RJ. Specifically, I began to include more volunteers involved in the Stride Program (support group and circles of support for women in and returning from prison). This allowed me to explore differences across programs and added variety to my growing

understanding of the volunteer experience at CJI and in RJ programs (Clarke, 2005). While such snowball sampling has limitations in terms of building generalizable results, I found the benefits of this sampling technique, in building trust with participants and facilitating the iterative process, to outweigh the limitations as it allowed me to develop in-depth understanding of the context.

In my interviews with volunteers, I hoped to explore their personal experience with CJI and how they understand and present meaning in their work, where as in my interviews with staff I looked to supplement volunteer interviews by approaching the context on the volunteer process and culture at CJI more broadly. I conducted three formal interviews with CJI staff - two at the beginning stage of my data collection (with volunteer coordinator and program manager) and one closer the end stage of data collection (with a program director) – and 12 interviews with CJI volunteers. I also conducted an interview with a volunteer who was trained by CJI but works with a sister agency elsewhere in Southern Ontario. This participant requested to be included in the study after learning about this work at a volunteer support night I was observing and was included in the study to provide an external point of reference to the transferability of my findings.

Although I approached the interviews with semi-structured interview guides (Appendix D and E), they became less structured as I sought to understand meaning for each participant. Recognizing that meaning is contextually situated, and the context of an interview is “continually renegotiated in the course of the interview,” I allowed the participants reflections and focus to lead the conversations (Briggs, 1986, p. 25). This process allowed me to follow the themes brought up by the volunteer, reflecting the language they used and prompting them for explanation, examples, and depth. I had designed the interview guides to explore relevant themes

in the literature on volunteer experience and restorative justice more broadly. However, as the data collection continued I was able to modify my interviews to focus on themes and concepts that came up in past interviews and observations and were more closely related to the case setting or participant's role. While some interviews addressed all the questions on the interview guide, others spent more time addressing the themes that were most important to the participants. In the end, the depth of data gathered was my priority and using a more open-ended approach allowed for more nuance than would have been elicited by simply answering the breadth of questions.

As each participant was able to express preference for location, the physical context of the interviews had an effect on the depth of content. In general, interviews that took place in a coffee shop were more direct; responses were shorter and more focused on answering the question directly, and during which I followed more closely to the interview guide. Interviews that took place in private, whether in the participants office or a conference room at CJI, provided more depth of conversation. In this setting, participants provided answers that were more detailed or addressed the questions more thematically, as a jumping off point for a conversation, and my questions as researcher were more thoughtful and targeted to the participants' responses. I limited the amount of note taking during the formal interviews and I relied on audio recording to record the data while I focused my energy on attentive listening to deepen the conversation and follow up on issues addressed.

Interviews with staff were crucial to facilitating an iterative process. While I was initially focused on volunteer motivation, I recognized within my first two staff interviews that motivating volunteers is not an aspect of concern at CJI. These initial interviews helped to focus my research more on what makes CJI unique in having a situation of surplus volunteers,

refocusing my research on understanding the meaning (as opposed to the motivations) for volunteers engaging with the RJ programs, as well as the organizational socialization process. My third staff interview was intentionally scheduled for later in the data collection process to further facilitate the iterative process. This interview served as an opportunity to flesh out my understanding of CJI processes and to ask questions of clarification. This last staff interview also served as a pseudo member check, as I was able to discuss some of the emerging themes with the staff member (Lietz et al., 2006).

### ***Participant observation***

In order to understand volunteer engagement in the context of CJI, I supplemented my interviews with active participant observation of volunteer trainings. I was able to attend one volunteer orientation session, one volunteer training course and one ongoing peer support/training for current volunteers. Due to event timing, I attended a three-day volunteer training course for mediators, a peer support night for mediators, and an agency orientation for a total of more than 25 hours of observation. These observation opportunities provided me with the opportunity to observe volunteers engaging with CJI and learning about RJ in a natural setting. They also provided a framework for understanding CJI organizational identity, processes, and roles. I was able to participate in and observe important role markers for volunteers as well as gain an understanding of how CJI communicates meaning prior to engaging in one-on-one interviews. This provided me with familiarity with the context and roles of volunteers, allowing interviews to focus more on the interpretive meaning for the volunteer, rather than descriptive details about programs.

At each observation session, participants were made aware of my role as researcher and provided informed consent to my presence. During the orientation and volunteer training

participants provided signed consent forms (Appendix F), whereas during the peer support night staff preferred to use vocal consent. During the sessions I used short hand notes to observe content (during the orientation and volunteer training the majority of the content was provided in the form of training manuals with which I was provided), interactions (in the form of communication/teaching styles and participant engagement) and atmosphere (including mapping out the setting of each event) (Kawulich, 2005). I conducted informal interviews with training participants during breaks, on which I took detailed notes. I also engaged in more reflexive note taking in the margins of my notebook and during breaks in sessions, noting what I was observing and where I could be more attentive (Kawulich, 2005).

As a participant researcher in CJI programing, I was aware that my presence could influence the natural progression of the training and orientation sessions. As such, I intended initially to maintain a passive role within the sessions in order to minimize interruption. However, in conversations with CJI staff about the format of the volunteer training and peer support, we recognized that not participating might detract from the atmosphere of the trainings and the development of intimacy and trust within the training participants. We concluded that to observe passively would have been awkward or disruptive. As theses trainings took place in a circle, it made sense for me to participate in discussions along with the other participants. In order to balance numbers, I was also encouraged to take place in the role plays and interactive activities that formed a core aspect of the training process.

Active participation complicated my notetaking attempts, as I was both trying to record participants comments and prepare my own responses but provided a more engaging experience. It allowed me to experience the trainings along with the volunteers, and thus to provide insight on the effects of using a reflective and interactive training style. Participating in this manner also

allowed me to build rapport with the participants and facilitated deeper conversations and informal discussions with volunteers during and after the trainings (Kawulich, 2005).

### **Data Analysis**

As is consistent with my theoretical approach, I used grounded theory and constructivist methodology to guide the analysis of my data. Beginning with the transcription process, I worked to familiarize myself with my data, allowing the participants meaning to be my focus. However, I was conscious throughout the process of my participation in the research and how, as discussed by Clarke (2005), as researchers, “we are, through the very act of research itself, directly in the situation we are studying” (p. 12). I recognized that my experience with restorative justice and re-entry support, my critical perspective on the criminal justice system, my role as participant (and conversant in interviews), and even my anabaptist faith, impacted what data stood out for me in the analysis. Researcher reflexivity provides an opportunity to be aware of how our personal experience and positionality impact the research process, including project selection, data collection, and analysis and works to establish the trustworthiness of the results. To assist with such reflexivity, I participated in peer debriefing regularly with my thesis committee and supervisor throughout the data collection and analysis process. They were instrumental in helping me crystalize key concepts, as well as opening up the data to other interpretations and avenues for investigation (Lietz et al., 2006).

### ***Transcription***

As per Cindy Bird (2005), transcription is an interpretive act that begins the formal process of analysis. When transcribing formal interviews from audio recordings, I chose to transcribe the conversation in whole, without cutting any content, even where it seemed irrelevant to the study at hand, in an attempt to create transcripts that were “faithful to the

original communicative event” (Bird, 2005, p. 238). Including subjects and stories that participants found important, even when they seemed unrelated to questions related to their volunteer engagement at CJI, allowed me to focus my analysis on what volunteers found to be important as opposed to what I, as researcher, was seeking to understand. At this stage, I maintained the grammatical errors and speech fillers (umm, you know, ah, et cetera) of the participants and included conventions to note tone, humour, and pauses that were obvious when listening to the recording.

When transcribing hand-written notes, including those from informal interviews, I chose to separate reflexive and analytic comments from observations, again with the intention of maintaining faithfulness to the original event. I recognized throughout this process the need to include clarifying context after the event and worked to develop deep descriptions from my memory of the experience. While these transcriptions were not ‘word for word’ replicas of the events in question, they provided more contextual details, such as tone, atmosphere, interactions, et cetera.

### ***Coding and Memos***

After transcribing the data, I began a process of “systemically coding observations and writing memos on emerging insights” (Tavory & Timmermans, 2014, p. 57). I used a combination of hand written memos and the computer software NVivo to facilitate coding at nodes, linking memos and interactive mapping of emerging themes. One of the challenges of case study analysis is the tendency to separate the different types of data and thus segment the analysis (Baxter & Jack, 2008). In order to prevent segmentation, I used a recursive process in which I cycled through each of the different interviews and observations at each stage of the analysis. By building familiarity with all the data prior to engaging in in-depth analysis of each

data point, I facilitated the mnemonic purpose of grounded theory methodology, which is to increase “the objects potential to resist our interpretations” (Tavory and Timmermans 2014, p. 53). I used this coding and memo writing process to develop theoretical concepts and points of tension in how volunteers discussed their experiences.

Additionally, I used an iterative approach that incorporated analytic memos to assist me in getting a holistic, instead of fragmented, understanding of volunteer engagement at CJI (Srivastava & Hopwood, 2009). Initial memos on each data point (interview transcript or observation) included a brief note on what seems to be most relevant or significant within the data after transcription. Once all the data was transcribed, I developed more detailed analytic memos for each data point which included a summary of topics and themes discussed, as well as initial connections or points of tension I observed between the data. I framed these analytical memos to answer the iterative questions developed by Prachi Srivastava and Nick Hopwood (2009: 78):

- 1) What are the data telling me?,
- 2) What is it I want to know?
- 3) What is the dialectical relationship between what the data are telling me and what I want to know?

To these I added the additional question of “Where do I see connections or tensions between this and other data?” in order to focus on the dialectical aspects within the data itself, not only my interpretation of it. At this point, I began to create more general memos on major themes within the data and points for investigation. Analytic memos were accompanied by reflexive memos on my personal connection and response to the emerging themes.

This memo writing formed the initial steps in the open coding process, which was supplemented by highlighting keywords, themes, and concepts in the data on a line-by-line basis. According to Clarke (2005), open coding facilitates “deconstructive analytic interpretation” as it



asserts that the “data are open to multiple simultaneous readings/codes” (p. 11). As such, during the open coding phase I named and tracked multiple emerging themes and concepts throughout the data. Tavory and Timmermans (2014) discuss open coding as a brainstorming session in which the researcher asks questions of the data. To facilitate this brainstorming, I supplemented my memo writing with discussions on the emerging themes with my supervisor and my community members.

As the relationship between different themes developed, I used the NVivo mapping and inquiry functions to explore axial codes. In this phase I systematically examined promising themes by exploring how they interact across the data (Tavory & Timmermans, 2014). I developed more substantial memos on defining themes and the relationships between them. I also made use of more structured peer debriefing in which my supervisor examined select transcripts that addressed key axial codes in order to provide an alternative perspective and additional dimensions for exploration (Clarke, 2005).

As the themes became more pronounced and defined, selective coding allowed me to engage with the themes on a more theoretical level (Tavory & Timmermans, 2014). As opposed to attempting to address a grand theory of volunteer engagement, I approached the selective coding process with the goal of providing a comprehensive map of the phenomenon of volunteer engagement in RJ at CJI (Clarke, 2005). While contextualizing the knowledge within this particular setting, I re-engaged the literature on volunteerism, restorative justice, and organization socialization to locate my findings within the theoretical field.

The core themes that emerged through axial and selective coding became the foundation of the analysis presented here. By allowing the analysis to build from the data, I maintained my constructivist focus on meanings expressed by the participants, as opposed to imposing a

theoretical lens on their discussions of meaning. This analysis is presented with the awareness that all knowledge is constructed through experience, and so while this analysis represents, to the best of my ability, my understanding of how volunteers discuss their engagement with RJ at CJI, it is not an overarching analysis.

## Chapter 4

### **Volunteers as advocates: The emergence of identity**

Volunteer engagement with Restorative Justice (RJ) encompasses both their actions of un-paid labor as well as their conceptions of the volunteer subject identity. As this thesis examines how volunteer's experience their engagement with RJ, it is essential to begin by examining the process through which they take on their volunteer identities. This chapter explores the emergence of the RJ volunteer subject at CJI and its links to an advocate identity. As this chapter illustrates, volunteers see themselves as both practitioners of RJ as well as advocates for advancing what they see as a more holistic model for community and social life. To that end their process of socialization at CJI works to both develop their skills and potential as volunteer facilitators of RJ processes as well as to create volunteer subjects that can competently advocate on behalf of RJ to the larger community.

Within RJ scholarship, practitioners and advocates are often seen as distinct identities. Margarita Zernova (2007), in particular, distinguishes between advocates as those who engage primarily in public and academic discourse on behalf of RJ, and practitioners who engage in the facilitation of RJ processes. However, as this chapter reveals, the unique positionality of volunteer practitioners reflects aspects of both of these identities so that the effective RJ volunteer, at least at CJI, emerges as both practitioner and advocate.

This chapter traces the shifts in subjectivity that volunteers experience in the process of taking on their volunteer identity. Drawing on the theory of liminality, in which anthropologist Victor Turner builds on Arnold van Gennep's theories on the rites of transition by focusing on the transformative nature of initiation rituals, this chapter illustrates the process through which individuals interested in volunteering with RJ engage in adopting new identities through a

transformative process of growth (Turner, 1994). As such, this chapter traces how individuals sense of self, emotional experience, and integrated world view shift as they negotiate their new understanding of RJ and a role as volunteer facilitator of RJ processes (Land, Rattray, & Vivian, 2014; Luhrmann, 2006). In the context of RJ volunteers at CJI, this process encompasses the initial attraction to RJ as an alternative, an intentionally lengthy discernment and training process, the adoption of RJ philosophy through experiencing RJ processes, and the emergence of an advocate identity.

To illustrate this process, this chapter highlights the Symbolic Interactionism (SI) concept of how identity and meaning are co-created through social interaction and personal rationalization (Prus, 1996). Core to SI is the notion that individuals are actively involved in shaping meaning. To that extent, when examining shifts in subjectivity, SI recognizes both the role of interaction and reflection in the process of adopting a new identity. In the tradition of constitutive theory, particularly as advanced by Patricia Ewick and Susan Silbey (1998) in *A Common Place of Law*, this chapter examines how it is through engaging in social practices that volunteers understand their subject identity in relation to RJ and, at the same time, constitute the meaning of RJ. As Naomi Mezey (2006) summarizes constitutive theory: “not only are society and its institutions collectively constructed by ‘us,’ but who we are and how we understand ourselves is always compromised by the social world we make.” The emergence of a ‘volunteer advocate identity’ among participants at CJI evidences this concept by illustrating how their subjectivity shifts alongside their understanding about RJ as they go through stages of the RJ training process. Their initial introduction, selection, training, and practicing constitute a meaning-making process that prepares individuals to become advocates on behalf of restorative justice.

Grounded in the narratives and experiences of volunteers collected and observed through interviews and participant observation, this chapter addresses the stages of the meaning-making process through which individuals adopt their volunteer identities at CJI. These stages are illustrated in the Diagram 1.1 below. Along with denoting the process towards adopting the volunteer advocate identity, the diagram also illustrates the opportunities for individuals to choose to disengage from this process and end their involvement with CJI. Throughout the chapter I discuss each of these stages in detail.



The chapter begins by analyzing how volunteers frame their introduction to RJ by expressing their attraction to its alternative framework. Next, I address the discernment stage, in which interested volunteers and CJI staff determine together through reflection and evaluation if an individual is a good candidate to volunteer with RJ. Because of the significance of this gatekeeping activity to the identity of RJ volunteer, I elaborate on two criteria volunteers frame as essential for RJ volunteers: the embodiment of nonjudgment and the performance of passion. I then touch briefly on the concept of committing to the volunteer role, but focus more on the importance of adopting RJ philosophy which requires volunteers to experience the RJ process. Finally, I address the centrality of the role of advocate to the volunteer identity that emerges.

### **Drawn to an ‘Alternative’**

Echoing throughout my interviews with and observations of volunteers, was the volunteers’ conviction that RJ is a better way of engaging in the world than the systems they have been exposed to previously. As this chapter illustrates, this belief in RJ as preferable alternative is central to the emergence of an advocate identity. As practitioners who are engaging in RJ without financial compensation or other incentives, the conviction many volunteers’ have of RJ as a promising alternative serves an important motivational role in their socialization process. In interviews, each volunteer with whom I spoke conveyed a common sense of discontent with what they see as the traditional means of addressing conflict and discussed approaching CJI out of an interest to reform the current systems or explore an alternative. As Jennifer, a staff member at CJI, stated, people are attracted to RJ because it offers “a different way” and “a better way” of dealing with conflict. Many individuals who seek out a volunteer role in RJ see this alternative concept as important enough to dedicate their time and labor without financial reimbursement. This belief in RJ as alternative was conveyed to me in a variety of discussions related to their engagement, but is best captured in their descriptions of the “hooking” aspect of initial interactions with RJ and CJI. That is, in their narratives of introduction to CJI, as well as in how they choose to introduce others to the concept, volunteers most clearly highlight the significance they place on presenting RJ as an alternative to the mainstream. As the following discussion illustrates, volunteers are less pronounced when discussing the nature of this alternative, though the following chapters address how RJ values of empowerment and inclusion are central to this concept.

Conversations with CJI staff and volunteers reveal three different avenues from which people come to volunteer at CJI.<sup>5</sup> A small portion of volunteers, usually students at the university or college level, approach CJI because they are interested in working within the criminal justice system, but want to do so in a more holistic or reforming manner. They see CJI as an access point to that field. Others have a personal connection with the criminal justice system and personal motivation for providing support for individuals who are victims or offenders. And yet others are interested in exploring alternative frameworks for addressing conflict and approach CJI through a desire to learn and gain skills. While the initial motivations for approaching CJI might differ, all interviewed volunteers note the allure of the alternative that drew them to this experience.

Regardless of their personal motivations for their initial involvement, almost all the volunteers with whom I spoke could recount in detail the interaction in which or the person from whom they first learned about the work of CJI. Their narratives of introduction to CJI include conferences or courses in which CJI staff or volunteers spoke about their organization, or family and friends that are current or past volunteers at CJI. Agatha, for example, is a volunteer who works with women in prison and was encouraged to volunteer with CJI after hearing stories from a close friend who is similarly engaged. By telling stories of their work, these “advocates,” as one staff member at CJI referred to them, illustrate the alternative model for conflict resolution that RJ provides and encourage people in their communities and social circles to “go see CJI.”

Volunteers’ reflections on these interactions illustrate how their introduction to RJ iterated an appreciation for its alternative nature. They note in detail their emotions of awe and

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<sup>5</sup> Because of the limitations of my data collection methods, I am unable to determine how representative those I spoke with are of the larger volunteer pool at CJI. However, their stories share similarities and echo the assumptions staff have of volunteer motivations.

fascination with what they saw as a new approach to dealing with conflict. For example, Erin, who volunteers with CJI to support women in prison and re-entry, described how when she learned about CJI in a university course she was fascinated by the “radicalness of it” and interested in volunteering there. Similarly, Natasha, who also volunteers with women in prison but learned about CJI through an Internet search, noted how the “uniquely engaged” ethos at CJI “peaked her interest.”

When Mariella, a student placement at CJI, shared her experience of learning about RJ in one of her college courses, she described how her emotions shifted from intrigued, to doubt, and finally to awe. She explained how when her professor first discussed RJ she found the concept “eye opening,” but then found herself wondering about its effectiveness. Then, when the professor showed a video of a mediation between a victim and offender, it brought her to tears. Specifically, she explained, the concept of reconciliation was an alternative that seemed almost unbelievable. Mariella’s emotional shifts illustrate both the allure of RJ, as well as how it was a foreign concept for her which she struggled to comprehend.

Complimenting her story, CJI staff members reflect often on how narratives are key to conveying the meaning of RJ, as facts alone do not allow for listeners to fully grasp the alternative nature and the potential within restorative justice. As Natasha’s experience illustrates, stories of RJ process have a way of invoking emotion and conveying the allure of the alternative model in ways that conveying RJ theory do not. For Natasha, while she was intrigued by the theory of RJ, it was only after witnessing a story of RJ take place that she felt the emotional impact.<sup>6</sup> This echoes SI theory, which denotes how individuals assign meaning for concepts

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<sup>6</sup> Witnessing the effects of RJ processes are also central to how volunteers frame the meaning of their work. Ch 2 discusses this concept in more detail.



through a process of witnessing others interact with those concepts followed by personal reflection (Blumer, 1969).

In a similar vein, when I asked her about her introduction to RJ, Amelia, a volunteer who currently supports women in prison and re-entry, shared a story of a study in which she participated on attitudes about sexual offense that encouraged participants to, as she described, “change your thoughtfulness”. She noted that prior to the study she had “a very strong black and white attitude about sexual offense” but through the process of writing a letter to a person who had offended sexually, her perceptions and expectations changed. She shared how:

I just remember how effective it was to think through, to hear the background information and really think through: “What the heck, this is really much more complicated than I thought it was.” And leave that study, and that kept, sort of, annoying my brain. That I went in with a very strong belief, with a line, and came out with no answers and just a sense that I had no idea what was happening in the world.

By using this story to explain her introduction to RJ, Amelia illustrated how for her RJ proposed such an alternative framework for engaging with crime that she found her entire world view altered. Through seeking to understand offender’s experiences, she was challenged to re-evaluate her beliefs and convictions around justice. While she did not become involved with CJI at that time, the concept of an alternative way of addressing conflict and offenders continued to nag at her. Years later, when a person close to her had an interaction with the criminal justice system, she recalled the existence of an alternative framework and sought out CJI to volunteer.

While each of these volunteers had a different narrative of introduction to CJI and RJ, their focus on how it was unique or alternative was directly linked to what they found alluring about volunteering at CJI. Amelia’s narrative in particular illustrates how finding meaning in RJ is a process that requires both conveyed information, self-reflection, and personal experience

because it advances an alternative framework. As Alan, a volunteer mediator with CJI, noted about his introduction to RJ:

I guess the possibilities got hold of me, of what is possible when you take this approach. [...] That's I think what, in many ways, CJI and restorative justice is all about, is looking at possibilities. [...] it hooks you, it hooked me.

He contrasted this framework of possibilities that for him describes RJ, with a philosophy of judgment that “don't look,” “don't see what's possible” and “don't see what the root causes” of conflict. Instead, RJ creates an alternative that is full of potential that “got hold” of him.

This concept of being captured, or gotten hold of, by the alternative framework of RJ is a common theme in volunteer narratives. While volunteers use a variety of terms to describe their initial interest in CJI or RJ, from more passive verbs such “intrigued” or “curious,” more often than not they refer to their initial attraction to RJ using metaphors related to being captured. Jennifer, who volunteered at CJI before becoming staff there, described her initial introduction to restorative justice by stating that “it grabbed me.” Other volunteers talk about how they “got hooked” during their first interaction with RJ. Valerie, a staff member at CJI, described this experience as how “once you taste the cool-aid, the RJ cool-aid, you never go back - one sip and then you're hooked.”

Volunteers explain this hooking experience by reflecting on how the values of RJ, including compassion, the focus on dialogue, and stakeholder involvement “resonated” with them or their previous experiences. For example, Irma, who has volunteered in a variety of capacities at CJI during the past 15 years, shared the following narrative about her introduction to RJ:

I think back when [CJI staff member] first came into my criminology class. How she presented CJI, what it was about, how it started, what they do. It got me right away. [...] I wanted to know more. And just the peaceful thinking and being compassionate and open to people. I was like, "I like this." Because I'm not into gossip and judgement, labels, and all that kinda thing, and how we deal with each other, I think makes what the world becomes. And at CJI how they teach you restorative justice, and, facing people you've harmed so that you can learn better next time. Taking ownership for things. [...] I was sold. I wanted to learn more. And as they kept teaching I wanted more.

This narrative illustrates how the contrasts between RJ, "as compassionate" and focused on resolution captured Irma's admiration. Because of the difference she saw in how CJI approached conflict and other models she had experienced, such as "judgment, labels and all that kinda thing," she was "sold" on this new process and interested in learning more. This desire to learn more illustrates how volunteers are not only hooked by RJ, but also active in the meaning making process.

