

Forgiveness as a Healing Agent in Cases of Traumatic Violence

by

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Abstract

This study examined the potential for forgiveness to act as a healing agent in cases of traumatic violence. An exploration of the psychological, emotional, behavioral, and somatic characteristics of the experience of trauma and journey to forgiveness was explored, as well as the ways in which forgiveness supported the healing process of victims and/or family survivors of violence. The study was based on qualitative interviews with 14 victims and/or family survivors who had suffered harm associated with acts of violence. Descriptive and explanatory analysis identified nine categories with three comprehensive themes: 1) acts of violence produce trauma and forgiveness is a means for healing that trauma; 2) the mediating factors of a) strength of relationship with the offender; b) religious or spiritual worldview; c) apology; d) offender accountability; and e) face-to-face meeting with the offender create conditions favorable for the emergence of forgiveness and 3) forgiveness produces psychological, emotional, behavioral, and somatic healing outcomes for victims and survivors of violence.

Keywords: Violence; trauma; forgiveness; healing; restorative justice

Dedication

It is with a heart full of thankfulness and gratitude that I dedicate this work to the gentlemen of Ferndale Institution in Mission, British Columbia. In particular to those I have been blessed to share the circle with in FAVOR group and in the Alternatives to Violence Project. Your hope in the healing potential of forgiveness for victims as well as for those responsible for the harm encouraged me to press forward when the burden of sharing the horror of violence became overwhelming. Lastly, to Yves and Mark I want to express my deepest appreciation for your contribution to my understanding of what forgiveness means to those who feel the most undeserving of it.

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I would like to express my deepest gratitude to the 14 participants of this study who navigated the often times emotionally perilous road back in time to recount for me the traumatic events in their lives that precipitated their journeys towards forgiveness and healing. I am forever changed by each story of loss and pain and profoundly touched by the courage they demonstrated as they embraced the less traveled and often messy and uncertain path of giving forgiveness to the one(s) responsible for their suffering. It is my hope that I can effectively bear witness to their experiences of trauma and journeys to forgiveness as well as share the ways in which forgiveness supported their healing process.

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1. Introduction

Incidents of violence are widespread and they affect the lives of growing numbers of people. Twenty-four hours a day accounts of unimaginable violence and human suffering are the lead stories on television and internet news channels across the globe. Recent headlines in my home town of Kansas City, Missouri read “Man shot and killed in KCK”, “Kansas City man charged with assaulting 80 year old”, and “KCK man charged with child sex at gunpoint” (Kansas City Star, 2012; Fox 4 News KC, 2012). On the same day in Vancouver, British Columbia the Vancouver Sun reported, “Vancouver police investigate Friday night stabbing” and “Surrey Mounties search for suspect in attempted sex assault” (The Vancouver Sun, 2012). An estimated 1,318, 398 violent crimes were reported in the United States in 2009 (United States Department of Justice, 2010). Of that number 11,044 occurred in Kansas City, Missouri (Kansas City Police Department, 2009). In the same year Canada reported 443,000 violent offenses (Statistics Canada, 2009), 656 of these in Vancouver (Vogt, 2011). In 2009 nearly 1.6 million Canadians ages 15 and over reported being the victim of a violent offense (Statistics Canada, 2010). In 2010 approximately 5.2 million United States residents were the victims of violent or serious violent crime (United States Department of Justice, 2011). Homicide is the 2nd leading cause of death for persons 15-24 in the United States (Kansas City Missouri Police Department, 2009) and the 3rd leading cause of death for individuals 15-24 in Canada (Statistics Canada, 2011). The effects of violent crime ripple out from the victim and encompass a wide circle of their family and friends. It is estimated that in the United States 5 million adults have lost an immediate family member to homicide, another 6.6 million have lost other relatives, and another 4.8 million have lost close friends, for a total of 16.4 Americans affected by the homicide of a family member or friend (Amick-Mcmullan Kilpatrick, & Resnick, 1991, pp. 551-552).

The pervasiveness of violence makes it so commonplace that unless it occurs on a large scale (e.g. mass shooting, serial murders) or is of a particularly heinous nature we barely take notice. We detach from the horror of violence by reassuring ourselves

that it only happens in “other places” to “other people”, when in reality violence is not bound by socio-economic status or geographic location. Violence is found in big cities, middle class neighborhoods, mountain communities, and seaside villages and it happens to *our* friends and it occurs in *our* families. When violent acts are committed they create terrible pain and suffering which has devastating effects on victims and surviving loved ones.

A growing body of literature exists on the effect that violence, and the resultant trauma, has on victims and family survivors. These studies find that acts of violence create severe psychological (Herman, 1997, p.33), emotional (Masters, Friedman, & Getzel, 1988, p. 113), behavioral (Bloom, 2010, p. 20), and somatic (Bloom, 2010, p.15) outcomes. Common responses to harm and trauma are those of anger, resentment, hatred, bitterness and the desire for retaliation and revenge. While such responses are normal and understandable reactions to violent harm, they have damaging consequences to those involved as they are linked to a variety of harmful outcomes including post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (Herman, 1997, p. 35), chronic pain (Greenwood, Thurston, Rumble, Waters, and Keefe, 2003, p.2) and cardiovascular disorders (Thoresen, Harris, & Luskin, 2000, p.257). There is another potential response to violence that is gaining empirical support, the gift of forgiveness.

Forgiveness has undergone a resurgence of interest as two decades of empirical research have expanded our conception of its utility beyond the domain of moral and religious tenets. Studies examining the efficacy of forgiveness to be a healing agent in cases of traumatic violence have found a strong association between forgiveness and improved psychological (Fitzgibbons, 1986, p.630), emotional (Witvliet, Ludwig, & Vander Lann, 2001, p. 118), behavioral (Enright, 2001, p.17), and somatic well-being (Lawler, et al, 2005, p.158). While forgiveness is not a panacea to all trauma-induced harm (Fitzgibbons, 1998, p. 67) it has been found to be a beneficial response in cases of serious personal injury. Two seminal studies found that therapeutic interventions promoting forgiveness produced substantial improvements in the health and well-being of individuals coping with traumatic offenses such as incest and the deprivation of parental love (Freedman & Enright, 1996; Al-Mabuk, Enright, & Cardis, 1995). Research supports what therapists have seen in their clinical work, “Forgiveness has remarkable healing power in the lives of those who utilize it” (Fitzgibbons, 1998,

p.71). The purpose of this study is to deepen our understanding of the effects of traumatic violence and the role forgiveness plays in the healing journey of victims and survivors. Because recovery in the aftermath of violent trauma is a very powerful personal journey, this study will be conducted via a qualitative phenomenological methodology. Lester (1999) states, "phenomenological methods are particularly effective at bringing to the fore the experiences and perceptions of individuals from their own perspective" (p.1). Personal stories of trauma and recovery as they are related through semi-structured interviews facilitate a deep understanding of the issue by allowing the reader to see the experience through the eyes of the victim and survivors.

Through the contribution this study makes to the larger body of forgiveness research it is hoped that forgiveness may be viewed as a therapeutic alternative to the responses of vengeance, anger, hatred, and bitterness most commonly experienced by those harmed by violence. With millions of people impacted by violent crime every year in the United States and Canada alone it is apparent that there is significant need to identify a positive coping strategy that may assist the recovery process of victims and survivors of violent trauma. In order to choose the healing path that is best for them victims and survivors must be given information that will allow them to make a well-informed choice. The findings of this study seek to aid those in the helping professions, (e.g., counselors, psychologists, restorative justice practitioners, and pastors) who work with clients traumatized by violence.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Healing justice

In the aftermath of violence victims and family survivors embark on a personal journey to find healing. Two potentially divergent paths lay before them: those of retributive and restorative justice. The philosophies and processes used by each paradigm to conceptualize and create healing are markedly different, as is their destinations. Though the principles embodied in the restorative model have been long used by indigenous peoples to handle issues of wrongdoing in their communities, the application of these values within the contemporary justice system is relatively new. Consequently, it is the well-worn and crowded path of retributive justice that is the avenue of healing most frequently walked by crime victims and survivors.

2.1.1. *Retributive justice*

Human beings create models of justice in order to deal with the conflicts that occur between individuals (Breton & Lehman, 2001, p.3). Zehr (1995, as cited in Dorne, 2008, pp.21-22) places the current criminal justice system under the retributive model of justice. Within the retributive paradigm:

- Crime is defined as a violation of the state.
- The focus is on establishing guilt and blame.
- It is an adversarial relationship.
- Justice is defined by intent and process.
- Action is directed by the state to the offender; victim is ignored, offender is passive,
- There is no encouragement for repentance.

Under the retributive theory of justice the primary means of dealing with the violation of societal rules and laws is punishment (Wenzel, Okimoto, Feather, & Platow,

2008, p.375). It is Breton and Lehman's (2001) assertion that people have been programmed to believe that punishment will restore justice. They said, "We have trouble imagining that justice could create health, harmony, and happiness, if we simply used a model oriented this way" (p. 54). If we believe that the role of justice is to produce healing outcomes, it then follows that we must consider whether the concepts and processes of the current retributive system creates health, harmony, and happiness. In order to ascertain whether the retributive model or any model of justice can assist in the healing process of those traumatized by violence we must first establish what it means to have justice.

2.1.2. *What is Justice?*

Derived from root-words having to do with "law" and "righteousness" (Breton &Lehman, 2001, p.xxv) justice is defined as "the principle of giving each person her or his due" (Dukelow & Nuse, 1991, as cited in Elliott, 2011, p. 48). The notion of giving someone their "due" as a response to their wrongful acts is contained within the theory of "just desserts." A just desserts model of justice is understood as payback, a need to avenge a harm by inflicting a precise degree of pain in order to right a wrong (Elliott, 2011, p. 47). If pain has the power to vindicate and if hurt creates justice it would seem to follow that the more brutal our methods of punishing, the more justice we would have (Breton & Lehman, 2001, p. 5). Yet, according to Zehr (2002) this model of justice is counterproductive because "what truly vindicates is acknowledgment of victims' harms and needs, combined with an active endeavor to encourage offenders to take responsibility, make right the wrongs, and address the causes of their behavior" (p.59). According to Breton & Lehman (2001) prisons and courtrooms filled with accusations, judgments, and revenge are not conducive to healing for it is not the job of justice to punish but to restore and make things right (p.54). Pranis (2007) explained:

Injustice causes harm, to the person who experiences the injustice, to the community, and to the person who commits the injustice. Justice as a state of healthy balance requires healing of all those parties. Healing needs are guided by the values of respect, maintaining individual human dignity, non-domination. When all parties feel equal, respected, valued in their individual uniqueness, able to exercise constructive control in their lives and able to take responsibility for their actions, then justice is achieved. (p.66)

If we accept that the role of justice is to bring healing to those who have suffered injustice, then it stands to reason that the model of justice pursued by victims and survivors of violence should be one that is founded on the principles of restoration.

2.1.3. Restorative justice

Restorative justice has been defined as “a process whereby all the parties with a stake in a particular offense come together to resolve collectively how to deal with the aftermath of the offense and its implications for the future” (Marshall, 1999, p.5). A consequence of wrongdoing is damaged relationships, therefore true justice would entail “the restoration to wholeness of those whose lives and relationships have been broken or deeply strained by criminal offense” (Dickey, 1998, p.107). Restorative processes “place [an] emphasis on healing rather than punishing: healing the victim and undoing his hurt; healing the offenders by rebuilding his or her moral selves; healing communities and mending social relationships” (Braithwaite, 1998, as cited in Wenzel, et al., 2008).

The restorative justice paradigm holds¹:

- Crime is a violation of people and of interpersonal relationships.
- Violations create obligations.
- The central obligation is to put right the wrongs.
- Dialogue and negotiation normative.
- Justice is defined as right relationship outcomes.
- Victim and offender are engaged in the process; victims needs are recognized; offender accountability.
- Possibility for repentance and forgiveness.

When the lives of crime victims and survivors bump up against the justice system it is most often the retributive model that attempts to give them justice. Breton and Lehman (2001) assert that despite our cultural conditioning to embrace this system, people perceive something is wrong: “We personally suspect that the current model of

¹ Zehr (1995).

justice sets up 'counterfeit justice' because it doesn't yield justice's true value. We don't experience the 'justice' it creates as the genuine article" (p, 6). As Plato said, that which is being experienced as justice is a dim shadow of what justice is and can be (as cited in Breton & Lehman, 2001, p.6).

A majority of victims and survivors of violence have faith that the retributive system will restore a sense of justice through the censure and imposition of punishment upon the offender. However, if we believe the role of justice is to bring healing to those traumatized by violence it seems unlikely that an adversarial model can possibly satisfy such a need. If there is to be a hope of meeting the need for healing we must look to a restorative paradigm that is oriented toward the construction of the health, harmony, and happiness of all those affected by crime: victims, offenders, and communities.

Gehm (2003) stated, "Two paths seem to be developing: the "hard", "traditional" justice based on a retributive model and a "soft", "alternative" one based on a restorative model. Forgiveness may be the link that spans the harder and the softer paths of justice" (p. 284). Forgiveness is one of the values of restorative justice that has gained academic interest over the past twenty years. Studies investigating forgiveness as a healing agent in cases of traumatic violence argue that forgiveness is one way that victims and survivors of violence may transcend the trauma they experienced.

2.2. Forgiveness

2.2.1. *The journey to forgiveness*

In most cases a journey implies an intended destination. If for instance I packed my suitcase and set off on a journey to Disneyland it would be my expectation that barring any unforeseen catastrophes along the way I would, at the time planned, reach the "Happiest Place on Earth". A journey as defined by Merriam-Webster² is "an act or

² <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/journey>

instance of traveling from one place to another or something suggesting travel or passage from one place to another.” However within the context of the restorative justice paradigm the journey metaphor is not necessarily suggestive of a linear venture having a fixed beginning and endpoint. According to Enright and North (1998) the forgiveness process is not one where the person moves rigidly from point A to point Z. “There are many twists and turns in any person’s forgiveness journey” (p.8). Zehr (2002, p.23) describes a journey as something that “may encompass a number of legs or stretches along a route that often twists and turns looping back on itself like a mountain road.” A journey also suggests that the goal, forgiveness in this case, requires a search or a process and that it is not binary--you do or you do not-- but instead may fall on a continuum (Zehr, 2002, p.21). All journeys begin with a first step and for those who travel the road to forgiveness the journey begins the moment the harm occurs.

2.2.2. *Forgiveness in religious thought*

Our fundamental understanding of the meaning and purpose of forgiveness is intrinsically connected to our perception of right and wrong, good and evil, repentance and redemption. Howard Zehr (1995) remarked that the Hebrew word *Shalom*, meaning peace, “is a core Judeo-Christian belief upon which other important beliefs are based: salvation, atonement, forgiveness, and justice” (as cited in Dorne, 2008, p.170). When a person is in *shalom* they are living in right relation to one another and to God. *Shalom* is also the basis of *covenant* which has to do with commitment and responsibilities between individuals and communities. Zehr (1995) pointed out that offenses were considered violations of covenant, as they were injuries against *shalom*. “Biblical justice”, Zehr said, “should be viewed as a search for solutions, on making things right, and should only punish in the context of redemption and *shalom*” (p.171).

Forgiveness is shrouded in an almost mystical quality as it intimates the presence of a heavenly power that is able to transcend human tragedy and pain. After witnessing the healing capacity of forgiveness as expressed in South Africa’s Truth and Reconciliation Committee (TRC) hearings into human rights abuses, Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela (2003) said, “it is hard to resist the conclusion that there must be something divine about forgiveness expressed in the context of tragedy” (p.95). Archbishop Desmond Tutu, also a member of the TRC stated, “whenever we were witnesses to such

inexplicable human responses at a public hearing of the TRC, would be driven to call for silence 'because we were on holy ground.' There seems to be something spiritual, even sacramental, about forgiveness, a sign that moves and touches those who are witnesses to its enactment" (as cited in Gobodo-Madikizela, 2003, p.95).

Illustrations of the value of forgiveness are found within the sacred texts of many of the world's religions. For example, Jesus Christ during his crucifixion says, "Father forgive them for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:35), the sacred Hindu poem Bhagvad Gita states, "If you want to see the heroic, look at those who can love in return for hatred. If you want to see the brave, look for those who can forgive" (Kornfield, 2002, p. 26, p.5), and The Buddha says, "Hatred never ceases by hatred, but by love alone is healed. This is the ancient and eternal law" (Kornfield, 2002). Ideas that have emerged from Christian thought have become central principles of restorative justice philosophy, policy, and practice (Dorne, 2008, p.165).

2.2.3. *Forgiveness in the restorative justice model*

Dorne (2008) stated, "important themes that are present in just about every organized religion resonate in the restorative justice movement: community, redemption, compassion, and mercy, forgiveness, peace and peacemaking, human encounter in the context of reconciliation, and helping the less fortunate, among others" (p.165). It is within the context of restorative interventions (e.g. victim-offender mediation, family-group conferencing, and sentencing and peace-making circles) that these themes may emerge.

The foundation of the restorative model is to assist those harmed by crime and violence in their healing journey. Though there are those, such as Gehm (2003), who believe "forgiveness lies at the very heart and center of processes for overcoming the deleterious effects of crime and other social inequity" (p.283) others contend that forgiveness is not the chief objective of restorative practices. That while restorative processes may pave the way for an opportunity for victims to forgive it is not something that can be forced, programmed, or demanded (Liebmann, 2007, p.327; Enright, 2001, p. 37; Roche, 2003, p. 120) because forgiveness is a gift.

2.2.3.1. The gift of forgiveness

A gift, as defined by Merriam-Webster³, is “something that is given willingly to someone without payment; a present.” It is also defined as “the act, right, or power of giving” which suggests that the choice to give a gift or not lies with the individual. Forgiveness is described as “a merciful act of giving a gift to someone who does not necessarily deserve it” (Enright & Kittle, 1999, p.1630). As forgiveness is considered within the context of restorative processes Roche (2003) states, “It is a mistake for restorative justice practitioners to become preoccupied with trying to achieve reparation or forgiveness or reconciliation, as these things, should not, cannot, be forced by convenors (as cited in Liebmann, 2007, p.332). Braithwaite (2002) further emphasizes, “it is cruel and wrong to expect a victim of crime to forgive” (p.570). Minow (1998) explains:

Forgiveness is a power held by the victimized, not a right to be claimed. The ability to dispense, but also to withhold, forgiveness is an enabling capacity and part of the dignity to be reclaimed by those who survive the wrongdoing. Even an individual survivor who chooses to forgive, cannot, properly forgive in the name of other victims. To expect survivors to forgive is to heap yet another burden on them. (p.17)

In his paper “Setting standards for restorative justice”, Braithwaite (2002) outlines a framework of three sets of standards so fundamental to justice that they must be guaranteed in restorative practices (p.571). These consist of: *constraining, maximizing, and emergent standards*. Constraining standards are those such as respect, non-domination, empowerment, and equal concern for all stakeholders that must be honored and enforced as constraints within restorative processes. Restoration of human dignity, property, safety, damaged human relationships, compassion, and peace are examples of maximizing standards which restorative justice advocates should actively encourage in restorative processes. Forgiveness, as well as remorse over injustice, apology, censure of the act, and mercy are considered emergent standards which the participants

³ <http://www.merriam-webster.com>

of restorative processes must not be pressured to manifest. Braithwaite calls them gifts which only have meaning if they well up from a genuine desire in the individual. Braithwaite counsels, "People take time to discover the emotional resources to give up such emotional gifts. It cannot, must not, be expected" (p.571).

Forgiveness as a predominant theme in Christian theology and other faith traditions has until recently been largely overlooked by scholars outside this realm (Hope, 1987) and while the roots of forgiveness run deep within these philosophies it is no longer constrained by these paradigms. Forgiveness has taken its place within the domain of psychological research where it is being recognized as an important element in the therapeutic process. Northey (1998) said, "forgiveness... is too often the "forbidden word"- yet forgiveness as a technique and a tool is also perhaps the most significant process for overcoming the devastation of crime" (as cited in Johnstone, 2003, p.159).

2.2.4. *Forgiveness in psychological theory*

Philosopher Joanna North (1987) defines forgiveness as "the overcoming of negative affect and judgment toward the offender, not by denying the right to such affect and judgment, but by endeavoring to view the offender with compassion, benevolence, and love while recognizing that he or she has abandoned the right to them" (p.502). Similarly, psychologist Robert Enright defines forgiveness as "a willingness to abandon one's right to resentment, negative judgment, and indifferent behavior toward one who unjustly injured us, while fostering the underserved qualities of compassion, generosity, and even love toward him or her" (as cited in Enright, Freedman, & Rique, 1998, pp.46-47). Denton and Martin (1998) further state that "forgiveness involves two people, one of whom has received a deep and long lasting injury that is either psychological, emotional, physical, or moral in nature. It is an inner process by which the person who has been injured releases him or herself from the anger, resentment and fear that are felt and does not wish for revenge. Forgiveness may take time and does not necessarily mean that one forgets all the painful memories" (p. 284).

Forgiveness involves more than a refusal to retaliate it is even more than avoidance of or a neutral stance toward the perpetrator, forgiveness involves an

intentional action; a change in the victim's behavior toward the one who harmed them. The victim knows they have every right to hate the offender and yet they give up that right in order to forgive (Fincham, 2000, p.4). But forgiveness rarely, if ever, happens quickly, it has been conceptualized as a transformation process, an intrapsychic struggle (Enright, et al., 1998, p.47), a journey that may take time (Whitney, 2011, p.xxii), involving changes in victim cognitions, emotions, and behaviors regarding the transgressor (Pargament, McCullough, Thoresen, 2000, p.302).

Enright developed a four-phase process model of forgiveness (North, 1998, pp. 67-72). The first phase of forgiveness involves the victims uncovering of the harm and an assessment of their hostile feelings towards the offender. In order for forgiveness to be considered there must be a harm or injury to the self that is recognized (Close, 1970 as cited in Newberg, d'Aqui, Newberg, & deMarici, 2001, p.101). This harm may occur directly to the individual or it may occur via a secondary mechanism; the perception of one's self being damaged because of injury done to a family member or friend (Newberg et al., 2001, p.102). During the decision-making phase the victim waives their right to revenge. They make an honest appraisal of their past coping strategies and determine whether these strategies have helped them to feel peaceful, happy, and optimistic. If not, then the decision is made to consider forgiveness as an option. The third phase is a time when the victim works to develop understanding and compassion for the offender, to accept the pain and to give the offender a gift such as a note, a kind word, or a declaration of forgiveness. North (1998) calls this process of understanding "reframing" (p.23). Reframing is an effort by the victim to separate the offender from the offense and to see him/her with "new eyes" (Freedman, Enright & Knutson, 2005 as cited in Worthington, 2005, p.395). In the third phase the victim also works to accept the pain caused by the offense; to hurt and to mourn rather than to pass the pain on to others. Lastly, during the outcome phase the victim finds meaning in the forgiveness process; the meaning of their suffering, the purpose of their life, and the freedom forgiveness can produce. The forgiveness process has constructed a new narrative of self and others wherein the forgiver sees him or herself "as having been made stronger, possibly better, by the struggle to forgive" (Malcolm & Greenberg, 2000, p.180-181).

Fitzgibbons (1998, p.66) suggests that the forgiveness process does not always end with the fourth phase as proposed by Enright (2001, p.78). A fifth, spiritual phase is

often times used by victims who have tried, but are unable to cognitively or emotionally let go of their negative feelings toward the offender. In this case, victims may ask God to do the forgiving for them or to release them from their anger and bitterness so they can forgive.

Other theoretical understandings of forgiveness suggest that it is an interpersonal construct which is “outward-looking and other-directed...annulling not the crime itself but the distorting effect that this wrong has upon one’s relationship with the wrongdoer and perhaps with others” (North, 1998, p.19). Fehr, Gelfund, & Nag (2010, p.896) describe interpersonal forgiveness as “forgiveness of a single offender by a single victim.” North (1998) adds that interpersonal forgiveness is also the type of forgiveness that is used when family members are mutually forgiving or when one nation forgives another (p.4).

Some view forgiveness as a gift given unconditionally (North, 1987, p. 505). Susan Collin Marks, a peace-builder from South Africa agrees saying, “Forgiveness is not dependent on apology, remorse or contrition. It is about each individual digging deep within his or herself to find common humanity with the other” (as cited in Whitney, 2011, p. 109). Though research has shown that forgiveness may be mediated by factors such as offender-remorse or empathy toward the offender (McCullough, Worthington, & Rachal, 1997, p.322) the choice to forgive belongs solely to the forgiver (Fincham, 2000, p.7), and can be given or withheld irrespective of external conditions. Shriver (1998) disagrees stating it is the very interpersonal construct of forgiveness that makes it conditional. Forgiveness is a transaction between the victim and offender (p.133). Once the offender acknowledges their offenses they then may receive forgiveness, otherwise, Shriver (1998) says, “forgiveness without repentance hangs, abstract and unconsummated, in limbo” (p.133).

In “Forgiveness as human strength: Theory, measurement and links to well-being” McCullough (2000) posits that there are two conceptual understandings of forgiveness. First, forgiving is a motivational construct and second, it is prosocial (p.44). Gottman (1993) states that there are three emotional responses to negative interpersonal events: these include general positive feelings; hurt-perceived attack; and righteous indignation (as cited in McCullough, 2000, p.44). Building on Gottman’s (1993) work McCullough purports that the two negative affective states (hurt-perceived attack

and righteous indignation) correspond to two motivational systems that dictate people's responses to interpersonal transgressions. People who are unforgiving are highly motivated to either avoid contact with their offender or to seek revenge against them. But forgiveness removes the offended parties' motivation to either avoid or retaliate against the offender. According to McCullough these motivations (including the positive motivation of benevolence) "work in concert to create the psychological state that people refer to as forgiveness" (p.44). McCullough explains, "Thus, forgiveness is not a motivation per se but rather, a complex of prosocial changes in one's basic interpersonal motivations following a serious interpersonal offense" (p.45). The ability to face one's transgressor without thoughts of retribution is a key step in the forgiveness process. When victims and survivors overcome the desire to avoid or seek revenge against the perpetrator, the door is then opened for the development of positive motivational stances, including forgiveness.

McCullough (2000) also likens forgiveness to three other prosocial psychological changes which promote cohesive relationships. These changes include *empathy*, the ability to feel the same feelings as another (Enright, 2001, p.158); *willingness to sacrifice*, the decision to forgo self-interest in order to promote the well-being of another (Van Lange, et al., 1997 as cited in McCullough, 2000, p.45); and *accommodation*, the inhibition of destructive responses and the enacting of constructive responses following an interpersonal offense (Rusbult, Verette, Whitney, Slovik, & Lipkus, 1991, as cited in McCullough, 2000, p.45). In each of these prosocial psychological changes the victim acts in a way that may be personally costly in order to preserve a relationship or to promote the well-being of another person (McCullough, 2000, p.45). *

Though the forgiveness journey is a grueling and time-consuming process, perspective taking and empathy are two variables that support the prosocial qualities of willingness to help others (Batson, 1991, as cited in McCullough, 2000, p.45) and forgiving. Perspective taking is the endeavor to understand the cognitive viewpoint of the offender. It requires getting beyond one's own literal or psychological point of view to consider the perspective of another person who likely has a very different point of view (Epley & Caruso, 2009, p.299). Malcolm and Greenberg (2000) define empathy as "an active effort to understand another person's perception of an interpersonal event as if one were the other person, rather than judging the other person's behavior from the

perspective of one's own experience of that event" (p.180). Empathy is "the only psychological variable that has been shown to help people to forgive specific real-life transgressions when manipulated experimentally" (McCullough, 2000, p.46). Relational closeness, commitment, and satisfaction are other factors that have been found to increase the likelihood of forgiving (McCullough, 2000, p.47).

McCullough et al. (1998) studied over 100 couples to determine the extent to which they had forgiven their partner for two different transgressions. The participants were asked about the most severe offense that their relationship partner had ever caused them and the most recent serious hurt that their partner had caused them. They found a strong relationship between the forgivers' degree of forgiveness for both offenses and the forgivers' and their partners' self-reported degree of closeness, commitment, and satisfaction. In a follow-up study the mediating effect of apology was also noted in the closeness-forgiveness relationship. In close relationships the offending partners showed a greater willingness to apologize while the offended partners expressed a greater capacity for empathy. This led McCullough et al. (1998) to posit that empathy may "serve as a psychological bridge between closeness and forgiving" (as cited in McCullough, 2000, p.48). There is further empirical support for the positive role that apology plays in a victims willingness to forgive.

