

**“We can’t just tell the good stories”:  
Reflections on Experiences of Storytelling and  
Restorative Justice**

**by**

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B.Soc.Sc. (Hons.), University of Ottawa, 2012

Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the Degree of  
Master of Arts

in the  
School of Criminology  
Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences

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**SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY**

**Summer 2015**

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## Ethics Statement



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## **Abstract**

This qualitative study examined the experiences of storytellers who publicly share their story of restoration and/or transformation in the aftermath of traumatic violence. In-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with 10 participants. Five participants spoke from a “harmed” perspective (victim), and five participants spoke from a “dual” perspective (offender and victim). Publicly sharing one’s story allows the storyteller to make personal and relational gains by providing opportunities to make sense of the trauma, learn more about themselves and others, and strengthen relationships. Audience feedback informs the storyteller’s perception of how their story influences story-listeners’ views on harm and its resolution. Storytelling is a teaching tool that can invite dialogue and build stronger communities. Sharing the story contributes to the journey past trauma by allowing for the reestablishment of order, connection, and empowerment. The results of this study can inform the practices of storytellers, story-listeners, restorative justice advocates, and may be used by helping professions.

**Keywords:** storytelling, narrative, violence, trauma, restorative justice

## Dedication

*To my participants who shared so much more with me than just interview time. Your kindness, generosity, wisdom, and inspiration will always stay with me.*

## **Acknowledgements**

I would like to extend my deepest gratitude to each person who was interviewed for this project. None of this would have been possible without your help. Thank you for being such an incredible inspiration to me and to so many others.

Thank you to my senior supervisor Dr. Brenda Morrison and to my supervisor Dr. Brian Burtch. I am so grateful for the support, guidance, openness, and understanding you both extended to me over the past three years. I am incredibly fortunate to have had such wonderful mentors on this journey.

I would like to thank Dr. Sheri Fabian and Dr. Ted Palys for the guidance and input given to me during the early stages of planning this project.

Though we never met, Dr. Liz Elliott's work is what inspired me to come study at the Centre for Restorative Justice at SFU. I feel as though I have been able to get to know her through the heartfelt stories shared with me by my participants and those in the SFU community. For this I will always be thankful.

Thank you to my family back in Ottawa, especially my mom and my sister. You are both incredibly inspirational women. Thank you for being my constant source of love and encouragement.

Thank you Jeff, for journeying to Vancouver with me to make my dream a reality. I wouldn't be where I am today without your friendship.

Thank you to my fellow graduate students, in particular to my partners in crime: Alex Flamand, Tanya Miller, Morgan Varis, Tamara Mirilovic, Asad Asadullah, Tania Arvanitidis, and Alana Abramson. I'm so lucky I got to stumble through this degree alongside you.

Finally, thank you Warren, for keeping me sane with your love, friendship, humour, generosity, and encouragement especially during the hardest times of thesis-writing (and life in general!).

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## List of Acronyms

CJS	Criminal Justice System
CRJ	Centre for Restorative Justice
GTRC	Greensboro Truth and Reconciliation Commission
LRP	Life Review Process
RJ	Restorative Justice
SFU	Simon Fraser University
TRC	Truth and Reconciliation Commission

# Chapter 1.

## Introduction

*“Stories are the creative conversion of life itself into a more powerful, clearer, more meaningful experience. They are the currency of human contact.” – Robert McKee<sup>1</sup>*

Stories play a key role in human life, both in traditional and modern societies. The author of the book, *The Storytelling Animal: How Stories Make Us Human*, argues that storytelling is fundamental to human survival, stating that stories provide us with entertainment, instruction, and “help bind us into communities and define us as cultures” (Gottschall, 2013, p. 197). In traditional societies, stories were shared orally as a way of remembering the past and sharing lessons for the future (Atkinson, 1998; Cangelosi & Whitt, 2006; Drees, 2013).

Storytelling is central in modern-day societies as well. We encounter stories as they are told in daily anecdotes, and in more formal channels such as poems, books, news media, plays, television, and movies. Stories can be fact, fiction, or both; as such, they can be based in reality or fantasy or a combination of the two (Brown, 1997; Senehi, 2011). Due to the wide variation in the types of stories that surround us each day, it is important to narrow down what is meant by story, and storytelling, for the purposes of this thesis. This thesis serves to examine the experiences of ten storytellers. These storytellers share oral accounts of their personal first-hand experiences with violent traumatic harm and the journey towards its resolution.

In 2013, there were 383, 945 incidents of violent crime officially reported across Canada (Statistics Canada, 2014). Accounts of such violent crimes can be read or heard daily in news media around the world. In these accounts we not only hear about the details

<sup>1</sup> (Goodreads Inc., 2015a)

of the crime, we also hear about how society, and its institutions, intends to respond to the violence that has occurred. One response to a violent offence is to engage the criminal justice system: the police apprehend the suspect said to be responsible for the incident; the courts will determine guilt or innocence, along with the appropriate punishment; and correctional institutions will dole out the sanctioned punishment (Zehr, 1990; Zehr, 2015). The messages within these stories shape, and are shaped, by the values we hold as a society (Atkinson, 1998; Pranis, 2001). Zehr (1990) has argued that crime news remains one-sided and is “viewed through the eyes of the legal process and its professionals” (p. 58). Media stories about crime present values and lessons surrounding culturally normative notions of what is right, what is wrong, who is good, who is bad, and how we respond to behaviours we deem acceptable or unacceptable. The lessons contained in these day-to-day media stories of violent crime are not necessarily the same lessons found in the stories told by the storytellers interviewed for this study.

The stories shared by those who participated in this research illuminate a different set of values that govern our notions of crime, or harm, and its resolution. These are stories that embody the values and principles of restorative justice (RJ) philosophy and processes, as opposed to those found in a criminal justice paradigm. Piper Kerman (2011), author of the bestselling memoir, *Orange is the New Black: My Year in a Women's Prison*, notes the lack of restorative justice opportunities available in the current correctional system, saying that criminal justice is about “revenge and retribution, all day and all night. Then its overseers wonder why people leave prison more broken than when they went in” (pp. 180-181). Restorative justice allows for opportunities to heal, rather than perpetuating the cycle of harm.

Restorative justice, much like storytelling, is not a new practice. It “is an old idea with a new name” (Centre for Restorative Justice [CRJ], 2012, “Restorative Justice Home”; see also Pranis, 2005). A restorative justice lens takes us to a personal and relational level; that is, crime is seen as “a violation of people and relationships” rather than “a violation of the state” (Zehr, 1990, p. 181). RJ presents an alternative way of thinking about crime and conflict, shifting the focus from the offender getting “what they deserve” through punishment, toward a focus on the needs of victims, offenders, and communities who will then inform how to best repair the harm done (Zehr, 2002a, p. 18; see also Zehr, 2015).

Elliott (2011) states that both systems, criminal justice and restorative justice, “focus on storytelling. The tension between these two paradigms comes in how the storytelling occurs” (p. 95). In a criminal justice process, detached third-party professionals recount the story of what occurred in terms of facts and evidence; while in a restorative justice process the stories are told first-hand by those who experienced the harm directly. We find stories at the core of RJ: “[r]estorative processes, by their nature, encourage the sharing of stories; stories of trauma, stories of empowerment, stories of deeply felt emotion and community” (Smith & Egan, 2010a, p. 8). Stories are told as part of the process of reaching an RJ resolution, and can later be used as part of educating others about RJ philosophy and practices.

Susan L. Miller (2011) observes that it is “...common for advocates of restorative justice programs to highlight emotionally gripping stories of transformation to demonstrate its qualitatively distinctive approach to healing and justice” (p. 159). An example of such storytelling can be found in the work done by *The Forgiveness Project*. This UK based charity holds a collection of stories from around the world meant to “explore how ideas around forgiveness, reconciliation and conflict resolution can be used to impact positively on people’s lives, through the personal testimonies of both victims and perpetrators of crime and violence” (The Forgiveness Project, 2015, “About Us”). The Centre for Restorative Justice (CRJ) at Simon Fraser University (SFU) also provides an online forum “for individuals to share their stories of restoration” (CRJ, 2012, “Stories of Courage and Compassion”). These stories can move us in our own assumptions about our world,

When we tell stories about personal transformation from victim to survivor and from offender to contributing citizen, we are painting a vision of a world in which there is hope, a world in which the human capacity for renewal and change can overcome enormous pain and difficulty (Pranis, 2001, p. 8).

Both online spaces hold these stories with the intention of creating awareness, teaching through story, and allowing others to begin conversations about conflict and its transformation.

In learning about restorative justice, I found first-hand accounts of restorative justice meetings between victim and offender to be one of the more effective and

interesting ways to demonstrate the power and possibility of restorative justice philosophy and practice. When I was a teaching assistant for Restorative Justice (CRIM 315) at SFU, I saw the impact of storytelling on undergraduate students. During lectures, students heard stories of crime and its restorative resolution told first-hand by those who experienced the events directly, as either a victim or offender. In tutorials, students most often referred to, and reflected on, the stories told by guest speakers. As part of their final assignment, students were asked to write a letter to someone who has influenced their thinking about criminal justice. It is the storytellers who speak to the class who consistently receive the most letters year after year. Knowing that these stories are often used by restorative justice teachers and advocates, and knowing the impact storytelling has had on myself and my students, this research project is designed to investigate the complementary part of the interaction: the storyteller's point of view.

In this study I explore the storyteller's experience of sharing their personal story of restoration or transformation. Two research questions will be addressed:

(1) Has publicly sharing one's story of restoration and/or transformation in the aftermath of traumatic violence influenced the storyteller over time?

(2) In turn, how does the storyteller experience the impact of their story on the audiences and communities who hear the story?

The purpose of the study is to provide further insight into the value of storytelling by examining the motivations and benefits of sharing one's story publicly, learning about the challenges that can arise, contributing to knowledge regarding safe practices in using storytelling as a part of restorative justice advocacy or studies, and complementing existing literature on storytelling through empirical analysis.

In Chapter 2, the literature on RJ and storytelling is reviewed. First, I provide foundational information on restorative justice philosophy and practices, comparing RJ to criminal justice; then discussing RJ in its own right. Second, I examine storytelling literature as it relates to the storyteller and story-listener. Topics explored include trauma, ontological security, narrative processes, transformative learning, and community building.



Chapter 3 outlines the methodological procedures undertaken for this study including participant recruitment, ethical considerations, and qualitative data collection and analysis methods. This research is situated within a phenomenological tradition and constructivist ontological position. Lastly, my role as the researcher is examined to outline my background and biases.

Chapter 4 presents themes that emerged from the interviews. The chapter is divided along the lines of the two research questions. First, I examine how storytelling affects the storyteller's identity and relationships; then, I discuss how the storyteller perceives the impact of their story on their listeners. Chapter 5 provides a detailed analysis of the results from Chapter 4, and places the themes of this study into the broader context of the literature on storytelling, restorative justice, trauma, and transformative learning. We see how storytelling can move individuals through their journeys past trauma, and how listeners and communities may also be changed in the sharing. Finally, Chapter 6 concludes the work by outlining a list of recommendations for storytellers and those hosting storytellers, discussing the limitations of this study, and offering a range of directions for future research.

This research study fills a gap by being one of the first studies to empirically look at the experiences of storytellers in the context of restorative justice. The findings of the project contribute to restorative justice goals of community building through illuminating the potential of storytelling to impact personal and relational changes for storytellers and the communities who hear the story. The results of this study can inform the practices of storytellers, story-listeners, and restorative justice advocates and they may be used by other helping professions such as social work or counseling.

## Chapter 2.

### Literature Review

#### 2.1. What is Restorative Justice?

*“Round and round the circle  
Completing the charm  
So the knot be unknotted  
The cross be uncrossed  
The crooked be made straight  
And the curse be ended”*

- (T.S. Eliot, 1939, p. 131)

This section is divided into two parts. The first part will discuss restorative justice (RJ) in context of the mainstream criminal justice system. The second part will examine RJ in its own right, and explain the definition of restorative justice used for this thesis.