As they approach the liminal process of shifting subjectivity from recipient of information about RJ towards volunteer advocate, they are, as constitutive criminology attests, both "coproducers and coproductions of their own and others' agency" (Henry & Milovanovic, 2000, p. 271). The agency of interested individuals and the 'hooking' power of RJ as an alternative are entangled in this initial attraction process because of how the RJ philosophy 'resonates' with interested volunteers' core values. As Jennifer explained it:

[RJ] is a more human way of dealing with the things that happen in our society than just excluding people and removing them, and just leaving them to do nothing. And so [...] I think you're attracted to it, at some level that's what draws you in [...] I think it touches people at some place inside of them that wants to pull them in more.

As this quote illustrates, Jennifer sees this more humanizing approach to conflict as what draws people to volunteer with RJ. Other volunteers point to a universal aspect of the values of RJ, noting how concepts like ‘loving your neighbor’ or seeing others first as human beings, as opposed to offenders or victims, are religious and spiritual values that resonate around the world. Paired with this notion is a lament that prevalent modes used to address conflict in our society do not adhere to these values. They are both ‘pulled’ by (acted upon) and ‘intrigued’ by (act towards) RJ concepts. The decision of interested individuals to engage in the liminal process through which they become RJ volunteers as a means to understand it more fully is a reflection of the discursive nature of subject identity.

That these values are perceived as both universal and alternative illustrates volunteers’ discontent with the models for addressing conflict in our society and their hopes for RJ as a redemptive alternative. As Minerva, a volunteer who supports women in prison, succinctly put it when her comparing her experience of the Canadian criminal justice system to other cultures and ways of living in the world, “the way we’re doing things is not the best way.” Similarly, Amelia noted how she likes to use “scare quotes” when she speaks of the justice system because “we don’t mean just,” and that restorative justice is instead “about what is hard and arguably about what is just.”

Seeing RJ as an alternative to other models for addressing crime is a central component within RJ literature. As John Braithwaite (2002) notes, “restorative justice is most commonly defined by what it is an alternative to” (p. 10). Contrasting RJ to criminal justice is a major focus of Howard Zehr, a prolific American RJ advocate who has been labeled the “grandfather” of RJ. In *Changing Lenses*, Zehr (2005) presents tables contrasting restorative and retributive models

for justice.<sup>7</sup> CJI uses a very similar table in their orientation booklet, highlighting the differences between restorative and retributive goals and models for engaging with crime.

This conviction that RJ stands as a holistic alternative to cultural or traditional means for addressing harm becomes a central aspect of how they communicate about RJ to others. As a conclusion to each interview, I asked volunteers to describe how they summarize their experience at CJI to others. Almost every response included the descriptor ‘alternative’, illustrating how central the concept of alternative is to their understanding of RJ, even if they struggle to define what exactly is alternative. For example, Mariella, provided the following hypothetical summary of her experience:

I would probably tell them that (long pause) ummm that it’s just (pause) an alternative approach to what society and media has (pause) has based our (pause). no that’s not the right wording. Just an alternative approach, in terms of not only just focusing on the offender (pause) but on the victims or the complainants as well, you need to know what their needs are to, so I would say probably that we’re here as a support system talking to both individuals from both parties and trying to find ways for them to communicate and move forward better. And you know, how to find that closure that is needed. Never forget obviously, but be able to move on.

As the lengthy and repetitive pauses illustrate, Mariella struggled to define the ‘alternative approach’ of RJ. She settled on how it provides support for individuals in conflict and highlighted the goal of movement, as an important aspect of the process. However, what this quote illustrates is her conviction in the “alternative” quality of RJ, regardless of the substance of that alternative.

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<sup>7</sup> Other RJ advocates, such as Kathleen Daly (2003) and Lode Walgrave (2004) are not as committed to this strict dichotomy, and even Zehr, in his later writings, has approached a more nuanced vision of RJ interacting within certain retributive settings (Zehr, 2002, 2010).

Similarly, Erin, a volunteer mediator with CJI, described her summary of RJ by stressing how it is a different way of experiencing and addressing conflict:

I'll say, there are alternative ways to have people address their conflict, deep seated toxic relationships, you know, embedded. That there are opportunities to give to people that they can experience it differently. So I say that CJI as an organization, particularly in mediation, but these other programs, of giving people opportunities to experience their conflict or challenges differently.

While Erin does not elaborate in this quotation on what makes RJ different, that it provides an alternative experience is key to how she summarizes her volunteer work to others. For her to describe RJ as different or alternative conveys that there is a dissatisfactory system that it stands in contrast to.

Being drawn to this alternative framework begins the sense-making process that those interested in volunteering at CJI engage in. That volunteers perceive RJ as a preferable alternative to other systems for addressing conflict is central to their experience with CJI, both as motivated and passionate practitioners and as eventual advocates for this alternative model. From an initial concept of RJ as alternative, through their experience volunteers develop a conviction in its alternative qualities (which are examined in more detail in the following two chapters) that translates into an advocate identity on its behalf.

### **Discerning One's Fit**

The act of being drawn to RJ as an alternative is but the initiation of the transformative process through which interested individuals adopt the identity of volunteer advocates. Not all those who are interested in RJ or CJI will become volunteers, for a variety of reasons. As volunteer narratives and observations illustrate, when individuals who are interested in volunteering with CJI encounter this alluring alternative, they begin an introductory process with

CJI, during which they, together with CJI staff, discern if their subjectivity fits within the confines of RJ at CJI. During this process, interested individuals learn more about the values of RJ, about CJI as an agency, about the volunteer roles, and about their abilities and limitations in adopting these values. At this stage of the process, individuals are in a position of flux, or a state of “liminality,” as they have not yet adopted the identity of volunteer with CJI but are engaged as trainees and participants in the discernment process that will determine if they will (or will be allowed to) become volunteer advocates. Their identity is such an anticipatory one, focused on the potential volunteer identity they might at some point adopt (Turner, 1994).

To ensure that volunteers are able to effectively facilitate restorative processes, CJI employs a screening and evaluation process. This process, which includes a mandatory agency orientation, 20-40 hours of program specific training (for which volunteers are financially responsible), and an interview with program leaders or the volunteer coordinator, is focused on discerning whether an interested individual has the qualities and skills to become not just a volunteer, but an advocate for RJ. As Valerie noted in her interview, volunteers “need to have the foundational pieces that put them in a place where they are going to be delivering restorative justice opportunities.” The “discernment process”, as Erin, who has been volunteering with CJI for over 10 years, describes this gatekeeping stage, allows volunteers to gain those foundational pieces as well as evaluate if they fit the role of an RJ volunteer at CJI.

In our conversation Erin noted how this stage of the liminal process has become more significant over the past ten years. She reflected on how “there seems to be a lot more deliberateness” as CJI is “more selective about who they are letting in.” For her, this change was about being able to better manage their volunteers and develop relationships with them. Similarly, a staff member who has been at the agency for some time noted how she is more

selective in who she chooses to volunteer in her program now than when she first began in her role. As such, the discernment process acts as a gatekeeping measure, or boundary work, that both restricts the pool of volunteers to those most qualified and functions as a means of instructing individuals who are engaged in this anticipatory stage about the values of RJ and co-constituting with them the meaning of RJ and the RJ volunteer identity that they might claim.

For CJI, the purpose of this discernment is twofold: it helps to select participants who are able to embody the values of RJ and thus function as effective and compassionate facilitators to RJ processes, as well as ensuring that participants are fully committed to their volunteer engagement. However, as opposed to simply evaluating interested parties through an application or exam format, this process pairs evaluation with self-reflection. By referring to it as a “discerning process” Erin conveys the participatory role potential volunteers play, along-side volunteer mentors and staff, in deciding who is a right fit for this role.

As one staff member noted, being able to practice RJ “takes an openness and an understanding and first of all you have to look at yourself [and ask] am I able to do this kind of work?” While staff and volunteers note that this discernment process includes evaluation by trainers and program staff, it also encourages self-evaluation for volunteers to determine if they are ready to engage with RJ in this way. Emma explained it as such:

We have lots of people that go through trainings and turn around and go, “you know what, I recognize that this is not for me. That the content of this information and what I am asked to do. I thought I was ready to do this work, and I’m so interested in this work. I’m not ready yet.”

As is evident in this statement, being drawn to this work is not the only requirement; participants also need to be ready to engage in it. For, as the following discussion and chapters illuminate, RJ



volunteer work will require them to engage with RJ philosophy by both facilitating RJ processes as well as learning to embody RJ values.<sup>8</sup> The discernment process allows individuals who are drawn to this alternative RJ framework to reflect on their ability to participate and allows them to gracefully, without any negative consequences, decide if they are actually a good fit. By including multiple steps in the process, CJI provides a substantial period of time during which interested individuals learn about and reflect on their abilities before committing to volunteer with the agency. As such, it provides space for, as Prus (1996) would describe it, the subprocesses of constructing and internalizing meaning through defining, considering, implementing, monitoring, and assessing RJ values.

Throughout my research, I spoke mostly with volunteers who had undergone this discernment process. A few of them participate as mentors and coaches during the trainings to assist new volunteers who are similarly discerning their fit with the organization. While meaning is continually evolving, these particular volunteer perspectives provide distinct insights on the initial discernment process of newer or incoming participants. As such, in interviews I asked volunteers to share characteristics they saw as central to being a volunteer with CJI. Their answers centered around variations of two qualities: ‘non-judgemental’ and ‘passionate’. Because of the significance of the discernment process to constituting the volunteer subject, I address these characteristics in turn in the following sub-sections and examine how the discernment process at CJI highlights these qualities.

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<sup>8</sup> Both the following chapters address in more detail the concepts and tensions embedded in embodying RJ values.

### *Embodying Nonjudgment*

Multiple volunteers highlighted being nonjudgmental, “or open minded,” as a prerequisite for engaging in this form of work. Amelia described this quality as “whatever the adjective version is of simply dealing with a human being as they are right now,” recognizing the connection between the values of RJ and the characteristics embodied by its practitioners. Similarly, Agatha, a volunteer who has supported women in prison for the past two years, noted how CJI volunteers have to embody “that value system of humanity first” and as such be accepting and nonjudgmental.

As is discussed in more detail in chapter six of this thesis, volunteers see nonjudgement as a core value of RJ and one of the key ways in which it is alternative. Volunteers prioritizing the ability to be non-judgemental illustrates the significance they place on being able to embody the values of RJ as practitioners. In the mediation setting, volunteers and staff talk about the importance of being neutral, or empathetic to both parties. They see the importance of creating a nonjudgmental process to facilitating restorative outcomes. Similarly, when supporting women in prison and re-entry, volunteers focus on how holding a nonjudgmental presence is essential for women to want to participate in the process.

The importance of being non-judgemental is a central focus of the CJI orientation session, making it one of the first characteristics volunteers associate with that role. At the orientation session I attended, the trainer provided extreme examples of crimes that participants might have perpetrated and encouraged interested individuals to reflect on whether they would be able to hear these stories without judgment before committing to volunteering with CJI. Instead of encouraging everyone to become involved, the opportunity was provided for individuals to quietly self-select out of the volunteer pool. By engaging in self-reflection,

volunteers chose if they wish to complete the liminal process and adopt a volunteer identity. At this stage, self-reflection works to narrow the pool of interested volunteers to those who feel they can embody this important RJ value.

Following the orientation, volunteers are encouraged to continue reflecting on their ability to sit without judgment within the 20-40 hours of program specific training. The format of these trainings, which prioritizes experiential learning through role plays and self-reflection, facilitates the ongoing discernment process. The process of learning about the values of RJ, practicing them, and then reflecting on the experience allows interested individuals to either internalize the meaning of RJ or to reflect on the challenges they experience in doing so and choose to terminate their involvement.

At the volunteer mediation training I attended, trainers stressed how participants need to feel that the mediator is impartial, or neutral, and nonjudgmental for vulnerable communication to happen. Volunteers were encouraged to think about how they could communicate this nonjudgmental aspect to participants in a variety of ways, including paying attention to their body language and avoiding the question why (because it can seem judgmental). Through role-playing mediations and other experiential learning techniques, training participants were able to practice these skills. Following each activity, training participants were encouraged to reflect together and with trainers on how they experienced those scenarios. For the role-play mediations, coaches were invited to observe the sessions and then facilitate discussions with the participants about their experience. Similarly, volunteers who volunteer with women in prison also reflected on how the role plays in their training helped them to evaluate and reflect on internal biases and how they were embodying nonjudgment and acceptance.

As one volunteer who participates in trainings as a coach and evaluator of newer volunteers noted, “there are people that just aren’t ready to do the training because they’re too directive, or they’re too much in a situation where they’re judging, or whatever the case is.” The role plays and facilitated reflection allows them to recognize this within themselves and to understand that volunteering with RJ might not be the right fit for them. The volunteer coordinator reflected in our conversation how these “red flags,” such as being too quick to judge, are then brought up with volunteers during their interview where they are encouraged to work on those qualities and then apply again to volunteer at a later date if they remain interested.

While nonjudgement is not the only value of RJ that volunteers are expected to embody in their practice, volunteers with which I spoke highlighted it as an essential quality to the volunteer identity. Chapter three addresses other ways in which volunteers embody RJ values, such as empowerment. However, as both of the following chapters illustrate in different ways, learning to embody these values is an ongoing process for volunteers. As such, during the discernment phase interested individuals are evaluated on their capacity to be nonjudgmental, and to be willing to engage in self-growth.

### ***Performing Passion***

Alongside a nonjudgmental demeanor, volunteers also noted the importance of being passionate to engaging in RJ work. As the following chapter discusses in more detail, volunteers are attracted to RJ because of their desire to effect change, both at individual and social levels. The performance of passion related to this desire for change is understood by volunteers to be a core characteristic of their identity. They speak of passion, or willingness to be present and involved, and commitment to RJ as vital to engaging in this form of work.

As an example, when I asked her what she thought was the most important characteristic of a CJI volunteer, Mariela emphatically declared “passion”. She followed this up by noting: “if you don’t have that, then don’t bother being here.” For Mariella, not only is visible passion a prerequisite for engaging in this work, it is also an act of embodying restorative justice. Toward the end of our conversation, she noted how she sees CJI embodying RJ values because “you can see the passion in people [...] the honesty and the want and the fight to really, to try to help and to make change within the community.” Similarly, Alan and Matthew, both volunteer mediators with RJ, focused on the willingness of volunteers to engage in a different way of being in the world. Alan noted the willingness to “be involved, to look beyond themselves, to have a desire to make a positive difference.” Matthew, instead, listed the willingness to “to work, or to be together, to have a buildable attitude.” What these concepts of passion or willingness hold in common is a desire to create and work for, or even fight, for positive changes in their communities.

Staff likewise see the importance of passion for change as a core characteristic of their volunteers. Jennifer described the volunteers as “people who want to change the world.” In our interview, Emma, another staff member, noted that when she is evaluating potential volunteers she is looking for volunteers who are not only able to embody the values of RJ but are also motivated to “create a restorative community.”

The discernment process works to select individuals who demonstrate passion about RJ through their commitment and perseverance. When discussing the role that paid trainings and orientation play in the volunteer process, Valerie focused on how they are designed to both develop skills relevant to their roles and to help volunteers “understand that there is a commitment involved.” Because of its lengthy nature, the process selects individuals who are

assertive about their desire to volunteer, as they are the ones responsible for reaching out to staff about trainings and other requirements. Unlike volunteer opportunities where one can simply show up, the discernment process to volunteer with CJI requires a significant upfront commitment.

Elena, who volunteers at CJI both with women in the prison and by providing mediations, reflected in our conversation on how this discernment process can create barriers for interested volunteers. While noting that she personally did not find these barriers a challenge, she sympathized with others for whom it might not be as easy. She stated the cost of training, even with the “half price” discount for students is “a lot of money to shell out” for a “mandatory training” and noted how she knows it “stops a lot of people from volunteering.” Additionally, she listed the “hoops you have to jump through” to volunteer in the prison, including “paper work”, and “fingerprints.” Interested volunteers encounter these barriers at the volunteer orientation, where the requirements, and cost, to volunteer with each program are listed in the manual and briefly addressed before the end of the evening.

By noting the extensive process up front, CJI encourages volunteers to reflect on the level of their passion and commitment to RJ, and, if they wish to do so, self-select out. As noted above, the goal of this process is to insure volunteers are both able and committed to facilitating RJ processes. However, recognizing that financial commitments are not always a good measure of commitment, CJI works to accommodate people as best they can by providing subsidies when asked. As Erin noted when discussing trainings in her interview:

There’s a commitment there, financially. I know that they’re mindful of that being a financial barrier for some people and I know that they make adjustments for those that might otherwise not be able to take, they’re inclusive that way. But for those that can

afford it there's a financial commitment which is important. But the time and the depth they go into, theory and practice, I think takes the role very seriously.

As Erin illustrates, the effect of asking for payment and a substantial time commitment for training conveys a level of gravity on the role of volunteer. While CJI works to address how this request might limit the participation of some individuals due to economic hardship, it remains a significant marker of volunteers' passion and willingness to participate in the restorative vision.

### **Committing to the Role**

If an individual successfully navigates the discernment process, they are then in a position to formally commit to the role of volunteer. In this instance, committing to the role of volunteer is distinctive from adopting the identity of volunteer advocate. While new volunteers have participated in trainings, reflection, and instruction about the nature of the volunteer identity, it has yet to emerge at this stage. As SI advances, meaning making and identity formation requires experiences. Thus, while individuals at this stage adopt the label of volunteer, they are still engaged in mid-transition, or as Turner names it, "liminality" while they begin the re-aggregation process through which they adopt their new subject identities (Turner, 1994). While they are committing to the role of volunteer, it is only in the experience of that role that the respective identity emerges.

In recognition that adopting this identity requires experiences, CJI requires a year-long commitment from new volunteers. In conversation with me, one staff member at CJI noted how this requirement distinguishes RJ volunteers from volunteers in other sectors, where retention is challenging and volunteering is "episodic." She focused on how commitment is not only helpful to organizational stability, but is integral to facilitating RJ, because participants "are depending on you." As Valerie noted in her conversation with me:

One of the biggest pieces is commitment. Because we are dealing with people and we are dealing with relationships - immersing ourselves in people's lives. People need to know and feel that they're trusted, they're respected, and that there's advocacy and there's dignity happening here.

As this quote illustrates, demonstrating commitment to this volunteer work has a direct impact on volunteers' ability to facilitate RJ. Because RJ is focused on dealing with people in conflict, Valerie sees demonstrating commitment as key to establish trustworthiness with participants. Similarly, volunteers who support women in prison talk about how a "commitment to be there every week" is essential because it takes time for participants to build trust with volunteers. By returning each week, volunteers demonstrate to program participants that they are trustworthy and will be there to support them in a meaningful way. The year-long commitment helps to create this sense of reliability for participants.

Additionally, the above quote illustrates how commitment is directly related to advocacy. Valerie links the notions of committing to the volunteer role to the act of advocating on behalf of the participants. In our conversation, Agatha also noted the link between commitment and advocacy on behalf of participants by noting how it is only after being present for at least a year can you learn enough about the justice issues at stake to advocate for change. Thus, by requiring commitment from their volunteers, CJI insures that they have enough knowledge and passion about RJ to effectively advocate for change.

### **Adopting an RJ Philosophy**

After committing to volunteering for a year, new volunteers adopt the RJ philosophy by experiencing restorative practices and participating in ongoing self-reflection and learning. In order to become effective advocates for RJ, volunteers note how they must first experience it and fully adopt the RJ philosophy. As one volunteer said, in order to practice RJ, they must "believe



in RJ all the time.” For her, this meant believing in the potential for a restorative outcome even when it was not simple or easy, and what allowed her to adopt that faith was witnessing the restorative process. Complementing this notion of needing to believe in RJ, another volunteer shared how she struggles with deciding if this volunteer work is the right fit for her because she is “not sure” about the restorative aspect. She noted how she needed to experience and learn more before she can believe her “volunteering is really important.”

Experiential learning, which begins during the training phase through role plays and continues to shape their volunteer experience when they participate in restorative process and ongoing trainings, provides opportunities for volunteers to internalize and adopt the RJ philosophy. One staff member shared the following story about how experiencing RJ is instrumental for volunteers to understand it fully:

Having people finish doing a mediation for the first time, or finish doing a group for the first time, or going into the prison, or seeing it, actually, this whole opportunity come to fruition [...] they come back and go: “oh my God. I never imagined it was gonna be like this!” [...] It’s almost like: “you weren’t stringing me along!” or “this really is what you told me it was gonna be.” [...] it’s come to the end of that point where they are having the value of what all this is. They are being able to see that transformation happen, and all of a sudden, those values, the understanding of restorative justice; ‘bing’ the lightbulb goes on.

As this story illustrates, this staff member believes that experiencing a restorative process is required to fully understanding the values and concepts imbedded in RJ. Volunteers likewise express how their passion for and understanding of RJ have deepened through their volunteer experiences. This is supported by SI theory that highlights the essential role social interaction plays in the creation of meaning, as well as constituted criminology which denotes how it is through engaging in practices that people engage and constitute meaning (Mezey, 2006).

Volunteers value this learning process and see it as both an essential aspect of engaging in this work and their identity as volunteers.<sup>9</sup> In conversations with me they highlighted how the ability to learn more within their volunteer positions is one of the aspects of volunteering at CJI that they most appreciated. As Alan noted in our interview when referring to mediations:

I would have to describe myself as a life long learner, a continuous learner, and, each one was, a learning experience that, yeah, it hooks you. It hooked me [...] So each one of these, again, was like a wonderful, a wonderful kinda interaction, [...] and you were learning from each one. That and the extra training and the talking with other mediators.

In this way Alan ties his identity as a life long learner to his volunteering at CJI because it allowed him to learn from each interaction. The potential for ongoing learning opportunities is what keeps him engaged in this work after nearly 20 years. His story illustrates the concept of SI, in which each interaction creates an additional layer of meaning for volunteers in how they understand and appreciate RJ.

The volunteer support structure at CJI facilitates reflection on these ongoing learnings through scheduling regular support nights, during which volunteers are able to reflect together on what they are learning and further develop their advocate identities. Volunteers appreciate ongoing trainings and support nights as places where they can reflect on what they are experiencing in their volunteer work and interact with a supportive network of people who have similar experiences. As Irma noted in conversation with me, volunteers use these spaces to express their insecurities and receive affirmation from their colleagues. She described the evenings as such:

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<sup>9</sup> Chapter 5 addresses in more detail volunteers' reflections on this learning process as an essential impact of the RJ process.

We all get together at CJI, they provide supper, which is very nice, and you sit and you either talk about it in a group or you have panel of people, but either way it's a time to listen and talk. And I think it's very helpful, [...] Hearing about some challenging cases and what mediators did in order to get through it, in order to help people, in order to kinda set the stage. [...] it just adds to your knowledge base, which is very helpful because the content, the people, personalities, conflict, so many things. Somethings are new information, some things you just at the time go, "oh yeah, that' a good piece to put together." So all of those are really important in order to be more successful and to help people more [...] also, there's self growth there too.

As Irma's comment illustrates, peer support nights are a structure at CJI in which volunteers gather over a meal to 'listen', 'talk,' and 'learn.' These learning opportunities use personal experiences to provide for growth and teaching, as well as assisting volunteers in constituting their understanding of RJ and their own identity as volunteer advocates.

Part of constituting the volunteer identity in this setting is the sense of camaraderie that develops among the volunteers. In the theory of liminality, Turner notes the significance of such camaraderie, which he labels as *communitas*, in facilitating the shifts in subjectivity during the period of "liminality" (Turner, 1977). For volunteers at CJI, this camaraderie intensifies the notion of alternativeness by focusing on how RJ volunteers and practitioners have a different philosophy from others. In their similarity to other volunteers, they see themselves are separate from, or alternative to, the mainstream. Volunteers express how coming to CJI is refreshing and affirming, because it is a community of individuals who believe in this alternative vision. One volunteer described coming to CJI support nights to me by comparing it to a church, in that it created a community that was centered around forgiveness. Similarly, Erin offered the following reflection in our conversation:

They feel like kindred spirits. Right? And this is such a different way of thinking about conflict [...] it's pretty isolating. So even more I appreciate that there are kindred spirits. There are people that get it. It's wonderful.