In Exline, Yali, & Lobel's (1998) study titled, "Self-serving perceptions in victim and perpetrator accounts of transgressions" college students were asked a series of questions about a time when they were the victim of harm. A number of factors were identified that influenced the participant's willingness to forgive the offender, these include: an admission of guilt by the perpetrator, the offer of a sincere apology, request for forgiveness, an expression of feeling sad for what they had done, an effort to "make up" for the offense, or the offenders forgiveness of the participant for a previous offense. This study supports other findings which indicate that victims are more disposed to forgive offenders who apologize (Darby & Schlenker, 1982.p.753). An apology, sincerely offered by the offender, communicates to the victim that the offender acknowledges the harm and seeks to atone for their actions. In the absence of remorse, the possibility of forgiveness is considerably diminished, if not outright denied. While factors such as empathy, relational closeness, and apology increase the likelihood of forgiveness the variables of rumination and suppression may impede one's ability to forgive.

Skinner, Edge, Altman, and Sherwood (2003) define rumination as a coping strategy characterized by “passive and repetitive focus on the negative and damaging features of a stressful transaction.” In a study of 89 participants who incurred a serious interpersonal hurt McCullough, Bono, and Root (2007) found that rumination causes people to be more angry and aggressive towards their transgressors than when they distract themselves. To ruminate on the offense “prolongs and exacerbates psychological and interpersonal distress” (McCullough *et al.*, 2007). The more one thinks about the harm and seeks to control or suppress these thoughts the more difficult it becomes to forgive the transgressor (McCullough, 2000).

As we have seen, forgiveness is complicated and not without controversy and though there are numerous conceptions of what forgiveness is, the understanding of what forgiveness is not, is fairly consistent.

2.3. Common Misconceptions Regarding Forgiveness

When harm has been committed one’s inherent sense of fairness demands that the scales of justice be balanced. To forgive the person who harmed us or those we love seems outrageous and inconceivable, contradicting our understanding of what justice should be. But oftentimes the basis for rejecting forgiveness is due to the numerous misconceptions about what forgiveness is and is not.

Forgiveness is not ignoring or condoning (North, 1987, p.501; Gobodo-Madikizela, 2008, p. 177; Enright 2001, p.28), tolerating, excusing, exonerating, or justifying the offense (Worthington, Witvliet, Pietrini, & Miller, 2007, p.292). Forgiveness does not require accepting abuse and should not be confused with trust (Luskin, 2003). Forgiveness is absolutely not forgetting. Shriver (1998) emphatically states, “Victims of very great evil remember that evil for a very long time. We begin to forgive by not forgetting...to forget the evil is an assault on the humanity of the victims” (p.141). Forgiveness is not the same thing as a legal pardon (Enright *et al.*, 1998, p. 48) as it is not connected to the legal system. Because forgiveness is a personal response to harm the victim may forgive the perpetrator even while the criminal justice system takes its course. Therefore, forgiveness is not a way to satisfy the demands of justice; on the

contrary, forgiveness recognizes that nothing the offender does could ever fully compensate for the harm they have done, especially in the case of traumatic violence. Forgiveness is also differentiated from reconciliation. Enright et al. (1998) explained, "Forgiveness is one person's response to injury. Reconciliation involves two people coming together again" (p.49). North (1998) stated, "Forgiveness is an element in reconciliation, not reconciliation that is included in forgiveness" (p.44). And in instances where the offender refuses to acknowledge their culpability and remains unchanged, reconciliation may not be a recommended or wise outcome (Enright, 2001, p.31).

While most people see the efficacy of forgiving insignificant injuries they squirm when forgiveness is mentioned in connection with cases of traumatic violence and harm. Objections are raised that forgiveness devalues the harm that was done, or that it judges the victim's legitimate anger and rage as inappropriate (Murphy, 2002, p. 1360). In the context of sexual abuse, forgiveness has been called "unwise (Bass & Davis, 1988), potentially dangerous (Engel, 1989), and inappropriate" (Forward, 1989) (as cited in Freedman & Enright, 1996, p.983). Aurel Kolnai (1973) said it is our duty to support the moral order by making it very clear what constitutes appropriate behavior. "If we do not show some resentment to those who, in victimizing us, flout those understandings, then we run the risk of being 'complicitous in evil'" (as cited in Murphy, 2002, p. 1360).

Freedman and Enright (1996) believe that those who criticize the use of forgiveness in cases of traumatic injury do so because of the aforementioned misconceptions. Because forgiveness is often confused with pardon, excuse, condoning, and reconciliation critics allege that forgiveness perpetuates abuse. Enright et al. (1998) disagrees, "To forgive does not mean to acquiesce blindly to harsh demands" (p.50). When we forgive we are admitting that the action was wrong and should not be repeated (Enright, 2001, p. 28). According to Nietzsche (1887) only "weaklings" forgive the perpetrator and that is because they have no choice (as cited in Enright et al., 1998, p.49). North believes such assertions are unwarranted as the very act of forgiving is a declaration by the victim that they are a person who has intrinsic value and is worthy of esteem and respect (North, 1998). By forgiving, North (1998) says the victim asserts, "If I can do this, forgive him, then I can't have been totally destroyed by his actions. I am something over and above the harm which he has done to me; otherwise I couldn't be

offering him forgiveness here and now.” Homicide survivor Marietta Jaeger (1998) describes the strength it takes to forgive. She said:

I’ve heard people say that forgiveness is for wimps. Well, I say then that they must never have tried it. Forgiveness is *hard work*. It demands diligent self-discipline, corralling of our basest instincts, custody of the tongue, and a steadfast refusal not to get caught up in the mean spiritedness of our times. It doesn’t mean we forget, we condone, or we absolve responsibility. It does mean that we let go of the hate, that we try to separate the loss and the cost from the recompense or punishment we deem is due. (p.12)

The psychological study of forgiveness is an area of inquiry that has grown over the past two decades. The extant literature from this field has great import for the discipline of trauma research. Numerous studies examining the theoretical principles and processes of forgiveness suggest that forgiveness may be able to mitigate the harmful psychological, emotional, behavioral, and somatic responses to traumatic violence.

2.4. Responses to Traumatic Violence

Psychiatrist Judith Herman (1997) argued traumatic events such as threats to life or bodily injury, or an encounter with violence and death, “overwhelm the ordinary human adaptations to life” (p.33). Traumatic events are those that cannot be assimilated with the victim’s “inner schemata” of self or the way they see themselves in relation to the world (Horowitz, 1986 as cited in Herman, 1997, p.41). Herman (1997) further explains:

Traumatic events call into question basic human relationships. They breach the attachments of family, friendship, love, and community. They shatter the construction of the self that is formed and sustained in relation to others. They undermine the belief systems that give meaning to human experience. They violate the victim’s faith in a natural or divine order and cast the victim into a state of existential crisis. (p.51)

Janoff-Bulman (1992) said traumatic life events shatter the victim’s assumptions about themselves and their world; assumptions such as “the world is a benevolent place; the world is meaningful; the self is worthy” may no longer be viable following

victimization (p.6). Trauma causes people to question the rules of justice, it undermines our faith in the goodness of others and in the belief that we are in control of our lives (Flanigan, 1992, pp. 15-68). Traumatic experiences cause pain and stress that is detrimental to the psychological, emotional, behavioral, and somatic well-being of victims and surviving family and friends.

2.4.1. *The Psychological Response to Trauma*

Hatred, anger, vengefulness (Baures, 1996, p.75), terror, helplessness (Herman, 1997, p.35), and fear (Bloom, 2010, p.24) are common responses to traumatic violence. Over time these reactions may lead to a host of negative psychological disorders such as depression, simple and social phobias, substance abuse, and in particular Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) (Peres, Moreira-Almeida, Nasello, & Koenig, 2007, 344). The American Psychological Association defines PTSD as “an anxiety problem that develops in some people after extremely traumatic events, such as combat, crime, an accident or natural disaster” (American Psychological Association, 2011). PTSD is characterized by (a) intrusion: re-experiencing the trauma in painful recollections or recurrent dreams or nightmares; (b) constriction: diminished responsiveness (emotional anesthesia or numbing) with disinterest in significant activities and feelings of detachment and estrangement from others, and (c) hyperarousal: exaggerated startle response, disturbed sleep, difficulty in concentrating or remembering, guilt about surviving when others did not, and avoidance of activities that call the traumatic event to mind (Bloom, 2010, p.222-223).

A study by Murphy et al. (1999) titled “PTSD among parents bereaved by the violent deaths of their 12-to 28 year-old children” examined 261 parents whose children had died within the past four months due to violence (including accident, murder, and suicide). The findings showed that half the parents experienced PTSD symptomology and twice as many parents of murdered children met PTSD criteria as compared to parents whose children died by accident or suicide. The parents who met PTSD criteria reported increased levels of mental distress, depression, anxiety, hostility, more extreme grief responses, lower self-esteem, and self-efficacy, poorer coping strategies, less social support, and less acceptance of death as compared to those who did not meet the

criteria. The experience of traumatic events also has devastating psychological impacts on children.

Studies on children subjected to war have found that such youths are at a high risk for anxiety disorders, depressive symptoms, and behavioral problems (Cohen, Mannarino, Berliner, & Deblinger, 2000, as cited in Al-Mashat, Amundson, Buchanan, & Westwood, 2006, p. 195). Poor academic performance, somatic complaints, substance abuse, and disturbances in family and peer relationships (Layne et al., 2001) have also been noted (as cited in Al-Mashat et al., 2006, p.195). Al-Mashat et al. (2006) examined the effect that the “Shock and Awe” campaign of “Operation Iraqi Freedom” had on 12 children, ages 9 to 13, living in Iraq at the beginning of the war. Through letters and drawings, shared in focus groups, the children answered four questions: 1) what was your experience of the war? 2) what meaning did the war have for you? 3) how are you doing now and what helped you cope? and 4) what are your hopes for the future? The results showed that war is traumatizing to children and though they put on a tough bravado as a way to cope with the situation their experience was one of horror, death, lack of security, and constant fears. A relationship between the severity of post traumatic-like symptoms and the severity of the child’s traumatic war experience was noted; those who witnessed the most horrific scenes of violence had the most obvious post-traumatic-like symptoms.

Childhood trauma is characterized by strongly visualized or repeated memories (flashbacks). Traumatized children also engage in play re-enactment of the trauma and suffer trauma-specific fears, in this case, the sound of helicopters, explosions, and shootings. Changes in the children’s attitudes regarding people, aspects of their lives and their future was evidenced by a desire to take revenge against the occupying army, a hope to die as martyrs in the liberation of their country, and a sense of pessimism and fear of the future. Many of these responses to trauma as well as others such as denial, psychic numbing, withdrawal, intrusive thoughts, and misperceptions and distortions in time, are common to those experienced by adults who have been traumatized.

2.4.2. *The Emotional Response to Trauma*

The word used to describe the basic biological component of emotional experience is affect (Bloom, 2010, p. 40). Nathanson (1992) identified nine different affects: interest-excitement, enjoyment-joy, startle-surprise, distress-anguish, fear-terror, shame-humiliation, anger-rage, and dissmell (reaction to offensive smells) and disgust (reaction to unpleasant tastes). Each affect has distinctive facial and bodily expressions that are innate and seen in infants throughout the world (p.40). Because the affective system is connected to every organ system of the body our emotions work like “ a ‘sensitive mental radar’ alerting us to the significance of things that happen to us externally or within our bodies”(Harber & Pennebaker, 1992 as cited in Bloom, 2010, p.41). So while the emotions of joy, love, compassion, and peace are life-affirming, wonderful expressions of our humanity, those that are born out of the horrific circumstance of traumatic violence (e.g. fear, anxiety, and anger) can be destructive and overwhelming in their ferocity.

In a paper titled, “Helping families of homicide victims: A multidimensional approach,” Masters, Friedman, and Getzel (1988) liken the emotions of the homicide survivor to a raging fire in that “The murder of a loved one leads to repeated eruptions of overwhelming emotional firestorms in the survivor” (p.113). Survivors are defined as the family members of murder victims. Many survivors relive aspects of the crime over and over again. Others vividly fantasize about revenge and retribution or become preoccupied with how they could have prevented their loved one’s death. New outbreaks of grief and suffering are triggered by holidays, birthdays, and anniversaries as well as proceedings involving the perpetrator such as the trial, sentencing, or parole. It is worth noting that the recovery process of homicide survivors did not follow the methodical progression of healing (e.g. shock, denial, and acceptance) found in previous bereavement studies. It is likely that the healing process for homicide survivors is atypical to others who are bereaved because, according to Masters et al. (1988), “Homicide precipitates in the survivor, a series of crisis, each of which causes new episodes of grief and pain and each of which requires a new process of working through and adaptation” (p.115). Erikson (1976) calls homicide “a chronic never-ending disaster which can never be completely worked through and put behind one” (as cited in Masters

et al., 1988, p.115). When the emotional wounds of trauma are not attended to they may lead to behaviors that further solidify the victim and/or survivor's grief and pain.

2.4.3. *The Behavioral Response to Trauma*

“Fight or flight” is the internal protective mechanism that humans use to protect themselves from harm. While this response is an effective, life-saving reaction to danger problems can arise when this response continues to occur in the absence of any threat (Bloom, 2010, p.18). A state of constant arousal sets up a host of maladaptive activities in the brain (Bloom, 2010, p. 18). In an attempt to control or mitigate these feelings of hyperarousal trauma victims and survivors may engage in such activities as alcohol and drug abuse, sexual activity, violent acting out, risk-taking behavior, over-eating, eating disorders, hurting the body, exercising, and over-involvement in work (Bloom, 2010, p.20). Other behavioral responses include phobic avoidance of homicide-related stimuli and increased self-protective behavior (Goldenson, 1984, as cited in Amick-McMullan, Kilpatrick, Veronen, & Smith, 1989, p.23); changing roles in the family and relationship disruption (Getzel & Masters, 1984; Rinear, 1984, as cited in Amick-McMullan et al., 1989, p.4); and the tendency to try to hunt for the killer (Poussaint, 1984, as cited in Amick-McMullun, 1989, p.24).

Dr. Alyssa Reingold (2005) of the Medical University of South Carolina National Victims Research and Treatment Center cited a number of common behavioral changes that families of homicide victims may experience, these include: difficulty in making decisions or keeping track of things such as appointments; becoming short-tempered even if it is contrary to their personality; appearing disoriented; acting lost or confused; and becoming apathetic and uninterested in pursuing their old interests or activities (p. 2). Violent acts cause a variety of negative psychological, emotional, and behavioral responses in the victim and survivors which in turn has deleterious effects on the body.

2.4.4. *The Somatic Response to Trauma*

Traumatic violence produces a powerful stress response in victims and survivors. Bloom (2010) states, “It is when we are severely stressed, when the expected routine of daily life is disturbed by traumatic events, that our bodies respond in primitive ways and we find ourselves in the midst of a storm of emotional and physical reactions that we

cannot understand or control” (p.15). The physical response to trauma is stress and according to the growing body of literature stress is a contributing factor in the development of physical illness (Bloom, 2010, p.46). Numerous studies have examined the physiological dimension of survivor symptomology and found disturbances in sleep and appetite, increased heart rate, headaches, gastrointestinal upset, and increased startle responses (Bard, 1982; Poussaint, 1984; Rinear, 1984; Rynearson, 1984, as cited in Amicik-McMullan et al., 1989, p.24). Researchers at Duke University point to a correlation between chronic stress, disease and premature death and the biobehavioral characteristics of depressed mood, increased sympathetic nervous system reactivity, decreased parasympathetic nervous system function, increased smoking, increased eating, and increased alcohol consumption (Williams, 1995, as cited in Bloom, 2010, p.21).

One particular stress response to interpersonal stressors, (e.g. transgressions, betrayals, offenses, and wrongs) has been conceptualized as unforgiveness. Unforgiveness is defined as “a complex combination of delayed negative emotions toward a person who has transgressed personal boundaries” (Worthington and Wade, 1999; Worthington, 2000; Worthington, Berry, & Parrott, 2001, as cited in Worthington & Scherer, 2004, p.386). The immediate reaction to harm is fear and anger, the “fight or flight” response whereas, unforgiveness “is a more limited, nuanced, and delayed response to a perceived transgression” (Worthington & Scherer, 2004, p.386).

In their paper, “Forgiveness is an emotion-focused coping strategy that can reduce health risks and promote health resilience: Theory, review, and hypotheses,” Worthington & Scherer (2004) suggest that unforgiveness produces ill health. Through an examination of the empirical research they identified four lines of evidence indicating that unforgiveness arouses negative emotions that could lead to physical changes similar to those produced in other stress responses. First, brain activity involved in stress and other negative emotions is consistent with activity in the brain during unforgiveness. Anger is a negative emotion that may be the link between the two as it has been shown to have a high correlation with unforgiveness (Berry & Worthington, 2001, as cited in Worthington & Scherer, 2004, p.388). Second, hormonal patterns in unforgiveness are consistent with hormonal patterns from negative emotions associated with stress (Berry & Worthington, 2001). Third, Witvliet, Ludwig, and Vander Laan (2001) found that

sympathetic nervous system activity and EMG tension in facial muscles are similar to patterns found with stress and negative emotions (as cited in Worthington & Scherer, 2004, p.389). Lastly, blood chemistry measures show a similarity between unforgiveness and both stress and negative emotion. Seybold, Hill, Neumann, & Chi's (2001) correlational study of forgivingness disposition and physical markers found those who were unforgiving chronically had blood chemistry assays similar to those under stress (as cited in Worthington & Scherer, 2004, p.389).

There is strong evidence to suggest that unforgiveness is stressful and that it can lead to negative health outcomes. Blaming others and chronic hostility, two of the components of unforgiveness, have been linked to numerous health problems including those of the cardiovascular system (Thoresen, Harris, & Luskin, 2000, p. 257). Cardiac patients who blamed their initial heart attack on others were more likely to suffer reinfarctions (Affleck, Tennen, Croog, & Levine, 1987, as cited in Thoresen, Harris, & Luskin, 2000, p.257) while anger and hostility have been predictive of all-cause mortality in a number of studies (Miller, Smith, Turner, Guijarro, & Hallet, 1996, as cited in Thoresen, Harris, & Luskin, 2000, p.257). The immune system is also negatively affected by unforgiveness. Under stressful conditions pro-inflammatory cytokines, which among other things help fight infection, are elevated and this dysregulates the intercellular immune system (Kieclot-Glaser, McGuire, Robles, & Glaser, 2002, as cited in Worthington & Scherer, 2004, p.395).

An act of violence is one of the most devastating events that anyone can go through. The victims and/or surviving family and friends are awash in a sea of negative psychological, emotional, behavioral, and physical effects as a result of the trauma. In the weeks, months and even years following the traumatic event the survivors will look for ways of healing that will enable them to move forward in their lives. Therefore it is imperative that positive coping strategies are identified in order to give victims and/or surviving loved ones the tools necessary to successfully integrate the trauma into their lives. One tool that has been shown to have powerful restorative potential is that of forgiveness (Luskin, 2003).

2.5. The Power of Forgiveness

It is understandable that victims of violence and/or family survivors should have nothing but the utmost contempt for the perpetrator. In such circumstances it can seem almost cruel for anyone to suggest that those who have suffered the trauma of violence should consider forgiving the offender. Dr. Fred Luskin (2003) concedes, "...most people do not consider forgiveness when deciding how to deal with the cruelties of life." But he says this omission comes with a cost to our mind, body, and spirit. If it were possible for feelings of anger, bitterness, and vengeance to alleviate the pain and suffering experienced by homicide survivors there would be no need to consider such a provocative response as forgiveness. But that is not the case. "Anger, hatred, resentment, bitterness, revenge-----they are death-dealing spirits," said Marietta, the mother of seven year-old murder victim Susie Jaeger, "and they will take our lives on some level as surely as Susie's life was taken" (Jaeger, 1998, p.14). Yandell (1998) said one of the most important features of forgiveness is, "...that the victim's life is no longer dominated by thoughts, memories, and negative feelings regarding the harm done by the offender" (as cited in Enright & North, 1998, p.39).

2.5.1. *Psychological Benefits of Forgiveness*

Psychiatrist Richard Fitzgibbons (1998) has observed numerous psychological benefits in using forgiveness as a therapeutic tool. He said the most significant among them are:

A decreased level of anger and hostility, increased feelings of love, improved ability to control anger, enhanced capacity to trust, and freedom from the subtle control of individuals and events of the past...In addition there are marked improvements in a variety of psychiatric disorders in all age groups of persons who present a significant degree of anger and hostility. These disorders in children include: oppositional, defiant, and disruptive behaviors; separation, anxiety, and attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder. In adolescents these disorders include: acting-out and socio-pathic behaviors, substance abuse, and mood and anxiety disorders. Adult disorders include: bipolar, impulse-control, panic, factitious, dissociative, and adjustment disorders. Finally, the use of forgiveness seems beneficial in treating those with personality disorders; these include the borderline, antisocial, histrionic, obsessive-compulsive, narcissistic, and paranoid types. (p.71)

Fitzgibbons (1998) said that while further studies are needed to better understand the relationship between disruptive symptoms, anger, and forgiveness; it is no longer possible to dismiss the role of forgiveness in the mental health field (p.73).

Forgiveness as a therapeutic treatment shows remarkable promise in reducing depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress for women after spousal emotional abuse (Reed & Enright, 2006). Forgiveness therapy directly targets the ongoing resentment through the use of the Enright four phase forgiveness model, i.e., *uncover* the harm; make the *decision* to consider forgiveness; do the tough *work* of forgiveness, and *discover* (also called *outcome*) meaning in the suffering (Enright & Fitzgibbons, 2000). Reed and Enright's (2006) sample consisted of 20 women (10 matched pairs) separated from their abusive partners for over two years. The intervention participants took part in weekly 1-hour individualized therapy sessions of forgiveness therapy while the alternative treatment participants engaged in weekly 1-hour participant-initiated discussion of current life concerns and intervener-facilitated therapeutic discussions. The findings suggest that forgiveness therapy is more successful in reducing anxiety, depression, posttraumatic stress symptoms, and resentment than the alternative treatment. It is likely these results are due to the fact that forgiveness therapy focuses the victim's thoughts, feelings, and behavior on compassionate responses to the offender while simultaneously helping them to appropriately express their anger and to grieve the pain. Common to the experience of emotionally abused women and victims and survivors of violence are the negative psychological impacts that linger long after the harm has ended. The results of studies such as this offer hope that forgiveness may act as a healing agent in cases of traumatic violence.

2.5.2. Emotional Benefits of Forgiveness

Victims/survivors of trauma often find that ongoing feelings of anger, bitterness, and resentment keep them bound in an emotional prison. Some believe that so long as they stay angry, the perpetrator stays in "jail" (Enright, 2001, p.18). But over time they come to see it is they who are imprisoned by their anger, not the offender. Enright (2001) said, "Our hatred affects us emotionally more than it affects the one who hurt us. Forgiveness is one of the keys to unlocking the door" (pp.18-19). The relationship

between unforgiveness, forgiveness, and emotional and physiological well-being is considered in the following study.

Witvliet, Ludwig and Vander Laan (2001) investigated the emotional and physiological effects of people who imagined responding to real life offenders in unforgiving or forgiving ways. Seventy-one participants were asked to identify a person that had harmed or offended them. They were then instructed to complete a questionnaire reporting the nature of the offense and their reactions to it. Lastly, during the imagery phase of the study, a script using autobiographical forgiveness-related imagery prompted unforgiving and forgiving responses to the offender. The imagery of unforgiving and forgiving reactions produced differences in both the participant's self-reported emotions and physiological responding. Participants reported feeling significantly more negative, aroused, angry, sad, and less in control during the unforgiving conditions than during the forgiving conditions. They also showed greater facial tension in addition to a variety of other negative physiological effects. According to Witvliet *et al.* (2001) these findings are a conservative measure of the effects that actually occur during real-life responses to offenders: hurtful memories and vengeful thoughts are intensified in daily life. Witvliet *et al.* (2001) said that while people cannot undo the past, if they "develop patterns of thinking about their offenders in forgiving ways rather than unforgiving ways they may be able to change their emotions, the physiological responses, and the health implications of a past they cannot change." When people are forgiving the physiological demands of unforgiving emotional hurt and anger are reduced. Forgiveness not only enables the one harmed to overcome the destructive emotions associated with the offense it also promotes positive behaviors in the victim.

2.5.3. Behavioral Benefits of Forgiveness

People are not required to be benevolent. Forgiving is a choice of behavior; an act of mercy toward one who does not deserve it (North, 1997, p. 502). The choice of forgiveness leads to positive behavioral changes in the forgiver. Enright (2001) said that as feelings of bitterness and resentment towards the offender are reduced the resultant negative behaviors (e.g. retaliatory or vengeful acts) are also alleviated (pp. 34-35). Genuine forgiveness not only diminishes negative behaviors toward the perpetrator it

also increases positive ones. Positive behavior may include the determination to no longer make disparaging remarks about the offender to others. It may be a smile. If the survivor is religious they may offer a prayer for the offender (Enright, 2001, p.35).

In their study "Forgiveness as an intervention with incest survivors" Freedman and Enright (1996) assessed the effectiveness of an intervention program for incest survivors using forgiveness as the goal. The 12 participants were randomly assigned to an intervention group or a waiting list control group. Pretests administered to the participants upon entering the program found the women to be anxious, depressed, and suffering from low self-esteem. Participants in the experimental group received 1-hour weekly individual intervention sessions (based on the forgiveness model developed by Enright and the Human Development Study Group, 1991) in addition to a manual/workbook that described the process model and offered examples relevant to incest. Each woman worked on the process at her own pace, with the average length of weekly sessions being approximately 14 months.

After forgiveness therapy all of the participants in the intervention group forgave the perpetrator. A significant improvement in the intervention group's psychological well-being was noted as well as positive behavioral changes toward the abuser. The secondary outcome of forgiveness education ranged significantly: one woman returned to school with plans to start a business another ended an unsatisfying relationship with a live-in partner; one went to see her father in the hospital and helped care for him, while another visited her father's grave for the first time (Enright, 2001, p.17). The shared negative psychological outcomes between acts of incest and acts of violence (e.g. PTSD, anger, depression, guilt, and low self-esteem) makes it reasonable to suppose that forgiveness interventions would also be beneficial to victims and family survivors of violence.

2.5.4. Somatic Benefits of Forgiveness

The relationship between forgiveness, disease, and physical health is one that is being addressed in the burgeoning field of forgiveness research (Thoresen et al., 2000, p.254). Findings from studies examining the physical health outcomes of factors conceptually similar to unforgiveness, such as anger, blame, and hostility (Booth-Kewley

& Friedman, 1987, as cited in Thoresen, et al., 2000, p. 254-260) have led scholars to consider the link between forgiveness and physical health outcomes. McCraty, Atkinson, Tiller, Rein, and Watkins (1995) conducted a series of studies which showed that an increase in positive emotional states, compared to negative ones, improved immune competence and reduced heart rate, blood pressure, and respiratory variability. Scheidt (1996) identified 12 physiological and psychosocial mechanisms that provide an explanation of how forgiveness processes could influence health. One of these mechanisms works by decreasing chronic sympathetic nervous system (SNS) arousal which becomes activated for the fight or flight response, thereby reducing the demands upon the cardiovascular system (as cited in Thoresen et al., 2000, p.258). Jiang et al. (1996) found that people with higher reactions to emotional stress (elevated SNS arousal) were nearly three times more likely to suffer a major coronary artery event over 5 years than those with less reaction to emotional stress (as cited in Thoresen, et al., 2000, p.258).

Major life events such as trauma and abuse are stressful experiences which require the body's physiological systems to adapt. As the body attempts to maintain stability (allostasis) a stressor would normally result in arousal and then recovery. But if the "load" (McEwen, 1998, as cited in Thoresen, et al., 2000, pp.258-259) becomes too high arousal may be extended or there may be no recovery at all. According to Thoresen et al. (2000) the concept of allostasis "suggests that forgiveness experiences might enhance health by reducing the excessive physiological burden that comes with unresolved stressful experiences, such as the hurt and offense attributed to others" (p.259). Therefore, it is conceivable that forgiveness may work to reduce the negative effects of distress thereby diminishing SNS arousal and ultimately lessening the risk of physical disease.