##### 2.1.1. Comparing Criminal Justice and Restorative Justice

In North America, the mainstream criminal justice system routinely takes a retributive approach (Elliott, 2011; Wenzel, Okimoto, Feather, & Platow, 2008; Zehr, 1990; Zehr 2015). The *Criminal Code of Canada* defines which acts are criminal offences. The direct victims of the criminal act often play a limited role in criminal justice proceedings, as “the state takes the place of victims” (Zehr, 2002a, p. 14; see also Zehr, 1990). When a person who has been accused of committing a crime is apprehended, they go through the court system. The courts establish guilt, and subsequently assign the appropriate punishment (Zehr, 1990; Zehr, 2015). In a retributive system, justice is accomplished through “the offender getting what they deserve” in response to the crime they committed (Zehr, 2002a, p. 21; see also Zehr, 1990). While acknowledging the strengths of this system, those who advocate for restorative justice have found that the current criminal justice system “[tends] to leave the needs of victims, perpetrators and communities unmet and leave the harm caused by wrongdoing unrepaired” (Johnstone & Van Ness, 2006, p. xxi).

Restorative justice is an approach that can address the limitations of the criminal justice system. RJ takes the view that “crime is a violation of people and relationships” (Zehr, 2002a, p. 21). Some scholars argue for a “conceptual shift from ‘crime’ to ‘harm’” that can allow us to address a greater range of wrongful acts, beyond just those defined in law (Elliott, 2011, p. 77). RJ allows for greater participation from those who have been harmed, those who have committed the harm, as well as the broader community who has been affected by the harm. Harm is repaired by directly addressing victims’ needs, holding the offender responsible, and inviting active participation of others affected by the harm, for example, community members (Marshall, 2003; Zehr, 1990, Zehr, 2002a; Zehr 2015). This is accomplished through a number of different restorative practices, for example, victim-offender mediation, community conferencing, and sentencing circles (Dandurand & Griffiths, 2006).

Zehr (2002a; see also Zehr, 2015) contrasts criminal justice with restorative justice by laying out different types of questions asked by each (p. 21).

**Table 1. “Three Different Questions” (Zehr, 2002a, p. 21)**

<b>Criminal Justice</b>	<b>Restorative Justice</b>
What laws have been broken?	Who has been hurt?
Who did it?	What are their needs?
What do they deserve?	Whose obligations are these?

Contrasting the two justice responses is a helpful starting point to allow us to understand the similarities and differences between the two “[making] the difficult job of explaining an unfamiliar concept much easier” (Roche, 2011, p. 77). However, it should be acknowledged that this is a simplification of both justice responses. The next section elaborates on restorative justice separate from criminal justice comparisons.

### **2.1.2. Restorative Justice**

It is challenging to provide a single definition of restorative justice (Daly, 2006; Elliott, 2011; Johnstone & Van Ness, 2006; Zehr, 2002a). RJ can be considered a set “philosophies, principles, theories, practices, and programs” (Elliott, 2011, p. 66). It is a perspective through which we conceptualize and resolve situations of conflict (Elliott,

2011). These situations are not restricted to crime; restorative resolutions may occur at school, in the workplace, or at home (Elliott, 2011). Restorative justice processes are concerned with how stakeholders decide upon resolution (Zehr, 1990). RJ processes “are collaborative and inclusive and, to the extent possible, outcomes that are mutually agreed upon rather than imposed [are preferred]” (Zehr, 2002a, p. 25). A process that accomplishes this is one that is guided by the values and principles of restorative justice.

RJ is based around a set of values that help guide us in our responses to conflict (Elliott, 2011; Pranis, 2011). Such values include, but are not limited to: accountability, compassion, empathy, equality, healing, honesty, inclusion, interconnectedness, love, participation, particularity, reconciliation, reparation, and respect (Pranis, Stuart, & Wedge, 2003; Pranis, 2011; Zehr, 1990; Zehr, 2002a). Zehr (2002a) identified five RJ principles that must be rooted in these values, especially in the value of respect. These principles include, “focusing on harms and needs”; “addressing obligations”; “using inclusive, collaborative processes”; “involving stakeholders”; and, “putting right the wrongs” (Zehr, 2002a, p. 33).

Johnstone and Van Ness (2011) outline three different conceptions of restorative justice: encounter, reparative, and transformative. These three conceptions overlap, but differ in “where the emphasis is placed” (Johnstone & Van Ness, 2011, p. 17). The encounter conception emphasizes the opportunity for victim, offender, and other stakeholders to meet and discuss how to move forward after harm has occurred. The reparative conception emphasizes repairing the harm. Repairing the harm can be accomplished through an encounter process, but there is acknowledgement that a meeting is not always possible and reparation may occur in other ways.

The transformative conception sees restorative justice as a lifestyle, or way of being. It emphasizes a transformation in worldview wherein we understand ourselves as “inextricably connected to and identifiable with other beings and the ‘external’ world” (Johnstone & Van Ness, 2011, p. 15). It is a worldview that recognizes we are all connected and facilitates greater opportunity for understanding, empathy, and lasting resolution within and among ourselves (Johnstone & Van Ness, 2011). The transformative conception of restorative justice is the broadest conception and resonates most strongly

with the goals and outcomes of storytelling. Storytelling contributes to building relationships, empathy, and mutual understanding. In this way, storytelling moves us toward a more transformative worldview by highlighting the connections and commonalities that exist between ourselves and our world.

## **2.2. Storytelling**

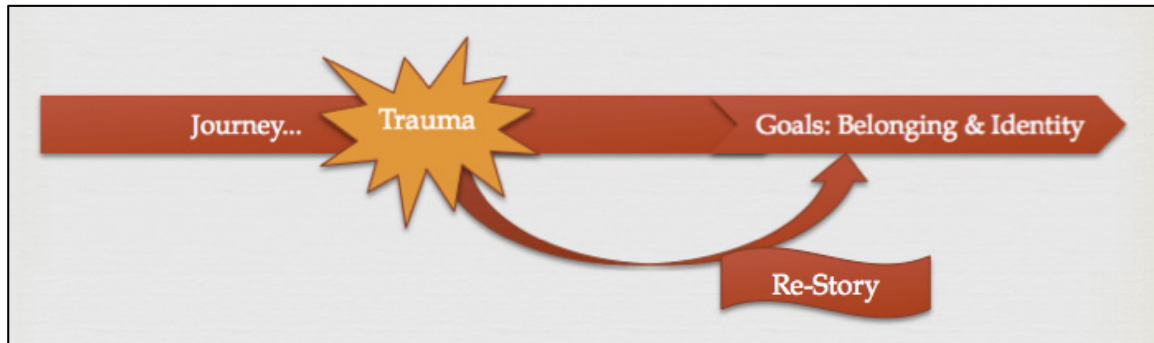
Storytelling is a “form of narrative” (Hill Bailey & Tilley, 2002, p. 576). There are a number of different types of storytelling. The types of stories we share can be folktales, cultural stories, or stories of personal experience (Brown, 1997). Stories can be based in fact, fiction, or a mix of the two (Senehi, 2011). We can share stories with others through speech, written work, performance, or visual arts.

Destructive and constructive storytelling are distinctive (Milojevic & Izgarjan, 2013; Senehi, 2011). Senehi (2011) explains, “Destructive storytelling is associated with coercive power (“power over” rather than “power with”), exclusionary practices, a lack of mutual recognition, dishonesty, and a lack of awareness” (p. 45). Propaganda can be one example of destructive storytelling. Constructive storytelling, on the other hand, “is inclusive and fosters collaborative power and mutual recognition; creates opportunities for openness, dialogue and insight; a means to bring issues to consciousness; and a means of resistance ... [it] builds understanding and awareness, and fosters voice” (Senehi, 2011, p. 45). Restorative justice facilitates sharing constructive stories; such stories may include topics of trauma, empowerment, emotion and community (Smith & Egan, 2010a).

### **2.2.1. Ontological Security: Journey toward Belonging; Journey toward Identity**

Zehr (2002b) makes the link between belonging, identity, and storytelling. He uses the metaphor of a journey, where each person is travelling toward the goal of belonging. The journey to belonging occurs in close conjunction with a journey to identity, where identity is conceptualized as “in relationships to others” (Zehr, 2002b, p. 21). Identity can be seen as “socially constructed and constantly re-constructed through stories that we tell, the stories that others tell of us, and the situations and relationships in which we find

ourselves” (Etherington, 2008, p. 48). When a person experiences trauma, as either victim or offender, they must make the journeys to belonging and identity again, “almost as if [they] were starting over” (Zehr, 2002b, p. 22).



**Figure 1. Journeys to Belonging and Identity (adapted from Zehr, 2002b)**

The journey relates to the concept of ontological security. Ontological security is present when an individual carries a sense of order and continuity surrounding their life events (Danermark & Moller, 2008; Giddens, 1991; Kay, 2012; Stanisevski, 2011). Ontological security “focuses on the security of oneself, one’s identity, and group affiliation” (Kay, 2012, p. 236). With this definition we can see the link to identity and belonging. Four pieces are important for an individual to feel ontologically secure: trust, continuity, routines, and predictability (Danermark & Moller, 2008). When these aspects of our lives are lacking, ontological security is threatened.

When we experience wrongdoing or conflict, we may also experience trauma (Zehr, 2008). Smith and Egan (2010a) define trauma as a “psychological or emotional injury caused by a deeply disturbing experience, and the effects from this wounding are often long-lasting” (p. 41). The intensity of a potentially traumatic experience depends on the type of harm and an “individual’s capacity ... to ‘handle’ the harm” (Elliott, 2011, p. 173). The psychological effects of trauma disrupt not only how we understand ourselves, “but also ... the systems of attachment and meaning that link individual and community” (Herman, 2001, p. 51). Traumatic experiences disrupt one’s sense of self and identity, relationships and attachment to others, and assumptions about the world (Danermark & Moller, 2008; Herman, 2001; Etherington, 2008; Westwood & McLean, 2007; Zehr, 2002b). Put simply, the effects of trauma involve disorder, disempowerment, and disconnection (Herman, 2001; Westwood & McLean, 2007; Zehr, 2002b). These effects

culminate in a violation of trust, continuity, routines, and predictability; therefore, threatening our sense of ontological security (Danermark & Moller, 2008).

Journeys to identity and belonging require recreation of meaning surrounding the experience to transform “stories of humiliation and shame into stories of dignity and courage” (Zehr, 2002b, p. 25). Storytelling contributes to working through trauma by facilitating movement towards order, empowerment, and connection; and ultimately ontological security through allowing a restoration of trust, continuity, routine, and predictability.

## **2.2.2. Influence of Sharing on the Storyteller**

*“Story is central to human understanding – it makes life livable, because without a story, there is no identity, no self, no other” (Lewis, 2011, p. 505).*

### **2.2.2.1 Order and Identity through Story and Narrative Processes**

Storytelling is a way to infuse meaning, order, and understanding into a particular experience (Atkinson, 1998; Etherington, 2008; Hill Bailey & Tilley, 2002; Lewis, 2011, Pranis, 2002; Shuman, 2005). Putting a critical life experience into story format allows us to examine the past, present, and future and see the event as a coherent and manageable whole (Gardner & Poole, 2009; Pennebaker & Seagal, 1999; Senehi, 2011). Weegman (2010) states that “stories are building blocks for identity” (p. 30) as such, when we story and re-story the meaning surrounding our experiences we also come to a deeper understanding of who we are and where we belong. In simplest terms, our identities are shaped by the stories we tell about ourselves, our experiences, and our world (Etherington, 2008; Kroth & Cranton, 2014; Weegman, 2010).

In understanding story as a strategy for meaning-making, the significance of narrative processes have been illustrated in many ways: narrative psychology, narrative therapy, narrative identity, and the life review process (LRP).

Narrative psychology illustrates that people make sense of their lived experiences through constructing stories, or narratives (Etherington, 2008; Pennebaker & Seagal, 1999; Sarbin, 1986). Likewise, Gardner and Poole (2009) note, “storytelling is at the root

of narrative therapy” (p. 616). In this approach, an individual is guided to develop a descriptive story surrounding different aspects of their life events in an effort to make sense of their experiences (Gardner & Poole, 2009; Pennebaker & Seagal, 1999; Weegman, 2010). A narrative therapy process can occur one-on-one, or within a group context:

Narrative therapy is especially suited to group formats where members present themselves on their own terms, sharing personal testimonials and experiencing relief and acceptance as a supportive audience listens, bears witness, and provides validation (Androff, 2012, p. 39).