By focusing on the sense of solidarity with CJI volunteers and staff, Erin illuminates how the concept of RJ as alternative shapes her volunteer experience, as well as her involvements outside of CJI. Through her volunteer work and exposure to RJ she has adopted a framework that she sees as different and isolating from those she interacts with in other spaces. By coming to CJI trainings and learnings, she is able to find support in adopting this contrary identity. Likewise, Matthew described how coming to CJI events and trainings reinforces for him that "it is okay to believe that [RJ philosophy] because there's other people who believe that." By noting the support they received from their CJI community, volunteers illustrate how the emerging identity of volunteer advocate for RJ is positioned as alternative to the mainstream.

As these narratives reflect, through witnessing and learning about RJ, volunteers find themselves adopting the alternative philosophy of RJ that initially drew them to this work. Through experiential learning and reflection with other volunteers this philosophy takes on meaning in their work and in their lives more broadly. Alternatively, they struggle sometimes to adopt the RJ philosophy and thus struggle to find meaning in their work or advocate on behalf of RJ.

### **Becoming an Advocate**

For those who do adopt the RJ philosophy, volunteers' practice of RJ becomes linked to their identities as advocates for the system. Similar to the 'advocates' who first introduced them to CJI, volunteers serve as advocates for RJ in their own communities. As Elena, a woman who volunteers at CJI in a variety of roles, noted in our conversation:

When I think about [...] how restorative justice practices are ideals [that] are needed [...] that's what keeps me going. And the fact that hopefully I can still [...] run groups and do mediations [...] and inform the community that this is working and that [it's] often better than the court system or often better than calling the police or something. [...] So I think that kind faith and sticking to it is all I can do.

Because of her faith in RJ, Elena is similarly committed to continuing to facilitate RJ processes and advocate on behalf of RJ to the broader community. For her, these two actions are linked. In “sticking to” her “faith” in RJ she sees her role as both to facilitate RJ process and “inform the community” about the RJ alternative.

Volunteers express how in telling stories of their experience to their friends and community they are able to encourage people in their lives to open up to this different philosophy. In conversation with me, Erin and Natasha both shared how when they talk people about their volunteer work in prisons, they attempt to change people's assumptions about offenders. Similarly, Minerva said that one of her most memorable moments of her volunteer experience was an opportunity in which she was able to share about that experience with others.

Other volunteers note how they are more assertive about advocating for RJ in potentially hostile environments. As Amelia shared, she is more willing to “take up the fight” with people about justice issues, such as challenging people who are “tough on crime” to think about alternative solutions. One volunteer, who works in dispute resolution outside of her volunteer commitment, noted how she is actively “trying to influence” policies at her work despite significant resistance, and that CJI staff and community are extremely supportive of her doing this advocacy work.

In discussing advocacy, volunteers tie the advocate identity to that of being a successful RJ volunteer. For example, Amelia described another volunteer that she admires at CJI as the

“biggest hardest non-activist activist probably in the universe” because she paired her volunteer work at CJI with a commitment to sharing stories of her work with her community. Sharing stories about RJ is seen as a crucial marker of the successful volunteer identity, along with facilitating restorative processes.

In a similar fashion, volunteers who are involved in encouraging participants to engage in RJ process often talk about this work as “selling RJ” to those individuals. At the volunteer support night I attended, almost half an hour was dedicated to discussing how volunteers could engage in this advocating process. While volunteers admitted that it was not always possible to convince individuals to participate, they saw recruiting participants as a part of their role.<sup>10</sup> Likewise, in our conversation, Irma noted that CJI personnel often complement her on her persistence in advocating about the RJ process with participants.

For volunteers this advocacy is centered around expanding the alternative vision of RJ in their community as well as providing RJ to more participants.<sup>11</sup> In that, it correlates directly with CJI’s current five-year strategic plan that hopes to bring about a restorative region. This plan aims to both increase the role of RJ in the region as well as CJI’s presence as facilitators of RJ in the community.

This hope for growth of RJ is shared by its advocate volunteers. In our conversation, Alan shared the following dream for RJ in this region:

So there’s all sorts of potential here. It’s like how do we, how do we light the fuse? How do we, I mean it’s happening now, but, I want to see from a continuous stand point, I would like to see a quantum leap. I would like to see logarithmic growth, not low slopped straight line, [...]. It’s like, okay we’ve had a long enough lag phase, now we need the logarithmic growth,

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<sup>10</sup> Ch 3 analysis how volunteers negotiate this concept of recruiting participants in more detail.

<sup>11</sup> Ch 2 discusses in more detail how volunteers focus on both participant and community change as meaningful impacts of RJ.

so, and that is still my hope and a good reason why I'm still involved. I want to be a part of the solution. Not part of the problem.

Alan is passionate about expanding RJ in this region and sees this as a part of his role as volunteer. After almost 20 years of volunteering, he is still committed to bringing about this change. Other volunteers with whom I spoke, even those just beginning their volunteer engagement at CJI, are similarly committed to advocacy on behalf of RJ. Simply by agreeing to participate in my research, they illustrate a commitment to RJ and a desire to participate in advancing and supporting its growth.

## **Discussion**

This chapter documents the process through which the advocate identity emerges for volunteers at CJI. As they engage in this process, individuals who choose to adopt the identity of volunteer with CJI, experience shifts in subjectivity that reflect their deepening understanding of RJ. As noted, the process begins with the recognition of RJ as an attractive alternative that is contrasted to other philosophies and models. Following that there is a process of discernment in which interested individuals are both encouraged to reflect on, and are evaluated on, their ability to embody key RJ values and perform their passion for this alternative. At this stage interested individuals commit to a volunteer role, and then begin to adopt an RJ philosophy more fully through witnessing RJ processes and further reflection with other volunteers. Finally, volunteers with RJ become advocates for this alternative philosophy and spread the vision of RJ into their communities and social networks. Integrated throughout the processes is a focus on self-reflection and support from like-minded individuals. Where volunteers do not find themselves amenable to this process, they are provided with opportunities to leave prior to committing to the volunteer role.

This process parallels Prus's (1996) discussion of the general social process of “being involved,” in which initial involvement moves from ‘seekership’ towards internalizing perspectives, achieving identity, accomplishing activities, making commitments, and developing relationships. However, because of the focus on self-reflection and discernment, it illustrates in more depth the role of participatory sense-making in this process. The emphasis on experiential learning and self-reflection illustrate how volunteers co-constitute the meaning of RJ in the transformative process through which they adopt their volunteer identities.

Additionally, the emphasis on experiential learning prologues the state of “liminality” and transformation until volunteers have engaged in facilitating RJ processes. For, as educational theorist Ray Land, Julie Rattray and Peter Vivian (2014) attest, the liminal process requires engagement, not merely observation, with new concepts in order to understand and reconstitute the self. As such, the public commitment to the role of RJ does not necessarily signify a final shift in subjectivity, but rather an ongoing evolution in how volunteers understand their identity in regards to their participation with RJ. In their reflections, volunteers focus on how it is through engaging in RJ that they learn to understand RJ and their volunteer advocate identity within RJ emerges.

That the emergent identity is one of advocate, not only volunteer facilitator, attests to the transformative nature of this liminal experience. As such, this process resonates with liminal experiences of religious conversion, as individuals engage in adopting an alternative philosophy and consequently an identity that includes advocating for that philosophy to others (Clements, 1976). Similarly, as CJI volunteers engage in the process of becoming a volunteer, they note the adoption of a new philosophical outlook and a resulting desire to advocate on behalf of RJ. Some scholars, such as Mark Umbreit and Marilyn Peterson Armour (2010), have postulated there are



religious and spiritual undertones of restorative justice. However, through my research it became clear that while some volunteers do associate their work with their religious convictions, the majority were adamantly against using religious language to describe their experience at CJI, and CJI as an organization maintains a non-religious identity. As such, while at CJI the process through which individuals adopt a volunteer advocate identity is defined within secular terms, it is nonetheless a transformative experience that involves an extensive shift in both the individual's ontology and subjectivity, resulting in a desire to invite others to participate in this transformative experience.

This chapter's analysis of the process through which those who engage in RJ as volunteers take on such volunteer identities exposes the central role understanding and finding meaning within RJ philosophy play in engaging in an RJ process. While this analysis is focused on the volunteers engaging in RJ at CJI, it demonstrates how, when RJ is framed as an alternative to criminal justice or other forms of conflict resolution, individuals new to this philosophy require both experiences of RJ as well as opportunities for personal reflection to begin the process of sense-making. Additionally, it presents a framework through which individuals, once introduced to RJ, may come to understand, participate, or even wish to advocate on behalf of this alternative.

## Chapter 5

### **Impacts of RJ: Volunteer Narratives of Motivations, Meanings and Values**

Restorative Justice (RJ) is a value-based reform movement. As noted in the previous chapter, volunteers' engagement with RJ is shaped by their adoption of RJ philosophy and values. Thus, throughout my research I asked volunteers questions about what is meaningful or important in their engagement with CJI, what motivates their engagement, and what they saw as the values of RJ. In response to these three different areas of questioning, volunteers would often shift to talking about a common aspect: the effects they see their involvement having, both tangible and ideological. This chapter explores how volunteers articulate and frame the 'impacts' the language they use to describe these outcomes, of their involvement in RJ.

Guided by grounded theory situational analysis, as proposed by Adele Clarke (2005), I use volunteer responses and narratives to map out analytical themes around how volunteers express meaning in regards to their program participation.<sup>12</sup> Given the premise of Social Interactionism that meanings are articulated and developed through social interaction, this analysis reflects on the ways in which volunteers' perceptions of 'impact' are grounded with the organizational context at CJI. As such, this analysis draws from sense-making traditions in organizational sociology to explore how the meanings articulated by volunteers reflect or contradict organizational messaging (Kramer, 2010). To that extent, this chapter illustrates how volunteers' expressions of meaning resonate through both their personal experiences and their understanding of the goals and vision of CJI and RJ. Specifically, it highlights how, in their discussions of impacts, volunteers illustrate the interconnectedness of meaning, motives, and values while reflecting on their volunteer experience. These conceptions of impact are also

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<sup>12</sup> As such, this paper builds on the procedural analysis presented in the previous chapter by focusing on the constituted meaning of this work for volunteers, as opposed to simply the process of involvement.

reflected in how volunteers define restorative justice, along with its inherent values, and how they communicate about their volunteer experience to others. It illustrates the concepts of constituted criminology by noting how, for volunteers, RJ is a product of the “reciprocal nature of meaning-making” for as they engage in this work, volunteers create meaning *in their* experience, which, in turn, informs how they conceive *of* RJ itself (Mezey, 2006, p. 149).

That volunteers focus their discussions of meaning on the perceived impacts of the RJ process, as opposed to the process itself, sheds insights on a major theme within RJ scholarship. A major question within RJ scholarship is that of seeing RJ as a reform movement that is either primarily democratic (and thus should prioritize procedural issues) or primarily restorative (and thus should prioritize restorative outcomes). In light of this debate, the volunteer reflections complement Katherine Doolin's (2007) notion that what distinguishes RJ from other approaches to harm or crime is its restorative outcomes. Doolin argues that when RJ is defined strictly in terms of a democratic inclusionary process, it risks losing its restorative focus. In this she echoes other scholars, such as Braithwaite and Strang (2001) who assert that RJ be evaluated both procedurally and principally. By focusing on impact, volunteers illustrate that, at least for them, restorative outcomes are just as meaningful as the process.<sup>13</sup>

In analyzing volunteers' conceptions of outcomes, the structure of this chapter reflects, as closely as possible, volunteers' expressions of meaning. I begin my analysis with a more general discussion of how volunteers frame their engagement with RJ in terms of the larger category of 'impact.' Then, as volunteers describe three spheres of impact related to their work, I address each sphere in more detail: participant, social, and personal. As participant impact was

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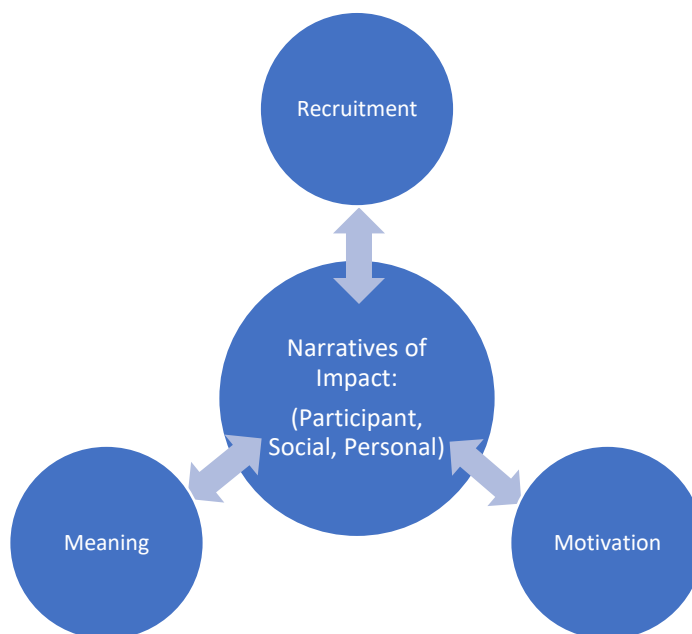
<sup>13</sup> Ch 6 addresses in more detail how volunteers discuss and see value in the RJ processes as well by addressing its embedded power dynamics.

communicated most strongly in volunteer narratives, it receives the most space in this analysis. However, each of the impact spheres was framed by volunteers as providing meaning to their engagement. In addressing each sphere of impact, I explore the scope of how volunteers frame the outcomes of their work, as well as organizational messaging. Thus, in each section, I highlight volunteer language and direct quotations that illustrate the connections between meaning, values, and motivations as well as observations from trainings that reflect similar or contradicting notions in organizational messaging. Finally, I conclude with a discussion on how volunteers' notions of impact illustrate the process of sense-making that is negotiated by personal experience and organizational messaging.

### **Narratives of Impact**

All volunteer narratives around impact focus on the potential for creating change. Whether they focus on the honor of witnessing change in participants lives, the cultural or practical impact that CJI is making in their community, or the impact that being involved in RJ has had on their lives, the volunteers express that the opportunity for change is what makes this work valuable and motivating for them. As Valerie, a staff member at CJI shared with me, “they want to see change.”

Volunteers note the importance of having a meaningful or valuable impact as what makes engaging in RJ different than other forms of volunteer work. As such, these stories of impact form a core part of how they talk about their experience with others, how new volunteers learn about and get involved in their work, and how volunteers stay motivated when they experience challenges in their work. Similarly, the focus on impact is reflected within organizational culture and messaging. This relationship is illustrated in Diagram 2.1.



As touched on in the first chapter of this thesis, stories of RJ in practice translate RJ theory into meaningful experiences for volunteers. Aly, a mediation volunteer who primarily works with young offender cases, illustrated this process during her interview with me. She talked about her personal journey from learning about RJ outcomes, to witnessing participant impacts, to personal motivation to engage in RJ work. In her words, “I saw the research, and I saw what restorative justice can mean for people, and I just, I thought if they need volunteers to get this off the ground, then this is where I want to be.”

Similarly, Elena, a former volunteer who recently transitioned to a role on CJI staff, discussed how other volunteer and staff examples of “outcomes” are what she initially loved about RJ and what drew her to become more involved. Building on this concept, another volunteer noted how she uses stories of impacts to convince people about the merits of RJ:

What, one of the big things that I share with people to change their minds, is the outcome of the restorative justice process. That when we incarcerate people, we perpetuate further harm. We often generate similar, or more severe offenses.

For each of these volunteers, stories of impact make RJ meaningful and accessible. Volunteer narratives illustrate how hearing and sharing these stories creates an entry point into RJ.

Such stories also provide the inspiration to remain engaged. Alan, who has been volunteering with CJI for over 15 years, framed the concept of impact as motivational:

It allows everybody here to feel that they're part of something big, that they're doing as a team, you know, very important good work. They're making a difference. Because I'm sure a lot of them could go elsewhere [...] so I think there has to be a belief component to say, that, you know, what I'm doing is more important.

In this quote Alan describes how conceptualizing this work as impactful, or 'making a difference,' makes it an enticing option for volunteers to dedicate their time to. He notes that there are other ways that people could be spending their time, and so to decide to commit to this work they must have faith that they are doing something important. As addressed in the first chapter of this work, adopting the philosophy of RJ, or "believing in RJ" allows volunteers to find meaning in their engagement.

Other volunteers described how this notion of impact has a motivating influence on their engagement when noting the many obstacles (such as balancing home life and work) they overcome in committing to this volunteer work, which can be time consuming and challenging. Knowing that they are making a difference is how volunteers justify continuing their volunteer work on days when they struggle with motivation. Amelia, who supports women in prison, talked about participant impact as building a track record of evidence that "just putting my body in that building every week made a difference to people" in order to maintain motivation for

participating. Isha, who came close to giving up her volunteer work when her life got hectic, noted that reflecting on the personal impact her volunteer work had on her life was what kept her involved. Similarly, Elena, reflected on how the social impact, being able to be a part of building community support for RJ through mediations and community education, keeps her engaged and maintains her faith in RJ when she struggles with difficult mediations.

As these examples illustrate, the notion of impact plays an important role in how volunteers understand their experience. While some volunteers focus on participant impact, some spend more time discussing the impact that this work has on their lives personally, and others note meaningfulness in the impact their work has on the community. Together, these three spheres of impact illustrate volunteers' notions of 'doing good' and 'making a difference' through their volunteer commitment, as well as how they conceive of restorative justice. Integrated throughout is the overlapping relationship between their experience of what is meaningful *in* RJ and what volunteers see as the meaning *of* RJ. To illustrate this concept further, I first analyze how volunteers frame each sphere of impact and then pull their narratives together into a discussion on how impact acts a lens through which to observe the ongoing meaning-making process volunteers engage in.

### **Participant Impact**

The first sphere of impact touched on by volunteers relates to the participants who engage in RJ programming. As noted in the background chapter, the majority of research on RJ addresses its impact on program participants, particularly victims and offenders. This is also a location where many volunteers begin their discussion around meaningful or motivational aspects of their engagement.

In conversations with me, as well as in group discussions observed during volunteer trainings and support nights, volunteers highlight how creating positive outcomes for participants is both the goal of restorative justice as well as the ‘most meaningful aspect’ of their engagement. Minerva, a volunteer who works with women in prison, discussed the impact her work has on the women she visits, stating “ that’s the most meaningful aspect, right? That we’re making a positive impact on their life.” Similarly, Valerie, who engages in mediation work and offender support, talked about the meaningfulness of seeing a difference in peoples lives:

You go and you see that significant difference, it feeds the soul. It feeds the soul and it’s significant to somebody. It’s like filling up your cup with happiness.

Both of these examples illustrate how by observing participant impact, volunteers find meaning and significance in their work. While their volunteer work is substantially different, they both find that creating positive change in participants lives invigorates their experience.

Volunteers frame the impact of their engagement on the program participants in a variety of ways. While those involved in prison support and re-entry highlight different qualities than those who facilitate mediation, volunteers involved in both these programs focus on witnessing change in participants lives. These changes include resolving conflicts, emotional healing, and empowering participants. Volunteers who lead mediation discuss witnessing both ‘transformation’ and ‘movement’ in participants emotional states around conflicts. Similarly, volunteers supporting women in prison and re-entry talk about the empowerment and humanizing effects of their work for participants. By witnessing change in others, volunteers find meaning in their volunteer work and in their lives more generally.



### ***Transformation and Movement***

Participant transformation and movement forms a core component of how volunteers who facilitate mediations at CJI understand the impact and meaning of their work. Movement, a concept used by multiple volunteers, explores the emotional state of the participants before and after engaging in RJ programming. Volunteers talk about both the magical, “ah ha,” moments in which conflicts are resolved and people are healed and also about participants taking small steps as they ‘move towards healing.’ Discussing movement allows volunteers to explore the impact of their work across a variety of situations, for while volunteers might not see participants reach a clear resolution, they focus on the ability to provide opportunities for growth or movement towards that resolution.

In discussing the transformation that occurs during a conflict, volunteers frame the experience using mystical language. When introducing themselves and their reason for being involved in RJ work at a support group for volunteers that I observed, volunteers used vivid ‘magic’ metaphors to describe the experience of RJ. This included describing the transformative moment in a mediation as “pure magic, and “an artist painting a true painting,” or “watching a miracle unfold.” In conversations with me, volunteers continued to use magical metaphors to describe the impact of RJ on participants. Alan, a long-time CJI volunteer, described the “ah ha moment” in some mediations, where participants go from a place of conflict towards understanding and agreement as “almost like magic.” Valerie, likewise, talked about RJ, through whichever program volunteers engage with it, as “a miracle in the workings.”

It is important to note that when volunteers use these magical metaphors, they do not describe their role as working or creating the magic. Instead, they take more passive roles and talk about making space for the magic and observing or witnessing it transform the lives and

conflicts of participants. At the aforementioned support group, volunteers who mentioned magic talked about the honor or privilege of “watching a miracle unfold” or “seeing so many miracles.”

In our conversation, Adrianna, another long-term volunteer mediator with CJI, talked about the magic of mediation as an opportunity to create movement:

Not like magic in the sense that suddenly I forgive you and suddenly everything’s shiny and happy. But it moves people along. It puts them in a different place than when the first sat at the table.

This definition of the magic of mediation is also reflected in how volunteers frame rewarding or meaningful aspects of the RJ process. Irma, who has been volunteering with CJI for over 10 years, framed mediation work as simply being there “to give them [the participants] the space and kind of give them the process” to move from conflict towards resolution. She followed this up by noting that what she finds rewarding and meaningful is “to *see* that someone else is no longer hurting and is towards the path of healing and peace” [emphasis added]. Similar to those who talk about magic, Irma noted that the meaning is in observing, “seeing” movement happen as opposed to engineering it.

This focus on allowing space for movement connects with how some volunteers frame restorative justice more broadly. Adrianna, when asked to explain what the RJ means to her, clarified that “I don’t see restore as an absolute, it’s a transition, [...] it’s that moving along with something.” Similarly, Valerie explained that restorative justice “looks at how do we help people to move forward, to provide better, safer, healthier choices.”

The centrality of this concept of movement to how volunteers understand RJ is also visible in how volunteers discuss their frustrations when participants are not willing to engage in the process. More details about the tensions they note around movement will be discussed in the

following chapter on embodying RJ values. However, I reference this phenomenon here as it in noting their frustrations with participants unwilling to engage in movement, volunteers highlight the centrality of this concept within their understanding of RJ goals and values.

Unlike the other ways in which volunteers frame meaningful impacts of their work discussed below, transformation and movement do not feature in CJI public messaging on the goals and value of RJ. While CJI staff with whom I met discuss the values of movement and transformation, CJI pamphlets, website, and reports focus instead on resolving conflict as the outcome of mediations. This contradiction between how volunteers discuss the impact of mediations and how CJI presents outcomes to the larger public illustrates hidden tensions in the interplay between volunteers framing of meaning and organizational goals.<sup>14</sup>

### ***Empowerment***

A second component of how volunteers frame participant impact has to do with empowerment. Empowerment, as discussed in terms of participant impact, is distinctive from volunteer notions of transformation or movement. While mediators primarily use movement is primarily used by mediators to address the impact of a mediation session on a particular conflict, empowerment applies more broadly towards the participants' sense of self. In that sense, volunteers frame empowerment as a shift in how participants see themselves in the world and their ability to deal with future conflicts.

Unlike transformation and movement discussed above, empowerment terminology is key to how CJI frames the goals of RJ to the public. This is consistent with RJ literature more broadly, as various RJ scholars and theorists note empowerment as fundamental to RJ processes

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<sup>14</sup> Chapter 6 provides more discussion of tensions between volunteer perceptions and organizational structures and goals.

(Braithwaite, 2003a; Johnstone & Van Ness, 2007; Sawin & Zehr, 2007).<sup>15</sup> CJI annual reports and pamphlets discuss how RJ ‘enables people to restore relationships,’ or ‘equips community members to handle conflict.’ Similarly, empowerment also forms a substantial component of volunteer training curriculum. In the curriculum for a volunteer training that I attended, the following definition was provided:

Empowerment is the cultivation of an individual’s sense of their value, strength and capacity to make decisions and handle life’s problems (sometimes called a shift from weakness to strength).<sup>16</sup>

This definition is consistent with my observations of how volunteers discuss empowerment within participant impact, illustrating how volunteer narratives and experiences can be shaped by organizational definitions. This observation resonates with sense-making theories of organizational socialization in which the meaning of a process or event for individuals is developed or articulated through ongoing social interactions within the organization (Kramer, 2010). Further illustrating the interplay between organizational messaging and concepts of meaning, some volunteers use empowerment language to frame their definitions of RJ, similarly to how other volunteers frame their definitions in terms of movement.