In conclusion, this review of the extant literature has painted a clear picture of the deleterious effects of violence and trauma, and has revealed compelling evidence that forgiveness may hold healing potential for those harmed as a result of such acts. According to McCullough, Pargament and Thoresen (2000) scientific inquiry into "the basic nature of forgiveness, how it develops, and its consequences for human health, well-being, and relationships has never been more relevant" (p. 2). Therefore in order to

examine the healing potential of forgiveness in cases of traumatic violence this study sought to answer two central questions:

RQ1) What are the psychological, emotional, behavioral, and somatic characteristics of the experience of trauma and journey to forgiveness for victims and/or family survivors who have suffered harm associated with acts of violence?

RQ2) In what ways does forgiveness support the healing process for victims and/or family survivors who have suffered harm associated with acts of violence?

3. Method

In this study a qualitative descriptive phenomenological methodology was employed in order to facilitate a deeper understanding of the impact of trauma and the healing journey for victims and family survivors of violence. Qualitative research provides “an in-depth and interpreted understanding of the social world of research participants by learning about their social and material circumstances, their experiences, perspectives and histories” (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003, p. 3). Phenomenology in particular “is a science whose purpose is to describe particular phenomena, or the appearance of things, as *lived experiences*” (Streubert & Carpenter, 1999, p.43) without making previous assumptions about the objective reality of those experiences (Holloway & Wheeler, 1996, p. 117). Descriptive phenomenology is a three-step process that draws on intuition analysis, and description of a particular phenomenon. Intuition is a process whereby the researcher becomes absorbed in the data in order to achieve an accurate and complete interpretation of what is meant in a particular description (Streubert & Carpenter, 1999, p. 331). The goal is to understand the phenomenon through the eyes of the participants. Analysis involves the identification of reoccurring themes and interrelationships as descriptions of the phenomenon are compared and contrasted (Brink & Wood, 1998, p. 20). Lastly, the purpose of describing is to convey the characteristics of the phenomena under study. It is the detailed description of what the researcher has found (Brink & Wood, 1998, p. 23).

An emic or “insiders” perspective of inquiry was employed through the use of semi-structured interviews. The range of interviews results in rich descriptions of the impact of traumatic violence and the healing power of forgiveness, characterized by both breadth and depth. Streubert & Carpenter (1999) characterize phenomenology as “a rigorous, critical, systematic investigation of phenomena (p.48) and is a highly appropriate approach to researching human experience (Wimpenny & Gass, 2000, p. 1486).

3.1. Participants

A particular group of research participants was required in order to determine the potential healing power of forgiveness in the lives of those harmed by violent trauma; therefore, a purposive sampling strategy was employed, specifying particular criterion for inclusion in the participant sample. Criterion sampling involves the selection of cases that meet a specific criterion of importance (Cohen & Crabtree, 2006). In this study the selection criteria for participation included the requirements that the individual be (a) 19 years of age or older, (b) have experienced the traumatic event a minimum of 5 years prior to this study, (c) have shared publically their personal story of trauma, and (d) must have, in the facing of harm suffered as a result of the violent actions of another, ultimately chosen to forgive the person(s) responsible for the wrongdoing.

Fourteen victims and/or family survivors of violent trauma were chosen to take part in this research. Two participants were recruited through a victim’s advocate working in the Midwest United States. One participant was identified and contacted as a result of a Google alert search using the keywords “Forgiveness and Murder”. Ten participants were recruited through personal connections with the Centre for Restorative Justice at Simon Fraser University. The final participant was a referral by a participant in the study (see Table 1). Participants remained anonymous and pseudonyms were used in the data collection process, in all drafts, and in the final report.

Table 1. Participant Demographics

Cases	Participant	Age	Ethnicity	Education	Vocation	Marital Status	Religion/Spirituality
1	Mary	67	Caucasian	Masters of Theology	Hospital education coordinator	Divorced	Catholic
	Sue	46	Caucasian	Masters of Science	Pre-sales consultant	Married	Catholic
2	Donna	78	Caucasian	2 yrs. college	Retired	Divorced	Student of A Course in Miracles
3	Allan	30	Caucasian	Bachelor of Arts	Banking, public	Single	Christian

					relations		
4	James	58	Chinese	Post graduate degree in Special Education	Retired public school teacher	Married	No religious affiliation
5	Erik Eve	63 60	Caucasian	Grade 12 Diploma	Self-employed contractor Arbor care coordinator	Married	Catholic
6	Clayton Claire	54 54	Caucasian	Grade 12 College certificate	School program coordinator Director of supported child development	Married	Protestant
7	April	51	Caucasian	Bachelors of Business Administration	Restorative justice advocate	Married	Spirituality
8	Nelson Rose	56 52	South Asian	Masters of English Grade 12	Freelance interpreter Retired	Married	Jehovahs Witness
9	Lily	36	Caucasian	Master's degree	Public speaker and author	Married	Spirituality
10	Grace	52	Caucasian	Bachelor of Arts	Professional speaker	Divorced	No religious affiliation

3.2. Procedures

An electronic message was sent to 15 potential research participants introducing both the researcher and the study that they were invited to take part in. Fourteen people accepted the invitation and a follow up conversation was held either by phone, electronic mail, or Skype to schedule a time and place for the interview. Face-to face interviews were conducted in the homes of nine participants while five participants were interviewed over Skype. Skype is an internet software application that offers free calling

between subscribers. In addition to telephone calls Skype enables video chat and video conferencing (Rouse, 2009, NP).

Semi-structured interview questions were used in order to permit the participants the freedom to talk about the issues that resonated with them while guiding the direction of the conversation toward a variety of topics that would allow for an in-depth examination of the comparisons and contrasts between the participants' journey's towards forgiveness and healing. Participant interviews lasted between one and two hours, the average being an hour and twenty minutes. The interviews began with each participant being asked to spend the first five to ten minutes grounding themselves in their own story through a narration of the events that initiated their forgiveness journey. Other questions (see Appendix A) included: What was your relationship with the offender prior to the offense? How did the traumatic event impact your life? How did forgiveness emerge? In what ways did forgiveness support the healing process?

3.3. Data Collection

Data was gathered over a two month period through the use of audio-recorded semi-structured phenomenological semi-structured interviews. Interviews were conducted in either the homes of the participants or via a video Skype meeting. The interviews produced over 18 hours of audio-recordings and approximately 300 typed pages of transcripts. Each audio recording was transcribed verbatim. All audio recordings and transcripts were kept secured in a safe location. Pseudonyms were used to protect the identities of the participants in addition to any third parties or identifying locations.

3.4. Data Analysis

Data analysis was performed with the use of NVivo. QSR International's NVivo is an industry standard software application that allows researchers to analyze the non-numeric data they have collected through various sources such as interviews, case studies, observations etc. by organizing it into a format where they can more readily

draw conclusions, identify trends, or develop hypotheses (University of Massachusetts Lowell, 2010, p.1.) There are those who suggest that electronic analysis of data adds rigour to qualitative research by reducing human error thereby yielding more reliable results than manual analysis (Richards & Richards, 1991 as cited in Welsh, 2002). NVivo, while not conducting the analysis, assists in the management and examination of data. Once the typed interview transcripts are uploaded into NVivo the text is then coded through a process whereby selected passages are highlighted and then “dragged and dropped” into categories of data called “nodes”. The nodes are then merged into linked concepts and further broke down into sub-categories. A process of repeated manual examinations of the coding results was conducted whereby conceptually related themes and categories were able to be integrated into three comprehensive themes: Violence/Trauma (11 sub-themes); Mediating Factors (9 sub-themes); and Forgiveness Outcomes (4 sub-themes).

3.5. The Researcher Role

Within the academic community there is the strongly held belief that researchers must remain neutral and detached from the research subject in order to achieve the goal of objectivity in the research process (Nagy Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011, p.74). The result is that the researcher’s voice becomes squelched and anonymized in the unrealistic attempt to subvert all subjectivity. This is not the role I have assumed in this work nor do I believe it is the appropriate role to take considering the sensitivity of the topic under analysis.

I, as the researcher, was fully present in this study and I saw my primary role to be the provider of a safe space in which to engage in a difficult conversation about what the road to forgiveness and healing looks like for those harmed by traumatic violence. Research shows that “suffering demands a voice [and] a witness” and that in order to be healthy, human beings “need to confide their thoughts and feelings about troubling events to other people”(Bloom, 2010, pp.13; 45).The expectation that a researcher should remain detached or unimpassioned when faced with the sharing of victims’ and survivors’ accounts of unimaginable horror and grief is an unrealistic expectation for most individuals and an affront to the loss the victims and survivors have suffered.

There are those, such as British sociologist Ann Oakley (1981 as cited in Nagy Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011, p.74), who believe that researchers do not need to maintain a distance between themselves and research participants. Oakley critiques this model of neutrality and instead argues for bridging this divide through empathy and affinity (cited in Nagy Hesse-Biber & Leavy, p.74, 2011). Though the subjective plays a key role in social science research--- in the end it *is* the subjective experiences of the participants that are being considered, it is still imperative for the researcher, in the interest of transparency, to acknowledge that there are unavoidable influences from their personal position that they bring to the study. Therefore, the primary ontological and epistemological assumptions I hold are:

- (1) Reality is socially constructed by each person from within their own particular contextual interpretation⁴, I therefore value the participants own interpretation of reality.
- (2) Knowledge is not gained through the discovery of objective truths but created through understanding of a phenomena within a particular context. Furthermore understanding is not immutable, but rather fluid in nature⁵.

The main assumptions held with respect to the potential of forgiveness to be a healing agent in cases of traumatic violence are:

- 1) Trauma affects the whole person⁶.
- 2) Traumatic experiences force individuals to develop new ways of thinking about their past, present, and future⁷.
- 3) The mechanism for healing is social⁸.

⁴ See Joniak, L. (2005) for an outline of the basic ontological and epistemological views of qualitative researchers.

⁵ Joniak, L. (2005)

⁶ An understanding of the ways in which trauma affects the whole person--- physically, psychologically, emotionally, and behaviorally is integral in order to assist the healing process of traumatized individuals. Bloom, S. (2010).

⁷ While a forgiving response to harm is never easy, oddly enough it may be the sheer enormity of the loss and pain that is the very thing that drives the victim to consider forgiveness. Enright (2001) declared: 'They are at a point where they are willing to consider anything that may help.' See also Coleman, P.W. (1998:93).

- 4) Forgiveness is not given to events but to people⁹.
- 5) Forgiveness is a gift and as such must never be required or demanded¹⁰.
- 6) Forgiveness is a process not an outcome¹¹.

Some of the life experiences, values, and beliefs that I bring to the research are that I am a 51 year old Caucasian female raised in the Midwest United States currently residing in western Canada. I have been married for 32 years and am a mother of two children and grandmother of three. I have a Bachelor of Arts degree in Criminal Justice/Corrections and am working on a Master of Arts degree in Criminology. With a particular interest in correctional systems processes and impacts I took part, first as a student and then as a teaching assistant, in the Inside/Out Prison Exchange Program in Leavenworth, Kansas. I am currently a volunteer at Ferndale Institution, a minimum security federal correctional facility in Mission, British Columbia. I attend a weekly restorative justice circle at Ferndale and also participate in the Alternatives to Violence Project where experiential workshops are used to help empower individuals to live non-violent lives. I have a strong Christian faith and have been involved in various roles within my church, most recently as the music director.

⁸ See Bloom (2010) and de Zulueta (1993) for the role of attachment and social support in the healing of trauma.

⁹ Flanigan, B. (1998) *Forgivers and the Unforgivable*. In R.D. Enright & J. North (Eds.) *Exploring Forgiveness* (pp.95-105). Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press.

¹⁰ As John Braithwaite (2002:571-2) asserts: Apology, forgiveness, and mercy are gifts: they only have meaning if they well up from a genuine desire in the person who forgives, apologizes, or grants mercy...people take time to discover the emotional resources to give up such emotional gifts. It cannot, must not, be expected.

¹¹ See North (1998); Fitzgibbons (1998); Enright (2001).

3.6. Ethical Considerations

All academic studies must adhere to the principles of research ethics which are the values “that guide the way we interact with research participants and the commitment to safeguard their rights and concerns” (Palys & Atchison, 2008). This research project was conducted with strict adherence to the guidelines outlined in the Tri-Council Policy Statement, Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans, (the TCPS). The following topics were addressed:

3.6.1. *Obtaining consent*

In order to ensure that the research participants understood that their involvement in the study was “an exercise of their choice, free from any element of fraud, deceit, duress, or similar unfair inducement or manipulation” (Berg, 2007), I made use of informed consent. Having adapted a consent form from examples created by Kirby, Greaves, and Reid (2006) and Nagy Hesser-Biber and Leavy (2011), I created an agreement form giving the research participants an outline of the particulars of the study including:

- The specific nature of the study
- How their participation will contribute to the work
- The voluntariness of their participation
- The participant’s right to stop the research at any time
- The degree of confidentiality afforded them
- The promise of anonymity and use of pseudonyms
- How the data will be secured
- How the data will be used
- Safeguards in place to protect them from psychological harm (Groenewald, 2004; Nagy Hesser-Biber, Leavy, 2011).

3.6.2. *Potential for retraumatization*

I was acutely aware that the nature of this research dealt with events that had the power to elicit numerous painful emotions in those who choose to participate, therefore I sought to mitigate the possibility of re-traumatization of the research participants by limiting participation in the study to (a) individuals 19 years of age and older (b)

individuals to whom the offenses occurred a minimum of 5 years prior and (c) to those who had spoken publically about their healing journey. I also informed the participants that a crisis hotline number would be provided to any who found the need to speak with a counseling professional.

The sharing of personal stories of trauma has the potential to retrigger numerous painful emotions and may even reactivate the trauma itself; therefore it is important to be particularly mindful and respond to the potentially negative affect that the interview could evoke. This can be ameliorated through participants taking short breaks or by changing the subject for a few moments if necessary (Westwood, Personal Communication, 2012).

The study was categorized as “Minimal Risk” and approved by the Director, Office of Research Ethics in behalf of the Research Ethics Board in accordance with University Policy r20.01 (<http://www.sfu.ca/policies/research/r20.01.htm>)

4. Results

“Ordinary people under certain circumstances are capable of far greater evil than we could have imagined. But so are we capable of far greater virtue than we might have thought.” Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela, 2003, p. 133)

4.1. The journey to forgiveness

4.1.1. Case 1 “Mary and Sue”

Mary, age 67, resides in a Midwestern city in the United States. She holds a Master’s degree in Theology and is employed full-time as an Education Coordinator in the Department of Surgery at a large inner city teaching hospital. Mary is Caucasian, divorced and a practicing Catholic. Mary’s daughter Camile was murdered by Nicholas, Camile’s ex-husband and the father of her two children. Mary described the night that forever changed her life and which began her journey to forgiveness:

Six years ago last night I was in bed about 11:30 and got a phone call from my daughter Tania. “Mom, this is Tania we’re out front. We’re coming in.” And by the time I got in the front room and turned on the light, she and Elaine and Tania’s husband, at the time, were coming in the front door and they were crying. And my first thought was “Oh, Nicholas killed himself” because he had made pseudo attempts and then I thought “No, they wouldn’t be crying.” They said, “You’ve got to sit down... Nicholas has killed Camile! He’s killed Camile!” And I said...I just couldn’t comprehend... there must be some mistake. You know, maybe she’s hurt real bad or...

Mary explained that Nicholas had been physically and emotionally abusive to Camile over the course of their marriage and refused to accept that she had divorced him. On the night of her murder Nicholas had called Camile and asked her to come to his apartment. Mary explained:

He had told her it was urgent that he see her. He had a plan and he didn’t know how to tell the kids. So she thought either he was going to

try to kill himself again, that's a good hook...or move and totally leave the kids.

When asked whether Camile's murder was the result of an argument that got out of hand or if Nicholas was lying in wait for her, Mary said that a month previous to the murder Nicholas composed an e-mail that would automatically be sent to his son, a friend, and his lawyer after he committed what he planned would be a murder-suicide. In the e-mail Nicholas informed them that by the time they received the message he would have already killed Camile and himself. Mary said:

And he had it set so all he had to do was hit send and it would immediately send so he had to get out of there. He purchased a gun the month before, a shotgun. I don't know how long she was over there ... people in the apartment heard them arguing. One man heard her begging for her life. This was not premeditated you understand. According to him it was an accident. The shotgun accidentally went off three times even though you have to pull the.... The fatal shot was in her back. But this person actually heard her begging for her life.

Sue, age 46, is Mary's daughter and she also lives in the Midwest United States. She is Caucasian, married and holds a Master's of Science degree. Sue is employed as a pre-sales consultant and is a practicing Catholic. Sue recounted the events that preceded her sister's murder. She said:

Ok, well my sister Camile had been married to her husband, ex-husband, Nicholas for 14-15 years, something like that. They had been separated and finally divorced in January of 2005. I know many times she left him. She never ever ever told us that he hit her...that he yelled at her... although we observed him yelling at her at family functions when he would get drunk.

The night of Camile's murder, Sue said she returned home from an out of town business meeting feeling uncharacteristically restless and antsy. She had only been home a few minutes when the phone rang. Sue related:

So about 10 minutes later the phone rang and it was my Mom's phone number but it was my sister Elaine. [She] lives right where I live and my Mom lives a half hour away from us, so it was weird at midnight to have Elaine call from my mom's house. Well, she said, "Our sister Camile is dead!" I argued with her because I didn't believe it. So obviously we knew immediately that it was Nicholas who did it because nobody else would have killed her. She didn't say it was an accident. She said she was murdered. At that point the police still hadn't told us

for sure that it was her at the apartment because Nicholas took all of her identification and her car so they had no other way of identifying her. But who else was it going to be....she wasn't home... she wasn't answering her phone... you know.

Sue and her family gathered at Camile's house to take care of her children while the police scoured the city for her ex-husband. Sue described:

They had helicopter's flying over the house and police stationed out front. So all night long... nobody slept. So they caught him the next morning. He had actually gone to talk to a lawyer and someone else... some other lawyer in the law firm had saw him and had seen the news and she's the one who called police we found out later. So it was maybe 8:30-9:00 in the morning we found out he was in jail and that the kids were safe. That's what we were worried about... that he was going to come after them next.

4.1.2. Case 2 "Donna"

Donna, age 78, lives in the western United States and is Caucasian. She had two years of college and is now retired. Donna is divorced and though she has no church affiliation, she is a student of A Course in Miracles, a self-study curriculum for achieving spiritual transformation. In 1979 Donna's 19 year old daughter Cindy was murdered in her home by Darren, a man who had come to murder her housemate Ed. Donna related:

Well, my daughter was in the wrong place at the wrong time and ...this gentleman, his name is Darren, had a beef with the young man whose name was Ed. Ed was living at his mother's home out in the country where we used to live...in the foothills up in the gold country. She (Cindy) was there. She had two milk goats. She had a horse. Her dog had just had a litter of puppies. .. It was interesting because she had just moved in there.

Donna explained that she and Cindy's father were divorced and that Cindy had been living with her father and his wife. Cindy's stepmother asked her to leave so she moved into Ed's home.

He (Ed) had been her boyfriend at one time but there were a whole lot of people living there. Darren came that one night and he had dinner with them and I guess they played a board game. Then Cindy went off to her room to go to bed upstairs and then I don't know what happened but Ed evidently fell asleep. He (Darren) took a baseball bat and hit him over the head and slit his throat and killed him. Then Cindy evidently either... I'm not quite sure because I don't know if we

have all the details... Cindy came to see what was going on and he killed her. He stabbed her to death.

So he had nothing against her. She was in the wrong place at the wrong time. It was just one of those things. Whenever I talk to a group of high school kids I always tell them, pick your friends carefully. Pick your friends carefully.

4.1.3. Case 3 “Allan”

Allan is 30 years old, single and lives in Canada. He has a Bachelor of Arts degree and is employed full-time in the banking industry. Allan is also self-employed and works in public relations and as a public speaker. He has a Christian faith tradition. Allan’s journey towards forgiveness began after his mother was killed by her boyfriend Blaine when Allan was 14 years old. At the time of her murder Allan’s mother had five children: three boys ages 14, 18, and 22 and two girls ages 9 and 19. Allan shared the story of his life leading up to his mother’s murder. He said:

I was nine years old when my parent’s separated...so we moved out here (west) and lived with my aunt. So we had to live pretty cheap. We had thirteen of us living in a little duplex. My aunt was also a single parent with four children.

Allan’s family eventually moved into their own home and when he was 14 his mother began dating Blaine. Blaine was a former police officer, who also happened to be the chief suspect in the murder of his previous girlfriend. There was some debate as to whether his mother was aware of this at the time, but it is known that the police never informed Allan’s mother about their suspicions. The very tumultuous relationship that Allan’s mother had with Blaine ended in her murder, during a week that he and his siblings were out of town over spring break. Allan explained:

There was a dispute and my mom had kicked him (Blaine) out because he wasn’t starting a job... a whole bunch of things. Just drinking really and she asked him to leave and I guess that’s when the fight began and it ended in her basically getting beaten and strangled to death. Then he spent the rest of the three days you know, at the house cleaning it up doing ...who knows what he was doing but...

So we came back from spring break to find that my mom didn’t pick us up from the airport. We called Blaine’s sister. She went to the house. We called the police to check out the house as well because she had never...his sister never got back to us. So the police, hours later, called us back and said they found a sudden death, a murder, you know. A

murdered woman around the age of 40. They wouldn't confirm who it was. So that was how we found out... over the phone at my brother's house...My brother delivered the news to us as he came out of the bedroom.

4.1.4. Case 4 "James"

James is a 58 year old Canadian of Chinese descent. He is married and has a post-graduate degree in Special Education. James is a retired public school teacher who volunteers as a restorative justice advocate. He has no religious affiliation. James shared the story of his sister's murder. He began:

Ok, well my story goes back more than 30 years actually. I was 27 at the time and I was just starting my teaching career. Darby (his wife) and I had decided we wanted to move to a place where we could both teach right away and get jobs and not have to be substitute teachers. So we decided to move to a small town...and we both were in our first... or second year of teaching. We were at that time working very long hours and as it typically was the case we come home late and have dinner late.

I remember on that particular evening we were getting ready for bed... and I received a phone call and it was my dad and the first words that he said were "James don't be scared... Michelle's dead." I couldn't believe my ears and I said, "What do you mean she's dead?" He said, "She's been murdered" and that was just like a lightning bolt that hit me. I said, "How's that possible?" He proceeded to tell me that she was on a business trip ... and she was murdered in her motel room and that he didn't know any more details other than that no one had been apprehended. So it was a very straight short conversation and I was totally stunned and had to sit down...The wheels kept spinning in my head about...well, what I do now?

The following day James and Darby took a flight to be with his family. James recalled:

Things [were] happening so fast. Right away there needed to be funeral arrangements made and my father had, and Michelle's husband had, gone over to the crime scene actually to take a look. But there was no information and so then I was left to be arranging the funeral with Michelle's husband, and it was a very, very traumatic time. I kept on thinking I can't believe this has actually happened...like she was only 29.

4.1.5. Case 5 “Erik and Eve”

Erik is 63 years old and is married to Eve, age 60. He is Caucasian, has a Grade 12 equivalent education and is a self-employed contractor with a pressure washing and painting business. He is Catholic. When I asked him to share the story of what happened to his son Murray he began by saying:

We were really shocked and alarmed when you say it came as a complete shock to us. We had no idea what he (Murray) was up to. I don't know if Eve told you but my whole family was all here for my daughter's wedding what...10 days before. And then back 10 days later for a funeral.

When asked how he was notified of his son's death Eric said:

The police actually came to where I was working...When the police turned up I first of all thought there was something wrong with Eve...He was only a young officer. He'd only just started working for the police and he felt really bad having to come up and tell me so ... he said, "do you have photo of your son?"... I carry one in my wallet. I said, "are you sure it's him?" And the minute he said he had this tattoo on his arm because he has a... tattoo on his arm and... flag, I knew it was him.

Erik's boss drove him to his wife's place of employment where he delivered the news to her. Erik then made a phone call to his daughter and son-in-law who were on their honeymoon. Erik said:

They'd only had four days of their honeymoon when I contacted them and told them what had happened. My daughter was just screaming on the phone. You can imagine. Plus the fact they couldn't get them out ... because there were no flights. So they had to wait till the Saturday...and flew back home Saturday and we picked them up. Well, it was quite a shock. It's something that you don't expect to happen to any family but...these things happen.

Eve, Erik's wife, is a 60 year old Caucasian woman living in Canada. She has a Grade 12 equivalent education and is committed to her Catholic faith. Eve works part-time as an arbor care coordinator, supporting bereaved families in a funeral home setting. Murray, Eve's son was murdered in 2005 by drug traffickers. Eve explained:

Well, we discovered the day after our son died...He had collapsed in the street. Later on that evening we discovered that they were treating

his death as a homicide...that he had been carrying two bags, two hold-all bags full of cocaine... 17 kilos of cocaine. We had no idea that he was involved in drug trafficking. We had seen him the week before...I guess about 10 days before and had no idea that anything like that was going on in his life. So just the shock...the shock to discover he's in... (Eastern Canada). That he's dead. That they're treating his death as a homicide and that he's been carrying cocaine. It's like somebody just keeps hitting you all the time, right. So it took a few months before we discovered you know how like this all really kind of played out.

Not long after Murray's death the pictures of two suspects appeared on the country's Most Wanted list. The police had determined that a gang of seven men were responsible for his murder. The first suspect was arrested after being seen on bank surveillance cameras using Murray's stolen bank cards. Soon after the youngest member of the gang came forward and gave police information which resulted in the arrest of three others. Thirteen months later five of the seven suspects had been caught and all pled guilty. Over time the story of Murray's murder and his involvement in drug trafficking was revealed. Eve said:

So we discovered that Murray had traveled about three weeks before he actually died...on a Greyhound bus and took these drugs on the Greyhound bus. When he got there he changed his mind and hitchhiked back [home] right away. Left the bags on the bus and they were then put in a lost and found depot in the bus station. So then our daughter was getting married and so we think he was able to do a deal with these guys. They were wanting him to go back and pick up these bags but because our daughter was getting married he was able...because those two and a half weeks went by...and he didn't do anything. Two days after the wedding he flew to... and again changed his mind and didn't go to the bus depot. [He] flew back the next day and the following day he flew again to...and was picked up at this hotel and taken to... for a meeting. He kept saying, "No I don't want to do this. I'm done." They wouldn't let him. They thought he had sold the drugs out to somebody else.

So they took him to a warehouse...and kept him there for six days beating him and torturing him until he gave in. The drugs were in a lost and found depot. He picked them up, crossed the street and collapsed on the street because of a blood clot to his lungs with being tortured and beaten. It's like there was different bruises...black eye... one finger was broken...but the coroner's report said it was this blow to the leg that caused the blood clot.

4.1.6. Case 6 “Clayton and Claire”

Clayton, age 54, is Caucasian has a Grade 12 degree and is employed full time as a school program coordinator. His religious background is Protestant and he and his wife, Claire, who was also a participant in this study, live in Canada. Clayton and Claire are in an unique position when compared with the other participants in this research project in that they are not only the family survivors of a daughter Allison who was murdered, but they are also the parents of Brad, the offender. Clayton began his story by saying:

Ok, so I mean the nuts and bolts of the story is that our son Brad killed our daughter when he was 17 years old and she was 15. So, I think the kind of relevant parts of this story are that we love both our kids very much right and I would say both kids are quite different in who they were as people and I, to be honest, was more connected with Brad than I was with Allison. She was quite a girl's girl and he was quite a boy's boy and him and I did a lot of stuff together, skiing and biking and all these things. You know, so I was really invested in him as a father I guess. I coached his soccer and baseball and all that kind of thing right.

Clayton shared that Brad began to have problems around the time he was going from Grade 7 into Grade 8:

He never really liked school at all. He hated writing things down. You know, he was not good at that or didn't enjoy doing it...So there's always this tug of war between him and us about...do your homework and all that kind of normal... well not necessarily normal but for a lot of people it's normal, right... I think we also recognized that he just hated it and he struggled with it and so we tried to be as patient as possible with that stuff.