Making sense of the experience involves finding meaning, or purpose, behind an event that does not fit within our dominant view of ourselves and our world. Finding meaning can occur in two ways: sense-making and benefit-finding (Davis, Nolen-Hoeksema, & Larson, 1998; Gillies & Neimeyer, 2006; Holland, Currier, & Neimeyer, 2006; Richardson, 2015). *Sense-making* refers to the “ability to develop a relatively benign explanation for loss, make sense of it within their existing fundamental schemas or worldviews” (Davis et al., 1998, p. 563). *Benefit-finding* refers to an individual’s ability to find the “positive implications” (Davis et al., 1998, p. 561) or the “silver-lining” (Holland, et al., 2006, p. 176) within the traumatic experience. Both processes are accomplished through narratives or storytelling (Richardson, 2015).

Empirical research on narrative approaches with older adults (Gardner & Poole, 2009; Westwood & McLean, 2007), individuals struggling with addiction (Etherington, 2008; Gardner & Poole, 2009; Weegman, 2010), and students (Pennebaker & Seagal, 1999) has shown that when people put emotional or distressing events into words, whether written or spoken, there are improvements to mental and physical health, as well as positive changes in problematic behaviour and thought patterns. When we put emotional or traumatic experiences into language, we are better equipped to explain and understand the experience (Gardner & Poole, 2009; Pennebaker & Seagal, 1999; Weegman, 2010). A deeper understanding of the experience allows people to revisit what happened to them and contributes to the ability to move forward (Androff, 2012; Gardner & Poole, 2009; McAdams & McLean, 2013; Pennebaker & Seagal, 1999).



Research on narrative therapy and addictions has found that telling personal stories about experiences with drug use and misuse can help individuals who have not yet recovered from addiction by allowing them to conceive of alternative ways to see the problem, thereby opening up the new routes to overcome the addiction (Weegman, 2010, p. 33). Individuals who are in recovery also benefit from narrative: story illuminates both the hardships and successes on the road to recovery, which increases understanding of the connections between past experiences and drug use (Etherington, 2008; Weegman, 2010).

When we understand ourselves and our experiences, it makes the world appear more predictable and controllable (Pennebaker & Seagal, 1999). Re-establishing predictability and control contributes to the creation of order and continuity in our lives. Feeling as though we have control over the events in our lives is also a feature of re-establishing a sense of empowerment. These features of narrative allow us to create a stronger sense of identity and know where we belong; this contributes to our state of ontological security.

McAdams and McLean (2013) explain the concept of a narrative identity, that is, “a person’s internalized and evolving life story, integrating the reconstructed past and imagined future to provide life with some degree of unity and purpose” (p. 233). In an examination of empirical research on narrative identity, McAdams and McLean (2013) found that individuals who are encouraged to construct positive narratives surrounding life’s hardships see improvements in “mental health, well-being, and maturity” (p. 234). Narrating negative life experiences allows individuals to make sense of who they are in relation to the world (McAdams & McLean, 2013). When we learn through story, we begin to form “a new identity consistent with a new story which might lead to resolution of conflicts in our lives” (Pranis, 2002, p. 5). Constructing narratives allows individuals to make sense of traumatic events that contribute to disempowerment and disconnection therefore increasing their capacities to move forward through the trauma.

Narrative identity re-construction has shown to be successful with aiding offender rehabilitation (Maruna, 2001; Ward & Marshall, 2007). Looking at the connection between desistance from crime and narrative identity, Maruna (2001) explains, “If such an

enormous life transformation is to be believed, the person needs a coherent narrative to explain and justify this turnaround” (p. 85). The story must convince both the former offender themselves, as well other stakeholders (for example family members or correctional staff). The author goes on to find that this new narrative identity must develop gradually and remain somehow connected to the past identity. This means “connecting past experiences to the present in such a way that the present good seems an almost inevitable outcome” (Maruna, 2001, p. 87). In this way, the general stability of an individual’s sense of self remains intact, while also “protect[ing] the person from becoming overwhelmed with shame regarding his or her past self” (Maruna, 2001, p. 87). A model of rehabilitation has been proposed which facilitates an offender’s ability to engage in “the construction of an adaptive narrative identity” that presents “someone who is socially responsive and a committed citizen” (Ward & Marshall, 2007, p. 295). This type of reconstruction is thought to better aid the individual’s ability to pursue a pro-social life upon their release (Ward & Marshall, 2007).

Westwood and McLean (2007) have employed the life review process (LRP) in the context of trauma and older adults. LRP “offers a relatively safe and effective means for older adults to integrate traumatic memories into their larger life story” (Westwood & McLean, 2007, p. 183). Individuals write their story of trauma, and subsequently share the story with others, either one-on-one or in a group. Past studies on life review have found benefits for older adults, including feelings of empowerment, increased self-esteem, connection to others, increased feelings of purpose and meaning, as well as reduction of symptoms of depression and anxiety (Brown-Shaw, Westwood & De Vries, 1999; Korte, Bohlmeijer, & Smit, 2009; Pinguart & Forstmeier, 2012; Pot, Bohlmeijer, Onrust, Melenhorst, Veerbeek, & De Vries, 2010; Westwood & McLean, 2007).

On a larger scale, we find benefits of narrative processes for victims of violence when sharing their stories in a Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) context. The Greensboro Truth and Reconciliation Commission (GTRC) took place in 2004, and a final report was published in 2006 (Androff, 2012). The Greensboro Massacre of 1979 was perpetrated by the Klu Klux Klan and the American Nazi Party when the groups shot at a “racially mixed group of labor union activists during a demonstration” killing five and injuring ten (Androff, 2012, p. 38). Subsequent injustices occurred in the aftermath of this

event, with the media presenting a distorted view of the victims framing them as agitators, and with the perpetrators being acquitted despite video evidence of the attack.

Androff (2012) conducted interviews with 17 individuals who had participated in the GTRC. Although some participants noted feeling anxious or emotional before, during, and after sharing at the TRC, most reported that sharing was a “positive and cathartic healing experience” (Androff, 2012, p. 42). The experience allowed them to understand themselves in relation to the events that had occurred and reflect on the past). The large scale and public nature of the TRC also left participants feeling validated and listened to. Two participants shared negative aspects of their experience, which included feeling rushed during their testimony, and dissatisfaction with the interviewer who had guided their sharing (Androff, 2012). A safe space and respectful audience were key elements in contributing to a healing experience. However, “storytelling and testifying is not therapy” though it may yield similar benefits, it may not necessarily lead to healing (Androff, 2012, p. 40).

In the context of therapeutic and justice interventions, a professional typically facilitates the construction and re-construction of personal story surrounding lived experiences. Richardson (2015) studied storytelling experiences outside of a professionally facilitated setting. She examined the “perceived benefits of sharing one’s personal story of trauma and loss with a public audience” through interviewing volunteer docents, that is, tour guides working at the 9/11 Tribute Walking Tour Program at the World Trade Center Visitor Center (Richardson, 2015, p. 22). Prominent themes included the rewards of interacting with and educating visitors, sense-making, and benefit-finding. Sense-making was accomplished through participants’ ability to find meaning and gain new understandings of the event. Benefit-finding involved being “able to see the ‘good’ in the world” and move forward with their lives (Richardson, 2015, p. 30).

Some restorative justice participants choose to share their story with others without professional facilitation. Jenkins’ (2012) research examined the role of forgiveness in the healing journey of victims of traumatic violence. Analyzing the behavioural impacts of forgiveness, she found “the decision to forgive opened the door to positive transformational experiences” (Jenkins, 2012, p. 131). Storytelling emerged as a

behavioural change that resulted from the act of forgiveness; this change “had to do with the way [the participants] now choose to live their lives in order to create meaning and purpose” (Jenkins, 2012, p. 131). All 14 participants in the study shared their story publicly. Sharing the story with others allowed them to make meaning out of the traumatic experience by teaching others, creating space to discuss forgiveness, and advocating for social justice issues (Jenkins, 2012).

Noting the value of storytelling in restorative justice contexts, Smith and Egan (2010a) developed a guide for people who are considering sharing their story publicly, and for those who support and host the storyteller. Through narrative interviews with storytellers, the authors examined the reasons for sharing their story and offered “cautions and concerns” for prospective storytellers (Smith & Egan, 2010a, p.49).

The interviewees stated that part of the reason to share their stories was to bring “some good” out of a traumatic experience; along with personal growth and a willingness to be an inspiration for others (Smith & Egan, 2010a, p. 50). The storytellers highlighted the need for self-care when sharing themselves and their emotional experiences. They explained the importance being able to speak effectively to individuals from various backgrounds and of being aware of who the audience is. Knowing your audience is key for a number of reasons. Interviewees wanted to be able to tailor the messages contained within their story so that it would be relevant to the particular audience. Additionally, the way they tell the story may be affected by audience qualities, such as age or religion. Finally, when sharing, there is an recognition of the reality of “the potential for creating vulnerabilities in [the] audience ... as a result of [the audience’s] life experiences” (Smith & Egan, 2010a, p. 56). Knowing who the audience is informs the storyteller on how best to approach their speaking engagement.

Participants emphasized the importance of having supportive individuals with them at their storytelling presentations, for example, having someone “to debrief with afterwards” (Smith & Egan, 2010a, p. 54). The storytellers acknowledged that as they change and grow, there might come a point when they will choose not to share the story anymore. The decision to cease sharing may be a result of changing personal needs, burn out due to the emotional toll of storytelling, no longer wanting to be seen in the “role of

‘victim’ in a public way”, or simply feeling as though they no longer want or need to share the story (Smith & Egan, 2010a, p. 55). Smith and Egan’s (2010a) interviewees raised a number of important issues that must be considered when stories are shared publicly.

#### **2.2.2.1.1 Identity, Belonging, and the Listener**

In understanding the link between identity and belonging, we need to consider the role of those listening to the story. Story-listeners play an important role in co-creating meaning and connection and contribute to identity co-construction. With each iteration, stories “need compassionate listeners to hear and to validate their truths (Zehr, 2002b, p. 25). As well as listening, feedback from listeners can have a corresponding influence on the storyteller: “the listener’s reactions, questions, and comments then have a reciprocal impact on the storyteller. Thus the original meaning and understanding of the story evolves into something new” (Kunz & Soltys, 2007, p. ix). Taking the personal story into the public realm contributes to further growth and development by creating opportunities for new understandings and avenues for exploration (Brown-Shaw et al., 1999; Kunz & Soltys, 2007).

We construct identities in our interactions with others (Soltys & Kunz, 2007). McAdams & McLean (2013) emphasize the importance of listeners in reference to developing narrative identity, “[t]hrough repeated interactions with others, stories about personal experience are processed, edited, reinterpreted, retold, and subjected to a range of social and discursive influences, as the storyteller gradually develops a broader and more integrative narrative identity” (p. 235). Telling a personal story about trauma requires an individual to be vulnerable. It is when the inner walls are taken down, and we receive “love and compassion” in return, that we will belong (Zehr, 2002b, p. 30). As such, respectful listeners in safe spaces are necessary for storytelling to occur in a productive way that will not result in more harm (Androff, 2012; Pranis, 2002; Zehr, 2002b). To maintain safety and avoid causing further harm, a respectful listener is someone who will acknowledge, validate, affirm, and hear the truth contained in the story (Zehr, 1990). Feelings of belonging develop when sharing in groups as “telling one’s story promotes a sense of knowing and being known and leads to social inclusion” (Gardner & Poole, 2009, p. 616; see also Soltys & Kunz, 2007). Having the story respectfully listened to reinforces

the truth of the story, creates acceptance among others, and contributes to the journey toward belonging (Zehr, 2002b).

### ***2.2.2.2 Listening as Empowerment***

Toews & Zehr (2003) explain that, “Talking is power ... As a result, those who talk control reality and the interpretation of the world around us” (p.259). Those who hold power in society are in a position to talk, that is, to articulate and interpret major events that have taken place. In our criminal justice system, it is “experts” who control the description of a criminal event, rather than those who experienced the event directly (Toews & Zehr, 2003, p. 260). Throughout the process we find police, lawyers, judges, expert witnesses, and other professionals emphasizing which aspect of the criminal event, or story, are relevant to the considerations of how to resolve crime and move forward (Toews & Zehr, 2003). In the criminal justice context, the focus is centered on the facts of the case with the aim of determining guilt or innocence of the accused; rather than establishing meaning and truth as it pertains to those directly involved in the case.