The following definitions of RJ provided by CJI volunteers in interviews with me illustrate how concepts of empowerment play into their understanding of RJ. In our conversation, Agatha, a volunteer with women in prison, defined RJ as restoring people’s faith in themselves. In her definition, she highlighted how “restoring a person’s vision of themselves” includes recognizing wrongdoings, but also coming to “a healthier perspective on who they are and what

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<sup>15</sup> Ch 6 addresses this concept of empowerment in more detail.

<sup>16</sup> This definition is an almost exact replica of Bush and Folger’s (1994) definition of empowerment in *The Promise of Mediation*, which reads: “In it’s simplest terms, empowerment means the restoration to individuals of a sense of their own value and strength and their own capacity to handle life’s problems” (p. 2).

the world can provide.” In this definition, she illustrates how the values of empowerment and responsibility are linked in her understanding of RJ’s meaning.

Similarly, Adrianna, a mediator with CJI, also noted a connection between taking responsibility and empowerment within RJ. She noted that RJ “gives people an opportunity to be their best self” because it “gives people an opportunity to say sorry.” For her, this opportunity with RJ to own one’s mistakes and “say sorry in an authentic way” is a meaningful distinction between RJ and other models of addressing wrongdoing or conflict. Further, Adrianna discussed how the act of forgiving an offender can be empowering. In her words, participating in restorative justice as victim or offender “has a huge impact, it allows us to be different in the world.”

In a similar way, Matthew addressed the empowering impact of coming to a resolution during a mediation:

If it’s a mediation that is helpful [...] then people can come away from that place being built up in themselves [...] As a mediator you get to be part of that, that gives these people, they believe, they see a light at the end of the tunnel. And that’s buildable. Like, this influences lives.

As illustrated in Matthews’ comments above, in their discussions of empowerment, volunteers often describe their role as more active than the passive act of witnessing transformation and movement. For example, Elena, who volunteers in both programs I studied at CJI, framed the acts of engaging in mediation and supporting women in prison as empowering to participants because she is advocating for and supporting them:

I mean all of it kinda has the same outcome when you’re dealing with marginalized people like that [...] when they finally see that there’s one person or one group that’s

sticking up for them, [...] trying to help them move on in their journey of life and not just put them down you know, ignore them because of the mistakes that they did.

In contrast to how volunteers discuss movement and transformation, Elena's reflection on empowerment highlights how it is the participants who *see* within the dynamics of empowerment, as opposed the volunteer. Through "sticking up" for and seeking to help participants, volunteers understand empowerment in RJ as an active role in which they participate, as opposed to witnessing movement in which they are passive observers of the participants progress.

One active way in which volunteers discuss engaging in empowerment is through relationship building. Relationship building plays across all areas of how volunteers discuss their engagement at CJI. From a complement describing staff as "relational", to a volunteer describing CJI's organizational culture as "very much about building relationships," to relationship building being one of the key learning opportunities Mariella (a student doing her volunteer placement) noted taking away from her experience, relationship language is imbedded in CJI culture. That building relationships with participants forms a core aspect of how volunteers discuss the impact and purpose of their engagement is yet another example of the influence of organizational context on conceptions of meaning.

In explaining what is involved in her volunteer engagement supporting women in prison and re-entry, Natasha commented that "we really just try to get to know the women that are there and form relationships with them." She later noted that the goal of these relationships is support and empowerment. In her words, they build relationships to "support them [the women in prison] while they are there and if they figure out how they are going to return to the community." She described her relationship with a woman in re-entry as "an emotional support," providing

encouragement, someone to talk to, and guidance “no matter what.” Similarly, Elena talked about her work as empowering participants by “helping women learn tools to repair their own lives” by building relationships. When discussing how she explains this volunteer work to others, she said she highlights how they are “providing support for the women that aren’t even going anywhere, just being a night out for them, and then helping those that are reintegrating back into the community.”

For each of the volunteers discussed here, the key aspect of these relationships is the supportive role that they play in empowering program participants. However, volunteers also frame these supportive relationships as providing a ‘night out’ for the women in prisons. Volunteers note that their ability to provide a measure of fun and normality to the women’s experience in prison is core to how they empower the participants. Erin, a volunteer who supports women in re-entry, described her role to me as “a listener, a question asker, and a joker.” For Erin, building empowering relationships involves walking alongside the women as a stable example, but also “just having fun together, and, being really flexible and open to talk about whatever.” In our conversation, she summarized her role by explaining that “it’s all just about relating well and having fun.”

Along with building relationships and providing examples of successful conflict resolution, a final aspect of empowerment that volunteers highlight is the development of tangible skills. In conversation with me, staff member discussed how focusing on creating opportunities to build empathy can make a ‘failed mediation’ meaningful for a volunteer. Similarly, CJI public materials highlight the development of communication and conflict resolution skills for program participants. While volunteers did not detail specific skills in their

conversations with me, they did stress the impact that participating in RJ program has on participants abilities to engage with future conflicts and relationships more successful.

### *Noting Appreciation*

As noted, volunteers engaging in RJ work in this setting commonly frame meaning in terms of witnessing change in participants lived experience . However, volunteers who are not privy to witnessing obvious changes in lived experience, such as when they support women in prison, frame participant impact differently. These volunteers discuss the sphere of participant impact in terms of the appreciation participants express for their presence and volunteer work. Instead of in witnessing change in peoples lived experiences, these volunteers find meaning in having their work and presence appreciated by participants.

For some volunteers, like Elena, that appreciation is experienced in the moment of engagement, as women in the prison “see you” and “actually open up and tell you about their life” as a display of trust. Similarly, Nadia talked about “knowing that the women really appreciate you coming” and how participants “tell you themselves that they really look forward to it.” While these volunteers might also highlight meaning in witnessing change, they also stress the importance of seeing their work appreciated.

Alternatively, for others like Minerva and Natasha, the appreciation is experienced second hand from feedback the participants give to other volunteers or the coordinator. Even though she noted that she does not experience the appreciation every time she goes to the prison, Minerva still discussed participant appreciation as “the most meaningful aspect” of her volunteer work. Similarly, Natasha, who struggles with social anxiety, noted that she finds it meaningful to challenge herself to engage with women in prison because “they have expressed that just having someone come in and talk with them is important.”



While most of the volunteers who support women in prison noted this participant appreciation as justification for the meaningfulness of their work, one volunteer expressed some concerns. In our conversation, Agatha questioned using participant appreciation as evidence of participant impact. Her questions serve as an important reminder that volunteers understand and note participant impact differently than those participants may experience it. As such this section explores how volunteers find meaning in what they interpret as participant impact by witnessing change or noting appreciation, but does not attest that such impacts exist for RJ participants.<sup>17</sup>

### **Social Impact**

Volunteers discussion of participant impact ties very closely to their concept of the larger social impact of RJ. In their focus on social impact, volunteers experiences corroborate arguments by Bazemore and other theorists who note that RJ moves beyond a response to individual conflicts “to focusing on interventions and outcome standards for the justice process that give equal emphasis to community change”(Bazemore, 2014, p. 202). For volunteers, recognizing a larger social impact adds value to the meaning they find in more targeted participant impacts. Again, CJI trainings and publications note the importance of community impact, which ties into how volunteers make sense of their work as socially impactful as well as their discussions on the role of community in RJ.

To that extent, as noted in the first chapter of this work, a common characteristic those I spoke with at CJI note about people engaging in RJ work is a passion for community change and the advancement of restorative values in the broader society. For example, when she described

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<sup>17</sup> Interestingly, while this research is focused on volunteer perceptions and does not seek to attest to the experience of program participants, research that explores participants experience does, in most cases, align with these volunteers’ perceptions of participant impact. (see Braithwaite, 1999; Kuo, Longmire, & Cuvelier, 2010; Sawin & Zehr, 2007; and Wong, Bouchard, Gravel, Bouchard, & Morselli, 2016).

the staff and volunteers at CJI to me, Mariella highlighted their passion for “the fight to try and help and to bring change within the community.” Similarly, a staff member with whom I spoke noted that the desire to “make our community a better place for people to live, a more peaceful place, a place where people think of restorative options first” needs to be an aspect of how an interested volunteer expresses their motivations for this work or “we’re not interested in you.”

Volunteers commonly highlight how the potential for social change is what drew them to volunteer at CJI. Minerva, for example, described all of her volunteer work to me “as aimed at improving things in the world; like creating better, more just, you know, fighting systems of oppression.” Other volunteers note this opportunity for community or social change as a direct motivator for their involvement. This insight echoes the findings of Souza and Dhami (2008) on motivations for volunteering with RJ, who note the significance of giving back to the community as a motivating value for engaging in RJ volunteer work. However, these findings go further by illustrating how the community impact volunteers are interested in is centered around creating community or social change.

As illustrated in the quotations above, when volunteers frame and discuss the social sphere of impact, they focus on the concept of *change*. While some volunteers are able to articulate a few practical implications of that change, most volunteers focus on more cultural components. Others remain vague, discussing some abstract form of “social change” or “giving back to the community” as a meaningful component of their volunteer work. For example, Mariella noted the goal of CJI “to do good” and “actually make some sort of change that is completely different” when framing why she is involved with RJ in terms of community impact. Similarly, Matthew passionately noted how restorative justice “can change how neighbourhoods are” as a vague description of the social impact of this work.

### ***Practical Impact***

The practical social impacts that volunteers are able to articulate vary considerably, from a focus on disciplinary reform in education (a direct result of the mediation program's work within schools in the region), to changes in legislation that encourage more restorative approaches. However, each of these practical impacts is tied to a larger concept of criminal justice reform that features heavily in volunteers' discussions of social impact. Volunteers tie their personal involvement in CJI to a desire to bring about a more restorative vision of justice.<sup>18</sup> As a staff member noted:

They [volunteers] recognize that our penal system right now is not the be all and end all. It has a place within society, but we could do better. And, with that parallel of restorative justice, it would really make that much difference that people would see that and feel that. And that they want to see change.

This quotation echoes the findings discussed in the first chapter of this thesis: that volunteers express dissatisfaction with the criminal justice field and see their volunteer engagement with CJI as part of trying to advocating on behalf of RJ as a more hopeful alternative.

Among a number of volunteers with whom I spoke, advancing a more restorative model creates tangible social impact by breaking cycles of violence and incarceration. In our conversations, Erin noted how providing support during reintegration is a direct response to a community's fear of crime because the "isolation and alienation and the stigma that comes with reintegration often perpetuate recidivism and reoffending." She argued that "if we can do our part to avoid that, or like help people not experience that as profoundly, then that's what we have to do to make society better."

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<sup>18</sup> This further supports the claims in chapter 4 about the volunteer advocate identity as related to a desire for change

Similarly, Elena stressed how RJ was making a “huge difference” by breaking the “cycle of repetition” both within conflicts between individuals and cycles of violence wherein victims become aggressors. While this change might seem limited to the participants involved, Elena stressed that it is creating a larger social impact as “just on that platform alone, you’re transforming society.”

### ***Cultural Impact***

When discussing the impacts noted above, volunteers also highlight how these practical changes are imbedded in cultural changes for which RJ advocates. These cultural changes include a more humanizing approach to addressing harm, in which offenders are seen as human beings and not simply demonized for their actions, as well as greater focus on the relationships between individuals and their communities. Volunteers note that their work is creating this cultural impact by being an example of a restorative alternative.

Adrianna, for example, talked about how, while her volunteer work is limited to direct interventions with mediation participants, she was “very mindful of influence [of CJI] on school boards, legal system, work place, that sort of thing.” She noted that these practical areas of social impact are based in the RJ model that “is challenging systemic beliefs” around the demonization of people who offend. Similarly, another volunteer highlighted the role of CJI in advocating for and supporting women in re-entry as “the tentacle-ing that needs to continue” in order to change perspectives on crime and offenders.

This concept of humanizing offenders relates to a more community focused culture that a number of volunteers highlight within RJ. In our conversation Alan was quick to approach the concept of social impact and noted “creating social change” as central to what he values in RJ. For him, restorative justice is about changing what he sees as an individualistic and fear-based

culture in North America by refocusing on community needs and community decision making processes.

This framing of RJ as a model for growing community solidarity is an ongoing topic of discussion among many theorists and scholars. Drawing on the work of Nels Christie (1977), writers such as Bazemore (2014), Bottoms (2003), Rossner and Bruce (2016) and Zehr & Mika (1998) present RJ as a effective model for building community responsibility and democratic engagement. However, George Pavlich (2001, 2004) warns of the dangers of focusing RJ around strengthening local communities because of the dangers of exclusion. Interestingly, volunteer perspectives on social impact of RJ, in particular those Alan shared with me, focus on the power of RJ to strengthen local communities as well as to combat exclusionary tendencies within our culture.

In discussing these social impacts, volunteers note how RJ creates cultural and practical changes by providing an example of an alternative value system.<sup>19</sup> This notion of creating change by example is echoed in how CJI staff discuss volunteers as embodying the RJ value system in their lives and thus creating a rippling impact in the community. In our conversation, Matthew noted this effect by highlighting how his experience volunteering at CJI changes both himself, his family, and that it “all kinda bleeds out and [...] has this influence all around us.” Ted Wachtel and Paul McCold (2001) describe a similar effect of RJ in their research by comparing it to a contagion, in which restorative practices and principles “are contagious, spreading from workplace to home” (p. 127).

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<sup>19</sup> More details on the ways in which volunteers see CJI embodying that value system in chapter 6.

## **Personal Growth**

This concept of cultural impact ties directly into the final sphere in which volunteers at CJI discuss the impact of their volunteer work: its effect on their own lives. Volunteers commonly highlight instances of personal growth as meaningful aspects of their involvement with RJ. They value both the tangible skill growth, such as learning to ask discerning questions, and lifestyle changes, as well as the adoption of an ideological framework, noted in the previous chapter of this work, that, as Matthew noted, bleeds through into all aspects of their lives. Some volunteers even note that engaging in this sort of work is an attempt to challenge themselves, both practically (as in keep to a commitment, or engage in tasks that are challenging personally) as well as philosophically (as in push against their prejudices or assumptions). The focus on personal growth as an impact of this work also features in CJI trainings and support sessions. Throughout their discussions of personal growth, volunteers address it as an inevitable impact of engaging in this work and also as justification for assuming other levels of impact.

### ***Tangible Life Skills***

One way in which volunteers note personal growth is in terms of tangible life skills that their volunteer experience has developed within them. A common theme is the recognition that the skills they learn for engaging in their volunteer work, such as facilitation skills, listening skills, or relationship skills, are also applicable to other aspects of their lives. As Amelia noted in her interview, working at relationships with the women she visits in prison “is like cross training for the rest of life [...] it changes how you are.” Similarly, a participant in the volunteer mediation training reflected on how the skills she was learning were beneficial to her, both for her volunteer work, but “also in current day to day interactions,” including in family and relationship conflict.

Learning these life skills is also an aspect of how some volunteers discuss their motivation for starting their volunteer work at CJI. Many CJI volunteers, particularly in the mediation program, are introduced to the agency through CJI's training on transformative mediation that is accredited through a local university. Thus, the desire to learn applicable skills is what initially connects them to the agency. For example, when asked why she was interested in getting involved with CJI, Minerva noted the opportunity to learn skills that "you just use in your everyday life." Agatha, likewise, highlighted the opportunity to develop the skill of "self-discipline" through a weekly volunteer commitment in response to a similar question about motivations. In conversations with both volunteers, they stressed the transferability of skills developed through their volunteer work.

Alternatively, other volunteers stress the capacity to provide aid to others that learning these skills provides them. In our conversation, Elena noted how her training at CJI impacts her ability to manage stress and conflict in her personal life. She expressed that what she finds valuable in this personal change was how it increases her ability to help others. Irma too reflected on how the skills she has acquired from CJI allow her to help others, both in mediations and in her life more broadly. In our conversation, she reminisced on a series of discussions she was able to have with an acquaintance that allowed him to work through some relationship drama. She shared how she applied the skills of listening and asking questions that she learned at CJI, and how the acquaintance was amazed by how she was able to help him, labeling her afterwards with the mystical title of "a freakin' jedi master." While the acquaintance attributed a mystical element to the skills, Irma herself talked about them in much more simplistic terms:

I feel I'm in a better position to sit, listen, understand, give people a chance to talk about it, and be able to give them perspective, if they want it, in a fashion that's not telling them what to do [...] in a way that's peaceful and what they need at the time.

The skills of listening and providing helpful feedback that Irma lists speak not only to tactical accomplishments, but to what Mark Umbreit and Marilyn Peterson Armour (2010) describe as the “presence” of an RJ facilitator. They define presence as a facilitator’s “unique persona” and “bearing,” which, being grounded in their understanding of and belief in restorative justice, furthers the dialogue process (Umbreit & Peterson Armour, 2010, p. 246). For Irma, and other CJI volunteers, they see this presence, or capacity to “sit, listen, understand” and offer gentle guidance towards movement or transformation evolve throughout their volunteer work.

Volunteers note how the opportunity to gain these tangible life skills provides an additional layer of meaning to their work, which, in doing so, increases their commitment to CJI as an agency. As noted in the previous chapter, volunteers express heartfelt appreciation for training and the possibility for personal growth that CJI provides. One volunteer even noted to me how the training set CJI apart from other organizations by illustrating how they are committed to their volunteers. Mariella, who works as a student placement volunteer at CJI, talked to me about the learning opportunities she had access too as the most meaningful aspect of her experience. In commenting on how they recognize and support their volunteers, CJI staff often highlight their trainings and learning opportunities. Similarly, volunteers note these learning opportunities as evidence that CJI values and supports their involvement.

### ***Personal Empowerment***

In addition to noting the tangible skills that they gain from this work, volunteers note a second form of personal impact that is more ethereal. Volunteers frame this impact in terms of



changes in their emotional or ideological outlook on life.<sup>20</sup> Similar to how volunteers discuss empowerment as an impact for participants, some volunteers discuss the empowering effects of that their engagement with RJ brings out in their own lives.

Matthew discussed this concept of personal empowerment by highlighting the hope that his involvement in RJ creates for him:

It creates in me an optimism for the world. Right, that there is, it is possible to love. It is possible to grow, and in situations where things seem impossible, there's still always hope [...] what that creates in me is, well, more empowerment.

He also noted how his engagement in RJ affirms his world view and sense of self, affirming for him that "I'm worthy, I'm okay, with CJI." Through his engagement with the RJ philosophy and practice, Matthew notes how he is empowered and encouraged in his self-image and more hopeful in how he sees the world.

Alternatively, Amelia highlighted how her volunteer engagement empowers her by building gratitude into her life or, in her words, "understanding fully how good my life is." This gratitude is based in the recognition of her mobility, that she can walk into and out of the prison every week when those she is building relationships with cannot. She notes how this feeling of gratitude then impacts simple things in her life that used to be stressful, such as traffic, which she now places in perspective as a component of her mobility. Additionally, the tangible act of doing something each week reduces her personal anxiety about a criminal justice system of which she is extremely critical on the grounds that it enacts harm on already vulnerable individuals.<sup>21</sup> In

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<sup>20</sup> In chapters 4 and 6, I discuss those ideological changes in more detail, however it is important to include here how volunteers see these changes as a personal impact of their engagement with RJ.

<sup>21</sup> More details on how the RJ volunteers experience their identities and engagement in relation to questions about criminal justice reform are addressed in chapter 6.

contrast, when engaging with RJ she helps to provide hope and dignity for those same populations.

### *Personal Change as Inevitable*

In their discussions of personal growth, volunteers often note how it is for them an inevitable part of engaging with the restorative justice process. As Adrianna stated, “if you’re gonna be true to the transformative model, you don’t stay the same either. You can’t be part of this process and be just an outside observer, really, you have to be impacted by it.” This assumption of personal growth is part of how CJI frames the RJ experience in their volunteer trainings, as well as key component that they look for in the discernment process, addressed in previous chapter.

As Jennifer, a previous volunteer who is now a CJI staff member, notes often in conversations and trainings, “this work forces you to be doing your own work.” In our interview, she noted how engaging in RJ is spiritual, in that “it strips the shit away” and helps her to “identify how to be a good human.” The requirement of personal growth is also an aspect of what she says ‘drew her’ to this work.

At the CJI orientation and volunteer trainings I attended, trainers stressed personal growth a core component of engaging with RJ. Trainers noted their own experiences of personal growth and advised participants that this work would “impact you in ways you cannot even imagine.” One trainer noted that engaging in RJ was “as much about your own journey of self awareness as about helping clients.” Similarly, at a peer support I attended, multiple volunteers noted the personally transformative effects of engaging in this work as rationale for their engagement. From comments such as “it changes you, listening changes you,” to idioms about a

two-way street or “as much helping other people as I am myself,” volunteers noted personal growth as both a beneficial, as well as inevitable, reality of engaging in RJ work.

Alternatively, while Amelia noted personal growth as an important and meaningful impact of her volunteer work in her interview, she was careful to frame that discussion by noting that she did not assume this would be the case. While her volunteer training included messages about how much this work would change her, she remembers disagreeing with their assumptions, and then, in her words, “almost immediately realizing that that was short sighted, or maybe not very emotionally aware.” What Amelia’s narrative illustrates is that the assumption of personal change is a socialized understanding of RJ that is based not only on stories of personal change in others and an organization culture that prioritizes such personal growth, but also on personal experience of change.

This personal experience of change also serves for some volunteers as evidence for participant or social impact. Take for example a justification that Emma provided me for why she engages in this work:

I really do believe in restorative practice and I’ve found it helpful in my own life, so I can only hope that other people have found that important. So I think the work we do is valuable.

Emma’s personal experience of the impact of RJ shapes how she observes or anticipates its impact on participants and the value she sees in her volunteer engagement. Similarly, staff at CJI recognize the impact that this work has had on their lives and so anticipate that it has had similar impact on volunteers and participants. Personal, societal, and participant impact, are discussed by volunteers as both expected and extremely meaningful outcomes of their engagement with RJ.

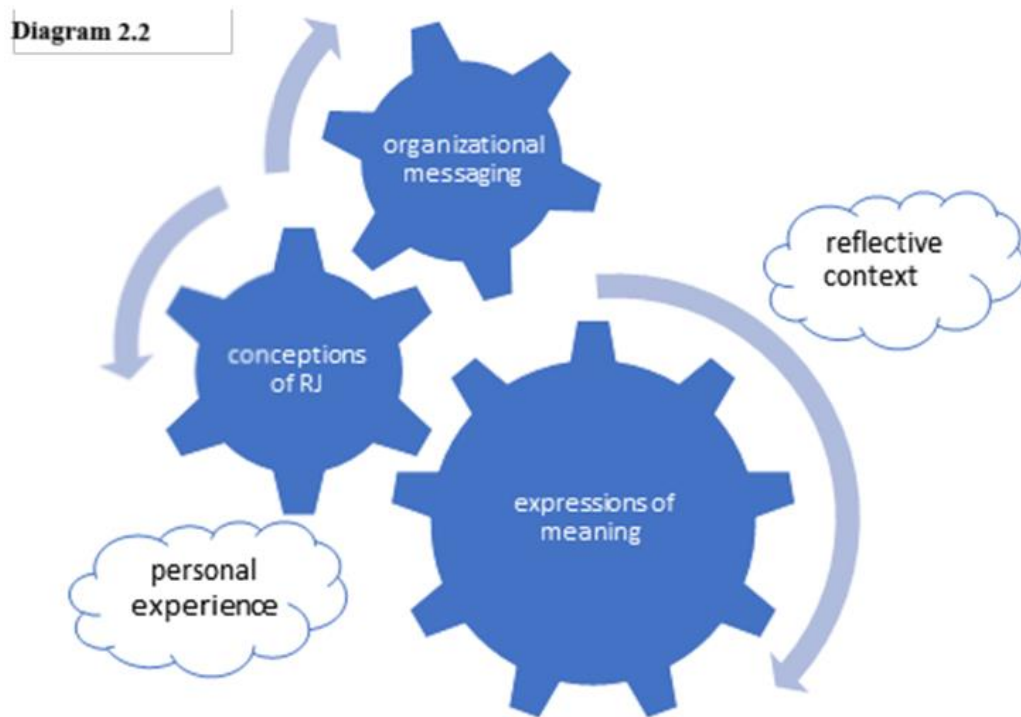
## Discussion

Volunteers with whom I spoke framed meaning in their engagement with RJ through the lens of impact. Using narratives of impact, volunteers expressed both how they see value in their engagement, as well as how they see meaning in RJ. By highlighting the effects of this work on the participants, their community, and themselves, volunteers' reflections demonstrate the value they place on the restorative outcomes of engaging with RJ. Whether it is through witnessing transformation or empowerment in a participant's life, laying the ground work for more restorative programs in their communities, or reflecting on the personal growth they have achieved, volunteers' narratives focus on the potential that RJ offers for positive change.