During this time Brad started hanging out with a group of friends who were into drinking and doing drugs. Clayton said that he and Claire were devastated as Brad continued down a path which eventually led to his arrest in a breaking and entering case involving cars at an apartment parking garage.

Following his run-in with the justice system Brad's relationship with his parents actually began to improve. Clayton said they were optimistic for the future as Brad began to communicate with them in ways he had not done previously. However, things took an unexpected and shocking turn one morning later that spring. Clayton shared:

On May * which was a Thursday, Claire and I were both at work and he (Brad) was going to an alternative school that just went in the afternoon for a few hours. So he was home that morning and Allison was sick and I tried to get her up to go to school but she was sick so we said, "well you just stay home you're ok." She was 15 years old so she was fine on her own, right.

So that's where we kind of left that day. We both went off to work and about 3:00- 3:30 that afternoon I'm at work and I get called down to the general manager's office and there was police there and they dropped the bomb. So that... that was ...yea that was kind of how we found out.

Claire is 54 years old and married to Clayton. She is Caucasian has a college certification and is employed full-time as an acting director of supported child development. Like her husband, Claire also had a Protestant upbringing. Claire began the interview by saying that though Clayton had already explained the events that preceded their daughter's death she would endeavor to describe, from her perspective, the day that Allison was killed. She began:

That morning when we got up Allison should have had a volleyball practice...she wasn't feeling great in the morning so she didn't want to get out of bed... We're like, ok you're not going early that's fine. As the morning went on a little bit more, it became really obvious that she was just not up to even going to school at all. So I just said ok fine. You're there...just stay. Brad at that point was in an alternative school program and he didn't have school till the afternoon that day.

Sometimes I would go in and wake him up to say goodbye... and some days I wouldn't, just depending. That day I just didn't go in and say anything to him. I always think about that later...I wonder if I'd gone in and said something to him...but you just never know, right....so she's in bed. I know she's staying home. He's in bed. He hasn't been awake but not a big deal. Clayton's gone off to work. I go off to work... it was just one of those days where it was just really busy at work and lots of stuff going on. It's just weird when you realize what's going on ...or you look back at it and you ...hmm man...all...day I just didn't feel right. I just had this really, I don't know unsettled kind of feeling I guess. I don't know.

Off and on throughout the day Claire thought about calling Allison to make sure she was ok but she never did because she did not want to disturb her while she was resting. Towards the end of the day Claire was summoned to the office of her department head where she was told that the police were on their way to get her. As she

waited for the police Claire described the whirl of thoughts that came flooding into her mind as she and her boss tried to fathom what was going on. Claire questioned:

Shit what happened?... because Brad had been in just enough trouble you know...and it was like oh shit! What happened? Then you get that minute of thinking and you think...the police don't come for no reason. There's something wrong. They don't do this...they don't do this if there's not...shit something happened to Clayton at work. We're like...no, no you know Clayton he's really good. It wouldn't be Clayton...oh, well what's Brad got into now?... Allison stayed home from school today...she (her boss) looked at me and was like no no no you know Allison's good. She knows (the neighbor) is right across the street. She knows she's got him there if she needs anything. Clayton's right close at work in... if there's anything with Allison. She's home... she's safe. You know that. Ok, so then it's got to be Brad...I wonder what Brad did now? ...I wonder what's happened? You have all this stuff through your head.

A short time later a female RCMP (Royal Canadian Mounted Police) officer knocked at the door and came into the office and sat down. Claire asked her boss to stay with her. Claire said:

So she sat back down and the officer looked at me and she said, *you're Claire A*?* I said, "Yea". *You have a daughter Allison?* And I just remember my whole body going like....uhhh (seizing up)... *You have a daughter Allison?...* "Yea." *...There's no easy way to tell you this...she's dead.* And all I remember next is [my boss] just grabbing me.

4.1.7. Case 7 "April"

April is 51 years old, Caucasian, married and living in Canada. She has a Bachelor's of Business Administration degree, is self-employed as a restorative justice advocate and though she has no religious affiliation she considers herself to be a spiritual person. When I asked her to share the account of the events that altered the course of her life and led to her decision to forgive the ones responsible for the harm, she shared:

In 1997 I'm living in a small...community with my husband Andrew and our two children who were four turning five at the end of that year...On New Year's Eve in '97 we were having a small gathering of people we had spent most New Year's with for many many years before. We were made aware that a house party was going on at the end of our street at the home of a vacationing friend. So Andrew, before cracking open the champagne and tucking into our New Year's, just wanted to be

sure those kids were ok. [Andrew] had phoned the house and was unable to reach the young host who he knew well so he felt he and his buddies could just quickly whip down to the end of the road and makes sure everybody was alright.

What Andrew and his two friends found when they walked into the house was an unimaginable scene of chaos involving over 200 young people, heavy use of alcohol, drugs, and property damage. April continued:

So Andrew was going to do his best to break things up. He went straight to the master bedroom which I can see him doing, wanting to be sure that our friend's personal space was secure. And it was not. There was a number of young people in that private space and when Andrew asked them to leave one young guy took exception to that and rather than having a conversation he threw a punch. Put Andrew on the ground and then another young man by the name of Russell came up to Andrew as he lay there and delivered four kicks to Andrew's head... one of which killed Andrew. So I was left with two children, and community who was choosing to be silent. No one would talk about what happened in that house.

4.1.8. Case 8 “Nelson and Rose”

Rose and Nelson, ages 52 and 56 respectively, are a married couple of South Asian descent living in Canada. Nelson has a Master's degree in English and works as a freelance interpreter. Rose has a high school degree and is retired. Both are committed to their faith as Jehovah's' Witness. Nelson and Rose's daughter Melody was murdered by two teenagers Kristen and Ronald. Rose and Nelson indicated that they preferred to be interviewed together so when I asked who would like to share their story they decided that Rose would begin. She shared:

Ok, so Melody had met some girls while she was in the care of the Ministry of Children and Families. She had met them in a group home and she was really happy because she had made some new friends and thought that were going to be able to hang out and do things. So while she was in the group home these girls they went out and partied or whatever. At that time Melody she was kind of I think afraid of these girls but she wanted their friendship at the same time.

One day when Melody came to visit Nelson and Rose she mentioned that there were some girls who had been threatening her. Rose said Melody seemed nervous

about this but did not share any details of the situation with them. Melody returned to her parent's home the next evening to watch movies with her family. Rose said:

So Friday after school she came over and she seemed like she was somewhat more relaxed. Then she got a phone call from one of her friends at about 6:30-7:00. She had heard that somebody was going to be beat up...maybe even her so she asked the girl. She said, "Well I heard you guys were going to beat me up tonight." They said, "Oh no, no it's some other girl, not you." So she kind of reluctantly left the home...So the next we heard from her was about 9:45 and she said she was going to come home. I waited up for her and she never came home. I thought ok maybe she decided she was going to go to her foster home and changed her mind. So I just kind of felt uncomfortable. I had a sense that something was wrong. So I didn't get much sleep.

The next morning when I got up I phoned her foster home and she wasn't there. Then I phoned my mom. She wasn't there. I phoned my brother's place. She wasn't there. So I thought maybe she went to some friends or something. So later in the afternoon I phoned the girl that had phoned and called her to go out. She said, "Well, I saw her last night but I haven't seen her since then. I don't know where she could be." At that time nobody knew what happened. Then I phoned the police. They said they hadn't heard anything...Every day I'd phone her foster mom. I'd phone the social worker... still no idea where she was.

Later on in the week rumors started circulating in the schools that a girl had been killed. A teenage girl then came forward and told the police that Kristen had been telling people about her involvement in a murder. A week after Melody's disappearance the police came to Nelson and Rose's home. Rose continued:

They wanted a picture of Melody...I think it was about three in the morning or something the police officer phoned and said he wanted to come and had some information. That's when he told us that...he said there had been a fight...there were two fights and Melody is presumed dead. So you know like you kind of know that's what must have happened because she would have been found somewhere by this time. So anyways the next morning is when her body was recovered from the... waterway.

They had swarmed Melody...kicked and punched her and then they... Ronald and Kristen, ended up following her over the bridge and taking her down the other side of the... and they kicked and punched her some more and ended up dragging her to the [gorge]...and drowning her.

Rose paused for a while and quietly said:

Even after all this time it's all still... hard to go there.

4.1.9. Case 9 "Lily"

Lily, age 36, lives in Canada and is married and of Caucasian, specifically Irish descent. She holds a Master's Degree and is self-employed working as a public speaker and author. Lily is also a teacher and on occasion works for the local school board. Raised in the Catholic faith Lily does not currently practice yet she maintains a strong sense of spirituality. Lily related the painful events which led her on a path towards forgiveness. She recounted:

Well in broad sweeping strokes...I was very, very happily involved in a relationship with Cameron who did have a criminal record from about 15 years prior. Which I went through a process...I knew about it right away as soon as we met each other...was very shocked and dismayed but I also saw that he was someone who had a huge amount of support around him in the community... who'd been given a second chance...So I was able to embrace him and his history as well and I had the reward of being in a really wonderful relationship with him for close to three years.

On Lily's one month wedding anniversary while she was away at a counseling conference she received news that would turn her world upside down. She explained:

I remember waking up that morning thinking my life was so perfect... actually thinking that I might be pregnant. I'd just been married. We had a home. I loved my job. Then a police officer arrived to tell me that basically the life that I knew was over. That the person that I thought I knew also had another side.

Cameron was accused of sexual offenses involving the kidnapping and assault of two strangers from their community. Lily said:

That began a very long journey into trying to understand what had gone wrong inside of Cameron. What he'd done and also a journey through the justice system and a social journey in which in the blink of an eye I went from being a well-respected professional, homeowner, wife, and neighbor to being the wife of a sex offender. That carried with it an enormous social stigma and so that was a long journey to try to find a way through that. I experienced a lot of judgment. I also experienced a lot of compassion...so both ends.

4.1.10. Case 10 “Grace”

Grace, age 52 is Caucasian, divorced and lives in Canada. She has a Bachelor of Arts degree and is self-employed as a professional speaker. Though Grace was raised Catholic she has no current religious affiliation. Grace was a 19 year old nursing student when her father was murdered by Ralph the next door neighbor. Grace described the event that triggered 16 years of bitterness before forgiveness entered her heart. She explained:

We lived in a little fishing community, 21 families and our next door neighbor who lived in the meadow with us. His wife had died in child birth and he moved to our area of the province to be closer to... where his four sons and his daughter went to live in orphanages. So summer holidays, Christmas holidays they'd come home to be with their dad. Now imagine if you were in a meadow and there were four little boys and a little girl with no mom. So they're coming home to be with their dad and my mother tells stories of making cookies for them and washing the boys' hair and all those kind of stuff so my mother knew him (Ralph) as a child and of course I was born and as we grew up he was like part of the family.

So by 1979 three of his brothers had married, his sister had married and they had families. His dad has passed away so he's living alone in the house next to us. He was acting strange that summer of '79 but he was always a bit different.

Ralph had a 10 year psychiatric history and had recently been picked up by the Royal Canadian Mounted Police after committing some mischievous acts in the community. After passing a simple psychiatric test administered by the local doctor Ralph was released. Grace and her family had just finished their dinner one Sunday afternoon when Ralph came into the house. Grace described:

So all of a sudden without any warning he (Ralph) just burst into the open door and sticks an axe in my father's back. No nothing. No warning... and I remember shaking my head. I couldn't believe what my eyes were seeing. I mean he was safe to us. Just like me asking you, make me a list of people who won't hurt you... won't bad mouth you...won't steal on you. If someone on that list hurt you you're dealing with betrayal. So as he was swinging the axe. I couldn't believe Ralph was doing this. This was someone we gave food to. My parents were protective of and defended him in the community. So my foster brother picks up a chair and tries to knock the axe out of his hand and he easily knocks the chair from my foster brother's hand...I go down and try to get him away from my father and he axes me in the right shoulder. I saw the axe go in but I felt nothing. Daddy gets

to his feet and I'll see him forever with his hands over his head trying to fend off the axe. He keeps chopping him.

After Ralph finished his attack on Grace's father he walked to a local shop, laid his axe on the porch and asked to wash his bloody hands. He told them that he had killed Mr... and to call the police. Ralph later explained that he killed Grace's father because his dead mother had told him to do so. Grace described the scene following Ralph's departure. She said:

The thing I remember most is how quiet it was. It was so so quiet. I felt alone in the world. My sister is now gone for help. My foster brother's in the driveway. My mother's on the roof of the porch. It was so quiet and of course there was blood everywhere and furniture is overturned.

It all took... he was probably in our house...well it was all over I would think in less than 5 minutes. He put 16 axe cuts in my father... seven in the head, neck and face. So now we lost my father that day. We lost a house which we never lived in again. And we moved from the little community because right that day we went to my grandmother's house which was probably 10 miles away and we never came back to the little community again. It's not like you got older and you said, "My, this place is too small for me." We never got the chance to grow out of it. And of course it's wherever you spend your childhood that always tugs at your heart.

4.2. The relationship with the offender

Prior to the act of violence the offender was known to half the participants in this study (See Table 2). In cases 1 and 3 the offender was/ had been in an intimate relationship with the participants' family member. One knew the offender since childhood (Case 10) while three participants had familial ties to the offender (Cases: 6, 9). Irrespective of the shared trauma experience each participant held divergent views of the offender following the act of violence. Seven participants had no connection to the offender prior to the crime (See Table 3). Four participants expressed strong negative feelings towards the perpetrator following the offense (Cases: 2, 4, 8) while two said they had no particular feelings concerning the perpetrators (Case: 5). One participant however expressed great concern for the unidentified offender and his family (Case 7).

4.2.1. *The offender was known*

Table 2 Relationship to and Affective Orientation towards the Offender Following the Offense

Case	Participant	Offender	Relationship	Positive	Negative
1	Mary and Sue	Nicholas	Ex-in law		x
3	Allan	Blaine	Mom's boyfriend		x
6	Clayton and Claire	Brad	Son	x	
9	Lily	Cameron	Husband	x	
10	Grace	Ralph	Neighbor		x

4.2.1.1. **Positive or loving relationship**

Three of the seven participants who knew the person responsible for the harm expressed that they continued to have positive or loving feelings towards these individuals following the offense.

Lily had been married barely a month when her husband Cameron kidnapped and sexually assaulted two women. Though horrified and repulsed by Cameron's crimes Lily continued to care for him as a human being. She explained:

All I could think of was that I still loved him. I hated what he did but still loved the person.

Clayton and Claire also exhibited unwavering devotion and support for their son though the evidence showed that he was the one responsible for his sister's murder. Clayton shared:

I put my arms around him and I said, Look Brad your mom and I we love you. We're going to support you and you need to tell the truth.

Claire shared that she gave her son "a great big hug" when she saw him at the police station the night of Allison's murder. She said:

I don't even remember that we said much of anything to one another. It was just more...I'm here. I'm here for you.

4.2.1.2. Negative relationship

The following four participants who also knew the perpetrator of the crime, previous to the offense, did not share in the same feelings of love and support marked by the previous three.

Ralph was the boy next door. Grace's parents had done many kind things for him throughout his life. Grace admitted that Ralph was psychotic, yet it enraged her when this diagnosis was used to mitigate his actions. Grace declared:

I would be furious when people used to come to me and say he was sick. I used to say well he was sick but he didn't come with a breadknife...he came with a bloody axe! He was well enough to know what to come with.

Fourteen year old Allan found his mother's boyfriend Blaine to be an entertaining guy. Blaine, a former police officer enjoyed sharing fascinating, albeit gruesome, "cop stories" with Allan and his siblings. Allan supposed that he loved Blaine because his mother loved him but after his mother's murder Allan's view of Blaine changed. Allan recalled:

He showed a lot of remorse but I didn't really know how to take that because I didn't trust him anymore. He's manipulative.

Though Mary and Sue had little contact with Nicholas after he and Camile divorced he had been a part of their family for over 14 years. Nicholas denies any responsibility for Camile's murder and continues to appeal his murder conviction which enrages Mary and Sue. Mary expressed:

He is as the judge said a troubled soul. Well, he is a narcissistic sociopath too, but yea, he's a troubled soul alright.

Clearly a victim or survivor's prior relationship with the wrongdoer does not presuppose feelings of warmth and compassion for the offender in the aftermath of trauma. *Psychotic, manipulative, and narcissistic* were a few of the adjectives participants used to describe their views of the offender following the offense. It is interesting to note that unlike Lily, Clayton, and Claire, these four individuals had no familial bonds to the perpetrator.

4.2.2. *The offender was a stranger*

The illusory face of the boogeyman, the “stranger danger” shadowy figure that we teach our children to beware of materialized in human form and took from five families the lives of one they loved. Erik and Eve’s son was killed by strangers who were the archetype of evil: a violent gang of seven drug traffickers. A fight between two men over drugs led to the murder of Donna’s daughter. For two years James suffered the “looking over his shoulder” fear that came from not knowing who murdered his sister. Troubled teenagers unfamiliar to Rose and Nelson murdered their daughter. Similarly, it was two unknown teenage boys who took the life of April’s husband.

Table 3 Affective Orientation Toward the Unknown Offender Following the Offense

Case	Participant	Offender(s)	Positive	Negative
2	Donna	Darren		x
4	James	Fred		x
5	Erik and Eve	7 offenders		
7	April	Russell Burt	x	
8	Nelson and Rose	Kristen Ronald		x x

For eight years Donna was consumed with hatred for the man who took her daughter’s, (Cindy) life. She considered him to be nothing more than a monster and one deserving of a violent death himself. Donna disclosed:

As far as I was concerned they should take everybody who has ever killed anybody and put them in prison, give them all guns and knives, lock the door and let them kill each other....who cares? He deserves it. He should be punished. It was like somebody needed to pay for what happened to Cindy and for what happened to our family.

Nelson and Rose were shocked when they found out that their daughter Melody’s killers were teenagers themselves. Nelson’s first view of Ronald, the young man, was from a courtroom sketch. Nelson said:

When I saw it I could not believe it. At that time he had this very strange hair...and standing up like a real punk...a skinny lad. I looked

at his picture and I got filled with anger and disgust that this little thing there killed my daughter. I really wanted to get him then.

Rose stated that she had mixed feelings when it came to Ronald. She said:

The anger was there but seeing him I just felt sorry for him. To me he looked like this pathetic little boy who seemed like he didn't have any kind of direction or care you know.

Though Nelson and Rose differed slightly in their first impressions of Ronald they were in agreement on their judgment of Kristen, the girl who drowned Melody by holding her head under water. Kristen's history of juvenile delinquency and her denial of responsibility led Rose and Nelson to take a very harsh view of her. Kristen's response to her arrest for murder helped shape their opinion. Nelson shared:

When she was in police custody they [the police] told us that she could not understand why she was there. She was yelling at the cops, *why do I have to stay here!* They said, *do you understand why you are here?* And she could not comprehend. Her brain was so underground of permafrost that she didn't see the severity or gravity of the situation of what she has done. This is what she did on a regular basis, she beat up people and she loved violence.

The identity of the person responsible for the murder of James's sister was unknown for two years. After a man was arrested for her murder James's mother, aunt, and Michelle's husband attended his trial and provided James with the image he had of the offender. He explained:

I heard that this person presented himself in court as a very arrogant fellow and not someone who was showing any bit of remorse for what happened at all and was even denying that he committed the crime. Basically a very horrible person and a monster we all thought.

A gang of drug traffickers murdered Eric and Eve's son Murray. Both stated that their initial feelings of anger were short-lived and overshadowed by the concern that all responsible parties would be quickly apprehended. Erik commented:

First of all I think a lot was anger, rage but then also pretty quick... are they going to capture these guys before they do it to somebody else? These guys were professionals at what they do. But no, I have no anger for them. I think that they caught somebody; it gives you closure.

The degree of culpability also influenced the view that Eve had of those involved. The youngest of the group was 19 years old and was recruited into the gang by his father. In Eve's opinion the father was a more despicable character than the son because he had enticed his son into criminal activities. The offender who had delivered the fatal blows was one of the last of the gang members to be caught and was given a distinctive moniker by Erik and Eve. Eve described:

The one we called the fat bastard, like we were determined to get him caught. He was the one that had struck the blows. We knew he was the one that was the most violent.

"Fat bastard" was the severest term Erik and Eve used to describe their views of any the offenders. Both mentioned many times that their feelings of anger were fleeting and that they held no animosity towards their son's killers.

As April stood in front of a microphone during a media interview the day following her husband Andrew's murder she knew that she was about to say something that neither they, nor her family, nor the rest of the world wanted to hear in answer to the reporter's question, "so what do you want to see happen to the person who killed your husband?" April responded:

I want to know that they're going to be ok. I'm worried about his mom or her mom. Like who is that person? You know somewhere out in my community there's a woman tossing and turning in her bed because something horrific has just happened to her child...because they're responsible for taking my husband's life.

April said she wondered if it was the "mom" in her that prompted the concern for the offender and his family. She continued:

It was five years before we knew who the person was but I still felt this powerful connection to the family on the other side of the trauma. Sometimes I thought there's nobody else on earth understands how complex and difficult these feelings are other than that family. So I really wanted to reach out to them...we were in this experience together.

In summary, half of the participants of this study knew the perpetrator prior to the crime. The attitude held by these participants in response to the offenders following the trauma appears to be dependent upon the strength and nature of the relationship prior to

the offense. Subsequent to the crime eight of the fourteen participants viewed the offender with a negative or hostile outlook. Four regarded the offender in a benevolent or loving manner while two took a more neutral or dispassionate stance toward the perpetrator.

4.3. The Effects of Violent Trauma

4.3.1. *Psychological*

In addition to the physical harm marked by acts of violence is the trauma which often leaves an indelible mark on the psyches of victims and survivors (See Table 4). Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) is a common outcome of the feelings of intense fear and powerlessness experienced by those who have suffered traumatic violence. Every participant experienced indicators of PTSD within one or more of its categories: avoidance, intrusion, or hyperarousal.

Table 4 Post-traumatic Stress Disorder

Case	Participant	Avoidance	Intrusion	Hyperarousal
1	Mary	x	x	
	Sue	x	x	x
2	Donna	x		
3	Allan	x	x	x
4	James	x		
5	Erik	x		
	Eve	x	x	x
6	Clayton	x		
	Claire	x	x	
7	April			x
8	Nelson	x		x
	Rose		x	x
9	Lily	x	x	x
10	Grace		x	

4.3.1.1. Avoidance

Following the offense, eleven participants endeavored to avoid places, people, or situations that had the potential to trigger disturbing thoughts and emotions. The home that Clayton and Claire shared with their two children, Allison and Brad, became a crime scene following the murder of their daughter. When the police allowed them to move back into their house they were not certain that this was something they could do.

Clayton recalled:

We really didn't know if we could be back here. We thought, boy you know, I don't... I mean we hadn't even driven down the street at that point.

Claire and Clayton made two attempts before they were able to walk into their house.

Clayton said:

So we came over and it just felt right. It felt right to be here. All our memories...all our *good* memories were here. This is where we brought our kids up. We'd lived in this house 25 years. We wanted to be here.

Similarly it was the crime scene that Allan sought to avoid. His mother's body had been found in the bathtub and this created a phobic reaction to bathing and being alone in a bathroom. Allan said:

Actually I've never told anybody this...this is just coming up now. I couldn't have a shower on my own for about a year... because my mom's body was found in the bathtub. So I always thought Blaine was going to come in and kill me.

When asked how he handled this situation Allan said:

I always had somebody standing in...it wasn't just me it was all my siblings... my whole family. So somebody would brush their teeth and talk and sing while the other one was in the shower. Then I couldn't have a bath until about ten years after her murder. Never had one bath. Just couldn't do it.

Nelson too stayed away from the crime scene while Sue steered clear of the street her sister's killer had lived on. Donna and James avoided going to the offenders' trials; whereas, Claire avoided, for a time, going to see her son in the youth detention center. As a devout Catholic, Eve had always enjoyed going to church but it became a

horrible reminder of her son's murder and funeral. Erik worked as a funeral home director but quit his job; the suffering of others too painful to bear. In addition to avoidance some participants also experienced intrusive or unwanted recollections of the traumatic event.

4.3.1.2. Intrusion

Herman(1997) states that even after the danger of the trauma is over, "traumatized people relive the event as though it were continually recurring in the present...it is as if time stops at the moment of the trauma"(p.37). In addition to flashbacks intrusive symptoms also include nightmares and intense physiological responses to reminders of the event (Yehuda, 2002, p.109). Eight participants experienced intrusive symptomology.

Lily, diagnosed with PTSD, was absorbed with images of violence and faced reoccurring nightmares, flashbacks, and panic attacks. Lily shared:

Both [flashbacks and panic attacks] are very overwhelming and exhausting. I'd have one and the whole next day I felt like I had an emotional hang-over. Having that kind of a serious illness really affects your identity. I became someone who couldn't trust in my own health and well-being. I couldn't commit to things because I didn't know how I would feel...and that really ate away at my confidence as an individual.

"Bombarded" was the word Rose used to describe the state of being where she was emotionally, physically, and mentally exhausted and yet unable to shut off her brain. Allan suffered from nightmares. Six participants had trouble sleeping. A continuous internal dialogue kept Claire awake at night. She explained:

I would lay down at night and my head would just start to go and it would not stop...thinking thoughts...stuff running through...things that had happened, what if, what if, what if, knowing full well there's nothing I can do. It just started and I couldn't sleep. The doctor gave us [prescription]. I do need my sleep and I knew if I didn't sleep I would never make it through this.

The ax murder of Grace's father was in the forefront of her thoughts at all times. She described:

So you're all wrapped up in it you understand. The murder's right up in your face. Let's say you said to me, *my look at that rain...*it rained the night before my father was murdered. *It's a beautiful day!* It was beautiful the day my father was murdered. No matter what you said to me I could bring my father's murder into the conversation. Picture it now as you're looking forward...let's assume that there's a top strip up here [across the forehead] of what you're seeing...the murder keeps replaying. So it's always replaying up here. You're looking forward but there's a certain amount of your attention where that keeps repeating.

The intrusive effects of the trauma were disruptive as the inability to turn off the disturbing thoughts and images and lack of sleep led to feelings of overwhelming exhaustion.

4.3.1.3. Hyperarousal

Hyperarousal: the third category of PTSD symptomology was experienced by seven participants. A basic internal response to danger is fight or flight. Bloom (2010) explains that this response is "not a planned deliberately thought-out reaction but a rapid-fire automatic total body response that we share with other animals" (p.18). When the human body is overloaded in its attempt to cope with massive amounts of stress the result is hyperarousal.

Lily constantly scanned her environment for danger, those who might judge *her* for her husband's crimes. Allan found it difficult to focus in school. Nelson was unable to concentrate on his job. Sue found it difficult to focus stating that her attention span is still not what it was before her sister's murder. Rose ran on adrenaline and was hyperaware of all that was going on around her. Eve became sensitive to watching anything violent. April was constantly on guard when she went out in public. She shared:

I was in an institution once when a fight took place in front of me. I'd actually never seen a fight so I had a total PTSD reaction. I was on the floor in the fetal position pretty fast.

While the fight or flight mechanism serves a life-saving purpose by enabling humans to confront or flee imminent danger, it becomes harmful when the victim or survivor of violence becomes "easily triggered by stimuli he can neither identify nor control" (Bloom, 2010, p. 20). Chronic hyperarousal has the potential to create stress-

induced negative physical effects when individuals are unable to turn down the ‘volume-control’ on their level of arousal (Bloom, 2010, p.18).

4.3.2. Emotional Impact

The emotional impacts of traumatic events in the lives of victims and survivors can be deep and long-lasting. Some common emotional responses to incidents of traumatic violence are shock and disbelief, disorientation or denial, fear, anxiety, grief, feelings of shame, self-blame or survivors guilt, irritability and outbursts of anger or rage and feeling of detachment or dissociation (Levin, 2004). When the participants of this study were asked about the emotions they were experiencing after the offense and how they felt they were able to handle these emotions four themes emerged from these conversations: acts of violence result in 1) stigma, 2) guilt, 3) fear and anxiousness, and 4) anger.