In addition to the criminal justice process, especially in high profile cases, news media tell the story publicly. Media outlets, therefore, are able to control which aspects of the story are emphasized or de-emphasized for public consumption. Those “who have suffered often see the media appropriations of their stories as a problem of representation” where the account of the event is being presented inaccurately by people who did not directly experience it (Shuman, 2005, p. 24). Victims and offenders, therefore, have limited opportunities for their version of events to be heard within the public context of the criminal justice system and the media.

In Western culture, those in power are those who are most often listened to; therefore, “[listening] respectfully to a person’s story is to honor that person’s intrinsic worth and to empower him/her in a constructive way” (Pranis, 2002, p. 9). Androff (2012) noted that in the public setting of the TRC participants felt validated through being treated with respect by the audience and organizers and having their stories heard and acknowledged publicly. Taking back ownership of one’s own story and having others listen respectfully is an empowering experience, especially in light of the fact that in cases of violent crime, we tend to only hear accounts from experts and professionals. In this way,

storytelling is contributing to moving through trauma by facilitating the movement from disempowerment to empowerment as a function of being listened to.

### **2.2.2.3 *Maintaining Safety in Storytelling***

When sharing in groups, maintaining safety is important for the process to be positive, rather than harmful.

One of the most important responsibilities of facilitators of processes of sharing personal narratives is the creation of a safe, respectful space for all participants. Storytelling can engage people on many levels – emotional, spiritual and mental, so the safety of space needs to address emotional, spiritual and mental safety as well as physical safety (Pranis, 2002, p. 9; see also Androff, 2012).

Facilitators of story-sharing processes hold the responsibility to create safe and non-judgmental spaces for all those involved, both storyteller and listener, “[s]torytelling without respect can do further harm” (Pranis, 2002, p. 9). It is also important that the story-listeners honour the storyteller’s intentions for what happens with the story that has been told, “either sharing [the story] widely or holding [it] close” (Smith & Egan, 2010b, p. 6). Restorative justice processes create safe spaces for dialogue to occur (Braithwaite, 2002; Braithwaite, 2006; Pranis, 2005; Pranis et al., 2003; Zehr, 1990; Zehr, 2002a). In sharing stories of trauma and restoration, we can maintain safe spaces through adhering to restorative values and processes, which emphasize respect, collaboration, and inclusivity (Zehr, 2002a).

### **2.2.2.4 *Transformative Learning through Story***

A link emerges between narrative processes, such as life review or storytelling, and transformative learning theory (Brown-Shaw et al., 1999; Tyler & Swartz, 2012). Tyler and Swartz (2012) explain “storytelling is a social process that can foster transformative learning” for both the storyteller and the story-listener (p. 455). This section focuses on transformative learning that occurs for the storyteller.

Transformative learning is a theory of adult learning wherein “the process of learning through critical self-reflection, which results in the reformulation of a meaning perspective to allow a more inclusive, discriminating, and integrative understanding of

one's experience. Learning includes acting on these insights" (Mezirow, 1990, p. xvi). Transformative learning can be triggered by a disorienting dilemma (Kroth & Cranton, 2014; Mezirow, 2000). A disorienting dilemma is a situation that calls into question our basic worldviews, such as the death of a loved one (Kroth & Cranton, 2014). The harm that occurred in stories of traumatic violence can be considered the disorienting dilemma that sparks transformative learning.

In Section 2.2.2.1, we saw that storytelling is a way of understanding and making meaning out of a life experience (Atkinson, 1998; Pranis, 2002). Narrating the story offers opportunity for critical self-reflection where the storyteller is able to reconstruct his or her ideas surrounding who they are and where they belong, in the aftermath of what happened to them. We have also discussed the role of the listener, and the influence of audience feedback in Section 2.2.2.1.1. The reactions and questions from the listeners have a reciprocal impact on the storyteller, which then allows the story to further grow and develop (Kunz & Soltys, 2007). Audience feedback, therefore, offers more opportunities for critical self-reflection necessary to transformative learning.

Mezirow's theory holds that learning is a process that involves reinterpreting the meaning of past experiences and reassessing one's assumptions (Mezirow, 2000). When sharing stories in safe spaces, we can engage in transformative learning as it creates an "opportunity for exploration of experience" (Tyler & Swartz, 2012, p. 460). The cycle of sharing the story and receiving feedback time after time is a process that is always offering space for transformative learning to occur for the storyteller.

### **2.2.3. Influence of Sharing on the Story-listeners**

*"The purpose of a storyteller is not to tell you how to think, but to give you questions to think upon." – Brandon Sanderson<sup>2</sup>*

#### **2.2.3.1 Learning through Story**

Storytelling is a teaching tool (Atkinson, 1998; Cangelosi & Whitt, 2006; Drees, 2013; Pranis, 2001). It is "the oldest form of education other than learning by experience"

<sup>2</sup> (Goodreads Inc., 2015b)



(Shannon, 1979, p. 50; see also Cangelosi & Whitt, 2006). In exploring story as teaching with Aboriginal storytellers, Drees (2013) found that stories contain lessons and invite a learning process, “[p]eople share their personal experiences for the benefit of others” (p. xxiii). Storytelling offers us a different way of learning and engaging with the lessons presented in the story. Storytelling engages “storyteller and listener at both cognitive and emotional levels intensifying the impact of the information shared” (Pranis, 2001, p. 7). Through sharing our stories we teach others about societal values, morals, wisdom, and expectations (Atkinson, 1998; Drees, 2013; Gardner & Poole, 2009; Pranis, 2001; Sorenson, 2012).

### **2.2.3.1.1 Transformative Learning & the Affective Domain**

Transformative learning may occur for the story-listener who may: “incorporate the storyteller’s experience into their own knowledge, and their thinking evolves. This may stimulate a variety of emotions and reactions that lead them to change” (Kunz & Soltys, 2007, p. ix). When there is safe space provided for group reflections and dialogue, it allows those who listen to the story to engage in meaning making as well (Shapiro, Wasserman, & Gallegos, 2012). When a listener hears another person’s story they are reminded that they are not alone: “stories change us; they make us share” (Drees, 2013, p. xxiii). Some storytelling can purposefully offer the listener a disorienting dilemma (Kroth & Cranton, 2014). Through inviting connection, emotion, and critical thinking, storytelling can trigger a transformative learning process in the listener. Emotional engagement of the listener is emphasized:

Storytelling not only organizes information but it delivers information in a way that opens the listener. When information is presented cognitively or asserted we immediately engage a screening device to determine whether we agree or disagree. The information is screened before entering us. We immediately begin thinking about how we will respond. We are primarily engaged mentally. Storytelling takes us to a different kind of listening. The body relaxes, settles back, is more open and less anxious. We take in the story before screening the content. We are engaged emotionally as well as mentally. This different kind of listening allows information to be exchanged more thoroughly leading to much greater understanding between people (Pranis, 2001, p. 7).

Senehi (2011) sees storytelling as a catalyst for transformation. She explains that storytelling presents information “but gains added power through the emotional impact of

the story that is sensed and felt by participants” (Senehi, 2011, p.52). The emotional engagement that occurs in storytelling engages the affective domain of learning.

In Bloom’s taxonomy there are three domains of learning: cognitive, psychomotor, and affective (Ferris, 2010; Ringess, 1975). The cognitive domain refers to what we traditionally would consider “intellectual activity” such as reading, writing, memorization, or mathematical problem solving (Ringness, 1975, p. 5; see also Ferris, 2010). The psychomotor domain has to do with the physical, for example, arts, athletics, or other “hands-on work” in learning (Ferris, 2010, p. 9). The affective domain “relates to values, attitudes and behaviours and involves the learner emotionally” (Shephard, 2007, p. 88). Emphasis is placed on the value of using teaching strategies that include both the cognitive realm and the affective realm to encourage deeper engagement with the lessons taught (Jagger, 2013; Shephard, 2007).

### **2.2.3.2 Change within Ourselves and our Relationships: Engagement in our Communities**

Moving from the discussion of the impacts of emotion on learning and the power of transformative learning processes, we can now make the link to individual, relational, and community change. In his 2003 article, *Reason for Emotion: Reinventing Justice with Theories, Innovations, and Research*, Sherman argues for an “emotionally intelligent” justice system (p. 2). That is, a system which acknowledges, rather than supresses, emotions felt by the various actors involved in the justice process would be far more effective at promoting self-awareness and offender compliance.

Sherman (2003) cites a number of neuroscience studies demonstrating “why emotional impulses so often overwhelm rational cognition” (p.6). This is a result of there being a larger number of neural pathways sending messages from the emotional part of the brain to the rational part of the brain, as opposed to the other way around (Sherman, 2003). That is, human beings are far more informed by their emotions than their rationality. Restorative justice is one example of how we capitalize on these scientific findings: “the power of the process comes from the engine of emotional engagement of the participants, in contrast to the suppression of participants’ emotions” (Sherman, 2003, p. 11). If we learn to integrate emotions into the system in a constructive way, therefore causing less

harm, the potential exists to reduce crime rates by nurturing healthier individuals and societies.

Individual and societal change “is driven more by stories than by data” (Pranis, 2001, p. 7). This statement makes sense in light of Sherman’s (2003) argument: if stories engage emotions and data engage rationality, it is more likely that a story will have a longer-lasting impact on an individual’s thoughts, actions, and reactions. Recall, that transformative learning is said to have occurred when we act on the new insights we have gained (Mezirow, 1990). Individual actions will then carry over into relationships and the community at large.

Stories therefore affect the way we interact in relationship to and with others. Storytelling is a way of bringing people and communities closer together (Elliott, 2011; Pranis, 2000). Relationships are made stronger and empathy is increased when we understand a person through learning their story (Atkinson, 1998; Doty, 2003; Miller, 2011; Senehi, 2011; Pranis, 2000). Hearing someone else’s story contributes to breaking down assumptions and stereotypes about the person, and reduces social distance (Pranis, 2000). When we understand and relate to ourselves and others in healthy ways, we grow in our ability to work together in situations of conflict.

In developing healthier relationships we also build stronger communities. Storytelling plays a critical role in strengthening community ties that enable community action (Pranis, 2001; Pranis et al., 2003). Involvement of the community is emphasized in restorative practices (Zehr, 2002a). Morrison (2010) asserts that “[t]hrough strengthening ... formal institutional mechanisms of social control, individuals and communities have become less involved in enabling justice, opportunity and dignity in those small places close to home” (p. 2). When third parties working within institutions of social control, for example schools or prisons, become deeply involved in the lives of citizens, it results in the exclusion of those citizens (Morrison, 2010). Communities then rely on professionals, rather than on themselves, to deal with situations of conflict.

Nils Christie characterized conflict as an opportunity for community participation. When conflicts are taken care of, or “stolen” by professionals, people are deprived of the chance to participate within that community (Christie, 1977). This becomes problematic

as community cohesion and strength becomes diminished. Steels (2014) argues that grassroots level citizen empowerment and engagement is key to community transformation. Stories allow individuals and groups to identify issues or problems of the community and being dialogue about how to move forward (Senehi, 2011). Storytelling is a process that translates into the creation of responsible and engaged citizens and communities.

The storytellers interviewed for this thesis share constructive stories surrounding harm and its possible resolution with public audiences, outside of a therapeutic setting. They actively participate in engaging and empowering their audiences and communities to take action and think about issues of justice, conflict, restoration, and transformation.

## **Chapter 3.**

### **Methodology**

#### **3.1. Research Questions**

The research questions to be qualitatively developed within a narrative framework are:

(1) Has publicly sharing one's story of restoration and/or transformation in the aftermath of traumatic violence influenced the storyteller over time?

(2) In turn, how does the storyteller experience the impact of their story on the audiences and communities who hear the story?

#### **3.2. Epistemology and Ontology**

A qualitative research design is well suited to investigate experiences of storytelling. Qualitative methods draw from a phenomenological approach (Palys & Atchison, 2014). This approach focuses on understanding a phenomenon through the "subjective perspective of the person who has the experience..." (Flood, 2010, p. 10). Epistemology is the position we take regarding how we are able to gather knowledge about the world or the topic of study (Richie & Lewis, 2003). The epistemological stance of this research is based out of a phenomenological tradition; that is, the way to gain insight into storytelling is to investigate participants' subjective lived experiences as storytellers.

Ontology is the position we take regarding what can be known about the world or topic of study (Richie & Lewis, 2003). This research takes the ontological position of constructivism. Constructivism understands that there are multiple possible realities that are constructed "through the shared investigation (by researchers and participants) of meanings and explanations" (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003, p. 12). In line with constructivism, this research takes the view that "the meaning of the event under study is constructed by those

who experience it” (Toews & Zehr, 2003, p. 266). The participants’ perspectives, understandings, ascribed meanings, perceptions, and constructions were used as the basis for understanding the experience of storytelling.