As illustrated throughout the spheres of impact examined above, in their discussions of participant, social, and personal impact volunteers reveal how they see the concepts of motivation, meanings, and values as intertwined. As noted, these expressions of meaning often reflect organizational messaging, illustrating the contextualized reality of sense-making and meaning creation. As Michael Kramer (2010) notes, "sense-making is not an individual process, but a rather an interactive, intersubjective process" that is grounded in communication (p. 14). Volunteers' conceptions of meaning in their *engagement with* RJ are constituted through their interactions with CJI messaging, trainings, staff, and other volunteers as well as through their own experiences of RJ practice. These same expressions of meaning emerge in volunteers' *definitions of* RJ and its values.

Constituted criminology addresses this concept of co-constituted meaning by reflecting on what Mezey (2006) describes as the "dance of mutual constructedness" through which individuals both imbed meaning in social structure and are "informed and constrained by the meanings and opportunities" available within those same structures (p. 152). Within the field of

criminology, this concept is usually applied to law and legal consciousness by recognizing, as Ewick and Silbey (1998) do how law constructs and constrains, of as well as being constructed by, human interactions and social practices. In this context, volunteers' narratives illustrate how meaning, motives, and values they experience in their volunteer work with RJ are both constituted by and constituting their understanding of RJ within the context of CJI. Diagram 2.2 illustrates this concept, pointing to how organizational messaging, conceptions of RJ, and expressions of meaning are interconnected for volunteers within the framework of the reflective context and personal experiences at CJI.



As opposed to a linear process representation of this relationship, Diagram 2.2 illustrates the interlocking relationship of expressions of meaning, organizational messaging, and conceptions of RJ, and their existence within the framework of a reflective context (such as an interview) and personal experiences. While it is tempting to attest that a linear narrative (such as

in Diagram 2.3 below) captures the whole of volunteers' discussions on impact in relation to their experiences, to do so would be extremely disingenuous to the data. For, as Richard Sherwin (1994) notes in an essay critiquing casual-linear legal narratives, "people prefer stories neat" but "the trouble with having one's stories neat, however, is that they tend to leave things out (p. 39).

**Diagram 2.3**



Instead of supporting the casual-linear narrative of meaning construction, volunteer narratives illustrate how meaning is constituted in an ongoing process through what constitutive criminology refers to as a "dialectical interrelationships of coproduction" (Henry & Milovanovic, 2000, p. 282).

For example, while I note above instances where volunteers' definitions of restorative justice incorporated or reflected expressions of meaning in their volunteer work, when discussing participant impacts, volunteers' definition of RJ do not always align so closely with their conversations of meaning. While most volunteers with whom I met talk about participants building understanding or empathy for others and taking responsibility for their actions as goals and impacts of the RJ process, they highlight witnessing empowerment, movement, and transformation as the most meaningful aspects of their work. In this their somewhat textbook understanding of RJ does not always, or simply, reflect their personal experiences of meaning from volunteering in RJ programs.

To illustrate this dynamic more clearly, I use the next few paragraphs to look more closely at the narratives of two volunteers, Nadia and Alan, whose conceptions of meaning *of* RJ and *in* RJ deviate from the causal-linear process in Diagram 2.3. Focusing on how meaning is constituted for and by these two volunteers, whose narratives question, challenge, or even contradict the expected pattern, demonstrates the complexity of the meaning-making process through which meaning, motives, and values are construed. As Clarke (2005) notes, it is through examining those whose experience is different, that we arrive at a more wholistic analysis of a phenomenon.

Nadia, a volunteer who supports women in prison and in re-entry, defined restorative justice fairly traditionally as “the women understanding what their crime was, them taking ownership of it, admitting their fault, and trying to make amends with the victims.” However, when I asked her about what motivates her volunteer work, she shared a story about witnessing women’s excitement for a craft they were doing one evening and how “just seeing their excitement and that it was something really special for them made it worth while.” Similarly, her most memorable experience volunteering with CJI was hearing about how a craft she had worked on with a participant impacted the participants relationships with her family.

Alan a long-term volunteer providing mediations at CJI, described the life long impact RJ process can have on participants. He gave an example of youth mediations, where mediation provides an interpersonal dynamic that is not available through the court system which encourages the youth the take responsibility. Later in our conversation, Alan noted the lower recidivism rates of RJ participants who get re-entry support. These concrete examples of change in individuals lived experience give evidence of the motivation for his involvement in RJ, which

is to “doing good” and “making a difference.” However, when he discusses what is most meaningful in this work, Alan focuses on its larger impact in “changing society.”

In reflecting on both of these volunteers’ experiences, it is important to note the reflexive context in which these expressions of meaning and definitions of RJ took place, as well as the personal experiences of both volunteers. What the linear process approach in Diagram 2.3 overlooks, and which the more complex map in Diagram 2.2 incorporates, are the context of the interview and the varied personal experiences of Nadia and Alan in their engagement with RJ. When Nadia defined RJ, she did so in response to a direct question from me and, when prompted, she struggled to connect her 2 years of volunteer work supporting women in prison and re-entry with the definition of RJ she provided. Alan, alternatively, often did not respond directly to questions and prompting in his interview, but instead addressed concepts of meaning and impact within his broader reflections on almost 20 years of engagement with CJI and mediation.

What these two narratives illustrate is that while there is an intersection between understandings of RJ, motivations, and meaning, volunteer experiences are diverse and complex. In the same light, I note above that while transformation and movement feature heavily in how volunteers frame participant impact, organizational messaging does not reference these concepts. Equating definitions of RJ with meaningful experiences or assuming a direct relationship between organizational messaging and volunteer expressions is too simplistic. It undermines the ongoing sense-making process within the context of CJI in which volunteers’ experience exists, as well as the impact of the social interaction of the interview on how volunteers discuss and frame meaning.



As such, a grounded theory situational analysis provides a more complex understanding of the process of sense-making through which volunteers at CJI understand and frame concepts of meaning, motives, and values *in* and *of* RJ. In mapping the theme of impact in volunteer narratives of motivation, expressions of meaning, and understanding of RJ, the interconnectedness of those concepts and the constituted nature of meaning for RJ volunteers becomes apparent. Additionally, such an approach allows the focus volunteers place on impact, or outcomes, of RJ to become central to the analysis. For not only does volunteers' focus on the three spheres of impact (participant, social, and personal) of their work illuminate the complexity of their engagement with RJ, but also re-invigorates the broader discussion within the RJ field on the importance of restorative outcomes. As RJ scholarship examines and furthers the process of constituting meaning *in* and *of* RJ in the broader society, the significance that volunteers place on narratives of impact cannot be overlooked. For, as Ewick and Sibley (1998) argue in such narratives of meaning define and create social concepts and practices.

## Chapter 6

### **Power Relations in RJ: Experiences of Tension in Embodying Empowerment**

Restorative justice (RJ) promises a transformation in how we deal with instances of crime and conflict. As noted in the previous chapter, volunteers engaged in restorative justice are interested in seeing meaningful change in their own lives, in the lives of participants, and in the greater social structure. However, as this chapter explores, they also note points of tension they experience in witnessing and embodying these meaningful changes. In particular, their reflections on empowerment within the RJ process and CJI organizational structure crystallize the significance of power relations to what they see as the alternative nature of RJ. In sharing narratives of challenge and hopes, volunteers' recounting of their experiences provide insight into the underlying power dynamics embedded within RJ—at least as practiced in the context of this study—and the challenges that exist in fully embodying RJ values.

This experience of tension around holding RJ values while engaging in RJ practices is an ongoing point of interest for RJ scholarship. The tension of working within and alongside larger systems of justice and conflict resolution is both a place of warning and a place of hope for RJ scholarship. For scholars, the potential for RJ to transform social norms and structures competes with the concern that RJ values will be corrupted or co-opted by existing justice norms and values. In their critique of restorative justice, Andrew Von Hirsh, Andrew Ashworth, and Clifford Shearing (2003) note its tendency to be aspirational, as opposed to practical, and dictate what is “hoped might be accomplished” as opposed to demonstrating effective change. Similarly, in her research comparing RJ practitioners' goals to RJ advocates' aspirations, Margaurita Zernova (2007) expresses concern that in practice RJ may be easily co-opted and compromised by criminal justice influences. These concerns about co-optation are echoed by a

variety of RJ scholars, including John Bazemore (2014), Howard Zehr (2005) and Andrew Woolford (2009). George Pavlich (2001, 2004) in particular highlights the potential for the community focus in RJ to develop into totalitarian control systems when exclusionary dynamics are not examined.

In contrast, other researchers are more hopeful of the transforming impact of RJ values on existing justice structures. While Carolyn Boyes-Watson (2004) highlights the “fundamental incompatibility between the state system of doing justice and the principles of restorative justice” (p. 215), she argues that the tensions between both practices create space for transforming state institutions. Similarly, speaking directly to the volunteer experience, Micheala Keet (2010) notes the tension of maintaining RJ goals in light of criminal justice and other community goals at the community RJ program she studied in Saskatchewan, and reflects on the on the important role volunteer participants play in grounding program activities in restorative values. Diane Crocker (2016), in her work with RJ facilitators, also suggests that “rather than taking on a diluted version of restorative justice, [...] justice programs may be able instead to dilute the dominant discourses with restorative justice values.”

In light of this debate, this chapter examines how volunteers frame the practical experience of embodying RJ values, both in the organizational structure at CJI as well as personally in their own experience, and the potential therein for both transformation and co-option. Central to volunteer discussions is the concept of power – and a radical way of seeing power and responsibility differently. As illustrated in the previous chapter of this thesis, empowerment is a key term to both volunteers and CJI organizational culture. This chapter builds upon those insights by exploring how, through RJ, empowerment is employed as a form of governing—or “conducting conduct” in the Foucauldian sense—that the volunteers contrast to

other more directive forms of governing. Volunteers' experiences of personal tensions with embodying empowerment dynamics, as well as their observations of how CJI as an institution struggles with the same dynamics, illuminate how the distinctive power relations embedded with RJ are central to what makes it an alternative model for addressing conflict. Similar to how Patricia Ewick and Susan Silbey (1998) note the potential for investigating power relationships at the points of resistance, it is in these place of tension, where volunteers observe themselves unintentionally resisting (while not engaging in resistance in the Foucauldian sense), that the power relations within RJ are most easily observed.

Volunteers' experiences help to clarify how power is imbedded and interwoven within RJ (Foucault, 1980). Volunteer narratives of personal and organizational tension illustrate how, as Barbara Cruikshank (1999) notes, in *The Will to Empower*, "power relations are ubiquitous," even within agencies that seek to empower others (p. 2). Cruikshank (1999) argues that such agencies employ Foucauldian notions of discipline and governmentality to "guide and shape (rather than force, control, or dominate) the actions of others" (p. 4) In this study, volunteers' experiences both expose these dynamics of power within RJ, as well as illuminate how they understand these power relations as distinctive from and alternative to other forms of power. In framing these places of tension between RJ and the broader culture as contrasting power relations, volunteer experiences provide unique insight on how RJ navigates the space between co-option and transformation.

This chapter begins with a discussion on how volunteers' reflections conceptualize empowerment as the embodied power relations within RJ, with reference to Foucauldian notions of power, and then shifts to focusing on the places of tension that volunteers note in practicing empowerment. Building on the notion of adopting an alternative framework I advance in the first

analytical chapter of this thesis, this chapter illustrates how volunteer reflections on empowerment start with a recognition that RJ values are something they have to learn to adopt. I then address areas in which volunteers note their personal struggles to embody the holistic values they admire within RJ. Complementing this discussion of the tensions in personal embodiment of empowerment, the paper then examines how volunteers see CJI as a practice of RJ that is attempting to embody RJ values of empowerment, inclusion and non-domination, as well as the instances where these values are challenged through interaction (or manifestations) of other power dynamics (such as funding concerns or the prison system). I conclude with a discussion on how volunteer experiences with RJ illustrate both the ‘ubiquitous’ nature of power, as Cruickshank (1999) labels it, as well as the potential for more restorative power relations that RJ provides.

### **Empowering Versus Directive Power Relations**

Throughout their reflections on engaging with RJ, volunteers stress the difference between restorative values and other measures of addressing conflict. As the first analytical chapter of this thesis noted, a common point of admiration that volunteers express for RJ is that it offers an ‘alternative’ to other approaches to crime and harm. In their reflections, volunteers note how the distinctive power relations that RJ embodies are key to what distinguishes RJ from other cultural models or systems for justice which operate in society at large. In contrasting what they refer to as directive methods —such as punitive measures or directive mediation models—to restorative power relations, volunteers illustrate the distinction between the two as a focus on empowerment.

Core to what volunteers see as unique to this perspective is the agency, or empowerment, it provides participants. Irma, a long term CJI volunteer, described RJ as a “refreshing way to

look at conflict completely different where we have a voice.” Through this definition, she illustrates how she sees the distinguishing factor between RJ and other systems for addressing conflict is the agency this process provides to participants. As opposed to other models of justice in which outcomes are determined *for* participants, RJ empowers participants to be involved in resolving their own conflicts.

As previous chapters note, empowerment is a key concept for both CJI and the volunteers with whom I spoke. Empowerment is also central to RJ theory. Braithwaite (2003) sees non-domination and empowerment as essential to restorative processes. Similarly, Zehr (2005) highlights how restorative justice is an alternative to state systems of justice because of its focus on empowering participants. In *Changing Lens*, his foundational work on restorative justice, Zehr (2005) details the experience of powerlessness of both victims and offenders in the disciplinary criminal justice process, as the state maintains direct control over the participants and the outcomes. He argues that a restorative approach must embody a radically different relationship of power that stresses autonomy and responsibility.

However, providing empowerment does not negate the existence of a power structure or attempts to govern program participants. In his reflections on the politics of RJ, Woolford (2009) uses the Foucauldian notion of ‘techniques of discipline’ to describe the methods in which RJ governs participants towards restorative outcomes. For as Lode Walgrave (2004) notes in a discussion on the interaction of RJ and retribution theory, both systems have similar goals to censure behavior, appeal to responsibility, and restore balance after a conflict. However, Wolgrave (2004) stresses that the distinctive quality of restorative justice is its social-ethical foundations grounded not in “top-down rules enforced by threat, coercion, and fear, but from bottom up motivation based on trust, participation, and support” (p. 54).

Volunteer reflections note both the existence of power relations with RJ as well as highlighting the distinctive quality empowerment embeds within those power relations. Michael, who has been volunteering with CJI for over 15 years, described these distinctive power dynamics by contrasting a restorative approach to more disciplinary power structures. He noted:

I guess what I like about the restorative justice system is the, that it acknowledges that we make mistakes, that we're offensive, that we harm others. It acknowledges that, but the response is to communicate better, to love, to acknowledge that there's lots of things that fed into this behavior. Do you have a personal responsibility? There's not doubt. But, the older I get, [...] the more I see that, like, sticks and discipline and rules do not change behaviors. Right? Or they change behaviors but in a bad way, like they, they don't achieve the goal that we hope they would, you know? And so, yeah, that's what I like about restorative justice. You know?

Central to this quote is a contrast between RJ and punitive power dynamics. In this contrast he notes how he has become more critical of punitive measures and that RJ provides an alternative method to achieving changes in behavior. He alludes to how RJ embodies a different power dynamic that encourages responsibility through communication and compassion. Grounding his preference for the restorative model is his personal experience of efficient techniques for governing behavior, rendering them distinct from the directive and punitive methods which he sees as less effective. However, his comparison recognizes how both dynamics seek to modify behavior, or 'conduct conduct,' and thus illustrates how the empowering dynamics within RJ are nonetheless reflective of power.

Cruickshank (1999) observed a similar dynamic in social service voluntary agencies which, she argued, rationalized "governing people in ways that promote their autonomy, self-sufficiency, and political engagement" (p. 4). Other critical scholars have used the Foucauldian term "pastoral power" to describe this form of governing, which is often framed as an ethic of care or compassion (English, 2004; Lustick, 2017; Singh, 2012). The following discussion of

volunteers' experiences of tension embodying RJ values crystalizes both how such empowerment based governing is present with RJ, as well as how it is conceived of as alternative to other forms of governing that volunteers are familiar with. Additionally, their reflections on personal struggles with this alternative framework complement their reflections on places where CJI as an agency struggles to do the same, illustrating how their individual experience of power relations constitute their understanding of power relations within CJI and RJ more broadly.

### **Embodying Empowerment**

As noted, volunteers express their engagement with CJI as embodying a different form of power relations than those present in the culture at large. However, they reflect that to achieve these alternative power relations, grounded in empowerment, requires a process by which they learn to embody RJ values. They express how embodying empowerment requires them to put aside their ingrained ways of interacting with conflict and learn to adopt a different power relationship. As Irma expressed in her interview:

I think you have to be in a place where you want to learn. You want to open your knowledge base, you might, that might mean moving out of your comfort zone. [...], we were raised with a lot of judgement and with a lot of labels and with a lot of gossip and stuff like that. A lot of us live in a world where, you know, like that. And you have to, going into CJI and doing this, you have to want to be in a place of peace and healing. You have to be open to learning, listening. You wanna help people, you want to devote time, you want to be compassionate. I think that's an important aspect because you can't run your own agenda, you can't want to come in to control the situation, that's not the case. You have to understand the process of what they teach you, and, it takes time to learn it and, you know, wrap your head around it, and just kinda learn ways to move on and roll with it.

As she noted, volunteers see a distinction between “judgemental” and “directive” approaches and the “compassionate” or “listening-based” process of RJ that promotes peace and healing.

Volunteers stress, particularly in the mediation program, that the RJ process is uniquely non-



directive. However, this quote from Irma also highlights how the non-directive dynamic is uncomfortable and requires time to “wrap your head around.” What Irma sees as cultural tendencies towards judgement and control are contrasted with the restorative model of listening, learning, and as other volunteers describe it, empowering power dynamics.

Similar to Irma, many of the volunteers with whom I spoke highlighted the meaningfulness of this empowering power dynamic, while also clarifying that adopting this alternative model is something they have to learn and continue to struggle with. Volunteers express experiencing tension when manifesting this distinguishing aspect of restorative power dynamics in two different capacities: facilitating the stakeholder process, including the tension around motivating participants, and moving away from judgement. The next sections of this chapter addresses each of these concepts in turn. As more of their reflections centered around navigating and facilitating the stakeholder process, I give it more space in this analysis. However, based on some volunteers’ reflections on their struggles with judgment and the amount of focus this topic receives in volunteer trainings, it is also a significant challenge for volunteers seeking to embody restorative power relations.

### **Tensions with a Stakeholder Process**

One of the struggles volunteers experience in navigating restorative power relations is the stakeholder driven process. RJ uses a stakeholder-driven process in which individuals who are affected most by a conflict are empowered to work together towards resolution (Sawin & Zehr, 2007). At CJI, as is common in many North American RJ programs, this stakeholder-led process means that participation by those affected is completely voluntary and participants, as opposed to facilitators, are responsible for creating outcomes that restore relationships and meet participants needs. By prioritizing voluntary participation and a stakeholder-led process, RJ aims to create a

more democratic power structure in which the agency and autonomy of participants are respected. While volunteers did not use the term stakeholder process in conversation with me, their reflections on motivating participants and coming to terms with unsuccessful mediations illustrate their struggle to navigate this aspect of RJ. Volunteers, as discussed in the previous chapter, experience meaning in this work in relation to the positive impacts they witness in participants lives. As such, they express frustration when the very process they admire limits their ability to motivate or direct others who might be hesitant to experience RJ for themselves.

This tension that volunteers express relates to the ongoing debate, noted previously, between prioritizing RJ process versus RJ outcomes. Braithwaite (2003) notes this potential struggle for facilitators of RJ when highlighting that empowerment and non-domination should be prioritized above other goals, such as forgiveness and healing. As Braithwaite (2003) describes, in a restorative process “participants are given the power to tell their own stories in their own way to reveal whatever sense of injustice they wish to see repaired” regardless of how the facilitator or larger community might feel about it (p. 11).<sup>22</sup> While facilitators and community members might value aspects of restorative justice, such as forgiveness and remorse, Braithwaite (2003) is adamant that these properties are emergent, and “if we try to make them happen, they will be less likely to happen in a meaningful way” (p. 13). Thus, while volunteer experiences highlight the significance of restorative outcomes, the process of RJ, when designed as an alternative, facilitates these outcomes only by refusing to invoke the hierarchal and directive power relations instilled in other forms of conflict resolution.

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<sup>22</sup> For other RJ scholars it is important that the justice sought by the participants in an RJ process be nonpunitive, though Braithwaite argues that democratic process is a better marker of RJ than the nonpunitive outcomes.

Volunteers at CJI see value in their role of supporting the stakeholder-driven process, as opposed to imposing an agenda or directing the outcomes. They contrast this role to other, more directive roles used by the criminal justice system. For example, Amelia spoke to me of how meaningful her presence and relationship with the women in prison is because it provides them with “the only non-agenda conversation in a long stretch of time,” in contrast to their relationships with prison guards and other inmates who are embodying different relationships. Similarly, Irma spoke to me about how she contrasts the experience of youth who go through the court system to the “freedom to choose” provided to participants of a restorative mediation.

While they find value in the stakeholder empowerment embedded in the RJ process, volunteers also express how they struggle with the power relationship that this process implies. For example, Adrianna describes what she appreciates about this empowering dynamic of the mediation process at CJI at the same time that she notes how adopting this non-directive approach is a personal challenge:

[...] the other huge part is that it's driven by the people around the table. [...] I really like that it's not directive. That it's led by the individuals. It's challenging as hell, because you like “oh, I see what you could do to fix this” but there's also great freedom as a mediator to really allow people that opportunity. People are hungry to be listened to.

As the above quotation illustrates, volunteers can experience a tension in learning to embody this alternative, non-directive power relationship which they admire in the RJ process. The desire to apply directive techniques to achieve reconciliation is contrasted with the recognition that empowerment dynamics provide the opportunity to reach those goals.

In a more extreme example, Elena shared how she struggles with the voluntary nature of the process. In her five years volunteering with CJI, she noted that what is most challenging for her in this work is motivating participants to come to a mediation:

There is only so much you can do, they're not court mandated, well they can be court mandated, but they're often not mandated, [...] mediations are voluntary, part of the voluntary process. [...] Physically getting the people here is often frustrating because they either don't want to come, they don't have the motivation to come, they don't care, or they're scared, which is completely understandable. [...] But the organization only has so much pull on that as well. Like we can't tell a kid that's in court like you need to come talk to us, you need to meet here with this other kid that was bullying you. Like its tough to do that so. [...] There's only so much you can do, so when it doesn't happen it's frustrating. [...] Not that it should be mandatory, but in my personal beliefs, its so helpful and its so beneficial to so many people and the greater community I don't see why it's not.

Elena sympathizes with participants' reasons for being hesitant to participate in RJ. Because she has so much faith in the RJ process, Elena is exasperated when individuals choose not to participate. While she noted that the process is voluntary, it became apparent during our conversation that she wishes there was a dynamic that encouraged participants to engage. She is torn between a recognition that the power relations within RJ are grounded in a notion of empowerment and voluntary engagement, and a desire to force individuals to engage in the process through coercive means.