Table 5 Emotional Effects of Trauma

Case	Participant	Stigma	Guilt	Fear or Anxiousness	Anger
1	Mary	x	x	x	x
	Sue	x	x	x	x
2	Donna				x
3	Allan				x
4	James	x	x	x	x
5	Erik				x
	Eve				x
6	Clayton	x	x	x	
	Claire			x	
7	April	x	x		
8	Nelson	x	x	x	x
	Rose	x	x	x	x
9	Lily	x		x	x
10	Grace			x	x

4.3.2.1. Stigma

In Allen’s (1991) work on survivors of homicide he asserts that the psychological health of survivors is compromised because murder is “stigmatizing, unnatural,

especially burdensome, and unexpected” (p.18). It is not only the family survivors of murder who experience feelings of stigmatization, families of offenders also experience numerous difficulties including relational stresses, financial problems, and social stigma (Codd, 2008, as cited in Condry, 2010). Eight participants in this study affirmed that they had experienced feelings of stigma as a result of being a victim or a family survivor of violence.

For Nelson and Rose it was the social stigma of people questioning “what kind of parents are they really” which added to their grief. Stigmatization leaves survivors and victims feeling vulnerable, isolated, and ashamed.

Clayton: You feel like you have a big mark on your head...pointing you out. It's what people are going to judge you for... what your son has done. People are going to judge you for what kind of parent you are.

James: It's such a very unusual experience that very few people have gone through. You feel like you have a past and you have something in you that nobody else really wants to know about...it's like you have this disease that people don't want to have around.

April: Oh yea, that makes me emotional thinking about that. I'm having coffee with a group of new moms, the kids are all just starting school and one of the moms leans in and says, *do you know what? My daughter came home and said one little girl in the group said...somebody used their hands for hitting and my daddy was killed.* I said ladies that would have been my daughter...nine months ago my husband was murdered... and just the look, the veil of fascination on one hand and the...who is this woman? What was she involved in to get her husband murdered?

Echoing April's comments, Sue and Mary stated that there seems to be an assumption that if you are a victim of murder you must have done something wrong. Mary said:

It even said in the paper they weren't sure why she [Camile] was over there at his[Nicholas] apartment that night.

For other participants the stigma may have been more subtle or they simply chose to ignore it. Donna said she did not feel stigmatized because people ignored her anyway, not wanting to hear about her daughter's murder. Erik did not take offense at unkind comments because he felt people said things unthinkingly.

The common thread that runs between the participants' experiences of stigma is that of judgment. Society judges the victim or the victim's family (survivors) by questioning: What is wrong with the victim or their family that resulted in their murder? For the family members of the offender the judgment is: You must bear some responsibility for the actions of your family member.

It is interesting to note that the participants who stated that they were not stigmatized (Grace, Eve, and Claire) also said they received a lot of support following the trauma either from their communities or from the police.

4.3.2.2. Guilt

It's so wrong. It's so unnatural. There's no way your child dies before you...the old people are supposed to die, not children. (Rose)

Seven participants stated that they wrestled with feelings of guilt and blame in the aftermath of the crime. Like Rose, Mary and Clayton struggled with the guilt that comes from a fundamental understanding that parents should precede their children in death.

Mary: A parent shouldn't bury their child. You know: why didn't he come kill me if he was angry? He had always told her I'll never hurt you. I'll hurt someone you love. So I thought why didn't he come kill me? That would have hurt her terribly but she would still be here with the girls and her sister's and her brother. Yea, parents should not bury a child.

Clayton: I had a big case of that [survivor's guilt] this weekend. We were babysitting and house sitting these two little girls... I was sitting there with them reading a story and thinking...shouldn't be me, this should be Allison here. I've often thought she would do a lot better things than I would do and she should be here not me. It's not fair...it's not right.

Frustration over their inability to keep their loved ones safe also led to feelings of self-judgment and blame.

Sue: I felt guilty because when she [Camile] was pregnant with [her daughter] we tried to convince her to move to Chicago and

live with us and go to school. She decided not to do that. If I'd pushed harder...it's just all that, you know.

Nelson: I kept thinking what else could I do? What could I do different to save her and protect her? Just horrible guilt that that night I should have gone and picked her up. How come I didn't go? That bothered me for so long...that self-accusing.

The feeling of guilt April experienced were a result of the decision she made to sever relationships with people who were unsupportive of the path of healing she choose to travel.

4.3.2.3. Fear

“Traumatic events generally involve threats to life or bodily integrity, or a close personal encounter with violence and death. They confront human beings with the extremities of helplessness and terror, and evoke the response of catastrophe” (Herman, 1997, p.33). From Herman’s description it is easy to understand how traumatic events can produce overwhelming fear in the lives of victims and survivors of violence. Fear, as a self-protective mechanism is beneficial to human survival, yet a persistent over-abundance of fear “results in paralysis, panic, and inability to mobilize defenses” (Bloom, 2010, p.41). Nine participants stated that their experience with violent trauma left them feeling fearful and anxious.

James: We really lived in fear at that time not knowing who had done this. And we didn't know if this person was someone that was known to us or someone that was a stranger...It was a time we were very anxious about anything that seemed out of the ordinary for us.

Rose: We got paranoid about youth. If you see young people hanging out and you'd immediately be afraid.

Nelson: Young people are out of control. Every Friday night when I hear the sirens, when I see young people partying and going in big groups my heart just clinched every time.

The fear experienced by most of the participants, with the exception of Lily who suffered generalized anxiety as a result of PTSD, tended to be specific to the offense. Fear steals from victims and survivors the power to move their lives forward in a healthy, productive way. It has the ability to render them helpless as it keeps them preoccupied with feelings of dread. Grace, speaking about fear said (quoting Mark Twain), “I've had a

lot of worries in my life, most of which never happened.” Of course, the problem for victims and survivors of trauma is that the unimaginable did happen.

4.3.2.4. Anger

Anger is a normal response to the sense of victimization that occurs following acts of violence. Oftentimes the focus of the anger is not limited to the person directly responsible for the harm but may fan out encompassing everything from the justice system to the victim themselves. Eleven participants stated that they experienced, at least for a time, feelings of anger or rage following the offense (See Table 5) .

The anger Sue and Mary felt over Camile’s murder continues to be enflamed because of the claims of innocence and murder appeals pursued by Nicholas and his parents. Rose and Donna were angry that everyone else kept living their lives oblivious to their pain and loss. The first Christmas following Cindy’s murder was a very difficult time for Donna. She explained:

I was really upset with people because everybody put up a Christmas tree. Everybody celebrated...it was like how can you have Christmas when Cindy is not here? What’s the matter with you? Don’t you get it? She’s gone.

Some of the most potent feelings of anger Lily had were directed at her school principal and the school board who refused to allow her to return to work following Cameron’s arrest, whereas feelings of anger towards Cameron were slower to come. She shared:

Anger is really a funny one. I didn’t feel anger for a long time. I just felt that everything that Cameron did was so much bigger than anger...it was just too overwhelming. I didn’t know how to be that angry. I just felt sad. I felt so brokenhearted.

Lily found that she was able to take her feelings of anger out on God. She stated:

I found God for me was actually the image I could get really angry with. When I couldn’t get angry with anybody else I could totally lose it in privacy with God....after I got my divorce papers...I remember just sitting in the park and looking up at the trees and really angrily telling God, I’m waiting for my apology from you!(she laughed). I’m waiting and thinking that the God of my childhood was one that would offer forgiveness...now in my adult life the roles were entirely reversed and I

felt like I could hear my God say, I'm sorry. I'm so sorry. I never intended this.

Like Lily, Grace too was angry not only at the offender who murdered her father but at God as well. Grace shared:

You're mad at God. How come this happened to my father? He didn't drink and he didn't beat my mother. You're taking it out on everyone around you because I used to think I had the monopoly on misery.

It was the justice system that promoted feelings of anger and frustration in Nelson and James. Nelson likened the justice system to "a big stage drama" where three trials and 36 jurors later everyone: the judges, the crown, and the defense attorneys had pursued their own agendas rather than try to get at the truth of what happened to his daughter. James was outraged when his sister's killer applied for parole. He could not fathom a justice system where someone with a life sentence could apply to be released early.

The bulk of Erik and Eve's anger was focused on their son Murray who was killed by drug traffickers. Erik said:

Probably my son... for what he's done. There was all that disappointment...which is natural to be disappointed in what he's done.

Eve said:

There was anger with him that he could have done this to our family. That he would have gotten involved in trafficking drugs. Definitely I was very angry with him. We were taking his suit to the funeral home and it was on a hanger and a friend held it up in front of me...and I took the lapels and it was just like I could head butt him.

Erik and Eve were also angry with Murray's girlfriend who knew about the activities he was involved in yet refused to tell police. She was questioned three times before she told the truth and Eve suspects that she still knows more than she is telling. When asked whether she was angry at the gang members who killed Murray Eve said:

I can't say there was anger at them...I guess because I had no relationship to them before...I had no expectations before. I think my anger at Murray and at her (the girlfriend) was because I was hurt and

disappointed. For them? (the gang) I didn't know them. I had no relationship with them. It was like they were nothing to me.

4.3.3. Behavioral

A wide variety of behavioral responses to trauma was noted among the participants.

Table 6 Behavioral Impact

Case	Participant	Did not work for a time	Job change	Substance Abuse	Risk-taking behavior	Self-harm	Ready for a fight	Over-work	Speaks her mind	Loss of interest in old pursuits
1	Mary Sue		x						x	x
2	Donna							x		
3	Allan			x	x	x				
4	James									
5	Erik Eve	x x	x							
6	Clayton Claire	x x	x x							x x
7	April									
8	Nelson Rose	x								x x
9	Lily	x	x							
10	Grace						X			

The common behavioral response to violence is to either challenge it or try to escape from it. When neither action is possible responses such as alcohol, drugs, sexual activity, violent acting out, risk-taking behavior, eating excessively, inducing vomiting, purposely hurting the body, exercising, over involvement in work are used in order to produce some relief from the state of hyperarousal (Bloom, 2010, p.20). Substance abuse, alcohol, risk-taking behavior, and purposely hurting the body were all

devices that 14 year old Allan used in an attempt to cope with the murder of his mother.

Allan shared:

The substance abuse was from the day she died...jumping out of vehicles, throwing myself against a sign or pulling my hair or punching myself in the head... that lasted about three years maybe.

While substance abuse and other self-harming behaviors are frequently used as coping mechanisms for trauma victims or survivors the behavioral change noted by seven participants was their inability to return to their job for a time, either because of the psychological effects of the trauma or because they had simply lost the desire to do that particular job.

Erik quit his job as a funeral director and went on long-term disability for a year before starting a power-washing and painting business. He explained:

I just couldn't do the job anymore. I think that was part of it. I mean it's difficult enough on a day to day basis dealing with families when I serve as a funeral director...I'm dealing with families and with all sorts of things happening to them...after that I just couldn't do it and I resigned from my job.

Sue left her profession for two years and used the time to volunteer at her son's high school and to take master gardening classes. Claire took a new position within her company when she returned to work after five months. Clayton left his welding job of 18 years and started a new career working with youths in schools. Lily who was fired from her teaching job as a result of her husband's crimes now works as an advocate for crime victims and families of offenders.

Mary feared for Camile's safety prior to her murder but never told her; therefore, she now responds to her children differently. She explained:

I wish I had told her... that I was afraid that he would kill her. I wish I had spoken out sooner...I always couched my words because I thought if they got back together I didn't want her to feel alienated from me or weird. But I did tell my other kids from now on I'm going to say what I think or feel. Pardon me in advance but I'm going to say what I think or feel. If it offends you I'm sorry. I have to say what I think or feel. To this day when I have to do that I say I'm sorry but I have to do this.

4.3.3.1. Somatic

Every participant experienced some form of somatic impact (See Table 7).

Table 7 Somatic Impact

	Participant	"A Blow"	Numb	Loss of Appetite	Over-eat	Faint	Illness	Noise	Over-sleep	Stress	Anger
1	Mary Sue	x			x						
2	Donna								x		
3	Allan					x					
4	James						x				
5	Erik Eve	x									X
6	Clayton Claire	x x		x x							
7	April							x			
8	Nelson Rose		x	x							x
9	Lily			x							
10	Grace									x	

Trauma not only has deleterious psychological effects it also produces stress which can result in negative health outcomes for victims and family survivors of violence. According to Bloom (2010) "stress is a major contributor to the development of physical illness" (p.21). When asked if they recalled any physical changes or health issues following the offense all fourteen described a variety of somatic effects subsequent to the trauma. These effects began the moment they were told about the murder of their loved ones.

Clayton: As soon as you get that news it physically feels like a blow...
it physically knocks you to your knees.

Mary: Well, it felt like it took my breath away—like I was punched in the stomach.

Eve: It's like somebody just keeps hitting you all the time right.

Claire: It is like having your whole insides just ripped right out of you.

James became physically ill after his sister's murder. He contracted pneumonia and spent the entire summer in bed. A common somatic effect noted by many of the participants was a change in appetite.

Lily: I immediately lost 20 pounds. I couldn't eat. I couldn't eat any of the foods we [she and Cameron] had eaten together and enjoyed. Food was a big part of our life so I was kind of limited to toast and yogurt. Other than that I just couldn't stomach anything.

Sue: Pretty much I've put on 70 pounds in the last six years. That's the big thing for me when I'm stressed I eat. Never in my life have I weighed as close to as much as what I weigh right now and I know it's direct result of that.

Claire and Clayton only ate when someone put food in front of them.

Claire: In the beginning it was literally somebody would bring something, put it in front of us and then I would eat. If they said, *do you want something?* No. *Do you want something?* No. No. Then they finally just bring something...and then I would eat.

Clayton: You're in a shock kind of state. You wouldn't think to eat...you wouldn't think about being thirsty or that kind of thing, like that's just not there.

The unrelenting media attention surrounding Melody's murder was an aggravating factor in Nelson's physical response to the trauma. He explained:

First of all the shock had taken over and I was in a daze because of the media frenzy. There were guards out there and police cars and they had all these media dishes and microphones...They were hounding us and the door bells were ringing. I was on the floor. Right away I could not eat anything. I didn't have the energy to get up.

4.4. Relationship with others

4.4.1. *Stayed the same or became stronger*

Every area in the lives of trauma victims and survivors are touched as a result of the act of violence. The relationship that the victim or survivor had with family or friends is often altered for better or for worse as a result of the offense. Ten participants found that their relationships with family and friends not only stayed intact in the aftermath of the trauma, but in some cases these relationships emerged even stronger (See Table 8).

Erik and Eve's family was very close and supportive and this continued after their son Murray was killed. Family members living out of the country having just returned home following the wedding of Erik and Eve's daughter, immediately flew back to be with them in their grieving. Following his mother's murder Allan continued to have a close relationship with his siblings and cousins. Mary and Sue's large family continues to be a close-knit group. Donna enjoys a close relationship with her son and daughter and her entire family supports her work as an anti- death penalty advocate.

The relationship April had with her mother grew stronger after her mother read April's book in which she detailed the events surrounding Andrew's murder and her decision to forgive. April said:

My mom, after reading my book...she stayed up all night the night my book came out and she said, *oh my gosh, I understand so much more.* She got a lot more about the choices I made wanting to have as rich a life as I could.

Clayton and Claire had a strong marriage prior to their daughter's murder and their son's arrest but their relationship grew even stronger as they held on to each other for support. Claire expressed:

I love Clayton and I had to be there for him. We had to help one another....people say, *oh it's amazing that you are still together.* People who knew us say *we were never worried about you. We knew that you'd be ok. But you guys are even better than you ever were before.* It's true. Somehow we navigated it in terms of self-care.

Talking...lots and lots of talking helped Clayton and Claire navigate the weeks and months following Allison's death. They went on what they called "our journey" visiting family around the province, walking the beach...and talking. Clayton said their conversations took two forms: talking about Brad and talking about Allison. Clayton said:

The talking about the Brad stuff was really heavy and the talking about the Allison stuff was really enlightening...it was really wonderful...who she was...remember that?...remember how she'd do this? That kind of balanced you know. Like when this got too much...then we had this.

Table 8 Relationships

Case	Participant	Stayed the same or became stronger	Were weakened or lost
1	Mary Sue	x x	
2	Donna	x	x
3	Allan	x	
4	James		x
5	Erik Eve	x x	
6	Clayton Claire	x x	x x
7	April	x	x
9	Lily	x	x

4.4.2. Were weakened or lost

4.4.2.1. Judgment

There are few if any "how to" books written on how to be a "proper" victim or survivor of violent trauma. Such a book would be absurd because there is no one right way for victims and survivors to respond to the harm they have received. Each person must find the healing path that is right for them. Six participants were judged as a result of either the violent act itself or because of the way they chose to respond to it and as a consequence relationships suffered or were lost.

Revulsion was the judgment James received when he told others the story of his sister's murder. James said:

I could not kind of fathom the response I got from people was that it's like all of a sudden you told them that you had a communicable disease...In some instances I thought my relationship had been permanently affected by the sharing of that knowledge.

The once close relationship that Clayton and Claire had with Clayton's sister and her husband "really changed in a negative way," Clayton said. The change began after Clayton and Claire shared the details of Allison's murder with them. Clayton's sister and husband had known Brad his whole life and their children had grown up together yet Claire and Clayton felt that they harshly judged not just Brad's actions but the very essence of who he was. Claire stated:

They had all these thoughts and I guess the best way I can describe it really would be us hearing from them at some level...the way we interpreted it was...your son is a monster. It's like come on! He grew up with you guys. You know he's not a monster but if you can sit there and say that...to us.

Traumatic events within a family such as the murder of a child often result in the parent's divorce. Donna and her husband grieved in very different ways. The judgment she felt from her husband over the direction she chose to take in her healing journey led to the dissolution of their marriage. She explained:

I had to get rid of him because he was not a support for me and he was the kind of a person who thought that anything spiritual was really stupid.

Judgments came at Lily fast and furious after her husband Cameron was arrested for the kidnapping and sexual assault of two women. Why did you marry a man once convicted of murder? Why are you going to visit him in jail? How can you continue to be supportive of him? Where is your anger? These judgments (coupled, of course with Cameron's actions) exacted a steep price as it cost the relationship of many people she once considered close friends. Lily shared:

There were levels of judgment around things like compassion and anger where I felt like I'm damned if I do and I'm damned if I don't. If I had reacted with anger and rejection and said publically I never want

to see Cameron again a whole different group of people would be in my life now...I couldn't please anybody but myself. I had to do what was right for me. I lost some friendships for sure.

After her husband Andrew was killed April made two choices that subjected her to judgment and condemnation: the decision to move quickly on with her life, and the decision to forgive those responsible for her husband's murder. April explained:

So I really decided in the early hours of the trauma that I was going to travel a road less traveled...I picked the right route but it wasn't popular. It was difficult and I alienated a lot of people along the way...it was not without cost in terms of other relationships for sure.

They (some family members) judged me very harshly particularly for moving on and remarrying and for being very public about my decision to forgive.

4.5. Sought professional support

As noted violent trauma produces outcomes injurious to the psychological, emotional, somatic, and behavioral well-being of victims and survivors. Those traumatized by violence commonly search for some form of therapeutic assistance following the offense. Interaction with the criminal justice system often results in referrals from Victim Services for professional counseling support. Occasionally counselors may be recommended by employers or insurance companies while other times the victims and survivors are on their own to locate someone who can help them. Eleven participants took part in some form of professional counseling with varying degrees of benefit.

Table 9 Experience with professional counseling or support

Case	Participant	Professional support		Did not	Unknown
		Positive	Negative		
1	Mary Sue		x	x	
2	Donna		x		
3	Allan	x			
4	James			x	
5	Erik Eve	x	x x		
6	Clayton Claire	x x	x x		
7	April	x			
8	Nelson Rose	x x			
9	Lily	x	x		
10	Grace				x

4.5.1. Negative experience

Seven participants had a difficult time obtaining counseling and support services. Not all counselors or therapists are prepared or have the skills necessary to assist someone whose life has been disrupted by a traumatic experience.

Erik: I can say that this guy knew as much about counseling as I did flying in the air. He knew nothing. The guy didn't have a clue what he was doing. We went to one meeting with him and I said to Eve, *I'm not going back*. I could counsel people better than this guy and they were paying this clown 150 dollars an hour.

Lily: I went to a psychiatrist once who was just like really trying to get to the bottom of why I would have married Cameron and all that kind of stuff. I'm like I'm not here for that. I'm not here to be analyzed on what kind of person I am. This **happened to me**. This was not my choice. This is no reflection of my life choices or who I am. It was really angering.

Mary: Well, I was seeing a counselor before that I kind of saw afterwards but I didn't feel that that was much help...she said, *well you know, I lost a cat once*. And then at some point she said, *you're really hooked on your daughter's death*. I said, you know...good bye.

Donna visited a social worker, a psychologist, and a psychiatrist whose only redeeming value was his "beautiful blue leather furniture and a whole wall of books". Not one of them knew how to help a family survivor of homicide. The psychiatrist told Donna:

You know nothing like this has ever happened to me. I've never dealt with anything like this before. I don't know what to tell you.

Claire and Clayton had a difficult time trying to get a counselor to even meet with them. Claire explained:

There's a whole story around trying to find a counselor. Picking up the phone to say, I think I need some help. I'm wondering if you can help me? *Well, what's your problem? What do you need help with?* Well...our son just murdered our daughter and you'd get this dead silence....*I don't think I can help you with that, sorry.*

In some instances persistence paid off. Four of the seven participants who had a negative experience finding a counselor eventually located someone who provided the assistance they needed. Four others receive excellent professional support from the beginning.

4.5.2. Positive experience

Lily, severely traumatized as a result of her husband's crimes, immediately sought help. Though she had an earlier negative experience with a psychiatrist Lily received help from a social worker and from her family doctor who provided talk and art therapy. Lily found the counseling sessions so beneficial that she continued them via Skype while she was completing her Master's degree out of the country. Lily commented, "I don't know what I would have done without her."

A grief counselor helped Nelson and Rose begin to handle the pain of their daughter's murder. Understanding the cycle of grief and how everyone grieves differently was of particular benefit. Rose shared:

That really helped me to understand why I was feeling the way I was because some days you thought you were going crazy. The emotions are so tumultuous you know...with that knowledge I was able to identify different feelings and thoughts.

Nelson struggled to understand why bad things happen to those who have done no wrong. The counselor recommended the book When bad things happen to good people¹² which gave Nelson a new perspective on suffering. He explained:

You know all these tragedies...why me? Why me? Sometimes people plan things. Sometimes tragedies can happen to you. Just because you're a good person doesn't mean you're going to be protected. You can come under fire any minute.

Allan's emotions were very unstable after his mother was murdered. Following a recommendation by Victim Services Allan began seeing a counselor within weeks of her death. Allan found the relationship with this counselor to be so positive that he has continued to meet with the same person for over 14 years.

April found EMDR or Eye Movement Desensitization Routine¹³ to be a very practical way to help her to deal with the trauma of her husband Andrew's murder. She remarked:

I did a little bit of counseling. I went because of the trauma part...arriving at the hospital and seeing them trying to resuscitate Andrew...seeing Andrew's body. The night of the event was very traumatic and thinking about it was...triggering nausea and all kind of things. So I did EMDR which I found to be really helpful.

¹² Kushner, H. (1983). *When bad things happen to good people*. New York: Schocken Books.

¹³ Eye Movement Desensitization Routine (or Reprocessing) is a type of therapy for Post-traumatic Stress Disorder that can help change how one reacts to traumatic memories. <http://www.ptsd.va.gov/public/pages/treatment-ptsd.asp>

4.6. The emergence of forgiveness

Rarely do victims or survivors of violent trauma immediately forgive the one responsible for the wrongdoing. Forgiveness is usually the result of a period of time wherein the one harmed wrestles with their many emotional wounds and injuries until a desire to forgive emerges. Before considering the results of the conditions under which forgiveness arose and how it was expressed we must first see what the participants of this study believe forgiveness is and is not.

4.6.1. *What Forgiveness is*

Table 10a Forgiveness is

Case	Participant	Giving up all hope for a better past	Wish offender well	Common humanity	Heart and brain connect	Release negativity	Honors the one who is gone
1	Mary Sue					x	
2	Donna	x	x				
3	Allan				x		
4	James						x
5	Erik Eve			x x		x x	

Table 10b Forgiveness is

Case	Participant	Giving up hope for a better past	Wish offender well	Common humanity	Loving the person	No judgment	Noble
6	Clayton Claire		x x	x	x		
7	April	x					
8	Nelson Rose		x x				x
9	Lily			x	x		
10	Grace	x				x	

Lily had not thought much about forgiveness one way or the other until it came up in a discussion she had with a friend. She said:

I realized that's what I've been doing. That's what I do. I forgive him every time I go to see him, every time I talk to him. Every time I'm willing to see that he's a human being I am forgiving.

Nelson felt that the gift of forgiveness was the honorable decision to make. He shared:

It's such a good feeling. It helps us to move forward and it's a noble thing.

An aboriginal man, a survivor of a residential school¹⁴ now serving time in prison made a statement to Grace that she felt beautifully described forgiveness. The man said:

Miss Grace, to forgive is to release all hope of a better past because you can't forgive until you accept the past.

Donna too described forgiveness as the letting go of the expectation of a better past. She said:

The past is over. It's finished...nothing you can ever do.

Allan found forgiveness as something intangible and very hard to describe. He said:

Forgiveness is one of those things you can't measure it and you can't see it and you can't touch it...how do you know if you fully feel it, if you partly feel it or you don't? It could change from one day to another or could not exist at all...forgiveness I mean that's where you have to connect your brain to your heart.

¹⁴ In Canada, residential schools for aboriginal people date back to 1870s. The last school closed in 1996. During this era over 150,000 aboriginal children were placed in these schools often against their parents' wishes. These government-funded, church-run schools were created to eliminate parental involvement in their childrens' intellectual, cultural, and spiritual development. <http://www.trc.ca/websites/trcinstitution/index.php?p=4>

Sue said part of forgiveness was the letting go of some of the horror, anger, and sadness. While she will always miss her sister she found that letting go of the pain has enabled her to focus on all the things about her sister that she loved.

Clayton and Claire continue to refine their understanding of what it means to forgive their son. Clayton said:

I don't feel any resentment. I don't wish him badly or anything like that. In fact I want him to do good things. I want him to prosper. I want him to be happy. I want him to have a life. I want that more than anything...life is too precious to rot away. So it's hard...like is that what forgiveness is?

Claire expressed:

Well, I want him to be out of that place (prison)...I want him to be able to have a happy productive life when he gets out. I want him to succeed. I want him to be the best he possibly can be. That's what I hope and wish for him. Does that mean I've forgiven him?

For Eve forgiveness is the recognition that we are all human. She stated:

I think the forgiveness part is we've all made mistakes, some more than others and I want to believe that everything can be forgiven.

4.6.2. What forgiveness is not

Table 11 Forgiveness is not

Case	Participant	Condoning/excusing	Permission	Forgetting	Reconciliation
1	Mary	x			
2	Donna	x			
6	Clayton	x			
7	April			x	
9	Lily	x			x
10	Grace	x	x		

According to Lily forgiveness does not mean you condone the offender's behavior. She explained:

I always say I don't forgive the action. I forgive the human being.

Lily's exploration of what forgiveness is and is not also led to the understanding that forgiveness does not entail reconciliation with the one who caused the harm.

[I can] love somebody and not want to have them in my life. That can be forgiveness. Yea, totally because forgiveness also comes with boundaries.

Forgiveness does not mean the victim or survivor of violence suddenly acquires amnesia with respect to the offense. April said:

I learned that forgiveness does not mean forgetting because I will never forget what happened to Andrew. It didn't mean diminishing the seriousness of what Russell did. What he did was unconscionable but I got to ask him to be accountable and I don't think I could have done that in an authentic way without opening my heart up.

Clayton and Grace also said that forgiveness does not mean the perpetrator's actions are excused. Grace stated:

Forgiveness is not permission. It doesn't mean the other person was right in what they did...that doesn't mean they're not held accountable.

Donna, who once thought all murderers should be locked together in a room and given weapons, is now a strong proponent of the anti-death penalty movement in the United States. She and her family vehemently oppose the execution of Darren, Cindy's killer, who currently sits on death row. Donna explains:

We want to be sure that people understand it's not because of what he did. We are not saying that what he did was ok. We are saying it's a terrible thing what he did but we don't want an execution.

It is obvious that for victims and survivors of trauma, forgiveness is not related to excusing or condoning the violent behavior of the offender. But there are findings which suggest that the presence of certain conditions may assist the emergence of forgiveness.