### **3.3. Participant Recruitment and Characteristics**

To answer the research questions a purposive sampling strategy was used, that is, specific criteria were required for participation in this study (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). First, this study is operating within a restorative justice framework; therefore, to create a sampling frame it was necessary to outline a definition of restorative justice. Johnstone and Van Ness’ (2011) transformative conception of restorative justice was used because of its broad definition, beyond the encounter and reparative definition, and the conceptual bridge with transformational learning, growth and development. This conception allows for a wider sampling frame due to its flexibility and inclusivity. That is, participants did not necessarily need to have undergone a formally facilitated restorative justice process (as defined through the encounter definition); being an active advocate of restorative values, and having had an experience of transformation following a traumatic event was enough to participate in the study. This ensured that I did not leave out potential participants whose stories would ordinarily not fall under a more limited definition of restorative justice.

Second, these individuals needed to have publicly shared their personal stories regarding their own experiences with traumatic violent crime and its resolution. Participants were recruited to balance two perspectives of crime and trauma. The first perspective was from participants who speak from a harmed (victim) point of view, where they experienced traumatic violence and found resolution in restorative practices and/or values. The second perspective was from participants who speak from a dual (offender/victim) point of view, where they were able to transform their lives using restorative practices and/or values. To include a harm-doer’s (offender) point of view, the dual classification also holds the criteria of having been incarcerated in the past. However, harm-doer’s experiences often also include elements of experiencing harm themselves (Zehr, 2002b). As such the “dual perspective” label was chosen to acknowledge a fuller experience of an individual who has committed serious harms. Finally, potential participants needed to be 19 years of age or older.

Potential participants were known personally or professionally to professors and instructors who are, or have been, associated with the Centre for Restorative Justice (CRJ) and/or who have taught restorative justice classes (e.g. CRIM 315, CRIM 442) offered at the School of Criminology at Simon Fraser University. Dr. Brenda Morrison is the Director of the CRJ. As such, Dr. Morrison was in a position to make initial contact with potential participants.

Dr. Morrison introduced each prospective participant to me via e-mail with the information sheet attached (see Appendix A). If the individual was willing to participate in the study they contacted me and an interview was scheduled. Four participants were contacted in the Fall of 2013 as part of a qualitative research project for Research Methods V: Advanced Qualitative Methods (CRIM 864) at SFU. All four agreed to participate in the project for the course, and agreed to have the interviews used for the thesis as well (for more information see Section 3.5.1). In the Spring of 2014, ten more individuals were contacted to participate in the research, and seven agreed to participate.

Seven interviews were conducted between April 2014 and July 2014. Of these seven, six interviews have been used in this thesis. The seventh interview was not used, as it became evident that the interviewee had not been deeply involved in storytelling. Combined with the four interviews conducted in Fall 2013, the final sample comprises ten participants. Table 2 (below) outlines the basic characteristics of the final sample. The table is divided according to the two perspectives (harmed and dual), and presents participants' names, ages, and the number of years they have been sharing their story.

**Table 2. Characteristics of Final Sample**

Harmed Perspective				Dual Perspective			
	Name	Age	Years Sharing		Name	Age	Years Sharing
1	Claire <sup>3</sup>	50s	6	6	Ben <sup>3</sup>	30s	10
2	Katy	50s	10	7	Jim	50s	25
3	Manjit	50s	10	8	Joe	40s	5
4	Michael <sup>3</sup>	60s	8	9	Pat	60s	15
5	Rose <sup>3</sup>	60s	29	10	Yves	50s	10

Eight of the ten participants are Caucasian with roots in a variety of European countries, including but not limited to Finland, Germany, Ireland, Italy, the Netherlands, and Poland. One participant is Indo-Canadian, and one participant is Chinese.

Each person is connected to restorative justice practices, values, and/or advocacy in a number of ways. Five of the individuals participated in a restorative encounter, and in some cases continue to do restorative justice related work, such as facilitating restorative workshops or volunteering with restorative justice organizations. Five participants did not experience an encounter; however, they are linked to restorative values and advocacy in variety of ways, including but not limited to volunteering with restorative organizations, facilitating or participating in circle-based workshops in prisons and communities, and promoting restorative values (such as forgiveness, engagement, connection, and resiliency) in the work they do.

Participants have experience sharing their stories in small settings with only a few listeners; as well as in large settings with hundreds, or even thousands, of audience members. Each participant has spoken at a wide range of venues, examples include: elementary/middle/high schools (for students, parents, and teachers), universities, justice related conferences, restorative justice related events and workshops, wellness groups, summer camps, community gatherings, book clubs, juvenile detention centres, and prisons.

<sup>3</sup> pseudonym



### **3.4. Data Collection**

I conducted one-on-one, in-depth semi-structured interviews that lasted between one to two hours. An interview topic guide can be found in Appendix C. Closed-ended questions were prepared to collect demographic information (e.g. age) and to establish how many years the participant has been sharing their story publicly. The closed-ended questions served the purpose of monitoring the variety of participant characteristics included in the sample. Interviews took the form of an oral history or life narrative, beginning with the participant's decision to share their story publicly. Open-ended questions were prepared and followed a timeline starting with what led the participant to decide to share their story; going through the early experiences of sharing; moving into the present time; and ending on a reflection about what the future holds for the participant. Topics addressed within each segment of the timeline included motivations, benefits and challenges in storytelling; development of identity; and changes or growth in close relationships and in community relations. These topics were assembled from a review of the available literature, and further refined through class discussions (CRIM 864) wherein the beginning stages of this project were initiated. Participants were encouraged to speak openly about their experiences with little guidance; however, if a topic did not come up organically I provided a prompt using the relevant open-ended question from the topic guide.

Six interviews were conducted in person at a location of the participant's' choosing, two interviews were conducted over Skype Internet software, and two interviews were conducted over the phone. All interviewees consented to being audio-recorded. I also took hand-written notes in my research journal, noting facial expressions, hand gestures, and key moments during the interview. Immediately after each interview, I wrote a reflection about the interview examining which parts were successful, what could be improved upon, and how the conversation influenced me. This was a practice in reflexivity that allowed me to become more conscious of my role and subjectivity as a researcher. The audio-recordings were kept on an external hard drive, encrypted using Apple OS X Mountain Lion's build-in File Vault disk encryption (AES 128-bit). The external hard drive was stored in a locked cabinet in my home. Within days of the interview, the interview audio-

recordings were transcribed by the researcher verbatim, and upon verification the audio-recording files were erased.

### **3.5. Data Analysis**

The interview transcripts were uploaded to QSR International NVivo 10 research software and were coded thematically. I used both deductive and inductive coding. Deductive coding was used as a starting point to create coding categories that reflected the two research questions. Coding categories were developed out of a literature review on restorative justice and storytelling, and based on the themes from the CRIM 864 project.

I remained open to inductive coding categories to allow for new themes to emerge from the data of the Spring 2014 interviews. The coding process was iterative with multiple rounds of coding to allow for rich inductive themes to emerge. This also contributed to reliability by ensuring that pieces of information were consistently coded for the same themes during each iteration.

### **3.6. Ethical Considerations**

An ethics application was submitted to the Office of Research Ethics at SFU on January 8, 2014. The application was approved with minor revisions by Simon Fraser University's Research Ethics Board on March 21, 2014.

#### **3.6.1. Oral Informed Consent**

In the initial e-mail contact, each person received an information sheet outlining the project and ethical guidelines that would be followed (Appendix A). Prior to the beginning of each interview, the participant and I read the information sheet together and made the necessary ethical agreement and decisions. In accordance with Simon Fraser University's Policy R20.01, each person was asked if they voluntarily consented to the interview, and they were assured that they can withdraw from the study at any time during

or after the interview. Each person was asked if they consented to being audio-recorded with the understanding that the audio recordings will be destroyed after transcription and verification. Audio recordings were stored securely on an external hard drive, encrypted using Apple OS X Mountain Lion's built-in File Vault disk encryption (AES 128-bit) stored in a locked cabinet in my home, until they were transcribed. After verification of the transcripts, the recordings were erased.

This thesis incorporated data from four individuals who participated in a study for CRIM 864 in Fall 2013. Participants in the previous study gave oral informed consent with the understanding that, in addition to being used for the course project, their interview transcripts would also be used for my Master's thesis and any resulting publications and presentations (Appendix B).

### **3.6.2. Confidentiality**

The participants are all speakers and authors known to the community who have chosen to share details of their lives in the public domain. Information about their stories and the crimes they committed, or crimes that were committed against them, can be found in books, news media, and on the Internet. In light of this, prior to beginning the interview, we had a conversation about the participant's preferences relating to anonymity. By default, I ensured that participants' identities are confidential by assigning pseudonyms, unless the participant indicated otherwise. I removed indirect identifiers by default, unless the participant indicated otherwise. The research decision was made to respect participants' voice and continued choices about being public with their story. Of the final sample six participants chose to use their real names instead of a pseudonym.

Participants were assured that the audio-recordings would be securely stored until they were transcribed, verified, and erased. The participants were also made aware that e-mail, telephone, and Skype are not considered confidential channels.

### **3.7. Reflexivity**

I am a strong supporter of restorative justice philosophy, processes, and practices. I drew heavily from Toews and Zehr's (2003) "principles for transformative inquiry" to inform my research decisions and to conduct the research in a way that complements restorative values and principles (p. 269). This was in line with the epistemological and ontological stances taken in this study.

I saw my role as a researcher to be a "facilitator, collaborator and learner, rather than neutral expert" (Toews & Zehr, 2003, p. 267). I chose to use a flexible topic guide during the interviews, rather than a fixed set of questions. This was to allow participants to guide the conversation about storytelling, with the recognition that they are in the best position to tell me what was important in their lived experience with storytelling. The topic guide allowed a balance for participant guidance and flexibility as well as a guiding structure from past literature. This allowed for a collaborative dialogue about storytelling to emerge.

I was aware of the possibility that the participants, their stories, and the research as a whole may affect me personally (Toews & Zehr, 2003). I was deeply touched by each individual's story, as well as their genuine willingness to help me with my research. I used my research journal to navigate my own reactions in response to experiencing each person's story. This practice in reflexivity allowed me to maintain "a balance between subjectivity and objectivity" (Toews & Zehr, 2003, p. 268). In each step of the research, from conducting the interviews to reporting the findings and performing the analysis, I was critically evaluating the research process and my role as a researcher. This contributed to my ability to reflect the values of transformative inquiry for this research project.

Finally, I understood the "power dynamics inherent in all inquiries" when researchers take on the task of interpreting another person's life experiences (Toews & Zehr, 2003). In an attempt to create a collaborative research relationship, participants' choices regarding their preferences related to confidentiality and anonymity were respected. Along this same vein, I kept myself accountable to my participants. Upon completion of the research results, I sent a copy of the results pertaining to each of the six

participants interviewed for the thesis<sup>4</sup>. In this way, they were able to give me feedback about whether I had captured their contribution in an accurate and meaningful way. If I had not done so to their satisfaction, we worked together until we reached an agreeable final product. One participant asked for a detail to be clarified, while all other participants approved the results in their original form. The research “process itself strives to be beneficial for the participant, regardless of the knowledge gained” (Toews & Zehr, 2003, p. 268). It was important to me that my participants were kept up to date on the research, that they felt comfortable being involved in the research process, and that the final product of this research is something that we can all be proud to have been a part of.

<sup>4</sup> The four participants who had been interviewed in Fall 2013 for the purposes of the CRIM 864 course project (and eventual thesis) were given a copy of the final paper prepared for the course. They were encouraged to provide feedback on the work. A copy of the results was not sent out beforehand due to the time constraints of a semester long class.

## Chapter 4.

### Results

A story facilitates an interaction between the storyteller and the story-listener. It is a tool that engages both parties in dialogue and personal reflection, creates opportunities for learning, and can inspire changes on individual and community levels.

#### 4.1. Influence on the Storyteller: “As much as I gave, I got back.”<sup>5</sup>

The influence of sharing on storytellers is demonstrated through the changes they experience over the years they have been sharing their story with others. Growth occurs in gaining confidence in the story (Section 4.1.1), as well as in the relationship the storytellers have to themselves (Section 4.1.2) and to others (Section 4.1.3).