I noted this desire for a mechanism through which to encourage participant engagement in other conversations with volunteers as well. At a volunteer support night, the conversation closed with a discussion on "selling RJ" to participants and communities. Volunteers expressed frustration in how to convince reluctant participants, especially victims, to engage in the RJ process. They wanted participants to understand the benefits and what they saw as miraculous outcomes available to them in the RJ process but encountered resistance. New volunteers were advised by staff and longer-term volunteers to "keep trying [to get participants engaged] but not up to the point of taking choice away." This tension with wanting to motivate participants but being limited by the power relations embedded in the RJ process was also expressed during interviews.

When asked about the most challenging aspect of engaging in this work, a number of volunteers who engage in mediation noted the difficulty in getting participants “to the table.” In our conversation, Irma noted how she understands the anxiety participants might feel in facing people they are in conflict with, and yet she continues to motivate them to try the RJ process. She described how:

I don't give up. I don't hound them, I don't stalk them, but I don't give up. [...] you have to use certain wording with them and, you know, just make it peaceful and, and you know, just inch them. And if they don't want to they don't want to and you have to accept that. But I don't give up, I try. With certain words, with patience. Give them time to think about it. And if in the end they're answer's no, it's no, and I have to accept that. And just let them be were they're at and that's fine. [...] But that, that's hard for me, because I just see the benefits of it. [...]

The struggle between convincing participants to engage but also knowing that they have to be willing to do so is evident in how Irma agonizes over her attempts to motivate them. She concluded by describing how she tries to communicate that she wants the participants to attempt the process because it is beneficial for them. She even offers shuttle mediation, a form of mediation where participants are in different rooms and which she is “not a fan of”, as an attempt to encourage participants to begin the process. However, she recognizes that empowerment requires participants participate out of a genuine desire for resolution, and so she cannot offer empowerment while forcing them to engage in the process.

Volunteer reflections of tensions with the stakeholder process, such as those noted above, stress how learning to embody empowerment is something that they grow into and continues to be something they struggle with throughout their experience of RJ. Adrianna, for example, notes how she has evolved in her practice of mediation from a directive approach focused on “fixing people” to a different conception of the power of a mediator:

Early on, you think you're gonna help "save" or "fix", you know, it's much more internally driven. Like you're gonna be, you're gonna help fix people. Truly, I'm going to be honest. As a mediator, I've grown tremendously in just stepping back. And I guess I see that more and more with these trainings and how, central, you think you are as a mediator. You have a lot of power as a mediator, but not seeing, like the solution, my notion of solution as success has changed huge.

As Adrianna illustrates, the power dynamics within the mediation process are shifted, from directive toward empowering. This requires, as Adrianna noted, a "stepping back", or a "letting go" as other volunteers frame it, in which their role as facilitator becomes more about empowering participants by providing space for and listening to participants pain and experiences. Even in this dynamic, Adrianna recognizes the power relations that exist within the mediation setting and her role as a mediator in governing the process.

Offering additional insights into this concept of "stepping back" Emma reflected on how volunteers often struggle when participants are not willing to engage with the process. She noted:

So you're an empathic listener, and usually where we go, is we empathically listen, and then we assume that you want things to get better. Right? That you want to dialogue with someone in order to not suffer so much from what's going on. And you're in this. And that's sometimes not what people want. So they, for some reason are happy staying there, in that conflict. And we can't make them want to get out of that conflict [...] They have to want to do that. And, it doesn't make sense to me personally [...] But what we have to do is accept that.

This quotation illustrates how volunteers are motivated out of a desire for the participants to experience positive change, but that the structures that supports this process also require that the participants want to experience change. Volunteers, in exercising governing through empowerment, have no techniques to direct the process in a disciplinary manor and thus 'have to accept' that they will not always be successful in meeting their goals.

In a different setting, Erin reflected on how coming to terms with the stakeholder process has changed her perspective of RJ. She noted how she used to believe "all the offenders need is

someone to love them and support them and they'll be okay.” However, through engaging in the RJ process, she has become more aware of the role that participants have to play in achieving a restorative outcome.

I think that [offender support] is part of it, for sure, and part of it is their own personal choice that they're making. [...] So restorative justice is huge and, like, at the same time people need to be willing to meet you there. And there is only so much you can do to get people to meet you there. [...] having experienced it more, I'm a little more nuanced in my perspective.

While she continues to respect the RJ process, this quotation illustrates how Erin has recognized the limits of these power dynamics. In our conversation she noted how she admires the attempt to change individuals through empowerment, but that there also needs to be an option for when participants chose not to engage authentically in this process of change.

Similarly, in our conversation, Agatha, who volunteers with women in prison, discussed her personal struggle with the non-directive dynamic, especially in relation to questions about long term outcomes:

I'm still learning about how effective it is. [...] I'm critical of it to some degree. Where I think it's a little unstructured. Umm. And not to my liking. That makes it hard to me to feel like we're being effective. 'Cuz it's kinda too loosey-goosey in that respect. And yes, you have to start somewhere, but there's still some pieces that I'm wondering if I'd do better in a, in a structured kinda of a.. And I don't know what that would look like.

In noting her discomfort with the un-structured aspect of stakeholder-based process, Agatha illustrates that embodying restorative power dynamics challenges her assumptions about effective outcomes. Later in our conversation she noted how she questions whether the process is “really restorative,” and that only recently, in her second year of volunteering, has she begun to see concrete examples of how the process has long term meaningful impacts. And yet, it was important for Agatha to note how she “admires what they're doing” through the process and

values “the engaging little moments.” She notes how it is a lifetime learning process to understand the value of empowerment in the stakeholder-driven process.

In a different context, Irma expressed her struggles in letting go when a mediation does not reach resolution:

One very important aspect of being a mediator is it really hits you when the people are not able to resolve the conflict, and you think: What could I have done differently? What did I do wrong? And being able to say: It wasn't me. It's that they have to be in the place that they want to, or that they know how, so you can give them the process, they might not, you know, follow through, they might not be in the place.

As illustrated in this quotation, Irma navigates a tension as she reminds herself that the stakeholder-led process means that she as a mediator is not responsible for the outcome. Her struggle with taking responsibility for outcomes that the underlying power structures in the RJ process assign to the participants illustrates how embodying an empowering power dynamic continues to be a challenge. These reminders serve to both resolve their sense of responsibility over outcomes, as well as their frustrations around motivating unwilling participants to engage in the RJ process. That these reminders happen continually speaks to the ongoing struggle for volunteers to embody restorative power dynamics centered around empowerment and autonomy. For, as the volunteer reflections illustrate, volunteers both value and struggle with the empowering power relations embedded in the stakeholder led process.

### **Tensions with the Tendency to Judge**

Another dynamic of empowerment that volunteers express experiencing through RJ is the act of providing acceptance as opposed to judgment. As noted in the first analytical chapter, one of the key characteristics volunteers see in the identity of RJ volunteer is the ability to engage with participants in a nonjudgmental manner. By providing acceptance instead of judgment, RJ illustrates power relations that are grounded in respect and empowerment.



In her interview, Irma contrasted this nonjudgmental and accepting quality of CJI to other contexts in which CJI participants experience governing techniques. She noted how CJI is “a peaceful place to go, where, no matter how you’re harmed, no matter how much hurt you have, no matter whether you’re an offender or not, its someone in need, it’s someone who made a mistake, they don’t look down on them.” Alternatively, she described the prison system as producing conflict because people “judge and label and point fingers,” implying how individuals in those contexts receive disrespect and become dehumanized due to stigma. For her, CJI’s more “nurturing” environment allows participants to “move on from what they did without judgement.” In a similar light, Elena stressed this non-judgemental aspect as the significant distinguishing factor separating RJ from other forms of power. She noted that in other environments, participants are “judged all the time” and that at CJI “we don’t judge at all so it’s a really enriching process.”

However, though volunteers see acceptance as foundation to RJ, they experience tension in this quality. While evaluating their ability to be nonjudgmental forms a key component of the discernment process volunteers undergo prior to engaging with participants,<sup>23</sup> volunteers expressed how they continue to struggle with a tendency to judge through out their volunteer experience. Nadia, for instance, stated in her interview that being nonjudgmental was an essential characteristic for RJ volunteers, but that for her, even though she has volunteered with women in prison for four years, the most challenging aspect of her volunteer work continues to be trying “not to judge.” Similar to the warning stories that were used in volunteer orientation (as noted in the first analytical chapter), Nadia noted that when the women she is getting to know in prison talk about their crimes, she has to “try not to react to what it is” and not “treat them any

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<sup>23</sup> As discussed in Ch 1.

differently.” Amelia also expressed how she thought she was nonjudgmental before going into the prison, but struggled with expectations around the types of interactions she would be comfortable dealing with.

Similarly, volunteer mediators indicate the importance of being aware of when they are incapable of neutrality because they connect too deeply with the conflict. A participant at a support night for volunteers that I attended disclosed the humbling experience of having to excuse himself from mediating a conflict because he was unable to be non-judgmental. Another noted how she struggles with finding neutrality because it often felt impersonal. Likewise, at the mediation training I attended a trainer shared a story in which he failed to be non-judgmental by laughing at a participant’s emotional comment. In our conversation, Alan noted how he struggled with learning not to judge in his early mediations. After sharing a story of how he pre-judged a participant based on hearing another participants story of their conflict, Alan noted the importance of not making assumptions. He reflected on how he continues to work at embodying this nonjudgmental aspect in his daily life.

These stories illuminate that while volunteers value the nonjudgmental component of restorative power relations, they experience tensions in embodying it fully. Their narratives crystalize how RJ conceptualizes power differently by focusing on nonjudgement and the stakeholder process. Together these empowering techniques seek to govern conflict and subjects in conflict in what volunteers view as a radically different method than the punitive power structures with which they are familiar. Instead of directing outcomes or dehumanizing participants, RJ governs individuals by providing them an environment in which, through acceptance and a stakeholder led process, individuals are empowered to resolve conflicts. However, these volunteer experiences also illustrate how because they understand this power

structure as alternative from ones with which they are familiar, they struggle to embody it effectively.

### **Empowered to Embody Empowerment**

Volunteers' journeys toward embodying empowerment, accepting the stakeholder process and moving away from the tendency to judge, do not happen in isolation. Volunteers stress the importance of CJI's trainings and volunteer support structure in encouraging them to embody this restorative power dynamic. Not only do they note how CJI creates space to explore these tensions through peer support nights and trainings, but they also express how CJI as an organization embodies those values.

Jennifer noted that embodying RJ values is what makes CJI such an attractive place to volunteer. In our conversation she stated:

You know why I think it's not so hard for CJI to get volunteers because they're very clear on their mission and values they hold in this organization. And so when you wear that on your sleeve, because you have to, this restorative environment, everything's restorative, even when we have disagreements as staff we use a restorative approach. And so, because you wear that on your sleeve, I think that attracts like-minded people or people that want to know more about it [...] Because they see, oh these guys are actually different.

In this statement, Jennifer notes how embodying restorative values as an agency is essential to facilitating a restorative process. By embodying a restorative environment, CJI also embodies an empowering, as opposed to directive, governing techniques.

As Adrianna expressed to me, they "really keep true to the restorative value" in how they communicate to and support their volunteers. The quotation noted above in which Irma expressed the challenges of letting go of outcomes in a stakeholder process came out of her discussion on the importance of peer support nights to the experience of volunteers. As discussed

in the first analytical chapter, volunteers see these settings as integral to the process of adopting the restorative philosophy and learning to embody RJ values.

From my observations, through listening, talking, and learning, these settings serve as a place in which volunteers share their experiences and frustrations to encourage and empower each other to further embody RJ values. As opposed to a directive approach to governing their volunteers, these sessions employ a similar empowering governing dynamic in which volunteers affirm and empower each other through the sharing of stories. At the session I attended, volunteers expressed awe and excitement about their engagement, along with their frustrations around motivating participants and sessions that did not come to resolution. Trainers and long-time volunteers encouraged each other and newer volunteers by admitting their limitations and focusing on the challenging moments as “planting seeds” that might come to fruition at a later point.

These evenings are one example of how volunteers see CJI embodying the restorative values of empowerment. They also express how empowerment is embodied at CJI through their commitment to offering free services, when possible, and working with vulnerable and shunned populations. In our conversation, Emma noted how she sees the values embodied in the organizational structure:

We empower people to have voice, we respect people and meet people where we are at. We have common values and those are really important. And we usually speak from our values as a work place. [...] I think that makes us a pretty special place to be.

For Emma, empowerment is paired with autonomy, by respecting people, and nonjudgment, by meeting people where they are at. These values are core to RJ and core to how CJI sees themselves structured as an agency and how they provide service to their participants. However,

while volunteers express admiration for these values and how they are embodied at CJI, they also illuminate places of tension where less empowering power dynamics are at play.

### **Tensions in an Empowering Labor Structure**

CJI operates with what they describe as a non-hierarchical division of labor in which volunteers are portrayed by staff as their colleagues. The ethos, from my observations and conversations with staff, is one in which the volunteers are seen as “what drives this agency.” Staff do most of the organizational tasks, and volunteers are responsible for the delivery of most of the programming. As one staff member shared with me, “they’re [volunteers] in the ship with the oars and they’re making this organization float.” The common assumption seems to be that this division of labor allows CJI to embody their values of empowerment, as unpaid community members are valued as much as paid staff.

As Emma noted in conversation with me, she hopes to convey this non-hierarchical relationship in her interactions with volunteers:

I’m quick to tell them, and I hope they feel this way, as a staff person I hope they feel that we are, they are our colleagues. Just as much as someone who gets paid to do this, someone who doesn’t get paid to do this is our colleague. So I’m not going to set myself up as the expert in this, umm, but that we both have expertise [...] so I hope that they don’t feel intimidated by that. I don’t try to take control over it, by any means.

Imbedded directly in her discussion of volunteer-staff relations is a desire that volunteers feel empowered as equals to their paid colleagues. The intention to avoid controlling or intimidating governing techniques illustrates how their relationship seeks to embody a different form of power.

Similarly, staff with whom I spoke reflected on how they use restorative methods when addressing conflict within the organization. By using mediation and other methods, such as encouraging open conversation when conflict occurs, they see themselves as embodying

restorative values through equalizing power dynamics and facilitating feedback from volunteers. One staff member reflected with me on how every interaction she has with a volunteer, even when they “address concerns” is positive. She noted the importance of “trying to be restorative in how we approach those things too” by focusing on what “we can learn from each other.”

Another staff member explained it thusly:

You know, if you're going to talk about restorative justice [...] It's not just, “okay we've got a really difficult volunteer here, let's just sweep them under the carpet.” That doesn't work for us. [...] I mean volunteers have their feet entrenched, whereas sometimes staff are on the outer perimeter and they don't see everything that a volunteer sees. So for that feedback, and to say well this was not really a feel good, this should really change [...] All of that is set up and put in place to be able to help us do better what we do. And it basically, it comes down to the volunteers giving us that information.

While acknowledging the different roles that exist between staff and volunteers, this staff member stresses that volunteer experience and insight is highly valued, even in situations of conflict.

Volunteers also reflect on this alternative power dynamic that exists in their relationships with staff at CJI. In our conversation, Matthew shared about the tension within organizations, such as CJI and other service providers or care giving agencies, between expressing love and following rules. He observed how “it's very difficult for institutions to deliver love.” In contrast, he described his experience at CJI as follows:

I guess I know that people in this organization they love me. And they love what I do. [...] I can't tell you why they love me, but I know that what I do here I love personally, and obviously it fits in. But there's not always words for it, right? [...] And it's kinda because we've been down the road together with different things, we've traveled some time together with different issue or whatever. [...] That institution, to have that kind of influence, or feeling or dynamic or whatever, that's a real high experience for me, that's wonderful. That's really really nice.

As the above quote illustrates, Matthew experiences the empowerment structure at CJI as receiving love, an act that he does not usually associate easily with institutions. As such, his

story highlights his perception of CJIs structure as unique and alternative to other organizational power structures with which he interacts. The essence of feeling loved by CJI for Matthew is based in shared experiences, in which he has been an active partner in ‘traveling down the road’ with CJI staff. In talking about this dynamic, he illustrates a sense of equality and respect that underlines the empowering relationship between volunteers and staff, as well as his awe in the ability of CJI as an institution to provide that form of empowerment.

Similarly, Adrinna noted how at CJI “there’s a level of trust” built into the structure at CJI. Reflecting on the freedom she has as a volunteer mediator, she shared how CJI staff provide the framework for feedback and support, but that “they’re not policing you.” She noted that this power dynamic was “particularly rewarding and unique” as she has not experienced other “volunteer positions with that level of trust.” By contrasting the trust she feels at CJI to other forms of governing, such as policing, she illustrates how volunteers experience the empowering structure at CJI as alternative and how this empowering dynamic adds value to their experience.

Other volunteers noted the different ways in which they feel appreciated and recognized by CJI for their contribution. A common theme was the amount of time staff dedicate to communicating with volunteers. One volunteer noted how CJI is the “gold standard” of volunteer support. Additionally, volunteers reflected on the annual recognition dinner at which CJI officially acknowledges their commitments.

Although volunteers at large are extremely positive in how they describe the empowering structure at CJI, there are some points of tension. While the vast majority of volunteers expressed to me their sense of being valued and recognized for their volunteer work at CJI, one volunteer noted that he is frustrated by the difficulty in translating his vast experience at CJI to other contexts. For him, internal recognition within the agency is in tension with a desire to receive

recognition in other contexts. A staff member at CJI illustrated a similar tension in which CJI had to convince larger licensing boards that their volunteer mediation work, based on empowerment, was as valid as other forms of mediation that used more disciplinary tactics.<sup>24</sup> This tension highlights how the empowering dynamics at CJI are constituted as being at odds with power dynamics in the broader culture and thus, that embodying restorative values requires navigating these places of tension.

In a further example of how this tension exists is the power dynamics that are embedded within CJI's volunteer recruitment and training process. As previous chapters illustrate, to embody what they see as an alternative power structure to what exists in other contexts, CJI requires their volunteers to undergo extensive training.<sup>25</sup> This distinction operates as a kind of extensive boundary work, for while it is designed to ensure that they are able to embody empowerment through non-judgment and stakeholder-led processes, it creates barriers for volunteers. These barriers include the cost of and time dedicated to training, as well as the paperwork and background checks for working with vulnerable sectors. Volunteers reflect on these barriers by noting how they might be restrictive. In our interview, Adrianna explained how she knows CJI is “mindful of that being a financial barrier for some people” and that “they make adjustments for those that might otherwise not be able to take, they’re inclusive that way.” Others, such as Minerva, expressed frustration in requiring volunteer labors to pay for their training, noting it as “a question of inclusivity.” Thus, in their attempt to embody empowering

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<sup>24</sup> Woolford (2009) notes this potential tension between how to recognize accomplishments and competency among RJ facilitators, advising that facilitator identity should “derive their sense of legitimacy from the satisfaction and empowerment they provide to participants in restorative justice” as opposed to training and credentials (p. 112).

<sup>25</sup> This process is examined in detail in Ch 3.



power relations, CJI exhibits restrictive power dynamics that prevent some individuals from the opportunity to be involved.

Additionally, in their attempt to build a non-hierarchical structure, they overlook some of the power dynamics embedded in the distinctions between paid and unpaid service providers. While reflections from staff members and volunteers noted above attest to how CJI works to negate these power dynamics, they nevertheless continue to impact CJI's ability to fully embody empowerment. At a regional conference on restorative justice at which CJI staff presented, I observed conference participants reflect on the systemic power dynamic in relying on volunteer labor. They noted how it excludes low-income individuals from this work and prioritizes participation from middle class or financially stable persons, as well as, perhaps unintentionally supporting patriarchal economic structures that undervalue caring, or traditionally female, labor by assigning it to low-paid or volunteer positions. Critical volunteer theorists address this idea by noting how, while volunteer work exposes democratic and empowering values, it perpetuates existing power imbalances because such opportunities are only provided to those with the financial stability to engage in voluntary labor (Hustinx et al., 2010). Thus, while CJI might be attempting to illustrate that volunteer labor is just as important as paid labor, this attempt at embodying empowerment exists within a culture in which individuals are valued through income. As such, it can never be completely successful in dismantling the hierarchies inherent in relying on volunteer labor to accomplish tasks assigned by paid employees, regardless of the empowering way in which those staff govern or support the volunteers. Volunteer reflections of tension in CJI's ability to provide empowering dynamics for their volunteers are but one more illustration of how RJ both seeks to and struggles to embody alternative power relations.

## **Tensions in an Empowering Service Agency**

Another way in which CJI as an agency seeks to embody RJ values is by empowering their participants as a service agency. As noted above volunteers place significant value on the empowerment of RJ participants. Their ability to witness changes in the lives of participants and advocate on their behalf creates meaning in this work.<sup>26</sup> However, volunteers also express how CJI experiences tensions within its goal of providing empowerment to its participants as a service agency because it receives funding from and provides services in conjunction with other agencies that are more directive or punitive in their governing techniques.

A common reflection among volunteers at CJI is that for an RJ agency to exist requires funding and support from other agencies. Volunteers noted that community members, judicial systems, and local government have to be supportive so that CJI can provide empowerment to women in prison or individuals in conflict. In our conversation, Elena noted how she wishes CJI could provide programming for more specialized conflicts but that they “don’t have the money or the resources.” She hypothesized that additional funding could allow them to “build up all those smaller issues” and thus “reach more people.” Similarly, Alan lamented how during the almost 20 years he has been with CJI they have started multiple programs, but due to funding limitations have been unable to continue with them. As he stated in his interview:

The part that I really dislike in some ways is that there is always a fight for funding to do good. [...] And yet CJI continues on with what ever they have and with a lot of volunteers that believe in this and are gonna try to make this work. But it would be so good if this was not something that had to be fought for on a continual basis.

Contained within Alan’s lament is the recognition that for CJI to be funded requires making an argument to funders that they “do good.”

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<sup>26</sup> As this dynamic is addressed more fully in Chapter 4 4 of this thesis, I will not elaborate more fully on it here.

While the funding is necessary, volunteers express how needing to effectively argue that their work is ‘doing good’ constrains and shapes the work itself. In our conversation, Minerva noted how she perceives the funding structure of the prison support work as geared towards facilitating the ground work for re-entry support, which translates into prioritizing the re-entry support role for volunteers. Alternatively, Matthew stressed how the increasing reporting necessary for funding appeals in mediation has changed the “realness” of the experience.

As noted earlier, Matthew expressed awe at CJI’s ability as an agency to demonstrate love, illustrating how he views the power structures embodied at CJI as alternative to ones he observes in other organizations. However, he also noted in our interview that during his 15 plus years of volunteer work at CJI he has seen an increase in bureaucracy and record keeping. For Matthew, the additional reporting changes both the role of the volunteers as well as their ability to empower participants. He notes how the added administrative layer makes it more difficult to “sell RJ” and motivate participant engagement by impeding his ability to build relationships with participants. In our interview he expressed how:

Personally, what I find with that is, in terms of the mediation process, it changes how it is. Because, you’ve got a little bit more administrative or a little more overhead. And I understand why it has to be, because there is all this reporting stuff [...] for the people who are giving you money, the government basically. [...] but it changes it. [...] a person is not right on the ground. [...] And it’s not a criticism, it’s a fact. Right? Like right, I understand that’s how the world works. But it does change it.

Underlying Matthew’s comments is a sense of realism; while he is aware of the role reporting has in shaping and restricting the empowering structure of RJ, he recognizes it as inevitable if CJI is to receive funding to engage in this work. As such, he exposes how in order to engage in empowerment work, CJI must interact with, and sometimes comply with, less empowering power dynamics, such as the constraining dynamics embedded within funding requests.

Similarly, volunteers who support incarcerated women lament the restrictions navigating the prison system places on their work, while noting that these compromises are inevitable for the empowering work to take place. In their discussions on navigating the prison system, volunteers describe how they understand RJ to embody an alternative power dynamic than that which exists in the prison. In her interview, Elena highlighted how because the prison is “a government organization, they have their own set of rules” and CJI has to “mend our own organizational rules” to fit. She contrasted the prison, with “their territory” and “their rules,” to CJI’s organizational goals and noted how it can be “kinda tricky to stay on board with both of them.” Similarly, another volunteer used a story of an interaction with a prison guard to illustrate how the prison system embodies a power dynamic that is contrary to CJI’s goals of empowerment. She noted how the male guard expressed “glee” in highlighting to a group of female volunteers the punitive and fear- based techniques, such as strip searches, used to govern inmates in, as she stated, what he knew was “a narrative that didn’t match why we were there.”