4.6.3. Conditions for forgiveness

4.6.3.1. Meeting the offender and apology

Twelve participants received an apology from the one who caused the harm. Ten had a meeting and dialogue with the offender wherein they received an apology. Two received the apology during court proceedings.

Clayton and Claire's son Brad pled guilty to the murder of his sister Allison. Claire said that following the reading of the victim impact statement in court Brad stood up, looked at them and apologized.

For seven participants an apology arose out of a face-to face encounter which occurred through victim-offender mediation. Victim-offender Mediation Process (VOMP) is a model of restorative justice in which an impartial third party helps the victim(s) and offender(s) to communicate, either directly or indirectly (Liebmann, 2007, p.73).

Erik and Eve flew with a mediator to the province where one of their son's killer's was incarcerated. Eve described the meeting:

When he came into the room right away he was crying and he said, *I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I'm so sorry this should have never happened.* There was something then you know (the stirrings of forgiveness)...when someone tells you they're sorry.

James too met the offender through a mediation process and received an apology from him. James explained:

He was very empathetic in terms of what happened to us as a family. He expressed his remorse...and apology yes. But he expressed it in a way that seemed really genuine because he realized how does one apologize for...and have it have any meaning for something like this. I think he was and has always been aware that being sorry and showing remorse is really only a beginning for making amends for what had happened. So he realizes that there is a lot more that he needs to do.

When Rose and Nelson met with Ronald, one of the two responsible for Melody's murder, Ronald became quite emotional and very apologetic. Nelson believes that the apology lifted a great weight off of Ronald's shoulders. Afterwards, Nelson and Rose told him that they hoped the best for him and that they expected him to do his best.

The first apology Blaine gave was in a letter written to Allan's (deceased) mother. Describing the letter Allan said:

[In the letter was] You know how much he loved her and all this stuff but there was nothing about the kids or the people that were affected. It was just about how it affected her and that didn't matter because she was gone...so are you really apologizing to her or are you apologizing to the people she's left behind or are you trying to apologize to yourself. And maybe that's more what it was.

Allen received a personal apology from Blaine during a victim-offender mediation process held at a later time:

He was very sincere or appeared to be sincere in that meeting and he was very apologetic. He cried lots. He showed a lot of remorse but I never really knew how to take that because I didn't trust him anymore.

Two young men were responsible for the murder of April's husband. April met with both men at different times and while she received an apology from each it wasn't a "game-changer" for her. She said their apologies had no bearing on her decision to forgive because her forgiveness was unconditional.

Though Donna and Grace did not take part in a victim-offender mediation process they each received an apology from the offender that transpired during a face-to-face meeting.

Lily visited her husband in jail on numerous occasions. She said:

I had someone who was remorseful [and] apologetic. I could see the torment in him. I didn't need to punish him. I didn't need to demand things from him. It was all there. That made it so easy.

Donna traveled alone to another state to meet Darren in prison. She shared:

We sat together and we talked and we both cried. He said, *what a stupid...what a stupid loss*. He was just so remorseful. Like in his letter to me he said, *if there was any way I could undo that terrible night...how stupid the loss was*.

In the psychiatric hospital where Ralph had been committed for over 15 years, Grace sat at a table across from him hoping to sabotage the plans for his release. Grace explained.

So then the man that murdered my father starts to talk and he begins by saying, *I'm very sorry. What I did to your lives was terrible. I was a very sick man.*

Once Ralph began to cry Grace said she could not contain herself, she rushed to his side, hugged him and told him that she forgave him.

Table 12 Meeting with the offender and apology

Case	Participant	Met with offender(s)	Received Apology	Did not meet with offender(s)	No Apology
1	Mary Sue			x x	x x
2	Donna	x	x		
3	Allan	x	x		
4	James	x	x		
5	Erik Eve	x x	x x		
6	Clayton Claire	x x	x x		
7	April	x	x		
8	Nelson Rose	x x	x x	x x	x x
9	Lily	x Cameron	x	x Principal	x
10	Grace	x	x		

Five participants did not have a face-to-face meeting with those who harmed them; neither did they receive an apology from them.

When Cameron kidnapped and sexually assaulted two women the harms he set in motion that night were far-reaching. Lily received an apology from Cameron for the effect his actions had on her but she never received anything close to an apology from her school principal or the school board who, as a response to her husband's crimes,

fired her from her teaching position. Lily was not only judged as a result of Cameron's actions she was scorned by many, including her best friend, for her decision to forgive.

Two teenagers were guilty of the murder of Nelson and Rose's daughter, yet only one was willing to meet with them and only one accepted responsibility and apologized. Kristen never showed any affect or remorse.

In the face of over-whelming evidence to the contrary Nicholas steadfastly refuses to admit any guilt in the death of his ex-wife Camile. Mary and Sue have seen Nicholas and his parents numerous times over the years at various court hearings yet they have never spoken with him one-on-one nor received an apology from him. Mary stated:

It would be nice for him to just quietly do his time...but no, it's this constant saying, *it's not my fault and I'm going to get out of it* that's made it hard.

The opportunity to speak with the offender face-to-face and to receive a sincere apology for the harm committed assists victims and survivors of violent trauma in their healing journey.

4.6.3.2. Religious or spiritual beliefs

For many individuals their faith traditions and spiritual beliefs effect the way they handle traumatic experiences. Twelve participants held religious or spiritual views prior to the trauma; eight felt that those beliefs played a part in their decision to forgive.

Mary: Every morning on my way to work I pray for my whole family and I pray for my litany of saints, everybody that's gone before me and then I pray especially for his (Nicholas's) family, for him, the guardian ad litem, the counselor, for everybody. I do that every day. Every day I do that and I'm very sincere in doing that.

Lily: I think so. I was raised Catholic and the Catholic God that was presented to me was a really loving and forgiving God.

Rose: I think our spiritual routine and prayer and knowing the bigger picture...there are unseen wicked forces ...you know we believe that there is a devil...so realizing that these kids...I think were under his control that night... Knowing that it makes you more forgiving and more positive about people can change.

Table 13 Religious or spiritual beliefs

Case	Participant	Held religious beliefs prior to the offense	Identify as spiritual rather than religious	Developed beliefs after the offense	No particular beliefs
1	Mary Sue	x x			
2	Donna			x	
3	Allan	x			
4	James				x
5	Erik Eve	x x			
6	Clayton Claire	x x			
7	April		x		
8	Nelson Rose	x x			
9	Lily	x	x		
10	Grace	x			

A few years prior to her death Allison had a religious experience that gave her a very strong faith and a belief in Jesus Christ. Claire and Clayton both had religious backgrounds and they both loved their son and while these factors certainly played a part in their decision to forgive Brad, forgiveness also became a way to honor Allison's life and faith. Claire expressed:

So religious in some sense, yes. That it's the right thing to do...yes, ...but also because I truly believe that if Brad had killed Clayton or I instead of her, that's right where she would have been. She would have been looking after her brother. She would have been supporting him. She would have done what she could do...how could I not do the same?

Grace was raised Catholic and was familiar with certain passages from the Bible, yet it is hard to say whether any of this had an effect on her decision to forgive Ralph. Grace shared:

Before I forgave I thought it was fantastic to get to tell my story and spread how bad he was...not that I'm a Bible thumper but I think there's a line in there somewhere that says "the hardened heart". I was the hardened heart. There's no one more shocked than me that I forgave him!

After Cindy's murder Donna said she was "a person without any religious background, without any faith, without any church, without any support system at all." Upon moving to a new town Donna began studying A Course in Miracles. The lessons learned from this course as well as her study of many other world religions laid the foundation for Donna's decision to forgive.

For James, forgiveness emerged not out of any religious viewpoint but from the personal encounters he had with Fred through the mediation process. He explained:

I didn't have any preconceived idea I would forgive him for what had happened. It just didn't occur to me that I would do that. I didn't have any spiritual or religious background that would predispose me to offering forgiveness.

4.6.3.3. Empathy, sympathy, humanizing, reframing, and compassion

Though violent offenders are often seen as nothing more than monsters all of the participants expressed having feelings of sympathy, empathy, and/or compassion for the offender. Many were able to view the perpetrator as a human being separate from their violent actions. As empathy and compassion move one from feelings into actions that promote the well-being of the other, participants who implicitly or explicitly expressed increased caring or relationship constructive behaviors towards the offender are reflected in both categories.

Table 14 Empathy, sympathy, humanizing, reframing, and compassion

Case	Participant	Empathy	Sympathy	Humanizing	Reframing	Compassion
1	Mary Sue		x x			
2	Donna	x		x	x	x
3	Allan		x			
4	James	x		x	x	x
5	Erik Eve	x x	x	x x	x x	x x
6	Clayton Claire	x x		x x	x x	x x
7	April	x	x	x	x	x
8	Nelson Rose	x x	x x	x x	x x	x x
9	Lily	x		x	x	x
10	Grace	x		x	x	x

4.6.3.3.1. Empathy

Eleven participants expressed empathetic feelings for the one responsible for the harm they received. Empathy can be defined as “a vicarious emotion that is congruent with, but not necessarily identical to the emotion of another person. Empathy incorporates concepts such as sympathy, compassion, and tenderness” (McCullough et al., 1997, p. 322). Empathy is about feeling *with* (identifying with) and *responding to* the pain of the other” (Gobodo-Madikizela, 2002, p. 22) even when the pain is a result of the offender’s violent actions. Claire recounted the night of her daughter’s murder when following her interrogation by the police they finally allowed her to speak with her son. She stated:

When he came into the room I just gave him a great big hug. It was just heart-wrenching to see him in the state he as in and we were both in not good shape. I really just held him and sat with him and I don’t remember that we said much of anything to one another. It was just more I’m here. I’m here for you.

The youthful age of one of the men responsible for the murder of Erik and Eve's son was a factor in the feelings of empathy they felt towards him. The young man told about the struggles he had growing up poor with an absentee father who only showed up when he wanted his 15 year old to join his gang. Without excusing his actions, Erik and Eve wanted him to have a second chance, an opportunity to turn his life around.

4.6.3.3.2. Sympathy

Sympathy involves the recognition of ones suffering and feeling sorry for them, without sharing in their distressed emotions (Keltner, Marsh, & Smith, 2010, P.98). It seems unfathomable that one who has been traumatized by violence could find sympathy for the one who caused the harm, yet seven participants were able to do so.

Erik: Yea, I felt sorry for him being in that position...like I say his age. He's more or less ruined his life...I think everybody's entitled to a second chance no matter what they do.

Rose: When I saw Ronald at his trial...like the anger was there but seeing him I just felt sorry for him. He looked like this pathetic little boy who seemed to me like he didn't have any direction or care...so I kind of just felt sorry for him which I never expected.

4.6.3.3.3. Humanizing

The monster disappears when the human face is recalled. Eleven participants were able to see the person, the human being, behind the act of violence.

Lily: The instant that it (the offense) happened my heart just broke into a million pieces. It was so easy to see him as a human being and for me that is what forgiveness is about. It's seeing someone else as a human being even though they've acted inhumanely.

April: I learned that as a society we put a huge difference between ourselves and the people who cause harm. That's them...we're us. **We** would **never** be on **that** side of the line and I just don't believe that to be true.

4.6.3.3.4. Reframing

To reframe is to view a situation or an individual from more than one perspective. In reframing, the "bad" act is separated from the person thereby modifying the victims and survivor's negative cognitions, feelings, and behaviors towards the

offender. At some point during their healing journey eleven participants experienced a time when they were able to perceive the offender as an individual distinguishable from their crimes.

During the victim-offender mediation process James shared with Fred pictures and stories of his sister's life. Afterwards Fred had the opportunity to talk. James stated:

I listened to him talk about his life, how he came to be the way he was and his journey. How he arrived at that situation where he decided to kill my sister....as I was listening I was very conscious of...this was someone who actually had a childhood. Who had parents...then I understood more of...who he was...whoever he might have been at that particular time when he killed my sister...so whatever animosity I think I might have brought to the process just kind of dissipated as I was spending the time together and listening and talking to him.

4.6.3.3.5. Compassion

Compassion acts upon the feelings of sympathy. Feeling sorry for the pain of others often leads to expressions of compassion. Compassion motivates one to do or say something that will assist the person with their problems (Crippen, 2010). Eleven participants had compassion for those who harmed them (See Table 14).

Should Darren appeal his conviction for the murder of Donna's daughter and loose it could cost him his life. Donna is not opposed to the death penalty in principal only; she walk the walk and advocates for Darren. She said:

I wrote him a letter and explained that I didn't want him to be killed. I didn't want an execution. My family didn't want an execution...I pleaded with him don't have another trial, just let it go...

Darren appealed his conviction and lost. The death penalty was reinstated. Donna said:

Most of the people in this state have no clue what goes on in the prisons. No clue. If you try to tell them, what they say is, *well they deserve it*. They deserve it unless it's your son or your father...or your neighbor's son or some kid you saw grow up.

Once consumed with hatred and determined to derail any possibility for Ralph's release from a mental hospital Grace is now his avid supporter. Grace expressed:

Now for me I forgave him and it grew into caring about him from the point of view of wanting the best for him and I would advocate for him...not only would I advocate for him but I'd love to hear now that he had somebody in his life. If you said to me I could take the memory (of the murder) from you or I could take it from Ralph, I'd have you take it from Ralph because look at what he lives with remembering it.

Due to Nicholas's belligerent attitude and continuing court battles it is nearly impossible for Mary and Sue to see him as anything other than a murderer. When asked whether she was able to see Nicholas as a person separate from his offense Sue stated:

I haven't ever thought of it that way and I guess since we only see him when it has to do with court stuff...which is the effects, right. So no I guess not...my mom said, *sin isn't in the act, sin is how you react*. So the fact that he has always thought that he is innocent of this thing, that he never did it, it wasn't him and it was all her fault...that really is the sin you know and that's what's torn his soul apart. It's hard to separate him from that because that is what has defined who he is, where he is, and how he is today.

4.6.4. **The ease or struggle of the decision to forgive**

Table 15 The decision to forgive

Case	Participant	Happened quickly	Happened gradually	Took a long time	An ongoing process
1	Mary Sue				x x
2	Donna			x	
3	Allan				x
4	James		x		
5	Erik Eve		x x		
6	Clayton Claire	x x			
7	April	x			x
8	Nelson Rose		x x		
9	Lily				x
10	Grace			x	

4.6.4.1. Happened quickly

In the cases of parental love and of a survivor determined to pursue a bold healing path, forgiveness appeared relatively quickly.

Claire: I think it just was there...I couldn't lose my son...I mean you don't just sever your child.

Clayton: Because we had a love for him, I don't think it was a struggle.

April: Where I really remember the forgiveness piece sort of forming in my heart even though I probably couldn't have put a word or label on it, was the first interview I gave the morning after Andrew was killed.

4.6.4.2. Happened gradually

For five participants forgiveness evolved over a period of time. Years of mediation sessions between James and Fred sowed the seeds of forgiveness. James said:

It was a very wide-ranging and varied range of discussions that we had over the years. I participated with him in restorative justice too at the institution. Over a period of time I realized that because of the nature of our conversations and the way that he was conducting himself...I realized that I had forgiven this person.

4.6.4.3. Took a long time

Twelve years went by before Donna was able to forgive the man who murdered her daughter Cindy. It took Grace even longer. For 16 years and 10 months Grace schemed to keep Ralph from getting out of the mental hospital. Intent on sabotaging his release, feelings of forgiveness unexpectedly overcame Grace as Ralph expressed pain and sorrow over his murderous act. Grace shared:

This was an absolute revelation...I only thought I was suffering. I didn't think he was suffering. He was the axe murderer.

4.6.4.4. Is ongoing

For five participants forgiveness is not an endpoint in their healing journey but an ongoing process of reflection and hard work.

Lily: It's something that is practical. It's not just a spiritual thing. I have really found out that it's something that needs to be maintained. It's a process. It's an ongoing decision and a way of life.

Mary: It's an ongoing decision. I didn't decide to forgive him and it's over. Every time I see him, every time we go back to court...it's really hard when they're in your face...to forgive...and no remorse, no responsibility.

It is interesting that while forgiveness emerged fairly quickly in April's case, she found it is something that needs to be revisited from time to time. She explained:

Forgiveness is a dynamic thing. It's not a one shot, ok I forgive you we're moving right along...I look at my kids struggling and I think ok what role did what happened in our lives play in my child's struggle? And I have to kind of revisit Russell and hope that he gets that it was a big deal that we did.

Have I really forgiven Blaine is something that Allan wrestles with from time to time. He states:

I don't know if it's a process or not...I think it's a process...I think once you've done it, it may take of couple of years to think you've forgiven, maybe you haven't...think you have...maybe you haven't. There's a lot of different layers to it so I think after a few years when you stop thinking about whether or not you've forgiven the person...I think you've done it.

4.6.5. A defining moment or event that prompted forgiveness

The participants were asked whether there was a defining moment or event that prompted forgiveness. Seven participants were unable to identify any singular event that induced forgiveness. Three participants found that forgiveness emerged as a result of the positive changes occurring within the offender. Two saw forgiveness as a way to move on with their lives. Four had singularly unique experiences that brought them to forgiveness;

Donna: It was just unbelievable! It was a process. A process of four years that ended in what might have seemed like an event but it was just the cherry on top!...I heard a voice...and when this voice came to me it said, *you must forgive him and you must let him know*. That's what prompted me to write that letter.

Eve: I think it happened in the jail when we met the young one. When he came into the room he was crying...*I'm sorry. I'm sorry...*there was something then you know. When someone tells you they're sorry. I know before we left I said to him, *I forgive you.*

April: It was right away. I think right away I was planning on taking a different road...I felt this powerful connection to the family on the other side of the trauma...so I really wanted to reach out to them. We were in this experience together.

Grace: He (Ralph) said that he was four when his mother died...when he said that my niece Ella was four and I was really close to Ella...I started to think about if, God forbid, my sister died. I started to think about how much I loved Ella, how I'd never turn my back on Ella. No matter what she did I'd always love her. If she killed somebody I'd want her given a second chance. I'd never abandon her...and I start to think, what's the right thing to do?...She (Ella) led me to the conclusion to forgive but then I think there's somewhere it says, *a little child shall lead them*, isn't there.

Table 16 The emergence of forgiveness

Case	Participant	No singular event	The offender's actions	A voice	Wanted to move on	Association with a niece	Apology	Wanted to take a different road
1	Mary Sue	x x			x x			
2	Donna			x				
3	Allan	x						
4	James		x					
5	Erik Eve	x					x	
6	Clayton Claire	x x						
7	April							x
8	Nelson Rose		x x					
9	Lily	x						
10	Grace					x		

4.6.6. *The way in which forgiveness was expressed*

A majority of the participants told the one who harmed them “I forgive you” or “we love you” or “we’re here for you”. Two wrote letters to the offender in prison to tell them they had forgiven them. One expressed forgiveness by writing her feelings in a journal and for another; the expression of forgiveness was in her heart.

Grace: Then he (Ralph) started to cry and said, *I’m to blame! I’m to blame!* Well, I couldn’t sit there any longer. I rushed around the table and I hugged him. I told him I forgave him. We’re all hugging, we’re all crying!

Allan: I wrote a letter actually...forgiving him...I sent that to him a couple of weeks before the meeting. Then when I was there I read the letter to him as well.

Sue: I’ve done some journaling about it but mostly it’s just me making that decision you know...for myself.

Table 17 The expression of forgiveness

Case	Participant	Said “I forgive you”	Said in other words	In a letter	Through journaling	In one’s heart
1	Mary Sue				x	x
2	Donna	x		x		
3	Allan	x		x		
4	James	x				
5	Erik Eve	x x				
6	Clayton Claire		x x			
7	April	x				
8	Nelson Rose	x x				
9	Lily	x				
10	Grace	x				

4.7. Forgiveness as a Healing Agent

4.7.1. *Who the gift of forgiveness is for*

Commonly, when one gives a gift to another it is for the benefit and use, even the enjoyment of the recipient. The paradoxical nature of the gift of forgiveness is such that “when we give to others the gift of mercy and compassion, we ourselves are healed” (Enright & North, 1998, p.54).

Table 18 Forgiveness is for

Case	Participant	Victim or survivor	Offender	Both
1	Mary Sue	x x		
2	Donna			x
3	Allan	x		
4	James			x
5	Erik Eve			x
6	Clayton Claire			x x
7	April	x		
8	Nelson Rose			x x
9	Lily	x		
10	Grace		x	

Five participants made the decision to forgive primarily to support their own well-being.

Lily: I realized it's more for you...it's more for the person who offers it even than for the person that receives it I think...because it just set me free.

Mary: As I tell my kids it's not for him that we're forgiving him, it's for us. Because if we have anger and hatred at him it doesn't

hurt him a bit. But it really physically, and spiritually, and emotionally hurts us.

Allan: I would say from my experience it's all for the victim. Maybe there's a 10 percent portion of it that's...hoping...they can accept it...and maybe that would change them going forward...typically your primary reasoning for forgiving is I think for a better life.

Grace was the only one who gave forgiveness primarily for the sake of the offender. To her surprise she profited from the gift as well. Grace said:

I never thought it would benefit me. I didn't do it for me. I did it for him...but the benefits that came to me was like...it was so freeing.

Seven participants explicitly mentioned or suggested that forgiveness has benefits for both the giver and the receiver.

James: I think it is a really important part for both people. I have talked to offenders who have a very difficult time forgiving themselves...they really do need to work on forgiving themselves because they won't ever be able to move ahead if they don't take that step...to move ahead you have to leave something behind often. You can't take everything in your past with you. That's true for them as it is for victims.

Donna: The act of mailing the letter to him...it was unbelievable...like all that anger and rage and the ugliness that I carried around for 12 years it was just gone. I was truly in a state of grace.

Darren read Donna's letter with much trepidation. Donna explained:

He said he was afraid to open the letter because he thought it would be a letter full of anger and rage. He recognized my name. He thought, uh oh, this is going to be something really bad. Then when he opened it and he read it he said he started to cry. He just sat there and cried when he read the letter.

4.7.2. The impact of forgiveness

Table 19 The impact of forgiveness

Case	Participant	Psychological	Emotional	Behaviorally	Somatic	Empowerment	Personal growth and meaning making
1	Mary Sue	x x	x	x	x x		x x
2	Donna		x	x			x
3	Allan		x	x			x
4	James	x	x		x	x	x
5	Erik Eve	x x					x x
6	Clayton Claire	x	x				x x
7	April	x				x	x
8	Nelson Rose	x	x			x x	x x
9	Lily	x					x
10	Grace	x	x	x			x

4.7.2.1. Psychological

Ten participants noticed improvements in their psychological well-being after they forgave the one responsible for the harm. Lily, diagnosed with Post-traumatic Stress Disorder, received a 99 percent improvement in PTSD symptomology. Erik, depressed after his son's murder, now takes each day as it comes. Clayton said he is no longer "hung up on why it happened". To lose her husband to murder and to forgive the ones responsible left April feeling like "I can make it through anything".

For Grace the horror of her father's murder constantly played in the forefront of her mind, until she offered forgiveness. Grace said:

I know it may sound unusual but murder is my normal. But so is forgiving it...I learned that trauma doesn't have to be a life sentence. I didn't think it was anything other than a life sentence until I met Ralph

and forgave him...think of it this way, the murder was always up here (forehead) now it's back here (back of the head). It's not up in my face anymore.

4.7.2.2. Emotional

Victims and survivors of violent trauma often find themselves on a tumultuous sea of emotions as feelings of anger, fear, and resentment threaten to engulf them. Seven participants gained a sense of emotional stability following forgiveness.

Forgiveness released James from the concern he had that his sister's killer would be released from prison. He shared:

I don't have that anxiety anymore about whatever happens to him is going to happen...if he's released one day that would have caused me some anxiety before. I would have definitely been concerned. I don't feel that anymore...I don't feel obsessed with thinking about the situation anymore...I definitely feel at peace with whatever happens.

Rose found grief and anger abating after she forgave Ronald. She shares:

I think having forgiven has made our talking to kids (in schools) not as emotional...before that the grief keeps going...I think it had a lot more hold on us before we forgave Ronald because all those feelings are still in there festering right...but having forgiven we were able to I think go along with the healing process more so.

4.7.2.3. Behavioral

An argument can be made that every participant now acts or lives their lives in ways very differently than before both the trauma occurred and they chose to forgive. Grace marvels at the change forgiveness brought to her actions and outlook on life. She expressed:

I no longer had this responsibility of keeping him locked up...I was carrying it and all of a sudden it was gone...suddenly I started seeing the world differently because before I couldn't see any joy... I was on a mission...but all of a sudden all of this was gone. Out of all that horror isn't it beautiful that he (Ralph) can have his life?...but maybe I've just become a pussycat as I'm getting older. (She laughs)I was a nasty woman. I'm telling you, I was bad.

Allan said, “The lessons learned from forgiveness have a vast impact on the way we live our lives and live to be happy.” Once you learn to forgive, Allan believes you can then carry it with you into all your relationships where you are able to use it on a daily basis. It is interesting to note that Allan’s current thoughts on forgiveness were not the same ones he had at the time he forgave. Describing his behavior following his decision to forgive, Blaine said:

Well, the next couple of years I got back into substance abuse. I think because I was having a hard time accepting what I did.

When asked if the hard time was because he had given Blaine forgiveness, Allan stated that it was more a struggle with feeling whether he had **truly** forgiven him. From time to time Allan still wrestles with the thought of whether he has really forgiven Blaine.

4.7.2.4. Somatic

All 14 participants experienced physical reactions to the acts of violence such as a loss of appetite, over-eating, the sensation of being punched in the stomach, and stress. In answer to the question *have you noticed any physical changes following your decision to forgive* three participants reported on changes they observed.

Sue: Well you know I actually have more energy and like I said I’m losing weight.

James: I felt like there was a huge kind of weight lifted from off my shoulders.

Mary: Well I’m sure that I’m less stressed and more relaxed but like I say it’s an ongoing journey.

4.7.2.5. Empowerment

One of the outcomes of violence is the disempowerment of the victim or survivor. The indignity of the offense and the inability to stop it often leaves the individual feeling weak and ashamed. By their gift of forgiveness to the offender four participants felt empowered.

April: So many victims of violent crime talk about being powerless and I just felt like forgiveness gave me back my power...I couldn’t control what happened to Andrew but I certainly could control the person I was going to be and I wanted to

have a life that was rich and filled with possibility and forgiveness was the tool for me to make that happen.

The murder trial(s) of the two teenagers who were convicted of murdering Nelson and Rose's daughter drew international media coverage. Interest in the case has continued due in part to people's fascination over Nelson and Rose's decision to forgive.

Nelson: Most people were happy and surprised when the articles came on forgiveness. I think that earned us a lot of respect in society that that's the right thing to do. It's not easy but if you do that you're a bigger person.

Interviewer: So its empowering to be able to forgive?

Rose: I think it is.

Nelson: It's such a good feeling. It helps us to move forward and it's a noble thing.

4.7.2.6. Personal growth and meaning making

It has long been understood that there is the potential for growth and meaning making within trauma and suffering. All the participants of this study have publically shared their stories of grief and suffering as a way to make a positive difference in the lives of others. They have spoken to criminology students at universities, to assemblies of elementary, middle, and high school students, at restorative justice conferences, at anti-death penalty rallies, and at fund raisers for victim support services. Four have written books about their experiences. Videos and documentaries, and in one case a made for television movie, have been made chronicling their cases and healing journey.

Victims and survivors often share their stories of trauma so that others learning from their experience may be spared the heartbreak they suffered. Melody had been a victim of bullying even before the night of her murder. Nelson and Rose now speak to youths to encourage them to take a bold stance against bullying.

Nelson: Now we tell them, we empower the young people...*you have a choice to make, don't do impulsive things, stay away from drugs and alcohol...you are very important people in life. You have your whole future.* They have so many pressures and we tell them that you have to be really careful.

Rose: And also we can tell them that if we can forgive our daughter's murderer you can forgive each other if one of your friends said something or done something.

For five participants new relationships, often grounded in the shared experience of trauma and forgiveness, were created. Lily and April are friends and colleagues who created a workshop in which participants may explore the concept of forgiveness.

Lily: I did grow a lot of relationships out of forgiveness. You know meeting April or other people from The Forgiveness Project¹⁵. It's been huge like we would have never connected before this so that's just a wonderful, wonderful gift.