##### 4.1.1. Confidence: “Maybe I’m more confident in my stories.”<sup>6</sup>

Participants commented that with experience they have gained more confidence in telling their story. Ben spoke about how he would get quite nervous before presentations early on, as he did not know what types of responses to expect. Claire, too, reflected that over the years she has become more and more willing to share in spaces where she would have not been comfortable doing so when she first began sharing.

Yves explained that the more he has shared in safe spaces, for example in circle, the more comfortable he has become with sharing, “...it’s about the sharing, being more comfortable... because when we’re in circle, everybody shares. And we have a lot of similar stories.” The safety that is allowed in circle translates into an ability to feel comfortable when speaking. By getting involved with restorative justice practices, Michael began sharing his story more often and he became more comfortable with talking about

<sup>5</sup> (Ben)

<sup>6</sup> (Rose)

himself, "...it brought me out of that victim isolation and it made it okay and more comfortable for me to talk about this aspect." Sharing in safe spaces contributes to a level of comfort with speaking about difficult topics.

Katy, Pat, and Jim spoke about how, over the years, they have become more confident with their story. Katy explained, "I feel confident, because I've shared the story so many times that I know what to expect. 95% of the time I know exactly what to expect when I tell it. So, with that comes a confidence." After doing it for a number of years, a portion of the nervousness related to the unknown subsides as the participants are able to read an audience and are familiar with the types of reactions they can expect.

Rose elaborated on the nuance in the type of confidence she has gained,

I don't think the confidence comes out of experience, I still don't feel very confident as a speaker ... I think perhaps my stories are solidified so that I can go up and maybe I'm more confident in my stories ... speaking in public really helps me write and define my stories, and imprint my stories, and memorize my stories.

Though there is a confidence that develops over time, the storytellers were careful to note that gaining confidence, does not mean sharing the story becomes easier. Michael reflected that over time he has "become better at talking to audiences", saying:

... the ability to feel like I can go before an audience and talk about a difficult subject and know I can do it right, because I've done it before. But, it's not ever easy ... if this ever became easy for me, I think that's the point where I should not do it anymore if it was actually easy for me.

These are stories of trauma, loss, and grief: subjects that are not easy to talk about no matter how often one does it. Confidence develops in relation to knowing they have the ability to share their story in a good way, and in being familiar with the audience reaction and feedback that is likely to occur.

#### **4.1.2. The Self: “My relationship with myself has changed.”<sup>7</sup>**

Storytelling influenced the storyteller’s ability to move forward from the traumatic events, make sense of what occurred, create a sense of purpose, and contribute to a re-creation of sense of self. Sharing has allowed participants to gain deeper understanding and insight into themselves, and what has happened in their lives.

##### ***4.1.2.1 Gains through Sharing: “Baring it instead of carrying it.”<sup>8</sup>***

In being able to tell their own version of events, and have it be heard and acknowledged, the participants gained an increased sense of purpose, along with practicing self-acceptance, compassion, and forgiveness.

One of the initial motivators to share the story is the “desire to make good come out of bad, of ugly ... And my way of making good is helping others ... I think storytelling is now my way of doing justice” (Rose). Creating something good out of something traumatic involves infusing meaning and purpose into the events surrounding the trauma, and subsequently sharing lessons that have come out of the traumatic event and its aftermath with others.

Manjit spoke about how the media portrayed him and his family in an inaccurate, hurtful, and harmful way immediately following the death of his daughter. By sharing what their family life was like in their own words, he and his wife have been able to reclaim themselves as good parents and recognize that what happened to their daughter was not their fault. By telling his story, Manjit has been able to let go of some of the shame and blame that had been placed on him by inaccurate renderings of his story.

In the case of committing violent crime, storytelling has allowed Pat to work toward admitting to the harmful actions of his past,

Quite often inmates, or ex-cons, or cons, myself included, try to overcompensate for all the bad stuff we’ve done by emphasizing the good parts. So, it took me a while to get around that, where I have to

7 (Jim)

8 (Ben)



admit that I did some terrible things ... and it's not easy to admit that ... So, that's a self-esteem thing.

Sharing this part of himself with others has given him opportunity to admit and overcome some of the more shameful aspects of his past actions.

Ben explained his story has allowed him to work through the emotions of his youth and “[make] sense of something that didn't really make sense, [try] to find a purpose.” Storytelling has allowed Ben to infuse a sense of order and meaning into the events leading up to, and occurring after his incarceration. He said that sharing his story has given him the opportunity to get “past the shame and the stigma” associated with the publicity of his case. Storytelling has contributed to, “...overcoming my own barriers in the sense of when I pictured who I was, or how I was, as a person. Just pushing off the shame I was carrying” (Ben). He reflected that by sharing who he is with others, it allowed him to get back to his “own roots and [become] firmly planted as an individual.”

This idea of getting back to the roots and digging deeper was echoed by Claire and Jim. Claire described how she has grown and changed through sharing her story as it allows her to journey “ever deeper into the roots” of understanding who she is. Each time she shares, she goes “deeper into [her] relationship in what it means to be a human being.” After 30 years of feeling like she did not have a voice, Claire now feels ownership over her story:

I'm not the little girl, you know, mourning for my father's murder, which I was a bit in the beginning. The little girl, as well as woman, as well as mother. And kind of, much firmer in my own feet in a way. ... It's kind of like I'm no longer simply a spectator of this story. It's more integrated in me somehow.

Jim explained that storytelling has changed everything about him and woken up the “...desire to heal. Desire to look at stuff. Desire to let go of unfinished business.” He has also explored his familial roots: “telling the story makes you desire to know more about yourself ... And the more you tell the story, the deeper the healing.” In coming to a deeper understanding of his family history, Jim has gained compassion for himself and for others.

Rose shared how storytelling fosters self-forgiveness, “I think confession is really a great therapy. So I was able to confess, again and again that I was sorry that I didn't

pick up Sarah<sup>9</sup> [the victim]. And I had to forgive myself for that.” Furthermore, Rose found that audience feedback has allowed her to reach a deeper understanding of certain aspects of her story. She spoke about how much she enjoys question and answer period after her presentations, “I allow myself to play with the questions, and to think about them, and explore them in my own mind ... then also to later on reflect on what my answer was and go deeper with it.” Audience questions have allowed her to practice forgiving the man her who took her daughter’s life, even though she wanted to be angry, “every time [the audience members] asked about the offender it was an exercise of forgiving, of moving on, of being gracious, and to move above the rage, to a place of valuing everybody in society.” Rose has found these moments of critical self-reflection to be therapeutic. Having had opportunities to share with audiences all across the country provided Rose with many therapeutic opportunities: “I’ve bled all over Canada, and Canada was my therapist.”

Through sharing, Pat, too, has had the opportunity to gain a better understanding of victims and their needs. He was invited to speak at a victims’ rights conference. Worrying he would be “the whipping boy for all these victims” he experienced something different: “nobody tried to take their anger out on me. And it turned out really good, because in a sense I got to be like a surrogate to a lot of victims, whose main question, was ‘Why me?’” Sharing his story at this conference provided new insights and understanding between parties.

Storytelling allows Yves to track how he has changed over the years. He elaborated,

It’s therapeutic in the sense that I, myself, could see the changes that I went through in my life when I talk about it ... It’s quite remarkable considering that at one time you’re literally in a cage ... And now I’m sitting here. So, it is therapeutic in the sense that if I ever doubt that I’ve changed I just have to look back.

Sharing with others is one way that Yves is able to see how much he has changed and grown for the better throughout the years he has been telling his story.

<sup>9</sup> pseudonym

Jim has experienced a wide array of changes as a result of sharing: “The story changes the storyteller, because it allows me to be accepted where I wasn’t in my childhood. It allows me to be a part of a community, which I wasn’t as a child.” He has been able to find self-acceptance and belonging by connecting with others through his story. The sense of belonging gained in sharing is echoed by Joe:

Bringing it back to once you’ve been through that lifestyle to where you truly belong ... my life came around full circle. I veered the wrong way ... It took away 18 years of my life. But, I came back to being exactly where I belong.

By sharing his story with youth, Joe has been able to “rebuild” himself, and come into a role where he feels he belongs. A sense of belonging contributes to the storytellers’ sense of who they are, and helps establish a place or role for them in the world.

Rose reflected that she has stepped into the role of “almost a sage ... I’m asked for life teachings. I’ve stepped into the role of being a speaker and a teacher, which is something I probably wouldn’t have expected.” Being storytellers and sharing stories relating to harm, contributes to development of new roles. Manjit and his wife received a public award from the provincial government for their role in the community and their contributions in “helping combat some issues with young people and violence and crime prevention.” This is one official way that their role in the community has been recognized.

In reflecting on the changes that have occurred over the time, Michael shared that he has entered a number of new roles and has become “involved in different aspects of justice” over the years, tapping into areas of youth mentoring, sitting on advisory committees, and becoming involved in RJ community facilitation. In this reflection he commented,

Some people have said, ‘Well you’ve become the wounded healer.’ ... And I said, ‘Well I wouldn’t be quite as dramatic as that.’ [laughing] But, I think the whole service part of it is a big part of my story now, with the other things I do for other people and not just my own story anymore.

Michael’s story grows with him as he takes on new roles in the community and integrates these new experiences within his ongoing story.

Michael added that while he thinks sharing his story is worth doing, he does not find sharing to be therapeutic, especially when presenting to large audiences. He explained, “if there’s a therapeutic aspect of storytelling then that occurs for me in a safe environment where you have a rapport with the people that you’re talking to.” He enjoys connecting with others and prefers speaking with a few people, rather than to a large room. The therapeutic aspect may emerge for him “in the form of just having a conversation with a friend or something like that. It doesn’t exist in say, a larger venue.” Section 4.1.2.3 explores safety in smaller environments in more detail.

These are some of the ways that storytelling has had, or could have, a positive influence on the storyteller. The following sections explore some of the challenges that occur in storytelling, along with how these challenges have created learning opportunities for the storyteller.

#### **4.1.2.2 An Emotional Toll: “There’s hard times too.”<sup>10</sup>**

While exploring the positives of sharing their stories, some participants explained that they do encounter tough moments brought on by sharing. Rose reflected that there are times when it is difficult to share,

The more energy you have, the more you can give to the audience. And sometimes you’re tired, and sometimes a person can be discouraged, or going through something ...There’s real hard times where you just don’t feel like doing it, you’ve committed to it.

Going back to the memories surrounding the traumatic experience is “very taxing at times” (Manjit). Yves explained that sharing his story, “does bring back emotions ... some of these events were pretty harsh and I’m still affected by them today.” Jim shared that after a presentation he comes home emotionally drained, needing to process the storytelling experience and the emotions that arose during sharing. Rose elaborated about this portion of sharing, saying that sometimes after a presentation when she is alone, she hits “a low ... kind of an abyss ...The thoughts of, ‘What did I say? How would that have’ – you know, the second thoughts. Maybe it’s a speaker’s remorse...” It is in these moments that

<sup>10</sup> (Rose)

storytellers have learned to engage in self-care, and critically reflect on new insights gained during and after their presentations.

Michael articulated the difficulty of revisiting the more traumatic aspects of his story:

It's a story of dying, that's part of it, the death of my sister, it's a story of dying. It's a story of the aftermath of that, so it's a story of trauma. Those are very difficult things to talk about ... And it's difficult because in a sense you're re-living it to a certain extent by talking about it.

Thinking about his role, or whether he sees himself as a storyteller, he elaborated,

I'm not ... thinking that this is an identity that I'd like to seek for myself. I've been pretty mindful of wanting to have a life that's apart from all of this too, right. Not going to let it to define me, even if it's a positive definition.

While recognizing that sharing his story has been a big part of what he has been doing over the last number of years, he would like to embrace a “more ordinary, more typical kind of lifestyle. That's not always the focus that I'm thinking about harm and aftermath of harm and the justice system and the politics ... Those aren't peaceful thoughts in my mind [laughing].”

Many of these challenges are dealt with through seizing learning opportunities, practicing self-care, and having healthy support systems. In some cases, it can be drawing on faith for strength to move through the hard times (Manjit, Rose). Ben spoke about the need to maintain balance in his life through enjoying wholesome food, keeping active physically, and having supportive and loving people who he can talk to. (Relationships and support systems are discussed in more detail in Section 4.1.3.)