Volunteers note that navigating this alternative power structure impedes their ability to be restorative because, as Minerva said in her interview, “they’re still going through the system.” Similarly, Amelia reflected on how the prison atmosphere impacts her ability to build empowering relationships with the women in prison. She stated:

If I could just do what my instincts said, it would be way easier. But I have to constantly balance this idea that somebody from the institution is sitting behind me and monitoring what I’m doing and screen my behavior through that lens. And it doesn’t change the types of conversation that I’m having, but it does change how I can have them.

In this quote, Amelia stresses how during her volunteer work in the prison, she is aware that she is in an environment that she sees as hostile or critical of her intentions to empower and support program participants. She then sees this awareness as impacting her ability to provide that

service. And yet, while Minerva and Amelia were both critical of the impact that navigating the institution had on their work, they both expressed to me the importance that CJI volunteers comply with the prison regulations so as not to “jeopardize” CJI’s ability to provide restorative services in that setting. As such, they reflect how the opportunity to provide some form of empowerment, even if it is limited by the tensions between restorative and punitive power relations, is important enough to risk some co-option of the restorative model by the retributive system. Their narratives crystalize how CJI’s role as a service provider that functions within larger systems of justice and funding structures constrains their ability to be fully empower their participants.

Similarly, along with impacting their work with participants directly, navigating funding and other external institutions creates a tension in CJI’s ability to engage in more overt political debates around advocating for more empowering power structures. As Minerva stated in her interview:

I don’t know exactly how their funding system works, but because they need to apply for grants to work within the prison system, I don’t know how much, advocacy, activism work they’re doing in terms of breaking down that system. [...] I could be completely wrong, I think they’re coming for the most part as an institution [of] working within the system and reforming it, instead of let’s have a transformation of society and how we do things. [...] I feel like that other role of breaking, trying to break down that system has to be done somewhere else.

While she is clear that her observations are not comprehensive, Minerva notes that from her perspective CJI is limited from engaging in advocating for more empowering structures at a systemic level. Instead they prioritize reform of the existing systems. Minerva’s sentiments were echoed by another volunteer, who noted that restorative justice values lead towards prison abolition, but that that she does not see CJI engaging in that “systemic change component.” Instead she notes that CJI, “by virtue of belief in the rightness of that work (RJ), are building a

case about what it can do [...] even within this ridiculously bad system.” These volunteers’ reflections illustrate how CJI’s role as a provider of restorative services prevents them from advocating for empowerment within the justice system.

This tension around CJI’s limited response to advocating for systemic change in power dynamics was also noted in regard to how they address racial justice in the region. At the regional conference discussed above, I observed some participants’ discontent at how CJI representatives seemed to shrug off the responsibility of RJ to address racial justice in the region as, as one conference participant shared, “outside of their mandate.” Racial justice is a particularly relevant question for RJ in this context as Canada is both witnessing a substantial increase in police-reported violence motivated by ethnic or religious discrimination (Leber, 2015) and beginning to recognize the systemic racism inherent within its criminal justice system (Jamieson, 2017). By excluding themselves from these systemic conflicts grounded in racialized power imbalances, CJI limits their potential to embody empowerment-based power relations and significantly challenge systemic power relations that cause harm.

Similarly, Erin noted in conversation with me how CJI struggles to address the racialized reality of the prison system. With what she sees as a primarily White volunteer population, she wonders how CJI is confronting racial injustice in the criminal system where persons of color are vastly overrepresented. That Erin was the only person, out of the 13 volunteers and three staff members I interviewed, to mention a racial dynamic to this work further illustrates how CJI has refrained from engaging in larger conversations about power relations and empowerment in society. CJI’s staff addressed racial justice in conversation with me only in terms of their continued efforts to diversify their volunteer population, for while noted that their volunteer

population is fairly diverse, they are continually working to encourage greater cultural and income diversity.

RJ scholarship at large struggles with this same tension when negotiating RJ's role in addressing systemic power imbalances. While recognizing that power relations and hierarchies within our society often manifest in conflict, scholars lament that in a pragmatic attempt to address immediate conflicts, RJ often reinforces larger systemic harms such as colonization, racism, or sexism (Jenkins, 2004; Price Lofton, 2004; Woolford, 2009). As such, RJ undermines its alternative nature and inevitably supports the hierarchal and dehumanizing power relations to which it stands opposed. Volunteer experiences at CJI highlight this place of tension within RJ between providing empowerment in individual circumstances and addressing larger power imbalances within society.

## **Discussion**

Volunteers express both awe for the alternative power dynamics exhibited through RJ as well as tensions in learning to embody those dynamics. In tracing these tensions both in their personal struggles with empowerment as well as the larger structural tensions they witness, volunteers expose how power relations are embodied both at the structural level as well as the interpersonal level. Their personal experiences of tension with facilitating a stakeholder-based process and embodying nonjudgment help to constitute their conception of RJ as grounded in an empowering power dynamic. With this constituted vision of the significance of empowerment to RJ, volunteers then reflect on places where CJI struggles to fully embody this restorative dynamic in their labor structure and their provision of restorative services.

The tensions that volunteers express in striving to embody RJ values illustrate their struggle to critique punitive power systems by presenting what they see as alternative, more

holistic forms of governing. Their discussions of empowerment within RJ illustrate how it operates as means to govern, or ‘conduct conduct’ of those involved in conflict. However, they focus their narratives on how they see this method of governing as more holistic and participant focused than disciplinary governing techniques that exist elsewhere. As such, their reflections on power within RJ illustrate Cruickshank's (1999) notion that “will to empower contains the twin possibilities of domination and freedom” by focusing on how on the potential RJ providers for freedom and hope for its participants (p 2).

However, their narratives also illustrate that this governing technique is incomplete because it operates in competition with and while inside of other societal governing dynamics at play. For while RJ seeks to empower participants, it is constrained in this potential by navigating the directive, punitive, and hierarchal power dynamics of funding agencies and the criminal justice system. Additionally, RJ – at least in this context – inadvertently supports systemic power imbalances by refusing to address racial and political climates of oppression.

As such, volunteers’ experiences navigating RJ practice illustrates the importance of analysing power structures embedded with RJ practice. While RJ scholarship struggles to determine the role of government involvement and oversight within RJ practice, these narratives stress the importance of recognizing the contrasting power relationships that are at play. For while volunteers highlight how CJI seeks to embody alternative power dynamics, they also note that it exists within a system that limits its ability to do so.

It is in this space of tensions between idealized values and embodying practices that volunteer personal narratives of struggle illustrate the potential for, as well as the challenge of, restorative power relations. For, in those narratives volunteers illustrate how embodying restorative values is something that remains tenuous, that require consistent reminders and



encouragement, and yet is something they persist in striving towards. Their experience echoes the potential envisioned within constitutive criminology for individuals to escape pervasive power constructions and harmful social constructions – such as the hierarchal, directive, and dehumanizing power relations volunteers note within their society and justice systems – simply through exposing those systems and then investing energy into alternative ones (Henry & Milovanovic, 2000). It is in these small acts of exposing harmful power relations and investing energy in alternative dynamics, both personally and organizationally, that RJ creates the potential to reconstitute power relations and effect social transformation.

Volunteer experiences illustrate how they see RJ as effecting this sort of change, if only in a limited capacity. As RJ advocates Von Hirsh, Ashworth, and Shearing (2003) describe in their discussion of the aspirational qualities of RJ, while volunteers note the tensions in embodying RJ values, they focus on the hopeful changes that are being made and “see themselves as serious reformers” (p. 24). For volunteers understand empowerment in RJ as an ideological stance that is embodied within power relationships, and as such reforming society. In this embodiment process, both structurally and individually, volunteers note places of tension in which the power relationships in the broader culture, which they name as directive or judgemental, push back or resist their attempts to be empowering.

As such, by investigating their experiences, this chapter illuminates how in engaging with RJ volunteers expose the pervasiveness of the punitive and harmful power relations in their Canadian, Settler context, as well as the potential for alternative power dynamics within a restorative framework. Their experiences serve as both a reminder for RJ scholarship to be aware of imbedded power dynamics, as well as source of inspiration for the potential within RJ to effect transformation through engagement. For, as Woolford (2009) notes in his discussion on

the politics of restorative justice, it is only once the power dynamics within RJ are recognized that RJ can truly be transformative.

## **Chapter 7**

### **Conclusion**

Using an inductive qualitative approach, this thesis explores the meaning of RJ as seen through the lived experience of volunteer facilitators in a way that illuminates the constituted nature of RJ. By examining how volunteers frame and describe meaning through 16 interviews and nearly 40 hours of participant observation, this study illustrates how meaning and understanding, for participants within this study, is created through experiencing RJ in practice. In tracing how volunteers see their engagement with RJ and their roles within RJ proceedings, this thesis illuminates the processes through which meaning within RJ is constructed. In so doing, this thesis addresses some of the blind spots within RJ literature.

RJ literature, as noted in the introduction and background chapters, fails to address the lived experience of its volunteer facilitators. The insights that the experience of these volunteers, who are essential to both RJ's theoretical grounding as a community and stakeholder-based process as well as its practical application, can provide about the nature of RJ and its advocates have been neglected. This study fills that gap, and in so doing illustrates how RJ, and its advocates, are constituted through engagement.

As a means of concluding this thesis, this chapter reflects on the meaning that volunteers see within RJ and the significance of exploring their experience for RJ literature. In particular, it addresses the potential that exists for RJ when envisioned as a constituted social system that is both created by and creates processes and agents of empowerment and transformation. While the nature of this research as a qualitative case-study does not present generalizable findings, the volunteer experiences do provide transferable insights. These insights include the allure that conceiving of RJ as an alternative vision of justice provides, the significance of witnessing

narratives of impact to understanding RJ, and the embodied power dynamics that RJ represents. However, the key insight that this thesis offers lies in illuminating the constitutive nature of RJ, and the recognition that RJ, like other socially constructed systems, exists within and through its practices, not separate from them.

This conclusion begins by addressing the summary of findings in reference to the three research questions raised in the introduction:

How do volunteers conceive of their engagement with RJ and their roles within RJ proceedings?

What are the processes through which meaning is constructed for volunteers?

What insights do volunteer perspectives offer about the nature of, and potential for, RJ?

As the following section address, the participants of this study conceive of their engagement with RJ by focusing on RJ's alternative nature and the perceived impacts of their work. Their excitement, commitment, and hope are constructed and constituted, along with their conceptions of meaning within RJ, through volunteers' experiences with RJ. As such, their perspectives offer insights about the embodied and alternative nature of RJ, including its struggles to advance empowerment-based power relations, and the potential for RJ that exists in witnessing and sharing narratives of impact. After reviewing the summary of findings, this chapter concludes by addressing the broader implications of volunteers' reflections on RJ as constituted through engagement, particularly regarding the theoretical and political assumptions of constitutive criminology,

### **Summary of Findings**

In response to the first research question, the three analytical chapters illustrate how volunteers conceive of their engagement with RJ by focusing on its alternative nature and its

potential for life changing impact. The participants of this study express a valuing of an alternative vision of justice that RJ presents. Specifically, as noted in the chapters 5 and 6 and detailed further in chapter 4, volunteers express discontent with a punitive justice system that is controlling, dehumanizing, and harmful. Chapter 5, “Impacts of RJ Work,” traces how in response, volunteers choose to engage in weekly acts of volunteering that create the possibility for almost mystical transformation. Even when they note the tensions and challenges in fully embracing restorative principles, discussed in chapter 6, they remain excited about the potential that RJ holds for growth and restoration.

Chapter 4 addresses how volunteers conceive of their role within RJ as that of facilitator advocates for what they see as an alternative and transformational model for addressing conflict. Chapter 5 focuses on the transformational aspect by interrogating the significance volunteers place on impact and the potential for change that RJ offers participants, facilitators, and the community at large. Chapter 6 illuminates how volunteers understand the alternative nature of RJ to be grounded in its empowerment-based power relations and their personal experiences with embodying those dynamics.

In investigating volunteers’ conceptions of their engagement and roles, the three analytical chapters likewise address how meaning is constructed and constituted for volunteers by engaging with RJ. Chapter 4 traces the emergence of the volunteer advocate identity through the liminal process of becoming a volunteer at CJI and illuminates how adopting such an identity occurs only through prolonged engagement with RJ. Chapter 5, similarly, illustrates how experiences with participant, personal, and social impact help to constitute meaning, motivations, and values for volunteers. Chapter 6 builds on these chapters by addressing how the radical

power relations that volunteers see as essential to RJ are developed and embodied throughout RJ practices.

Together, these three chapters provide a variety of insights into the nature of, and potential for, RJ. While the literature debates the essence of RJ – as intervention or reform, outcome or process, transformational or co-opted – volunteers experiences provide insight into how the essence of RJ takes hold within RJ practice. As such, by investigating the experiences of volunteers within RJ, this thesis provides substantial contributions to RJ literature. Chapter 4 illustrates how for volunteers, the roles of RJ facilitator and RJ advocate are interdependent, for it is in experiencing RJ that they become passionate about the philosophy and such passion requires them to become advocates on RJ's behalf. Chapter 5 and 6, alternatively, address the debate between prioritizing outcomes or process within RJ literature. Where chapter 5 stresses the importance of narratives of impact in conceiving meaning within RJ, chapter 6 illustrates the significance of the RJ process to these narratives of impact by investigating the restorative power relations that RJ processes embody. Both chapters 5 and 6 also provide insights into RJ's potential for transformation; chapter 5 in discussing volunteers perceptions of social impact and chapter 6 in illuminating the places of tension and resistance to RJ. However, the most significant insight that volunteer perspectives offers RJ scholarship regards the constituted nature of meaning.

Volunteer experiences illuminate how engaging with RJ is a means of constituting an alternative vision for addressing conflict that empowers and transforms communities. Constitutive theories within criminology argue that legal consciousness, as well as the very nature of law and criminal justice, are socially constructed and constituted through individual experiences. Similarly, this thesis argues that RJ, as an alternative approach to harm and crime, is

likewise constituted through experiences and that through engaging in RJ processes, volunteers construct the meaning of RJ, their own identities, and the alternative social structures that RJ envisions.

### **Constituting a Replacement Discourse of Restorative Justice**

Volunteer narratives crystalize how RJ – at least for them – is grounded in empowerment, alluding to a radically alternative assumption about power relations that RJ represents, and produces impacts and change in the lives of facilitators, participants, and the broader community. Additionally, volunteer narratives expose how their conception of RJ and its radical power relations are constituted through engagement. Their experiences sheds insight into how RJ, as a vision of responding to harm, is what constitutive criminology refers to as a “replacement discourse” that creates the “potential for human growth” (Henry & Milovanovic 2000, p. 270-271).

In summarizing the theory of constituted criminology, Stuart Henry and Dragan Milovanovic (2000) argue that it includes a political mandate. For them, in exposing the constituted nature of reality, constituted criminology has the responsibility to make “the politically conscious analysis that some social constructions and ways are more harmful and others are less harmful” and then invest energy into creating less harmful constructions (p. 270-271). Henry and Milovanovic (2000) argue for deconstructing harmful constructions and reconstituting ‘replacement discourses’ that are less harmful and restrictive. By recognizing the constituting process through which we construct concepts, systems, or discourses, and are in turn constrained or liberated by those constructs, constitutive theories create a framework in which constructing systems designed for human growth is possible. RJ, as seen through this thesis, provides one such replacement discourse that creates potential for human growth. Volunteer

participants narratives describe RJ as an alternative framework to address harm, one that replaces controlling or dehumanizing frameworks, and in turn provides impacts of transformation and empowerment – or human growth.

In their application of a constitutive framework to criminology, Henry and Milovanovic (2000) define crime as “the harm resulting from humans investing energy in harm-producing relations of power” (p. 27). They note that crime is domination, or the act of denying agency, and that such acts are coproductions of investing in unequal power relations. As such, Henry and Milovanovic (2000) see criminal justice as similarly harm producing because it denies people the freedom to act and interact with the world. Volunteer experiences, particularly those addressed in chapter 6, illustrate how the power relations that exist within RJ contrast the harm producing and dehumanizing power relations that exist within the criminal justice system. Their experiences of RJ illuminate how RJ answers Henry and Milovanovic call for a response to the harmful and domineering power relations that produce harm by creating a “justice policy of reconstruction” based in reconstituting less harmful power relations (Henry & Milovanovic, 2000, p. 275).

The volunteer experiences of RJ investigated through this thesis echo the arguments of Henry and Milovanovic (2000) and present RJ as a replacement discourse that furthers such a justice policy of reconstruction. The experiences discussed within the previous three analytical chapters illustrate how volunteers see RJ as an alternative model for addressing conflict grounded in power relations that are empowering, as opposed to limiting or directive. Additionally, they express how the processes of RJ, when applying empowerment and nonjudgment, creates the potential for transformation, movement, and growth. As such, this thesis illuminates how, by seeking to embody empowerment, RJ, and its facilitators, engage in what Henry and Milovanovic (2000) might refer to as reconstituting ‘less harmful’ power



relations and open “the possibility for transformation of human subjects and the social structures we construct” (Colvin, 1997, p. 1450).

By investigating the process through which meaning is constructed for volunteers, this thesis also addresses how such reconstituting might take place. Guided by the tenants of Symbolic Interactionism (SI), this thesis explores how meaning and identity within RJ are constituted through personal experiences. As such, it responds the questions of Naomi Mezey (2006) and Kathleen Daly (2003) about how RJ, and other systems, are adopted.

Mezey (2006), in responding to the concepts of constitute criminology, asks about the mechanisms of transmission and inscription. She wonders about the processes through which social practices are constituted by individual narratives and acts. While constitutive theory argues for that humans are “coproducers and coproductions” (Henry & Milovanovic, 2000, p. 271) of social systems, Mezey (2006) asks about the mid-level theories that explain how such coproducing takes place. This thesis addresses such questions by examining how RJ is constituted for volunteers. Volunteers narratives, as discussed within the three analytical chapters, crystalize how - at least for them - meaning within RJ is constituted throughout their personal experiences. Those experiences include witnessing narratives of impact – either personally or as shared by other volunteers, staff or participants – learning to embody empowering power dynamics, and adopting the alternative philosophy of RJ. As volunteers produce and facilitate RJ processes for participates, they also produce their own identities within the framework and the values of RJ.

In such a way, this thesis also addresses the concerns expressed by Daly (2003) about the gap between theory and practice within RJ. Daly (2003) illustrates, using research from RJ practices around the world, how in practice RJ programs do not always embody RJ theory. She

notes that because RJ is alternative and advances new scripts for addressing conflict it does not always live up to expectations. She then poses the question of how the scripts of RJ are to be transmitted and adopted within society, particularly as RJ often happens within confidential dialogue settings. While volunteer experiences reflected within this thesis also address the places of tension that exist in embodying RJ theory within practice, they highlight how the alternative nature of RJ requires experience to understand – and that it is within experiencing it as an alternative that transformation takes place.

This study examines the meaning-making process for volunteers that includes investigating narratives of impact, exposure to RJ processes, and adopting RJ philosophies. In so doing, it illuminates how identity and meaning are co-constituted by RJ volunteers through their engagement with RJ. The volunteers' faith in and understanding of RJ is constituted through their experiences of RJ, which then create the vision of RJ that they, and the agency in which they serve, embody within their community. As such, this "dance of mutual constructiveness," as Mezey (2006) names the constitutive process, is embedded within the experience of RJ itself (p. 152). As noted in the introduction to this thesis, volunteer experiences illustrate how RJ, like other social structures that "confront us as external and coercive, do not exist apart from our collective actions and thoughts as we apply schemas to make sense of the world" (Ewick & Silbey, 1998, p. 44).

In response to the questions of transcription and inscription posed by Mezey (2006) and Daly (2003), volunteer experiences offer the insight that RJ is constituted through and by experiences. Their reflections illustrate that RJ does not exist separately from the practices in which it is embodied and cannot be constituted, except through processes of empowerment that provide opportunity for transformation and change. In this, volunteer experiences hold together

the significance of both impact and process within RJ. For, within their experiences volunteers illustrate how it is within the reconstituting power relations of the RJ process that the transformational impacts take place, and also that only through sharing and witnessing narratives of impact is the potential for embracing such alternative power dynamics created. Based on their interconnectedness of their conceptions of meaning in and of RJ noted in chapter 4, I forward the observation that for volunteers, the theory does not exist separate from its incarnation within restorative processes and the resulting restorative outcomes.

However, their reflections on the tensions they experience and witness in embodying these restorative processes and facilitating these restorative outcomes, documented in chapter 6, illustrate how the practice of RJ is incomplete. In constituting RJ, they, and CJI, fall short of embodying empowerment and reconstituting the harmful power dynamics at play in the society around them. As such, volunteers' experiences echo Daly's (2003) reflections that RJ in practice does not live up to its ideal. Their experiences of tension related to facilitating the stakeholder-based process and maintaining nonjudgement, as well as their reflections on the limitations within CJI's ability to be fully empowering within their structure and service, illustrate how RJ values are at tension with larger cultural scripts and assumptions. Yet, volunteers maintain hope that such a potential for transformation and empowerment remains possible. In this, they counter the pessimism of advocates such as Daly, and even Zehr (2005) who notes that "retributive justice is deeply embedded in our political institutions and our psyche; perhaps too much to hope for that to change in fundamental ways" (p. 227), through their continued engagement and hope in the potential of RJ. For while they see the limitations of RJ in its current form, they continue to facilitate, advocate, and hope on RJ's behalf.

The hope and commitment volunteers express, regardless of their experience of tension, illustrates what Henry and Milovanovic (2000) describe as the ‘recovering human subject.’ For as Henry and Milovanovic (2000, p. 272) describe:

The human subject is seen as “recovering” because it always striving for a final and certain state of being, but never arrives. Such a vision is an important first step in developing a framework that allows for the richness of human potentiality, without foreclosing its endless possibilities. The recovering human subject always has the potential to escape the cages of its own and others' constructions, not least by investing energy in new ones.

As such, the volunteer experiences illustrate how even in their struggles to embody empowerment with RJ, they are developing a restorative framework that provides space for human potential. By never arriving at a complete vision of empowerment, they create space in which to continue to challenge themselves and RJ to continue reconstituting a more empowering vision of itself. Instead of becoming satisfied with their current version of a less harmful justice system, they continue to strive for a more inclusive, more democratic, and more restorative vision. This is illustrated in their reflections on how they note continued opportunity for self growth and advocacy related to community change, discussed in chapters 4 and 5, as well as their commitment towards continuing to practice empowerment, even when they struggle, discussed in chapter 6.

### **Future Research**

I began this thesis by describing the experience of two teenagers who underwent a restorative process in 1974. In proposing an alternative sentence for these two individuals, the parole officer on their case engaged in reconstituting the justice system by advancing a more restorative alternative. Today, the agency that developed out of that act continues to reconstitute the vision of justice in their community by responding to instances of harm with empowerment and nonjudgment. However, this is only one story of RJ.

This study illuminates the constitutive nature of RJ within the lived experience of volunteer facilitators in one of the earliest and longest running RJ programs to work within the colonial legal setting. This thesis explores how, for the community members who engage in this work as volunteers, RJ is constituted through these processes of empowerment and the potential for transformation that they create. It examines how through experiencing restorative power relations and witnessing transformational impacts, community members adopt identities of facilitator advocates on behalf of RJ. In so doing it provides insights into how understanding and advocacy for RJ can be grounded in experiencing alternative power dynamics and witnessing narratives of impact. These insights about the nature of RJ and its facilitator advocates, about the integrated relationship between impact and process, and about the ongoing tensions in embodying the empowering dynamics of RJ within a larger retributive and directive power relations, provide *sensitizing concepts* for future RJ research to explore in other spaces. In investigating volunteer experiences in one local, this thesis offers future RJ literature “directions along which to look” (Blumer, 1969, p. 148). Research on how facilitators, and participants, experience RJ in other contexts, particular as related to its constitutive nature, will similarly enrich the literature.