Donna has become friends with others like herself who speak internationally on behalf of the anti- death penalty movement. Donna explained:

I have a huge circle of friends who have had murder in their families, who have forgiven [and] who go around talking about the death penalty.

Clayton, a welder for 17 years, now works in the restorative justice community as school program coordinator training students and staff in restorative processes. Both he and Claire are prison volunteers.

Claire: You know I don't know what life would have been had this not happened. I just know that it's extremely different now than I ever imagined it to be. I really do believe I'm very fortunate to have met so many of the people I have met. It's a blessing really. Going to AVP¹⁶...I've said to a few people...the most real conversations that take place, take place inside of prison. They're not outside. I don't talk about anything real out here.

¹⁵ The Forgiveness Project uses the real stories of victims and perpetrators to explore concepts of forgiveness, and to encourage people to consider alternatives to resentment, retaliation, and revenge. <http://theforgivenessproject.com/>

¹⁶ AVP (Alternatives to Violence Project) Operating in prisons and the community AVP is a training program that enables participants to deal with potentially violent situations in new and creative ways. Workshops are experiential and run by trained facilitators. <http://avpinternational.org/>

4.7.3. *The relationship with the offender following forgiveness*

While victims and survivors of violence share in common experiences of pain and suffering, the confrontation of the trauma, the healing journey, and the experience of forgiveness is unique to each individual. With this in mind, it is not the intent of this study to pass judgment on the authenticity of another's forgiveness. Yet, if forgiveness is, as Enright and North (1998) said, "victim-centered; its goal...therapeutic in the sense of being aimed at aiding the healing, the recovery from the effects of being harmed" then it is important to consider the context of forgiveness, informed by the extant body of research, as to whether an individual's experience of forgiveness has produced healing benefits.

In this study the participants' subjective experiences of forgiveness will be considered within the framework of a forgiveness continuum rather than a forgiveness-unforgiveness dichotomy. Because the gift of forgiveness is rarely a cut-and-dried decision the use of a continuum will allow for the various facets of forgiveness to be considered as it "draws our attention to the distance that must be traveled" (Cordova, Cautilli, Simon, & Sabay, 2006) by the victim or survivor while underscoring the steps in the forgiveness journey.

According to the psychological literature, forgiveness encompasses a change in affect (overcoming resentment by substituting compassion), cognition (overcoming condemnation with respect and /or generosity), and behavior (overcoming indifference or the tendency for subtle revenge with a sense of goodwill) (Enright, Freedman, & Rique, 1998, p.47). While forgiveness does not pivot on the manifestation of each and every indicator you would expect to see the expression of more positive sentiments and constructive responses towards the offender than negative when forgiveness is present. Therefore the overall extent of the presence or absence of indicators of forgiveness and unforgiveness as shown in Tables 20 and 21 are the basis for the participants' placement on the forgiveness continuum.

Table 20 Forgiveness Continuum¹⁷

		Total Unforgiveness ¹⁸	Tolerance ¹⁹	Embracing Forgiveness ²⁰
		Anger Avoidance Vengeance		Good-will Compassion Reconciliation
1	Mary Sue	x x		
2	Donna			x
3	Allan		x	
4	James			x
5	Erik Eve	(Oldest gang members) x x	(Young gang member) x x	x (Son) x
6	Clayton Clayton			x x
7	April			x
8	Nelson Rose	x (Kristen) x		(Ronald) x x

¹⁷ The forgiveness continuum is anchored on one end by total unforgiveness and on the other by embracing forgiveness (Cordova, Cautilli, Simon, Sabay, 2006).

¹⁸ Characterized by avoidance, withdrawal or revenge-seeking (Cordova et al., 2006).

¹⁹ According to Cordova et al., (2006) "it is at this mid-point that one might be able to say that one has forgiven someone but is no longer interested in maintaining a relationship with that person."

²⁰ In Cordova et al., (2006) study of "Behavioral Analysis of Forgiveness in Couples Therapy," embracing forgiveness was characterized by the experiencing of the partner as mostly appetitive and working towards reconciliation.

9	Lily		x
10	Grace		x

Table 21 Indicators of forgiveness²¹

Affective	Cognitive	Behavioral
Positive feelings towards the offender	Positive thoughts towards the offender	Positive behaviors towards the offender
Sympathy/empathy	Wish the person well	Generosity in the form of occasional friendliness to the offender
Loving-kindness	Reframing, recognizing the offender's basic human worth	Supportive of offender's positive actions and motivations
Compassion		Reconciliation

Grace's current perspective of Ralph bears no resemblance to the adversarial stance she took against him for 16 years. Feelings of compassion now replace those of anger and retribution. Grace shared:

I'm happy for him and I've come to admire him for rebuilding his life... he has a part time job. He attends university. Isn't that a beautiful bright spot out of something so horrible?...just think about the strength it takes now, with full memory of killing someone who treated you like a son, you have enough courage to go out in the world and rebuild your life. How could I not admire him...when you get past the fact he murdered my father...it's been a journey.

As a result of numerous mediation sessions James has been able to "reframe" Fred, to view him within the context of his life. Consequently they have progressed beyond the labels of victim and offender "into people who are now recovering from what

²¹ North, 1998; Fehr, et al.,2010; Wenzel & Okimoto, 2010; Enright, 2001; Enright &North, 1998).

has happened and moving off in a more positive direction for our lives.” James continued:

I would probably say that to someone who’s observing us I would think it would look pretty much like a typical relationship you might have between people who are well acquainted with each other...there is no sense of awkwardness or a feeling that it’s “us” or “them” or that this is a victim and offender...I think there’s kind of a mutual sense that we will be involved into the future.

Erik and Eve met the youngest gang member responsible for the murder of their son. Both expressed feelings of sympathy and compassion for the young man and the situation he found himself in. Erik stated:

Once you see these poor people you think, now they’re going to be incarcerated for a while...he’s more or less ruined his life. I believe in giving people a second chance. I think everybody’s entitled to a second chance no matter what they do.

While Erik and Eve are supportive of the young one’s determination to turn his life around, their feelings of benevolence do not necessarily extend to the two oldest gang members, in particular the young man’s father who enticed his son into criminality. Eve explained:

I don’t think there would be the same forgiveness maybe...I think, do I want to spend that energy? Yea, probably not. That kind of energy has to be spent in good things...I don’t have to be their guide or shining light...I think I can just forgive them in my heart and forget about them. I don’t have to do anything else.

Though eleven participants expressed general feelings of good will toward the offender following forgiveness not all enjoy (as Grace does) or feel the need to stay in close contact with the perpetrator.

When April met with Russell during victim-offender mediation she extended an invitation for him to work with her following his release from prison. For a number of years April and Russell took the message of social responsibility and the importance of cultivating healthy relationships to groups of students in schools. Russell has since moved back to his home-town. April stated:

He's gone back to his community, which I think is just so amazing. He's held his head high...he's volunteering...he's working...I don't want a closer connection with him. I'm happy to know that he's doing really well, but we don't need to be in each other's back pocket.

Lily continued to visit Cameron in prison even after their divorce and while she said will always care about him she does not feel that continued contact with him is in her best interest. Lily shared:

I saw him last July and I saw him this July and both times it wasn't good...I just had like a two day hangover after going to see him. I was totally drained and I just don't want to go to the prison anymore. I just can't really take it...I don't know what will happen in the future. Sometimes I think about when he dies...of course I'll claim his body. I have a cemetery plot for him that I bought because I needed to know that he was going to be ok.

Sue and Mary have had the difficult task of trying to forgive a most "unforgiveable" character who, with his denial of responsibility and persistent appeals of his conviction continually tests their patience and determination to be benevolent.

Sue: You know I feel sorry for him. He's stuck in this horrific jail...for the rest of his life. I wish that he would take responsibility for his actions because I think if he did then all of this court stuff would stop and that is painful for everybody.

Mary: I know he could never explain what he did...he has all the excuses in the world, why he did what he did and it wasn't really his fault...I would like for all of us to sit down and tell him just what he did, just what we think...it would be nice if he ever admitted what he did but I don't need to hear him say I did it and I'm sorry because I wouldn't believe it anyway from what's transpired all this time.

Table 22 Indicators of Unforgiveness

Affective	Cognitive	Behavioral
Negative feelings towards the offender	Negative thoughts towards the offender	Negative behaviors towards the offender
Hatred, rage	They are bad, evil, a monster	Desire for retribution
Contempt	They are stupid and lazy	Avoidance
Fear	They are emotionally disturbed	Criticism

4.7.4. *The greatest gift received as a result of forgiving*

It seems in opposition to our self-interest to willingly let go of the harms committed against us. Hope (1987) calls this the paradox of forgiveness, “When we give to others the gift of mercy and compassion we ourselves are healed” (Enright, 1998, et al., p.54). Each of the participants stated that they received a gift when they forgave the one who harmed them.

Table 23 The greatest gift received

Case	Participant	Peace	Relationships	Release of anger	Life	Trust	Satisfaction
1	Mary Sue	x	x		x		
2	Donna	x		x			
3	Allan		x				
4	James				x		
5	Erik Eve	x					x
6	Clayton Claire		x x				
7	April		x				
8	Nelson Rose	x x					
9	Lily					x	
10	Grace			x	x		

4.7.4.1. **Finding peace**

Rose: Peace of mind. Just having that peace and I think also to be able to show the world that it can be done. You can forgive your child’s murderer.

Mary: I guess peace... peace of mind. The gift of gratitude for as I say, every minute every person you see that are so special to you. I don’t think if I had not forgiven that I would be able to enjoy being around those I love as much as I do.

Eve: I think definitely that peace, that letting go. I think forgiving Murray too was a huge part of it...I think the first person I had to forgive, was to forgive Murray. If I could offer that to the young guy...then I had to offer it to my son too.

4.7.4.2. Relationships

Claire: About six to eight weeks after Allison died someone really smart connected us with another couple who had lost a child to murder...when they left...I turned and looked at Clayton and I said, I cannot be like her...I cannot be hurt, angry, resentful, mad for 10 years...I call it a gift. It's one of the best things that could happen to me because I knew right then and there.

Clayton: I think the fact that Claire and I are still together. I think that's a big gift. If I didn't have her I would not be here. So that's the biggest one I think. I think the gift of just having our son. You know, we lost one child, we're not going to lose another...so we have him.

4.7.4.3. Release of Anger

Donna: Wow, the greatest gift I received from forgiving was letting go of anger and rage...and forgiveness, that's what forgiveness is all about.

Grace: The anger is gone. I got my life back. I can feel joy again...before, I was on this Hell-bent crusade.

4.7.4.4. The return of life

James: Well there is a couple of aspects...it set me free and I tell people that it basically ended my own life sentence around my sister being murdered...The other aspect was...I am now able to offer something positive for other people in similar circumstances.

Sue: I feel like I have my life back. I feel like I didn't have it for a long long time and I think that probably is it right there...I can enjoy my life again.

4.7.4.5. Love and trust

Lily: I feel that for me forgiveness has made it possible to love and to trust to the point I'm in a wonderful happy new marriage and am becoming a mother.

4.7.4.6. Satisfaction

Erik: I think the satisfaction of forgiving them. It's not easy to forgive people...that's just my belief. You have to forgive. You've accomplished something by forgiving.

4.7.5. A few last thoughts

The interviews were concluded by giving the participants an opportunity to share any last thoughts they had about their experience and decision to forgive.

Mary: I'd give anything not to go through it. I'd give anything to have Camile back here. I think I can feel more deeply for other people.

April: I think I learned a ton about myself in the experience...it helped me understand my family of origin really really well. It's such a privilege to be able to share it with other people and talk through my experience with other people because if it cracks open a place they hadn't considered looking...

Nelson: Our hope is from the Bible...but people have no respect for spiritual things...people have to have some higher guidance... and then things can change...The Bible says in Revelation He's going to turn this into a beautiful place with no pollution, no crime, and no sickness. People will enjoy life the way it is supposed to be in the first place. So that's our hope and we tell people that. It's a message of hope.

Grace: Now if you said to me, *Grace you have six months to live. What are you happiest about?* That I wasn't going to die angry. Through all this I'm able to empathize with others. I'm not the superior know-it-all anymore you understand. I'm only a mere mortal now!

Allan: Well, the act of forgiveness has not had a negative impact on me so I don't see any harm in it. There's a component of trust there that you have to be really cautious about...if you're letting that person back into your life...but forgiveness doesn't necessarily mean you have to let them back in your life either.

James: I think the story of victims and offenders who have sought a process with each other is often a story, one: that's not told enough and two: it's not seen as something that's as valued perhaps as much as mainstream responses to harm...I have often said that you really can only have justice with healing there for everybody. Otherwise you're just talking about a legal system. You're not talking about how people move forward in their lives. I think that really needs to be emphasized more than it is now...stories of forgiveness do play a role in that because I think that's an essential part of this process.

The words from the American spiritual "We must walk this lonesome valley. We have to walk it by ourselves. Oh, nobody else can walk it for us. We have to walk it by

ourselves”²² are reflective of the solitary nature of the healing path walked by victims and survivors of violence. Though no one can make the healing journey for another, we in effect, walk beside them when we listen to their stories. Gobodo- Madikizela (2008) said, “Trauma needs to be spoken in all its horror and violation to a listener or audience”...the listeners are called to bear witness to the victim’s pain and suffering (p.175). It is not easy to bear witness to the suffering of others. Experiences of horrific brutality are difficult to hear and while the stories shared by the participants of this study are of heartrending tragedy their overall message is one of hope. Violence creates terrible psychological, emotional, and physical wounds and forgiveness has the power to heal such wounds.

²² “Jesus walked this lonesome valley.” http://www.hymnary.org/person/Schrader_J

5. Discussion

In order to refine our understanding of the healing journey traversed by those harmed as a result of acts of violence and the potential for forgiveness to be a healing agent this study sought to answer two research questions:

RQ1) What are the psychological, emotional, behavioral, and somatic characteristics of the experience of trauma and journey to forgiveness for victims and/or family survivors who have suffered harm associated with acts of violence?

RQ2) In what ways does forgiveness support the healing process of victims and survivors who have suffered harm associated with acts of violence?

In response to these questions three primary findings emerged: 1) Acts of violence result in trauma, and forgiveness is a means for healing that trauma. 2) Certain mediating factors create conditions favorable for the emergence of forgiveness. 3) Forgiveness produces psychological, emotional, behavioral, and somatic healing outcomes for victims and survivors of violence.

5.1. Acts of violence result in trauma

5.1.1. *Psychological trauma*

Trauma is the principal characteristic of the experience of violence for victims and survivors. Herman (1997) calls psychological trauma the affliction of the powerless for it “overwhelms the ordinary systems of care that give people a sense of control, connection and meaning” (p.33). Phrases such as “my perception of life has changed”, “the whole family was in a private hell”, “I’m probably not going to wake up...surely you just go to sleep and die”, and “I felt I was in the deep somewhere under the ocean there where it is dark and there’s no light I could see”, were used to describe the psychological state of trauma. Post-traumatic stress disorder is often the impact of severe

psychological stressors. In a study of approximately 200 surviving family members and close friends of criminal homicide and alcohol-related vehicular homicide Amick-McMullan, Kilpatrick and Resnick (1991) found that 1 in 5 developed homicide-related post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) at some point in their lifetime (p.552). While Lily had the only clinical diagnosis of PTSD in the group, the entire spectrum of indicators consistent with post-traumatic stress disorder was reported. Every participant identified symptoms falling within at least one or more of its categories: 1) intrusion; 2) hyperarousal; and 3) avoidance (Yehuda, 2002, p.108).

Victims and survivors do not easily or quickly overcome the experience of violence. Intrusion, the unwanted recollections of the event in the form of distressing images, flashbacks, and nightmares (Yehuda, 2002, p. 108) is unsettling and disruptive. "The murder kept replaying" and "my mind was completely absorbed with violence" are descriptive of the intrusive thoughts that affected over half (57.14%) of the participants. Hyperarousal, the "fight or flight" defense mechanism which becomes destructive when the body stays over-aroused in the absence of a threat (Bloom, 2010, p.18) was experienced by 50% of the participants. Nearly all of the participants (78.57%) reported avoidance. When coping resources become overwhelmed by trauma, victims and survivors seek to mitigate disturbing thoughts and emotions by avoiding places, people, and circumstances that cause them discomfort (Yehuda, 2002, p.110). While a certain amount of denial and avoidance of reality is healthy, according to Bloom (2010), a lingering desire to hide from painful events prevents the potential for personal growth (p.31). Herman(1997) concurs stating, " In avoiding any situations reminiscent of the past trauma or any initiative that might involve future planning and risk, traumatized people deprive themselves of those opportunities for successful coping that might mitigate the effect of the traumatic experience" (p.47).

It should be noted that this study suggests somewhat higher proportions of PTSD symptomology than did McMullan's et al.,(1991) study of prevalence of homicide-related PTSD : 40.7% reported intrusions, 50.2% reported hyperarousal, and 40.9% reported avoidance (p.552).This discrepancy is likely due to the difference between McMullan's et al.(1991) clinically diagnosed (PTSD) sample compared to 13 out of 14 participants of this study with self-reported symptoms that were consistent with, but not verified as, post-traumatic stress disorder. Irrespective of these differences it is apparent that acts of

violence leave victims and survivors with traumatic wounds which left untreated and ignored can fester leaving deep psychological scars.

5.1.2. Emotional trauma

This study found anger (79%), fear (64%), stigma (57%), and guilt (50%) to be the primary emotional consequences of violence. Consistent with Bloom's (2010) findings that anger and fear are the dominant emotions aroused during trauma (p.43) anger, whether focused on the perpetrator, the criminal justice system, or the world that continued on despite their loss was experienced by nearly all participants. Anger can be a healthy part of the healing process as it conveys a sense of self- respect and self-worth in the face of injury and violation (Malcolm & Greenberg, 2000, p.180; Baures, 1996, p.76). But anger is only healthy if the victim and survivor can learn to let it go (Baures, 1996, p.75). Enright (2001) said "Anger is like alcohol. A little bit can be beneficial, but too much of it is a problem, even addictive" (p. 47). Numerous studies have demonstrated a strong link between negative emotional states such as anger, fear, and depression, and disease, in particular, cardiovascular, immunological functioning, and all-cause mortality (Jiang, et al., 1996, Miller, et al., 1996 as cited in Thoresen, Harris, and Luskin, 2000, pp. 257-258).

It is interesting that in two of the three negative cases the strength of relational bonds appears to have mitigated feelings of anger. Clayton and Claire were devastated when their son murdered their daughter, but they were never angry. This is consistent with findings by McCullough et al., (1998) which shows that people are more willing to forgive in relationships characterized by high satisfaction, closeness, and commitment (p. 1588). While McCullough's et al. (1998) work specifically examined dyadic relationships, similar relationship-constructive transformations can be understood through interdependence theory and its concepts of accommodation and willingness to sacrifice. In each phenomenon a person in a close relationship chooses to respond to an offense in a manner that will contribute to the health of the relationship rather than destroy it (Kelley & Thibault, 1978, as cited in McCullough et al.,1998, p.1587). Clayton and Claire had already lost one child. They were committed to their son and determined they would not lose him as well.

Allen (1991) said, surviving the murder of a loved one may be detrimental to the well-being of survivors because “murder is stigmatizing, unnatural, especially burdensome, and unexpected (p.18). Sue said, “There is a stigma in society that if someone murders you, you must have done something wrong.” Survivors often feel marked “as an object lesson in the community about what can go wrong in someone’s life” (Armour, 2002, p.375). Murder was likened to having a disease that no one wanted around or a big mark on your forehead pointing you out. The stigma of violence can be isolating to the survivors as the community and extended family and friends, unable relate to their experience, make erroneous judgments regarding the circumstances of the event (Armour, 2002, pp.376).

“If only he had killed me instead of her” and “what if I’d gone to pick her up that night?” reveal the sense of guilt two parents experienced following the murder of their children. According to Herman (1997) feelings of guilt and inferiority are nearly universal experiences as survivors examine and judge their own conduct following traumatic events (p. 53). Feelings of guilt can be understood as an attempt by victims and survivors to regain a sense of power and self-control. According to Masters, Friedman, and Getzel (1988) it may be more tolerable to imagine that one could have done something better than to face the reality of total helplessness (p.56-54).

5.1.3. Behavioral effects of trauma

The chief behavioral outcome of the trauma, at least in the short-term, was the effect it had on many of the participants’ ability to work and in some cases on their desire to continue their old vocation once they returned. While a loss of interest in life and social withdrawal are common manifestations of grief the desire to change jobs may also be explained by changes in the life priorities of victims and survivors. In their work on post-traumatic growth Tedeschi, Park, and Calhoun (1998) found that “persons for whom trauma has produced a greater sense of their vulnerability, and therefore an appreciation for life, are often loathe to waste their time on the inconsequential” (p.14). The new life and career paths chosen were those which nurtured intimate relationships and had the potential to make a positive impact on the lives of others.

The literature makes a clear connection between trauma and negative coping behaviors. Allan was the one participant to mention changes in behavior that involved substance abuse, risk-taking, and self-harming. It is conceivable that his response is due to his age (14) at the time of his mother's death in comparison to the others who were adults with families and careers at the time of the offense. Experiences of trauma in childhood can have cognitive, emotional, physiological, and behavioral effects similar to those seen in adults such as anger and PTSD (Armsworth & Holaday, 1993, pp.50-53). Traumatized youths are also more likely than their peers to be self-abusive, self-destructive, and chemically dependent (Green, 1986; Cavaiola & Schiff, 1988, as cited in Armsworth & Holaday, 1993, p.52). It is theorized that chronic stress creates the potential for people to become addicted to the endorphins released in their bodies as part of the "fight or flight" response. High-risk and self-harming behaviors can reduce anxiety, rage, depression, and fear, evoking a calming response because of the release of endorphins (Bloom, 2010, pp. 56-57).

5.1.4. Somatic effects of trauma

Herman (1997) states, "The ordinary human response to danger is a complex, integrated system of reactions, encompassing both body and mind" (p.34). The participants of this study had a variety of responses to the traumatic event including the sensation of having received a physical blow to the body, sleep and appetite disruptions, numbness, increased sensitivity to noise, fainting, pneumonia, anger, and stress. Stress is the result of the body's inability to modulate its state of arousal following traumatic events and "...is a major contributor to the development of physical disease" (Bloom, 2010, p.21). Anger, hostility, anxiety, and depression have been identified as psychosocial risk factors for heart disease, and chronic sympathetic nervous system arousal (activated for the fight or flight response), as a mechanism for the relationship between psychosocial factors and heart disease (Allan & Scheidt, 1996, as cited in Witvliet et al., 2001, p.122).

Acts of violence produce traumatic outcomes in the lives of victims and survivors which left untreated can be psychologically, emotionally, behaviorally, and somatically destructive. Post-traumatic stress disorder, anger, fear, stigma and guilt, inability to work, negative coping behaviors, change in life priorities, and bodily disruptions were all

reported by the victim and survivors of this study. Forgiveness has been found to be an effective way to decrease or eliminate the devastating effects of trauma. This study found that there are five mediating factors in forgiveness: 1) strength of relationship with the offender; 2) religious or spiritual worldview; 3) receive an apology; 4) offender accountability and 5) face-to-face meeting with offender. In the presence of all or some of these factors empathetic concern for the well-being of the offender grows prompting the gift of forgiveness

5.2. Mediating factors of forgiveness

5.2.1. *Strength of relationship with the offender*

It is difficult for most of us to imagine ourselves or our family being affected by violence and if we should, even for a moment attempt to picture what such an encounter might look like it is much easier to imagine the offender as a faceless stranger than to believe that harm could come by the hand of one we know. For half of the participants of this study this is true, the perpetrator was unknown to them or their family until the day their paths crossed. But for seven others the offender was someone they knew and in some cases even loved.

A son, husband, ex son-in-law/brother-in-law, mother's boyfriend, and next door neighbor were the one's responsible for the harm suffered by half the participants. Following the offense and prior to forgiving four expressed a negative view of the offender characterized by feelings of anger, hatred etc. while three continued to view the offender (a son and a husband) in an overall loving and benevolent manner. The views of the offender following forgiveness were: two continued to have negative views; four expressed favorable opinions; while one was conflicted. For those with no previous connection to the offender four expressed negative views, two were neutral towards the perpetrator and angry with their son (the victim), and one had, if not a completely

positive view, a compassionate stance towards the offender. Following forgiveness all seven developed more favorable views of the offender.²³

There is clear empirical evidence that strong relational bonds are associated with the likelihood of forgiving (Fincham, 2000, p.14). McCullough et al. (1998, p.1588) lists 7 ways relationship quality is linked to forgiveness:

1. People are motivated to preserve relationships in which considerable resources have been invested.
2. Partners in high-quality relationships have a long-term orientation that motivates them to overlook hurts.
3. Interests of oneself and one's partner may become merged.
4. A collectivist orientation motivates one to act in ways that are beneficial to the other, even at a cost to oneself.
5. A shared history gives one access to the other's thoughts and feelings.
6. Greater likelihood of having empathy for the other.
7. Offenders more likely to apologize and express remorse.

The strength of relational bonds as a mediator of forgiveness is observed in two cases of this study: Claire, Clayton and Lily. Claire and Clayton were devastated that their son Brad is the one responsible for the murder of their daughter, yet they love him very much and are supportive of his healing journey. Lily was a newlywed when her husband Cameron kidnapped and sexually assaulted two women. Though Lily eventually divorced Cameron she stayed with him during the criminal proceedings and still cares deeply about his welfare.

McCullough et al. (1998) found: 1) Pre-offense closeness, apology, empathy, and forgiveness appear to be highly interrelated; 2) In close relationships transgressors are more likely to offer apologies for their action; and 3) Victims are more likely to

²³ In cases with multiple offenders, a favorable view is applicable to at least one.

develop empathy for their transgressors when the relationship is close, committed, and satisfactory (p.1999).

Though once related by marriage the bond between in-laws, especially ex-in laws, is too weak to overcome ongoing harm by the offender. Following Camile's murder Mary and Sue attempted to take a compassionate view of Camile's ex-husband Nicholas. They told others he must "sick" or he would not have killed her. But as Nicholas continues to exhaust his legal appeals and deny all responsibility²⁴ instead putting the blame on Camile, Mary and Sue forgive him *in spite* of the relationship he had with Camile not *because* of it. McCullough et al. (1998) findings are strengthened by the inverse example of this case. In relationships that are strained, uncommitted, and unsatisfactory the offender is less likely to apologize which decreases the development of victim empathy towards the offender making forgiveness more difficult.

While the link between relationship qualities and forgiveness is robust it is interesting to consider how relational bonds did not facilitate forgiveness for Erik and Eve, and may have even hindered it. Erik and Eve quickly forgave those who murdered their son. They were strangers and there was no conception of how these men should act. But it was a different story with their son. Erik and Eve had very high expectations of how Murray should behave and they were hurt and angry to find he had been involved in illegal activities that led to his murder. It is conceivable that those with no prior relationship to the offender are able to forgive precisely for this reason; they have no expectation of strangers. So while the strength of relational bonds may enable us to more easily take a compassionate view of those we are close to it also makes us more vulnerable to being hurt which can make healing difficult.

5.2.2. A religious or spiritual worldview

Thirteen out of fourteen or 93% of the participants at one point or other in their healing journey held a religious or spiritual worldview that directly or indirectly played a

²⁴ Offender accountability-forgiveness link considered in section 5.2.3.3.

part in their decision to forgive. Eight participants actively practice their faith while five have religious backgrounds but do not regularly attend church. Religious views and practices such as prayer were credited with helping to resolve the pain, hold the family together, and enable them to see a “bigger picture” beyond the tragedy. Forgiveness was considered “the fabric of who we are” and as “the right thing to do”. Two expressed having an obligation to forgive when forgiveness was requested. One had a profound spiritual experience that compelled her to forgive. Overall, participants drew on their religious and spiritual beliefs more as a source of comfort and strength rather than feeling those views required them to forgive.