Michael reflected that a part of engaging in self-care has involved learning to identify his “own needs versus the needs of others. And also being aware of needs changing for me”. Setting out his own priorities, knowing his needs, and creating boundaries have all become salient issues for Michael. When someone asks him to share his story, he said,

I do tend to obsess a little bit about what I want to say and the points I'm trying to get across. Weeks before I know it's going to happen, it's

on my mind ... it's not as if I can turn it off easily for myself ... Which is in a way a detriment to wanting to do it for over the longer term, because, well, how much do I actually want to be thinking about this? If I could just think about it one hour before I did it [laughing] well that would be a different case, rather than a whole month or something like that.

The amount of thinking that occurs prior to his presentations happens in part because of the way Michael has chosen to approach his storytelling, that is, he does not use a script in order to preserve the emotional impact he wishes to get across to his audiences. This approach is elaborated on in more detail in Section 4.2.2.1.

#### **4.1.2.3 Safety: “I need to know exactly what the intentions are.”<sup>11</sup>**

When offered a speaking engagement, seven participants said they rarely, if ever, turned one down (Jim, Joe, Katy, Manjit, Pat, Rose, Yves). For Katy, refusing a speaking request was more about logistics, rather than feeling that “the presentation doesn’t fit.” But for others, the people in specific communities who wish to hear the story play a role in influencing whether the participants feel they could be open to share.

Ben considers physical, emotional, and mental safety before he agrees to speak. If he does not feel he can trust the event organizers to create a safe atmosphere for both himself and his listeners, he will not speak there. Claire recollected a time when she had been scheduled to present, but in trying to organize and work with the venue she began to feel uncomfortable,

It was kind of like a spectacle. Like something, ‘Oh, look!’ You know, the freaks at the zoo or the circus. There was something about it that just felt absolutely un-kindred.

When she ultimately decided she did not wish to continue working with this particular group and declined to present, she felt “relief to be done with it.”

Part of safety in sharing occurs when the opportunity for connection is present,

If I feel like there’s an ability to connect and have a two-way conversation with the people I talk to, then that creates a situation

11 (Joe)

where I can feel more able to disclose or delve deeper into whatever feelings I have about my situation (Michael).

This ability to connect is the part of storytelling that “gives the most meaning ... being able to share part of your life with somebody” (Michael).

When discussing safety in storytelling, issues related to media appropriations of the story came up during the interviews. Joe shared a learning experience in this realm. When a headline had been printed about him in an inappropriate way, he explained “media has a tendency to want the ugly side of the life I lived.” He needed to quickly do damage control to ensure that the message was a positive one and remained focused on the work he does now.

It was a huge learning curve from my end. And at the end of the day we brought it back home and made it what it’s supposed to be about. When it comes to media, yeah, absolutely, there’s huge concerns (Joe).

He was able to use social media to re-focus the message on his ongoing work with youth, rather than his past history. From the outset, Joe has been clear on needing to know the intentions of the event organizer, and adhering to basic ground rules of what he will, and will not, talk about when he shares.

Manjit had negative experiences with the media at first, “in the beginning we were just baffled with the whole thing ... That was the hardest part, because ... media sometimes could be really relentless” and ask “inappropriate questions.” The media had been approaching wrong sources and publishing incorrect information related to the personal character of himself, his family, and his daughter who had been killed. Manjit recognized that the media is “hungry for news ... that’s their job.” He and his family contacted the media and took control of the story through working with them so the truth could be published:

...believe it or not, media was surprised. And I said, we have nothing to hide, and ever since they gained so much respect [for us]... I have respected them too now, because they have come and have appreciated it when we give them time. We have always given them the time if they need to have any clarifications ... We always accommodated them.

By learning how to work together, the relationship between Manjit's family and the media grew into something more accurate and productive.

Michael has consistently declined to speak with the media:

I don't talk to media. I don't talk to people who have movie projects or book projects, because that's kind of putting my story in someone else's hands and that's a thing I've never wanted to do. If I want to a book to be written, I've always said that I'd be doing the writing. Not somebody else.

Actively considering issues of safety, controlling the story, as well as knowing and maintaining one's own boundaries are important components that factor into whether the story is told, and how it is told.

#### **4.1.2.4 Letting Go: "I have to give up control of my message."<sup>12</sup>**

While storytellers spoke about controlling the story, that is, not having it told inaccurately by others; they also reflected on the need to recognize that they cannot control the message others take away from the story. The notion of taking responsibility for your own story, but letting go of the responsibility of what others hear came up across the interviews.

Storytellers are careful not to speak on behalf of others involved in their story. Katy explained that she only shares what was real for her in her experiences: "I can't be responsible for everyone in the story. I can only be responsible for myself." Beyond this notion, storytellers acknowledge they cannot attempt to control what others hear.

Wanting to inspire big changes, Claire explained she is challenged sometimes because she cannot articulate her message in a way that is "somehow package-able" for individuals in power to be inspired to "shift and change policy." However, through experience she has recognized that her job is not to change their minds; it is to "invite the conversations", which she has been doing successfully.

12 (Rose)



Rose recognized that whatever she shares with an audience, “goes through a translation, so I really do not know what is happening to the person who’s listening.” She recalled a time when three audience members approached her after a presentation to thank her about something she had spoken about,

And I hadn’t spoken of it. I didn’t even have it my notes. ... so they were obviously taking my story and translating it into their own experiences. And that just gave me a clue as to what my responsibility is, and what their responsibility is. And I’m not responsible for what they hear ... just trusting the people to hear what they need to hear.

Michael noted some concerns about engaging with larger audiences as he is less able to know what they may be thinking. He explained, “I’m less concerned about the reaction, because I’m just presenting an option ... whatever people take or don’t get from it, that’s up to them. I’m just here to share it.” Recognizing this allows Michael to let go of being worried about whether or not what he has shared does or does not agree with the opinions held by individual audience members.

Jim echoed Michael’s thoughts on this, saying, “...this is me. This is who I am. This is my story. Take what you want, and leave the rest.” Over the years, storytellers learn they can only offer the story that is true for themselves, and trust that audience members will take what is most relevant for them.

#### **4.1.3. Connection “Relationships now are meaningful, more productive, healthier.”<sup>13</sup>**

Each person spoke about relationships and connections they have made to people and communities that would have not been possible if they had never chosen to share their story.

##### **4.1.3.1 To the victims: a “legacy.”<sup>14</sup>**

For those who lost a loved one, sharing the story was one way to honour, and stay connected to, the family member who was murdered. Katy said that sharing the story is

<sup>13</sup> (Ben)

<sup>14</sup> (Katy)

“one of the best legacies [she] could create for [her] husband.” Claire said that in sharing her story she is keeping a promise she made to her father: “Your death will not be for nothing.” Rose, too, referring to the death of her daughter said, “...there’s a part of me that’s still mothering Sarah and wanting her to live on.” For the women who were harmed by crime, the story is a part of their relationship to the loved one who was killed.

When reflecting on how sharing his story could be more healing for him, Michael said that perhaps he could tell it in a different way. That is, if he told it in a way where he focused more on the positive and enriching qualities of his murdered family member and turned his story into more of a “commemorative story about the person that’s been killed.” He is contemplating on whether a change like this might bring more benefits for himself when sharing with audiences.

During his incarceration, Pat learned about Native spirituality, which taught him that, “The fact that I’ve turned my life around, and the fact that I try and help young people realize the pitfalls of going down the road that I went down, then that honours that man’s [his victim’s] spirit.” For each storyteller, there is a desire to make something good come out of a traumatic situation, and part of this includes honouring and acknowledging the life that was lost, and the lives that were harmed, through sharing and giving back to the community in a positive way.

#### **4.1.3.2 To family and friends: “They thought I was very brave!”<sup>15</sup>**

Each person spoke about the relationships they have with their families and friends, and how their decision to share their story has impacted some of these relationships. Rose noted that her close family members and friends thought she was very courageous to share the story. Katy talked about how recently her children shared her TEDx Talk with their peers. It was hugely validating for her that her kids are proud of what she does. Manjit and his wife share the story together. He reflected, “a normal family can be ripped apart” under such circumstances. His family stayed together, but there was “a chance it could have gone that way”. For Manjit, sharing together brings a sense of comfort

15 (Rose)

and support in knowing they have been able to deal with the death of their daughter while staying close as a family.

Jim finds love and support in his wife who has helped him write a book about his story. A powerful moment for Jim was when he shared his story with his sons for the first time; the connection he made with his children through sharing will always stay with him. Along a similar vein, Joe met his soon-to-be wife as a direct result of sharing his story. And, much like Jim, he noted that his relationship to his sons has improved since he has changed his life through sharing his story and helping others. Ben had the chance to reconnect with his mother, which taught him new lessons about how to share his story with her. For these participants, sharing the story plays a role in bringing about closeness in their familial relationships.

On the other hand, sometimes the decision to share may not be fully understood by the storytellers' family members. Claire said that she can talk about pieces of her storytelling (and her relationship with John<sup>16</sup>) with her brother and, a bit more so, with her mother. However, she cannot be fully open about it with her family; a mystery surrounds this part of her life. However, with her daughters, Claire knows that the story lives within them, that they know its wisdom. She also spoke of her close friends, or "kindreds," with whom she has strong relationships. These individuals know her story and support her work completely.

Similar to Claire, Michael shared that his family "doesn't really know the extent to which [he has] done this". He explained,

It's something I've kept apart from discussing with them. I think the difficulty is that, for them, their experience is different ... They haven't had the ability in any great way to transform their lives and to find a different meaning out of it ... And so any conversations I might have with them I think could very easily trigger them into negative thoughts.

Michael's wife and close friends from the RJ community have been supportive of him whenever he has needed it. Even so, he often chooses not to rely on others to support him in his sharing, "This is something I've felt that I wanted to do on my own in some ways.

<sup>16</sup> pseudonym

I feel like if I have the strength to do this then that's good, if I don't, then I shouldn't be doing it." Keeping in line with Michael's approach to sharing his story, it is a role or identity that he does not wish to make central in his life, and this translates to the amount of support he wishes to have in this realm.

Each storyteller has close relationships that have been influenced through their sharing. In some cases, the storytellers did not or do not have access to close family members, but they explained that they have always been lucky enough to have supportive people from the community, such as volunteers, surrounding them (Ben, Pat, Yves). This is elaborated upon in the following Section 4.1.3.3.

#### ***4.1.3.3 To audiences and the community: the "amazing moments of connection."<sup>17</sup>***

Some of the greatest rewards or most memorable moments the storytellers shared related to the connections made to audiences or to the community. Each person explained that interacting with their listeners is rewarding, "very powerful, and encouraging" (Yves). The piece relating to connection with listeners is discussed in more detail in Section 4.2.1.

Beyond moments of connection to individual audience members, new and healthy relationship development expands into the broader community level. Katy has kept in touch with a number of people she met professionally as a result of her storytelling. Claire explained she is not a group joiner, but during our interview she reflected on how many people she had met and kept in touch with because of sharing her story at various organizations in different cities. She saw that community is not "in a box"; it is the connections that continue after the fact. Rose has found great connection to "the acquired society of storytellers, I love the culture of storytellers ... I love associating with storytellers. I love the interactions with writers and belonging to writers." These elements of community and development of friendships emerge largely because the storyteller has chosen to reach out and share.

Manjit and his wife have received a lot of support from the community, "we were supported by the community at large." He mentioned the names of professors and

17 (Rose)

community volunteers as sources of support, as well as the encouragement from members of their own community, “Whenever people saw us, we hardly knew them, and they will stop and give us hugs.” These connections to the community, particularly to the RJ community have touched the lives of the storytellers. Michael explored this idea in detail,

It’s been quite amazing for me to know that there’s this network of people who know me and understand what I’ve gone through. And I wouldn’t have known any of those people if this terrible thing hadn’t happened. It was just the whole irony of the situation that you have such deep relationships with people out of a result of terrible loss. If I hadn’t had the loss then I wouldn’t have known any of these people. I would have had, you know, the typical life perhaps. So, that part of it is always not, in a way, sometimes hasn’t made sense to me. Why do you have to go something so horrible in order to have something – you know, good relationships come out of it? ... that’s caused a lot of thoughts for me.

Though these relationships are meaningful and important, it can sometimes be difficult to reconcile the fact that these relationships may have not developed had the trauma not occurred.