The insights raised in examining volunteer experiences, particularly related to tensions of RJ in addressing and advocating on behalf of larger systemic issues, should encourage research to explore how, and if RJ, can be engaged in addressing systemic harms. Additionally, the recognition that RJ, in the context of this study, has yet to address racial tension calls for future research to examine such models of RJ, particularly as they exist within Settler communities, with a critical race or decolonizing framework. While this thesis crystalizes the constitutive nature of RJ, it also challenges RJ practitioners and researchers to continue to examine the places

of tension, in which RJ practice is not effective or empowering, and the impact embodying such places without awareness of these tensions may have on the potential to constitute RJ as a replacement, and less harmful, justice model.

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## APPENDIX A

### Letter of Information and Informed Consent

**Project Title:** What Motivates Restorative Justice Volunteers? A Case Study

**Research Method:** Semi-Structured Interviews

**Researcher:** Rebekah Smoot-Enns, MA Student

Department of Sociology & Legal Studies  
University of Waterloo  
200 University Ave. W.  
Waterloo, ON N2L 3G1  
Tel: (226) 868-0104  
Email: [renns@uwaterloo.ca](mailto:renns@uwaterloo.ca)

**Supervisor:** Rashmee Singh, PhD

Department of Sociology & Legal Studies  
University of Waterloo  
200 University Ave. W.  
Waterloo, ON N2L 3G1  
Tel: (519) 888-4567, ext. 33020  
Email: [r78singh@uwaterloo.ca](mailto:r78singh@uwaterloo.ca)

You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by Rebekah Smoot-Enns in the Department of Sociology & Legal Studies at the University of Waterloo. The objective of this study is to gather information on how community members are motivated to volunteer with restorative justice programs. The findings will be used to increase the translatable knowledge available on restorative justice volunteers and to provide recommendations to community restorative justice programs on building successful volunteer recruitment and retention strategies.

#### **Purpose of the study**

Restorative Justice (RJ) programs rely on community volunteers to fulfill vital program functions, including facilitating victim-offender conferences and mediations, participating in support circles, and providing administrative support. Developing and maintaining strong volunteer engagement can be a challenge for community RJ programs.

Thus, the primary objective of this research is to develop important knowledge about why volunteer are motived to participate in restorative justice programing and examine how CJI engages and motivates its community members. This entails addressing questions on the experiences of volunteers within CJI, the training and orientation process, the volunteers understanding of RJ values and their perspectives on the role CJI plays in the larger community.

If you decide to participate in this study, you will be asked to meet with the researcher for an interview. The data collected will be used for the researcher's Master's thesis, as well as to provide groundwork for a number of academic publications, articles in appropriate trade publications, conference presentations. The thesis will be made available to CJI following its defense, you are also welcome toe request a copy from the researcher at [renns@uwaterloo.ca](mailto:renns@uwaterloo.ca)

#### **Procedures involved in the research**

Participation in this study is voluntary. It will involve an interview of approximately (insert time) in length to take place in a mutually agreed upon location. You may decline to answer any of the interview questions if you so

wish. Further, you may decide to withdraw from this study at any time without any negative consequences by advising the researcher. With your permission, the interview will be audio recorded to facilitate collection of information, and later transcribed for analysis. Shortly after the interview has been completed, I will send you a copy of the transcript to give you an opportunity to confirm the accuracy of our conversation and to add or clarify any points that you wish. All information you provide is considered completely confidential. Your name will not appear in any thesis or report resulting from this study, however, with your permission anonymous quotations may be used. Data collected during this study will be retained for 10 years in a locked office at the University of Waterloo. Only researchers associated with this project will have access. There are no known or anticipated risks to you as a participant in this study.

### **Potential harms, risks, or discomforts**

There are no anticipated physical or psychological risks with your participation in this study. The interview questions will be focused on your decision to volunteer at CJI. There is a possibility that this line of questioning could prompt some emotionally difficult thoughts and memories, particularly when questions relate to previous interactions with criminal justice. However, the foreseeable emotional risk associated with discussing your motivations and personal history is not greater than that you would encounter in your regular volunteer work with CJI.

### **Potential benefits**

The results from this study will be of direct benefit to participants in several ways. *First*, participation in this study will ensure that volunteer experiences and narratives are considered when developing program recruitment goals and strategies for restorative justice. *Second*, the study will assist your organization in better understanding and supporting its volunteers. *Third*, the findings of the study will provide valuable information to other RJ programs looking to develop volunteer recruitment strategies. Such knowledge will allow for increased capacity of current RJ programs and development of new programs. *Fourth*, this will assist in ensuring that RJ programs are available in more communities and can be used to address more cases in which a restorative approach would be beneficial to victims, offenders and the larger community. Additionally, discussing their own stories of engagement and reflecting on motivations could benefit their self-knowledge and clarify their personal feelings around CJI and RJ.

### **Confidentiality**

All data collected through the interviews will not contain any personal information or other relevant details. Your name will not appear in any thesis or report resulting from this study, however, with your permission anonymous quotations may be used. If there is any possibility that a quotation could compromise confidentiality, I will contact so you can review the information and provide informed consent for its use in that context. All information you provide is considered completely confidential and will not be shared with other participants or CJI. As this is a case study, there is the possibility the CJI executive director, staff, and volunteers could identify participants and/or their comments from the study findings, quotations, etc.

The Informed Consent form will be kept in locked, secure storage space separate from the audio recording and transcript at the University of Waterloo. You will receive a signed copy of the Informed Consent form for your

records. The audio recording will also be kept separate from the transcripts, in a password protected encrypted file on external hard drive in a locked office at the University of Waterloo. No identifying factors will be included in the transcript. All data collected during this study will be retained for 10 years in a locked office at the University of Waterloo. Only researchers associated with this project will have access. All observational data and Informed Consent forms will be destroyed 10 years after study completion.

For all other questions or if you would like additional information to assist you in reaching a decision about participation, please contact me at 226-868-0104 or by email at renns@uwaterloo.ca. You can also contact my supervisor, Professor Rashmee Singh at (519) 888-4567, ext. 33020 or email (r78singh@uwaterloo.ca). This study has been reviewed and received ethics clearance through a University of Waterloo Research Ethics Committee (ORE#22383). If you have questions for the Committee contact the Chief Ethics Officer, Office of Research Ethics, at 1-519-888-4567 ext. 36005 or ore-ceo@uwaterloo.ca.

I would like to thank you for your participation in this study.

Yours sincerely,

Rebekah Smoot-Enns, MA Student



**INFORMED CONSENT TO PARTICPATE IN INTERVIEW**

**What Motivated Restorative Justice Volunteers? A Case Study**

Please initial each box below to indicate your consent for each right and privacy option. By signing this consent form, you are not waiving your legal rights or releasing the investigators or involved institutions from their legal and professional responsibilities.

**Consent and Privacy Options** **YES** **NO**

- 1 I understand I am voluntarily participating in this research.
- 2 I agree to have my interview audio recorded
- 3 I agree to the use of anonymous quotations in any thesis or publication that comes of this research.
- 4 I would like to receive a copy of the Executive Summary and Thesis when it is completed.

I have read the information presented in the Information Letter about a study being conducted by Rebekah Smoot-Enns of the Department of Sociology & Legal Studies at the University of Waterloo under the supervision of Dr. Rashmee Singh. I have had the opportunity to ask any questions related to the study, to receive satisfactory answers to my questions, and any additional details I wanted.

I am aware that I have the option of allowing my interview to be audio recorded to ensure an accurate recording of my responses. I am also aware that excerpts from the interview may be included in the thesis and/or publications to come from this research, with the understanding that the quotations will be anonymous. I was informed that I may withdraw my consent at any time without penalty by advising the researcher.

This project has been reviewed by, and received ethics clearance through a University of Waterloo Research Ethics Committee. I was informed that if I have any comments or concerns resulting from my participation in the study, I may contact the Director, Office of Research Ethics at 519-888-4567 ext. 36005.

With full knowledge of all foregoing, I agree, of my own free will, to participate in this study.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Participant (please print) – Date (dd/mm/yy)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Email address

In my opinion, the person who has signed this Informed Consent is agreeing to participate in this study voluntarily, understands the nature of the study, and any consequences of participation.

**APPENDIX B**  
**Interview Recruitment Email – Staff**

Distributed to CJI staff

FORWARDED TEXT:

Hello,

This email is being sent to you on behalf of the researchers in a study on restorative justice volunteers.

My name is Rebekah Smoot-Enns and I am a MA student working under the supervision of **Dr. Rashmee Singh** in the Department of Sociology and Legal Studies at the University of Waterloo. I am interested in what makes community members decide to volunteer in restorative justice programs, such as Community Justice Initiatives (CJI). I am currently looking for staff at CJI who work regularly with volunteers who would be interested in being interviewed as a part of my research.

Participation in this study involves one 45 to 60 minute interview. We can set the interview up in a place and time that is convenient for you. During the interview, you would be asked about your interactions with volunteers at CJI. You would be able to decline to answer any of the interview questions if you so wished without penalty. Further, your participation is completely voluntary. You can decide to withdraw from this study at any time without any negative consequences. With your permission, the interview would also be audio recorded to facilitate collection of information, and later transcribed for analysis. However, any information you share will be confidential and any quotations I use in later published work would be anonymous.

If you are willing after the interview, I will also ask you to forward an invitation to 3-4 volunteers with whom you work to contact me if they are interested in participating in this research study.

Please find attached a more detailed letter of explanation and consent form.

If you are interested in participating in an interview, please contact me at 226-868-0104 or by email at [renns@uwaterloo.ca](mailto:renns@uwaterloo.ca).

I look forward to hearing about your experiences with CJI,

Sincerely,

Rebekah Smoot-Enns



**APPENDIX C**  
**Interview Recruitment Email – Volunteers**

Distributed by CJI staff to volunteers.

FORWARDED TEXT:

Hello,

This email is being sent to you on behalf of the researchers in a study on restorative justice volunteers.

My name is Rebekah Smoot-Enns and I am a MA student working under the supervisions of **Dr. Rashmee Singh** in the Department of Sociology and Legal Studies at the University of Waterloo. I'm interested in what makes community members decide to volunteer in restorative justice programs, such as Community Justice Initiatives (CJI). I am currently looking for volunteers at CJI who work regularly with the restorative justice programing and who would be interested in being interviewed as a part of my research.

Participation in this study involves one 60 to 90 minute interview. We can set the interview up in a place and time that is convenient for you. During the interview, you would be asked about your motivations for volunteering with CJI and your experience with restorative justice. You would be able to decline to answer any of the interview questions if you so wished without penalty. Further, your participation is completely voluntary. You can decide to withdraw from this study at any time without any negative consequences. With your permission, the interview would also be audio recorded to facilitate collection of information, and later transcribed for analysis. However, any information you share will be confidential and any quotations I use in later published work would be anonymous.

Please find attached a more detailed letter of explanation and consent form.

If you are interested in participating in an interview, please contact me at 226-868-0104 or by email at [renns@uwaterloo.ca](mailto:renns@uwaterloo.ca).

I look forward to hearing about your experiences with CJI,

Sincerely,

Rebekah Smoot-Enns

## **APPENDIX D**

### **Restorative Justice Volunteer Motivations**

Semi-Structured interview schedule— Staff

#### Preliminary

Information Letter.

Verbally note that while confidentiality will be maintained, due to the nature of a case study, there is the possibility the CJI executive director, staff, and volunteers could identify participants and/or their comments from the study findings, quotations, etc.

Respond to any questions about the study or the participation in the interview

Sign Informed Consent Form

Provide research participant with a copy of the signed informed consent sheet

#### Background information

- 1) How long have you been working with volunteers at CJI?
  - a. In what ways do you work with volunteers?
  - b. What motivates you to work with volunteers?
- 2) What roles do volunteers take on at CJI?
- 3) What do you see as the most important characteristics for a CJI volunteer?
- 4) What do you like best about working with volunteers?
- 5) What do you like least?

#### RJ Values

- 6) In your view, what are the goals of RJ?
  - a. Do you believe in these goals?
  - b. How important is this goal to you in your volunteer work with CJI?
  - c. How does CJI live out this goal in your community?
  - d. In the criminal justice system?

#### CJI culture

- 7) How do volunteers fit into the larger vision of CJI?
- 8) How do volunteers hear about CJI?

- a. What are CJI recruitment strategies?
- 9) What is involved with the training and orientation for volunteers?
  - a. What are the goals of the trainings?
- 10) In what ways are volunteers recognized for their time and commitment to CJI?

### Volunteer Motivations

- 11) Based on your experiences, what are some common reasons community members volunteer with CJI?
- 12) If you had to identify a primary motivation to volunteer, what would you say and why?
- 13) How do you see motivations change throughout a volunteers experience with CJI?

### Motivating Volunteers

- 14) How does CJI work to maintain or spark volunteer motivations?
  - a. In what ways are encouraging volunteer engagement a goal of the training program?
- 15) What strategies do you personally use to motivate volunteers?
  - a. How do you know your strategies are working?
- 16) What do you see as the main challenges to overcome in recruiting new volunteers?
  - a. What are the main challenges in retaining experienced volunteers?

### Summary questions

- 17) How would you describe the ways in which CJI volunteers relate to one another and the organization as a whole?
- 18) How does CJI relate and recognize their volunteers?
- 19) What is your most memorable experience with a CJI volunteer?
- 20) What would make you want to volunteer with CJI?
- 21) What are the challenges you see regarding volunteer recruitment and retention?
- 22) Is there anything that we haven't mentioned today that you think is important for understanding volunteer engagements with CJI?
- 23) Do you have any additional questions that I can answer now that we have finished the interview?

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this research.

## **APPENDIX E**

### **Restorative Justice Volunteer Motivation**

#### Semi-Structured interview schedule— Volunteers

##### Preliminary

###### Information Letter

Verbally note that while confidentiality will be maintained, due to the nature of a case study, there is the possibility the CJJ executive director, staff, and volunteers could identify participants and/or their comments from the study findings, quotations, etc.

Respond to any questions about the study or the participation in the interview

###### Sign Informed Consent Form

Provide research participant with a copy of the signed informed consent sheet

##### Background information

- 1) How long have you been volunteering with CJJ?
- 2) What roles do you have as a volunteer here?
  - a. What does volunteering in \_\_\_ role typically involve?
  - b. How much time do you dedicate to your role a week? A month? A year?
- 3) What for you is the most important aspect of being a volunteer with CJJ?
- 4) What training did you receive prior to your volunteer work?
  - a. In your opinion, what was the goal of the volunteer training?
  - b. How did it meet that goal?
- 5) Do you, or have you ever, volunteered with any other organizations?
  - a. How does volunteering with CJJ differ from volunteering with other organizations?
- 6) What do you see as the most important characteristics for a CJJ volunteer?

##### Motivations

- 7) What motivates you to volunteer with CJJ?
- 8) What do you see as the most meaningful aspect of your volunteering?
- 9) What is the most difficult/challenging?
  - a. When this \_\_\_\_\_ occurs, what keeps you going as a volunteer?
- 10) Have you ever considered ending your volunteer work with CJJ?
  - a. Why?
  - b. What changed your mind?

##### Introduction Story

- 11) How did you first hear about CJI?
  - a. What interested you in learning more?
  - b. How did you go about getting involved with CJI?
- 12) Prior to your work with CJI, what were your interactions with criminal justice?
  - a. What opinions did you have about criminal justice?
  - b. In what ways have your impressions of the criminal justice system changed now that you are a volunteer in a restorative justice program?
- 13) How did you first become introduced to Restorative Justice?
  - a. What were your initial impressions of RJ at the time?
  - b. In what ways have your impressions of RJ changed?

### Values

- 14) What do you see as the main values of restorative justice?
  - a. How are these values visible at CJI?
- 15) How do you see RJ values connecting with spiritual or religious values you hold personally?
  - a. How did you become aware of the connection (if connection exists)?
  - b. How might an awareness of religious or spiritual values affect your volunteer work?
- 16) How important are the RJ values in your decision to volunteer with CJI?
- 17) How might other volunteers engage with or understand RJ values differently?

### Role of RJ

- 18) In your view, what is the goal of RJ?
  - a. Do you believe in this goal?
  - b. How important is this goal to you in your volunteer work with CJI?
  - c. How does CJI live out this goal in your community?
  - d. In the criminal justice system?
- 19) In what ways does your volunteer work support this goal?
- 20) In a perfect world, how could CJI achieve this goal more fully?
- 21) What do you see as other potential means to reach this goal?
  - a. Would you consider engaging in any of those capacities?

### Summary questions

- 22) How would you summarize your volunteer work with CJI to someone who knew nothing about RJ or CJI?
- 23) What was your most memorable experience volunteering for CJI?
- 24) Is there anything that we haven't mentioned today that you think is important for understanding your volunteer work with CJI?
- 25) Do you have any additional questions that I can answer now that we have finished the interview?

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this research.



## APPENDIX F

**Project Title: What Motivates Restorative Justice Volunteers? A Case Study**

**Research Method: Participant Observation**

**Researchers: Rebekah Smoot-Enns, MA Student    Supervisor: Rashmee Singh, PhD**  
Department of Sociology & Legal Studies    Department of Sociology & Legal Studies  
University of Waterloo    University of Waterloo  
200 University Ave. W.    200 University Ave. W.  
Waterloo, ON N2L 3G1    Waterloo, ON N2L 3G1  
Tel: (226) 868-0104    Tel: (519) 888-4567, ext. 33020  
Email: [renns@uwaterloo.ca](mailto:renns@uwaterloo.ca)    Email: [r78singh@uwaterloo.ca](mailto:r78singh@uwaterloo.ca)

You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by Rebekah Smoot-Enns in the Department of Sociology & Legal Studies at the University of Waterloo. The objective of this study is to gather information on how community members are motivated to volunteer with restorative justice programs. The findings will be used to increase the translatable knowledge available on restorative justice volunteers and to provide recommendations to community restorative justice programs on building successful volunteer recruitment and retention strategies.

### **Purpose of the study**

Restorative Justice (RJ) programs rely on community volunteers to fulfill vital program functions, including facilitating victim-offender conferences and mediations, participating in support circles, and providing administrative support. Developing and maintaining strong volunteer engagement can be a challenge for community RJ programs.

Thus, the primary objective of this research is to develop important knowledge about why volunteer are motivated to participate in restorative justice programming and examine how CJI engages and motivates its community members. This entails addressing questions on the experiences of volunteers within CJI, the training and orientation process, the volunteers understanding of RJ values and their perspectives on the role CJI plays in the larger community.

If you decide to participate in this study, you will be asked to allow the researched to observe your orientation or training session with CJI. The data collected will be used for the researcher's Master's thesis, as well as to provide groundwork for a number of academic publications, articles in appropriate trade publications, conference presentations. The thesis will be made available to CJI following its defense, you are also welcome to request a copy from the researcher at [renns@uwaterloo.ca](mailto:renns@uwaterloo.ca)

### **Procedures involved in the research**

*Volunteer interactions.* At the beginning of the session, my status of participant researcher must be verbalized and consent from each participant provided. If consent is not granted from each participant, the researcher will not observe the session.

*Observational notes.* During the training, I will take hand-written notes of my observations. Observational

notes will not include any information that could identify any members of the training (e.g., direct identifiers such as name; indirect such as employment history, religious affiliation). If you are concerned that any observational notes may include confidential or personal information, you can inform the researcher and they will delete those comments from observational notes.

*Directives to the researcher.* In order to minimize any disruption to the training and to ensure that their presence does not negatively effect the learning environment, you can at any time direct the researcher to leave the room. You may also terminate the observation without any negative repercussions by notifying the researcher.

### **Potential harms, risks, or discomforts**

There are no anticipated physical or psychological risks with your participation in this study. The participant observation will focus on the types of activities that normally occur during CJI orientation and training. The purpose of the research is not to identify the actions of a trainer or volunteer, but to better understand the way CJI engages volunteer motivation. To protect you further, the researcher will keep your identity and information confidential among conversations with others within the CJI community.

### **Potential benefits**

The results from this study will be of direct benefit to participants in several ways. *First*, Participation in this study will ensure that volunteer experiences and narratives are considered when developing program recruitment goals and strategies for restorative justice. *Second*, the study will assist your organization in better understanding and supporting its volunteers. *Third*, the findings of the study will provide valuable information to other RJ programs looking to develop volunteer recruitment strategies. Such knowledge will allow for increased capacity of current RJ programs and development of new programs. *Fourth*, this will assist in ensuring that RJ programs are available in more communities and can be used to address more cases in which a restorative approach would be beneficial to victims, offenders and the larger community.

### **Confidentiality**

All data collected through the observation will not contain any personal information or other relevant details. Your name will not appear in any thesis or report resulting from this study, however, with your permission anonymous quotations may be used. If there is any possibility that a quotation could compromise confidentiality, I will contact you so you can review the information and provide informed consent for its use in that context. All information you provide is considered completely confidential and will not be shared with other participants or CJI. However, we cannot guarantee the confidentiality of any comments made in the presence of other training participants volunteers as they will have also heard your remarks. As this is a case study, there is the possibility the CJI executive director, staff, and volunteers could identify participants and/or their comments from the study findings, quotations, etc.

The Informed Consent form will be kept in locked, secure storage space separate from the paper and electronic observational data at the University of Waterloo. Written observational data collected during this study will be retained for 10 years in a locked office at the University of Waterloo. Only researchers associated with this project will have access. All observational data and Informed Consent forms will be

destroyed 10 years after study completion.

If you decide to withdraw from the study before, during, or after the training or, you can choose to have any of the observational data recorded to be immediately destroyed. This can be communicated to the researchers verbally, in writing, by telephone, or email.

You will receive a signed copy of the Informed Consent form for your records. If you have any questions or require more information about the study itself, please contact the Principal Investigator Rebekah Smoot-Enns by email at [renns@uwaterloo.ca](mailto:renns@uwaterloo.ca). As with all University of Waterloo research projects involving human participants, this project was reviewed by, and received ethics clearance through a University of Waterloo Research Ethics Committee. However, the final decision about participation is yours.

This study has been reviewed and received ethics clearance through a University of Waterloo Research Ethics Committee (ORE#22383). If you have questions for the Committee contact the Chief Ethics Officer, Office of Research Ethics, at 1-519-888-4567 ext. 36005 or [ore-ceo@uwaterloo.ca](mailto:ore-ceo@uwaterloo.ca).

I would like to thank you for your participation in this study.

Yours sincerely,

Rebekah Smoot-Enns, MA Student

**INFORMED CONSENT TO FOR PARTICPANT-OBESERVATION OF TRAINING SESSION**

**What Motivates Restorative Justice Volunteers? A Case Study**

Please initial each box below to indicate your consent for each right and privacy option. By signing this consent form, you are not waiving your legal rights or releasing the investigators or involved institutions from their legal and professional responsibilities.

**Consent and Privacy Options** **YES** **NO**

- 1 I understand I am voluntarily participating in this research.
- 2 I agree to have observations recorded as handwritten notes.
- 3 I am willing to allow the researchers to use information observed providing it's cited anonymously.
- 4 I would like to receive a copy of the Executive Summary and Thesis when it is completed.
- 5 I agree to be contacted at a future date if the researcher would like clarification on information collected during training.

I have read the information presented in the Information Letter about a study being conducted by Rebekah Smoot-Enns of the Department of Sociology & Legal Studies at the University of Waterloo under the supervision of **Dr. Rashmee Singh**. I have had the opportunity to ask any questions related to the study, to receive satisfactory answers to my questions, and any additional details I wanted. I am aware that I may withdraw from the study without penalty at any time by advising the researchers of the decision.

This project has been reviewed by, and received ethics clearance through a University of Waterloo Research Ethics Committee. I was informed that if I have any comments or concerns resulting from my participation in the study, I may contact the Director, Office of Research Ethics at 519-888-4567 ext. 36005.

With full knowledge of all foregoing, I agree, of my own free will, to participate in this study.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Participant (please print) – Date (dd/mm/yyyy)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Email address

In my opinion, the person who has signed this Informed Consent is agreeing to participate in this study voluntarily, understands the nature of the study, and any consequences of participation.