In Subkoviak’s et al. (1995) study measuring interpersonal forgiveness in late adolescence and middle adulthood no general relationship was noted between forgiveness and depth of religiosity. There was a modest increase in forgiveness for those who were religiously-affiliated compared to the non-affiliated and a more significant correlation between forgiveness and religiosity when the person was hurt by a more distant person other than a family member or friend (pp.652-653). Similarly, this study noted a greater indirect than direct correlation between religiosity/spirituality and forgiveness. A moderate increase was also noted between the religiously affiliated (62%) compared to the unaffiliated (38%). On the other hand, only two (14%) found forgiveness easier to give to strangers than to a family member. This discrepancy can likely be explained by the difference in sample sizes between the two studies: 14 as compared to 394. Fincham’s (2000) work corresponds with the findings of both Subkoviak et al. (1995) and this study. He states:

In view of the strong link between forgiveness and religion, one might expect that being religious is associated with greater forgiveness. Religious affiliation has been found to relate to views about forgiveness but such findings do not link religion to actual forgiving. Formal religious affiliation is unlikely to predict forgiving as it is the centrality of religious beliefs and the attempt to live according to those beliefs that most likely predict forgiveness (p. 13).

Religious or spiritual beliefs support the healing process of victims and survivors of violence by providing comfort and acting as a moral compass. For the majority of the participants with a religious or spiritual worldview it was the foundational principles of

these beliefs and their desire to respond in ways that were in consonance with these beliefs that facilitated forgiveness, not church membership or attendance.

5.2.3. Apologies

According to Darby and Schlenker (1982) “Apologies are social conventions that perform a variety of important functions, including serving as recognition that rules have been broken, reaffirming the value of rules, and controlling and regulating social conduct by acknowledging the existence of interpersonal obligations” (p.742). Apologies help victims and survivors of crime recover from the psychological harm they received as a result of the offense. Dorne (2008) said, “Apologies are vehicles to correct an imbalance of power that exists...when one party commits a wrong against another party” (p. 172). The power the offender has by the commission of the offense is shaming to the victim. Within the context of an apology power and shame are reversed as the offender accepts the shame for the offense thereby empowering the victim to forgive (Dorne, 2008, p.172).

Twelve (86%) of this study’s participants received an apology. Ten received the apology within the context of a face-to-face meeting with the offender as either part of an official victim-offender mediation process or an informal visit with the offender in prison. Not everyone considered an apology to be a “game-changer” or a prerequisite to forgiveness but those who received an apology looked more favorably upon the offender and in one case the offender’s apology melted away years of hatred and bitterness making forgiveness possible. These findings correspond to other studies which have examined the apology-forgiveness relationship. In Exline, Yali, & Lobel’s (1998) study of college student recollections of transgressions greater forgiveness was reported towards perpetrators who took responsibility for the offense, offered sincere apologies, asked for forgiveness, expressed remorse, took steps to repair the harm, or forgave the participant for a past transgression(as cited in Exline & Baumeister, 2000, pp. 136-137). In a study of children’s reactions to apologies Darby and Schlenker (1982) found that those who gave more elaborate apologies(not just “I’m sorry”) were looked at more favorably, liked more, blamed less, and forgiven more (p. 747). In contrast, defensive responses by the perpetrator such as self-justification, refusal to accept responsibility, and blaming the victim were associated with harsher judgments of the perpetrator, a greater desire to

punish them, and lower levels of forgiveness (Gonzales, Haugen, & Manning, 1994, as cited in Exline & Baumeister, 2000, p. 137). Such research explains the contrast between the participants of this study who received an apology and those who did not in terms of their views of the offender and indicators of forgiveness.²⁵

5.2.4. Face-to-face meetings with the offender

Face-to-face meetings between the victim and offender such as those facilitated through a restorative justice processes “often leads to a greater sense of closure and healing for all involved” (Umbreit, 2001, as cited in Armour & Umbreit, 2006, p.124). The Reintegrative Shaming Experiments (RISE) compared the effects of standard court processing with the effects of a restorative justice intervention known as conferencing on victims of both property and violent crime and found apologies to be a significant factor in the emotional restoration of victims (Strang, 2002, p. 113). A majority of the court and conferencing victims wanted an apology, 88 and 91 percent respectively. 72 percent of the conferencing victims as compared to 19 percent of court victims received an apology. The apologies received by the conference victims were considered more sincere as compared to the court victims (77% to 41%). Of the court victims who received an apology none said it was part of the court outcome while 91 percent said it was part of the conference outcome (Strang, 2002, pp.114-115).

Umbreit, et al. (2002) investigated the development and impact of Victim Offender Mediation/Dialogue (VOM/D) programs in Texas and Ohio. Data from this study suggests that “many of the principles of restorative justice can be applied in cases of severe violence including murder with clear effectiveness in supporting both the process of victim healing and offender accountability” (p.1). A few of the findings include: VOM/D in cases of severe violence is highly effective as reported by individual victims, family survivors and offenders; A majority of victims and family survivors reported that dialogue with the offender contributed to their personal growth and healing. They also reported their feelings towards the offender had changed for the better; Both victims and

²⁵ See Tables 21-22.

offenders reported major life changes occurring relating to their overall outlook on life being more positive and being more at peace with the circumstances they are faced with; Virtually all found the dialogue process to be helpful (pp.2-3). Offenders know how to “take” the punishment given by the criminal justice system but having to “own” their behavior and take responsibility for the harms they caused is often a very different matter.

5.2.5. Offender accountability

Zehr (2003) said, “Judges often talk about accountability but what they usually mean is that when you do something wrong you must take your punishment” (p.69). True accountability goes beyond punishment it means understanding the real human consequences of one’s actions and taking responsibility for making things right (Zehr, 2003, p.70). Victim offender mediation gives offenders the opportunity to: own the responsibility for their crime; find out the effect of their crime; apologize and/or offer appropriate reparation; and reassess their future behavior in light of this knowledge (Liebmann,2007, p.29).

In summary, all but two participants (86%) received an apology and of these (83%) the offender took responsibility for the offense and apologized during a face-to-face meeting. This study confirms that while forgiveness can be given in the absence of an apology, offender accountability, or a face-to face meeting, there is overwhelming evidence to suggest that these factors are potent mediators of forgiveness and ways of responding to violence that are therapeutic for victims and survivors of violence. It is thought that “the greatest benefit from restorative justice dialogue may be found in the most serious crimes because the higher level of emotional engagement by victims and offenders is the mechanism leading to the emotions of empathy and remorse”(Armour & Umbreit, 2006, p. 132).

5.2.6. Empathy

Empathy is “an active effort to understand another person’s perception of an interpersonal event as if one were that other person, rather than judging the other person’s behavior from the perspective of one’s own experience of that event” (Malcolm & Greenberg, 2000, p.180). When we have empathy we come to care for a stranger’s

welfare and desire to help them in some way (McCullough, 2000, p. 45). Out of a sample of 14 “forgivers” it is not surprising that eleven (79%) conveyed empathetic feelings towards the offender. Because “empathy for the offending partner is believed to be the central facilitative condition that leads to forgiving” (McCullough, et al., 1997, p. 322) the lack of an apology or a sincere apology by the offenders in the three negative cases reaffirms the apology-empathy-forgiving causal sequence posited by McCullough et al., (1997, p. 322). In addition to motivating forgiveness empathy leads to the humanization or as Gobodo-Madikizela (2002) said the “rehumanization” of the perpetrator which “[opens] the door to his re-admittance into the realm of moral humanity” (p.23).

5.2.7. Humanizing

When monstrous acts of violence are committed it is easy to believe that the individuals who perform such acts are monsters. Gobodo-Madikizela (2002) states that while such thoughts are comforting, “studies clearly show how the histories of men and women who perpetrate terrible deeds are rooted in the same moral humanity as the rest of us” (p.27). In time, 79 percent of the participants were able to see the human being behind the horrible deeds. “He wasn’t this imposing figure who was a monster” and “the person I met in the letter was not the person I had been hating all these years” express the participants’ realization that the offenders were ordinary people. When we can resist the temptation to draw the line at certain abhorrent behaviors and say, “where you have been, I cannot follow you...your actions can never be regarded as part of what it means to be human”, we open the door to the possibility of transformation (Gobodo-Madikizela, 2003, p.103).

5.2.8. Reframing

North (1998) said, “Reframing does not do away with the wrong itself, nor does it deny the wrongdoers responsibility for it, but it allows us to regard the wrongdoer in a more complete, more detailed, more rounded way, in a way, that is, which does justice to the complexity of the wrongdoers personality” (p.26). Grace gives an excellent description of the reframing process she experienced in regards to the man who killed her father. She explained:

Lose your mother at four. In an orphanage until eighteen. Get sick at twenty. Kill someone you love at thirty...if we take the judgment out we can see the whole person. If I focus on a wrong someone does I can't see them. I don't have amnesia; I remember he murdered my father. I just don't remember it with judgment or anger.

Reframing is a crucial stage in the forgiveness process identified by Enright and others (North, 1998, p.24). A majority of the participants (79%) were able to separate the offender from the "bad act" which allowed compassion and forgiveness to emerge.

5.2.9. Compassion

Psychotherapist Stephen Crippen (2010) defines compassion as sympathy plus help. At the point of sympathy there has been no concrete or active steps taken to help the person other than to provide a listening ear. Compassion adds an active-helping component to sympathy. Compassion means you want to assist the one who is hurting, to do or say something that will help them with their problems (Crippen, 2010). Eleven participants (79%) pursued a course that would promote the well-being of the offender. Anti-death penalty advocacy, engagement in mutual restorative justice processes, and working with the offender post-incarceration were a few of the ways participants sought to further positive change and growth in the offender's life.

As mediators of forgiveness the strength of relationship with the offender, religious or spiritual views, offender apology and accountability, and a face-to-face meeting with the offender all serve to weaken the walls of hatred and bitterness that surrounds the victims and survivors as a result of the act of violence. Once weakened, these walls further crumble as empathetic connections develop the capacity for compassion and forgiveness. To give "good" for "evil" is "far from being an unnerving proposition and a burdensome moral sacrifice... compassion for many is deeply therapeutic and restorative" (Gobodo-Madikizela, 2003, p. 129).

5.3. The healing power of forgiveness

5.3.1. Psychological Impact

Victims and survivors of violence suffer a multitude of psychological, emotional, behavioral, and somatic disturbances which may threaten their health and well-being if left ignored and untreated. It is often thought that acts of revenge or retribution will alleviate the pain and suffering yet these actions “can be self-defeating and illusory” (Minow, 1998, p.13). Herman (1997) states, “people who actually commit acts of revenge such as combat veterans who commit atrocities, do not succeed in getting rid of their post-traumatic symptoms; rather they seem to suffer the most severe and intractable disturbances (p.189). The study further supports a growing body of research which shows that forgiveness has the potential to assist in the healing journey of those who have been traumatized. All participants of this study reported that their lives were positively impacted as a result of their decision to forgive and yet most found it more challenging to list the specific benefits of forgiving than to describe the horrible effects of the offense. Sue stated, “I think everything started to get better after I made the decision that I wanted to forgive him and the more practice I have the better off all these things get.”

Some of the particular psychological and emotional benefits noted by participants were a reduction in anger, fear, anxiousness, and intrusive thoughts. Similar positive effects were reported in two studies by Al-Mabuk, et al. (1995) which examined the effect that forgiveness education had on love-deprived late adolescents. Study 1 showed an increase in hopefulness and willingness to forgive but not actual forgiveness when a curriculum focusing on a commitment to forgive was used. A more complete outcome pattern was realized in the second study which involved a therapeutic regime using Enright and the Human Development Study Group’s (1991) forgiveness model. The results were an increase in hopefulness and willingness to forgive in addition to actual forgiveness towards a target person. Attitudes towards parents increased as did self-esteem while trait anxiety decreased. It was concluded that the entire forgiveness regime leads to better outcomes than a partial treatment. While the whole forgiveness program produces better outcomes overall it is the findings of Study 1: a **willingness** to forgive results in a more hopeful and positive attitude about the future- which are most

germane to this study. From this finding it becomes apparent that it is completely irrelevant where a victim or survivor is in their healing journey or where they fall on the forgiveness continuum, it is the fact that they are **on** the journey or continuum, at all, that is important. This finding suggests that there are healing benefits for everyone who embarks on the journey towards forgiveness no matter where they are on the path.

5.3.2. Emotional Impact

Witvliet et al (2001) states, “Interpersonal transgressions are emotionally laden experiences that often stimulates negative and arousing memories or imagined emotional responses” (p. 118). When people ruminate on or rehearse the harm they received negative emotions and adverse physiological effects are perpetuated (Witvliet, et al., 2001, p.118). Letting go of negative feelings and adopting an attitude of goodwill towards the offender “may free the wounded person from a prison of hurt and vengeful emotion yielding both emotional and physical benefits “(Witvliet et al., 2001, p.118). The emotional benefits of forgiveness described by participants were:

The ability to trust and feel love...to be set free from the life sentence I was serving as a result of my sister’s murder...it released a lot of negative emotions...the murder has no more importance in terms of the big cross to bear...I feel at peace...a huge weight lifted off my shoulders...we were able to get on with our lives...forgiveness can be there in the light of anger and all the other stuff too...I haven’t been as hung up on the question “why?”...I almost feel like myself again...it’s so beautiful to let go...I do not live in fear...all the anger, rage and ugliness of 12 years was just gone...I see joy in everything and I believe forgiveness opened that door.

Gobodo-Madikizela (2003) said, “Forgiveness recognizes the deed, its impact having been and continuing to be lived by the victim, but transcends it. People who come to the point of forgiveness have lived not only with the pain that trauma and loss bring, but also with anger and resentment at those who caused the pain...when forgiveness is granted, however, it is a choice the victim makes to let go of the bitterness” (pp.95-97) a choice which frees the individual from the negative consequences of unforgiveness.

5.3.3. Behavioral Impact

Only four of the participants could recall specific behavioral benefits following forgiveness yet one behavioral change was reported by all of the participants and it had to do with the way they now choose to live their lives in order to create meaning and purpose. Tedeschi et al. (1998) said, "Existential psychologists have long recognized opportunities for growth in trauma and suffering, and have described trauma as a time when meaning may be created and courage may be found" (p.4). Though few were able to think of specific ways they act differently now than before they forgave, it is obvious that the decision to forgive opened the door to positive transformational experiences.

Each participant shares publically about their story of trauma and forgiveness as a way to show others that the effects of violence and trauma can be transcended. James said, "I am now able to offer something positive to people in similar circumstances... [who] feel that there aren't any alternatives to harm other than to seek healing through punishment." Herman (1997) states, "Most survivors seek the resolution of their traumatic experience within the confines of their personal lives. But a significant minority, as a result of the trauma, feel called upon to engage in a wider world" (p.207). Giving to others is the essence of the survivor mission and "common to all of these efforts is a dedication to raising public awareness" (Herman,1997, p.208).

Mary and Sue share their story to raise awareness of domestic violence and to support a local battered women shelter; Donna advocates for the abolition of the death penalty in the United States; Allan started a victims of homicide support group; James is a prison volunteer and restorative justice advocate; Erik and Eve are active in homicide support groups and Eve is coordinator of a bereavement helpline; Clayton works in schools training students and staff in restorative processes while both he and Claire share their story to raise awareness of victims of crime; April, Nelson, Lily, and Grace have written books about their experiences and speak professionally on a number of issues including social responsibility, restorative justice, compassion, and forgiveness; Nelson and Rose speak frequently in schools to educate youths about the dangers of bullying. Herman (1997) asserts that while it is impossible to compensate for the harm they have suffered, "there is a way to transcend it, by making it a gift to others"(p.207).

5.3.4. Somatic Impact

Thoresen *et al.* (2000) suggests that the willingness and ability to forgive may be one of the characteristics of positive overall health and well-being (p.256). Two participants stated general somatic benefits they experienced as a result of forgiving and one reported losing weight and having more energy. It is reasonable to posit that this lack of reporting is not indicative of an absence of somatic benefits but is rather due to the fact that negative health effects produced by unforgiveness often take years to manifest. Therefore, unless participants have an obvious condition (e.g. high blood pressure) that has been markedly improved after forgiving it may be very difficult for them to pinpoint specific somatic benefits. When people feel psychologically and emotionally sound they feel good overall. Sue summed this up when she said, "I think everything started to get better after I made the decision that I wanted to forgive him."

It is thought that forgiving responses may safeguard health by repressing unforgiving responses and by nurturing positive emotional responses in their place (Worthington *et al.*, 2007, p.297). According to Lawler *et al.* (2005) there are six pathways linking forgiveness to health: 1) decreased psychophysiological reactivity; 2) less interpersonal stress; 3) less frequent stress; 4) constitutional weakness associated with hostility and health; 5) more healthy behaviors; and 6) transcendent or religious factors (p.158). Thoresen *et al.* (2000) offers six additional pathways: 1) decrease in chronic blaming, anger, and hostility; 2) reduction in chronic hyperarousal and /or allostatic load; 3) optimistic thinking; 4) self-efficacy to take health related actions; 5) social support; and 6) transcendent consciousness (pp. 257-261). Though most participants could not put their fingers on exact somatic benefits of forgiving many of Lawler *et al.* (2005) and Thoresen *et al.* (2000) correlates of forgiveness and health such as transcendent or religious factors, reduction in blaming, anger, and hostility, lessening of chronic hyperarousal, less stress, optimistic thinking, and social support were reported as outcomes of forgiveness by the participants. This suggests that while the somatic benefits of forgiving may not be immediately apparent, a more healthy future may be in store for those who are forgiving.

6. Conclusion

Forgiveness does not overlook the deed: it rises above it. This is what it means, it says. I cannot and will not return the evil you inflicted on me. And that is the victims' triumph (Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela, 2003, p. 117).

This study set out to explore the potential for forgiveness to act as a healing agent in cases of traumatic violence. Millions of people in the United States and Canada are impacted by acts of violence every year and this has created an urgent need to identify positive coping strategies that may assist the healing process of victims and family survivors. While the field of forgiveness research has swelled over the past twenty years, few, if any, studies have explicitly examined the elements of the experience of trauma and the forgiveness journey as it is related by those directly affected by violence. In order to expand and enrich our understanding of the effect that violence has in the lives of victims and survivors and the role forgiveness plays in their healing journey this study sought to answer two research questions:

1. What are the psychological, emotional, behavioral, and somatic characteristics of the experience of trauma and journey to forgiveness for victims and/or family survivors who have suffered harm associated with acts of violence?
2. In what ways does forgiveness support the healing process for victims and/or family survivors who have suffered harm associated with acts of violence?

The findings of this work indicate that acts of violence produce trauma resulting in long-lasting and disruptive psychological, emotional, behavioral, and somatic outcomes in the lives of victims and family survivors. Trauma produces symptomology consistent with Post-traumatic Stress Disorder and triggers the emotional firestorm of feelings of anger, fear, stigma, and guilt. It leaves victims and survivors for a time, unable to work and as a result of changing life priorities new vocations are often

pursued. Trauma feels like a blow to the body causing stress and sleep and appetite disruptions. Trauma has the potential to foster lifelong destructive consequences if left untreated. Therefore the most noteworthy and promising discovery of this study is that forgiveness has been found to be a mechanism for the healing of trauma.

Except in rare cases, forgiveness is not the first response that comes to the minds of those harmed by violence. In most cases forgiveness is a process that takes time and in the presence of factors such as: a) strength of relationship with the offender; b) religiosity or spirituality; c) apology; d) meeting with the offender; e) offender accountability; f) and the emotional components of empathy, humanizing, reframing, and compassion optimal conditions for the development of forgiveness are created.

Forgiveness is a gift one gives not only to the perpetrator of the harm but to one's self. This has been called the paradox of forgiveness: when we give the gift of mercy and compassion to one who by their actions has forfeited such a right, we ourselves are healed. Forgiveness results in a reduction of Post-traumatic Stress Disorder symptomology as the attendant negative emotions of unforgiveness are released and feelings of benevolence are nurtured. The gift of forgiveness opens the door to feelings of peace, joy, and of being set free from the emotional prison or "life sentence" produced by the offense. Forgiveness creates opportunities for positive transformational experiences as victims and survivors share their story of how forgiveness helped them transcend the pain of trauma. Most remarkably, even the desire and willingness to forgive cultivates a more hopeful and positive attitude towards the future, a future now filled with the promise of over-all health and well-being.

6.1. Implications for practice and further research

As a result of this study it is hoped that forgiveness may be seen as a viable and attainable healing agent in cases of traumatic violence. These findings may be of particular benefit to those with professions such as counselors, psychologists, psychiatrists, restorative justice practitioners, and religious or spiritual advisors who have contact with individuals harmed by violence. This is of course not to suggest that forgiveness should be put forth as the one and only correct response to harm. Victims

and family survivors have the right to choose the healing path that is best for them but in order to do so they must be given the information that will allow them to make a well-informed choice. Due to common misunderstandings of what forgiveness is and is not the gift of forgiveness, especially in cases of traumatic violence, can be a controversial subject. Without further clarification by those assisting victims and survivors in the development of a wellness plan it is unlikely forgiveness would be considered a worthwhile therapeutic option.

The enormity of the amount of data collected in this study precluded an in-depth analysis of every topic that was mentioned by the participants. This allows for various “jumping off” points for future areas of research. One area of inquiry could explore in greater depth the position that forgiveness is a gift that must not be compelled or demanded. Is there a difference in healing outcomes between victims and survivors of violence who freely choose to give forgiveness and those who feel duty-bound to forgive due to religious prescriptions or other societal cues such as “forgive and forget”? Also, the different ethnicities represented in this study raises interesting questions such as how does forgiveness vary among cultures? Are there cultural aspects to the experience of violence and trauma which fosters or impedes the possibility of forgiveness? To build on the current study future research may explore trauma and forgiveness from the perspective of the one who perpetrates the offense and who receives forgiveness. Are the perpetrators of violence themselves traumatized as a result of the harm they inflict on others? If so, in what ways? What are the characteristics of the experience of being forgiven?

Victims and survivors of violence are not given a road map to assist them in their healing journey. Most find themselves stumbling along the path, doing the best they can to navigate the psychic rubble left behind as a result of the trauma. To give the gift of forgiveness to those responsible for such devastating pain and suffering is a powerful testament to the strength of the human spirit and an enduring symbol of the victim’s and survivor’s victory over the harm they experienced.

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Appendices

Appendix A.

Interview Questions

Descriptive

RQ1 What are the psychological, emotional, behavioral, and somatic characteristics of the experience of trauma and journey to forgiveness for victims and/or family survivors who have suffered harm associated with acts of violence?

1. What can you tell me about your experience? (the story)
2. In what ways (e.g. physically, psychologically, emotionally, & behaviorally) were you impacted by this offense?

a. Physically:

Did you experience any physical changes following the offense? Change in appetite? Headaches? General health?

b. Psychologically: PTSD Symptomology

Intrusion: Did you find yourself thinking about the event even when you didn't mean to? Nightmares?

Avoidance/numbing: Were you able to handle the feelings that you were experiencing or did you avoid them? Did you seek to avoid certain people, places, or situations?

Hyperarousal: Did you feel on guard/anxious after this occurred? Were you able to concentrate? Sleep?

c. Emotionally:

Did you experience feelings of anger? Anxiety? Fear? Resentment? Depression? Did you have a desire for revenge?

Did you experience feelings of guilt or shame?(e.g. survivor's guilt, disgrace, dishonor, loss of self-esteem, loss of virtue, or loss of personal integrity, shame over the inability to prevent the offense from happening or to directly repair the harm).

Was/is there a stigma attached to being a victim or family survivor of trauma?

Withdrawal: Did you feel the need to isolate yourself or hide?

Avoidance: Did you engage in avoidance strategies such as substance abuse or thrill-seeking behaviors?

Attack others: Did you ever physically or verbally lash out at others? Blame others?

Attack self: Did you ever blame yourself for what happened?

d. Behaviorally:

After the offense were you able to continue to do the things you enjoyed doing previously?

Did you begin to act in ways you had not done prior to the offense?

3. Were your relationships with family and friends altered by this offense? If so, in what ways?

4. Was there something... a defining moment, or an event, that prompted you to consider forgiveness?

5. Did religious or spiritual beliefs play a part in your decision to forgive?
6. Did you have a worldview that espoused forgiveness prior to the offense?
7. Did you seek out any type of professional help after the offense? (e.g. psychologist, religious or spiritual advisor).
8. How would you characterize your relationship with the offender prior to the offense? How did you view and /or respond to the offender following the offense?
9. Did you struggle to come to the decision to forgive or was it relatively easy?
10. Was an apology or an expression of remorse by the offender necessary for you to forgive?
11. Did empathy and/or sympathy for the offender play any part in your decision to forgive?
12. If the offender was a stranger did you have the desire to meet with them? If so, why?
13. Did you offer forgiveness to the offender prior to meeting them or afterwards?
14. In what way(s) did you express forgiveness? A letter? Personal visit? Other?
15. Were you supported in your decision to forgive by family members or friends?
16. Did your decision to forgive the offender affect your relationship with family members or friends?

Explanatory

RQ 2 In what ways does forgiveness support the healing process for victims and/or family survivors who have suffered harm associated with acts of violence?

1. In what ways (e.g. physically, psychologically, emotionally, & behaviorally) was your life impacted when you forgave the offender? Or what differences have you noticed in your life as a result of forgiving?

a. Physically;

How did it physically make you feel to forgive? Did you notice any positive physical changes after you forgave? Any change in health conditions?

b. Psychologically;

Did your feelings of anger or the desire for revenge subside after you forgave?

Did you notice a difference in the amount of time you spent thinking about the offense? Nightmares?

Following your offer of forgiveness was there a difference in the way you were able to handle your feelings?

Did you notice a change in your ability to concentrate following forgiveness? Sleep?

c. Emotionally:

How would you describe the way forgiveness made you feel? Did you notice a change in your level of anger, or feelings of anxiety, fear, resentment, and depression? What about the desire for revenge or retribution? Were you calmer?

Guilt/Shame:

Did forgiveness in any way affect your feelings of self-esteem, or provide a sense of empowerment?

d. Behaviorally:

Did you notice anything different about your behavior after you forgave?

2. What did you notice about your desire to participate in the activities of your life following forgiveness?
3. Did forgiveness change your view(s) of the offender?
4. Did you experience a change in perception? An ability to separate the offender from the offense?
5. At any point did you experience feelings of compassion for the offender? What precipitated these feelings? Did compassion play a role in your decision to forgive?
6. Did forgiveness humanize the offender? Were you able in some way to emotionally identify with them or make a human connection as a result of forgiving them?
7. Were feelings of compassion or the making of a human connection necessary for you to forgive the offender?
8. In what ways did forgiveness affect your relationship with the offender?
9. Do you continue to have contact with the offender?
10. What do you consider to be the greatest "gift" you have received as a result of forgiving?
11. Is there anything else you would like to share about this experience and your decision to forgive?

Appendix B.

Terminology

Though forgiveness research has been on the rise over the past twenty years researchers have yet to come to a consensual definition of forgiveness. Forgiveness has been conceptualized as a transformation process, a prosocial change in the victim cognitions, emotions, and behaviors regarding the transgressor (McCullough & vanOyen Witvliet, 2000 p. 447),” a stage-like unfolding of a sequence of events over time”, and something that requires conscious effort (McCullough, et al., 2000, p.8). One main feature that all conceptualizations of forgiveness have in common is “when people forgive, their responses toward people who have offended or injured them become more positive and less negative” (McCullough, et al., 2000, p.9). Thus for the purpose of this study the following definition of forgiveness will be employed:

Forgiveness: Forgiveness involves two people, one of whom has received a deep and long-lasting injury that is either psychological, emotional, physical, or moral in nature; forgiveness is an inner process by which the person who has been injured releases him or herself from the anger, resentment, and fear that are felt and does not wish for revenge (Denton & Martin, 1998, p.284).

Victim: A person who suffers harm or wrongdoing or who perceives this to have happened (Exline & Baumeister, 2000, p.135).

Survivor(s): Surviving family members of homicide victims (Amick-Mcmullan, Kilpatrick, Veronen, Smith, 1988, p.22).

Violent trauma: Extraordinary events that overwhelm the ordinary human adaptations to life such as threats to life or bodily integrity, a close personal encounter with violence or death, or exposure to extreme violence (Herman, 1997, p.33).

Harm: Injury that occurs directly to an individual as a result of physical, mental, sexual or verbal actions or via a secondary mechanism such as the result of harm being done to a friend or relative (Newberg et al., 2000, p.102).

Healing: A voluntary individual process of recovering from harm (Elliott, 2011, p.69).