The connection and support to the community have been valuable in the lives of the participants who had been incarcerated, as they can often feel isolated from family and friends. Pat explained that he was very well supported by those working in correctional institutions in his decision to share his story with others, referring to a prison warden who went with him to present a few times. Yves shared that it has always been helpful to have supportive people around him when he presents; people he can debrief with about how his talk went, saying, “sometimes it’s just one person is enough ... the debriefing helps maybe to bring me back to reality, too.” These supports and relationships contribute to safety in sharing as well.

Joe explained that the relationships he has built in the schools he works with are integral to allowing him to be able to share his story and do his work with his organization. Ben and Jim emphasized how sharing their story has made them feel like they belong. For Ben, community is “interchangeable” with family. When talking about the relationships he has developed, he explains,

Ultimately those relationships may never have come to fruition, if I hadn't have reached out ... through storytelling I was also reaching out to be a part of the community that I felt like I had lost. Not many people see it that way. They usually just see it as giving back, giving back, giving back, but it also lets me be a part of [community].

When talking about the way he feels when he connects with people when sharing food and conversation, Ben said, "There's nothing that beats that feeling ever." Jim, too, feels a community connection to his audiences: "The story changes the storyteller, because it allows me to be accepted where I wasn't in my childhood." Pat explained that through the connections he made while presenting on the inside, it contributed to his successful reintegration once he was released: "I wasn't just suddenly thrown out of jail ... I was able to make a lot of community contacts, and that's what it's all about is community: community contacts and just being part of the community." The men who had not felt connection throughout their lives, the sense of belonging and acceptance that has come out of their storytelling has been enormously valuable.

## **4.2. Influence on the Listener: "My storytelling has a purpose."<sup>18</sup>**

In this section I present the ways in which the participants intend to influence their listeners; as well as how storytellers perceive the impact of their story on the audiences and communities who hear it.

### **4.2.1. The Listener as Motivation and Reinforcement: "I was telling it for the people that didn't live through it."<sup>19</sup>**

When they first began sharing, the participants had a sense that the lessons in their story were valuable for the community. Manjit explained that he and his wife knew the issues of youth violence were important for the community to think about, saying, "we were touched with it personally in a horrific way. So, instead of keeping quiet about it, we

<sup>18</sup> (Jim)

<sup>19</sup> (Katy)

wanted to create awareness". Each storyteller echoed the motivation to help others by telling their story.

Joe explained that the work he does with his organization and sharing his story, is "100% for these kids." For Joe, his story is something that is meant to be told: "I have to embrace this journey, and understand this is bigger than me. This ain't about me. This is about these kids." For some of the storytellers who had caused harm, there is a will to share the story so that others can learn from their mistakes. Pat explained that part of the reason he wished to tell his story was to give back to the community and hope that his words could impact a young person "so that they didn't follow the life of crime that [he] led." Yves shared along these lines, saying "it would be a shame to let all this experience go to waste ... And I wouldn't want anybody to make the same mistakes I've done." These ideas are, in part, some of the initial motivators to begin speaking to others.

The motivation to share the story was reinforced when the participants began receiving audience feedback after the first few presentations. Manjit shared that the response from the audiences and communities was one of deep appreciation, which gave him and his wife "more impetus to bring awareness" to the community. He elaborated "even if it affects one life, it's worth doing." Katy recalled the audience response she received after first sharing her story was so rich that "right away [she] believed [she] was onto something." Claire and Jim echoed this sentiment saying that the feedback early on was what demonstrated to them that their words could and did have an impact.

This feedback encourages the storytellers to keep coming back to share year after year: "It's what keeps me going. It's those hundreds of e-mails" (Jim). Ben explained that seeing the connection individuals made to his story, there was a "glimmer of hope that I'd seen, that I was actually doing something that was worthwhile." Michael said the feedback he receives "gives [him] a reason to actually think this is worth doing." When Katy hears the difference her story has made in the lives of others, she said, "that's what keeps me coming back." Seeing how the story moves people in their own lives is one reason that keeps the storytellers motivated to continue sharing.

Rose said these moments of audience connection are what demonstrate to her that her story is important, recalling a time when "there was one man, came up and said

it was magical ... that just gives you a feeling of I'm at the right place, saying the right thing, at the right time." For each participant (along with the internal drive to share lessons with communities) it is the comments, letters, questions, and emails they receive that demonstrate and reinforce the importance and value of their stories.

Over the years, the storytellers and their stories have become known to their local communities, and in some cases known across communities in Canada and internationally. Many shared that at this point in their storytelling journey, they rarely seek the opportunity to share. Manjit and Michael both explained they do not initiate sharing; when they do share, it is in response to an invitation from members of the community wishing to hear the story. Michael maintained that feedback shows him his story is important, valuable, and worth sharing; however, it is not the primary reason why he does it: "if [the listeners] get something out of it, that's pretty cool for me. But whether it's enough for me to want to look for more opportunities to do it, probably not." Michael sees his sharing as a "public service" to those who have asked him to share.

Rose, too, explained that much of her sharing recently is out of "demand and opportunity ... It very much depends on the whims of the people, of the public demand that I'm supplying." Yves echoed this notion, joking, "I'm in demand!" The participants explained that they do their best to respond to these invitations when they can. Agreeing to speak can depend on logistics (Ben, Claire, Jim, Joe, Katy, Manjit, Michael, Pat, Rose, Yves), safety (Ben, Joe, Claire), and whether they feel they have "enough emotional reserve to do it" (Michael). We find the presence of the listener at each stage: the motivation to share at the beginning, the reinforcement to continue sharing, and ongoing sharing through responding to requests.



#### **4.2.2. Lessons from the Heart: “Storytelling is a way of communicating information from the heart.”<sup>20</sup>**

The lessons contained in the stories are best shared when participants are able to speak from a place of emotion and heart, rather than a more structured approach, such as, lecture-style or sharing a scripted piece.

##### ***4.2.2.1 Embracing Emotion: “Speaking from the heart.”<sup>21</sup>***

Each storyteller explained the value of speaking openly and honestly from the heart; rather than presenting a scripted story. Katy noted, “how different it was when you were just telling your own story and speaking from the heart, how easy it was to share. And what fruitful conversation came out. The conversations that emerged were so interesting and diverse.” All the participants touched on the fact that sharing lessons from the heart is what will work best when teaching others.

Some participants explained that in the past, they had tried to be more scripted, but found when allowing for more spontaneity and flexibility the messages they wish to share had more of an impact. Joe said his presentations are far better received if they are unscripted and come from the heart:

Shoot from the heart ... If you’re shooting from a scripted, kind of, in-your-face, you know, oh-I-know-best and this is the way it is ... no [shaking head]. Not the kids I work with. The kids I work with want to know one thing: that it’s real.

Pat, too, explained early on he would use a script because he was “new at it, and nervous, and determined to do well at it.” However, with experience he realized that the structure created by a script did not give enough space for a dialogue to emerge between him and his audiences. He stopped using his script and encouraged more audience participation, “...by doing that, that would allow the talk to go into the direction that it needs to go. Rather than where I think it should go. That worked a lot better.” He continued, “I think people tend to get more interested in spontaneous stuff, and believe spontaneous stuff, rather than scripts.” Yves’ approach to sharing is to “tell the truth” about his

20 (Jim)

21 (Katy)

experiences. Speaking about lived experience works best without attempting to structure or memorize the story exactly.

Michael very consciously does not use a script. What occurred in his story has

... harmed a lot of people, devastatingly so. And if I can't communicate that through emotion and power of the words, then I ought not to be doing this at all. ... by having a script, it detracts from the emotion of it. I don't want to do that, because it loses impact there if it feels like I'm just reciting something over and over again.

Asked why this emotional impact is important for himself and his audiences, Michael explained that it contributes to a fuller understanding of his story and creates more opportunity for learning and growth,

It seems to me that people transform more when there's emotion involved. It's not just about weighing pros and cons of this approach versus another approach, right. And emotion's involved because the crime, the harm, involves emotion. It's not something where you are just talking about these events academically. We're talking about real people, real lives. ... And that's emotional ... So, if you don't convey that to an audience who hasn't had any experience in that level of harm, then you have to actually give them a sense of what it feels like, because if they don't feel it, their understanding of it won't be as great.

Michael's words were picked up in other participants' reflections. Each person explained that the reason storytelling works so well in relaying these lessons, is because it is real, it is told from the heart, and it engages people emotionally: "That's what storytelling is about, you share a story not because you're shaking up the intellect, it's because you're moving [places hand over heart]" (Claire). Jim reflected that people are moved and connections are made when the storyteller's authenticity, heart, and soul come out through the story. Lessons are considered to be more transformational and longer-lasting when individuals are engaged emotionally.

Ben elaborated on why connecting lessons on an emotional level works better than solely teaching through cognition, especially in youth,

It's a lot better to speak with your heart. ... The thing I know with kids is there's a lot of data stating that their frontal lobe's not developed. So when it comes to decisions, it's very emotion-based. So connecting at a more emotional level and ... getting them to a position where they're emotionally charged and thinking of the positive things and connections

to the community. Whereas, if they're out in the community and they're emotionally charged in a negative situation, they may not make the best decisions. But if we connect those two...

Engaging emotional learning allows youth to make connections in ways that do not need to rely solely on their rational thinking. By putting a face behind the story and infusing emotion behind the headline, Ben saw that youth “could connect with the story. They connect with the bad parts, but they can also connect with the parts that were transformational.” For each storyteller, engaging emotion through real stories is an effective method of teaching others.

#### **4.2.2.2 Lessons Shared: “It all changes group-wise.”<sup>22</sup>**

The story is used to convey “valuable lessons” (Ben) and “teachable moments” (Katy). While speaking from the heart and allowing for a natural and flexible presentation to occur, the foundational portion of the story, that is, the events that occurred, largely stays the same. However, the lessons included in any given presentation are more fluid. The lessons shared depend on where the participants are at in their lives; and largely, on who the listener is: “There’s a million different stories/life lessons that anyone can get out of it. It changes every time. If you see me do ten presentations, it would change ten times” (Ben).

Each person talked about how they do tend to tailor the message to the particular audience, and be “cognizant of the audience in terms of their needs” (Michael). Joe used the analogy of becoming a “chameleon” when choosing which aspects of his story to emphasize. Before a presentation Claire will think about “what it is that [she] feels [she is] responsible for presenting and sharing.” Pat explained he will get a “feel for the audience” and share his story in a way that fits best for those listening.

A challenge that can occur is related to being able to read the audience:

Every place has it’s own personality and every place has a host, so you’re dealing with the dynamics of walking into a hosted party, in a way, learning what are the rules of this party ... And so, the uncertainty of the challenge to read the audience, make the adaption (Rose).

Though, as previously mentioned, with practice the storytellers do gain an increased confidence or ability in being able to read the audience.

Each storyteller has experience speaking to a variety of different audiences in a variety of settings. The most common audiences that participants referred to include: youth, prisoners, victims, justice practitioners, and community members. Topics overlap for each audience type; however, they vary in emphasis and focus for each varies accordingly,

I'm gonna speak differently, emphasize different things. [I'll] say things a little bit softer and cautionary and sensitively, or even suggestively, with victims ... or having an offender in the room, and knowing that there is a lifer sitting there, and when I talk about lifers, when I talk about offenders, how do I give space to that person and generosity to that person. You know, and not humiliate anyone in public (Rose).

It is important to each person that what they teach in their presentation is useful and appropriate for the particular audience. The following two sections provide an overview of the types of lessons the storytellers convey across audiences.

#### **4.2.2.2.1 Inviting Critical Thinking: to “provoke some reflection and thought about the whole notion of harm and who does harm.”<sup>23</sup>**

The participants explained that with their stories of restoration or transformation they wish to invite their listeners to reconsider how they think about harm, crime, and its resolution. This includes challenging stereotypes and encouraging community responsibility. Claire explained she wants “folks to challenge all of the things that would seem the norm, and seem acceptable...” It is about inviting students, communities, and justice professionals to question what they are told and to think originally and critically. Michael explained that a part of his story “dispel[s] notions people may carry about crime, and the criminal justice system that are, stereotypical or reinforced by the media.” Katy shares what worked for her in her particular case, “...not letting myself fall into the social expectation to be filled with hatred and vengeance, worked for me.” The participants are presenting alternative ways of dealing with harm and its aftermath, which fall outside the dominant way society tends to about these issues.

23 (Michael)

Storytellers wish to challenge assumptions and stereotypes. A part of Ben's message is to have his audiences get "passed fear-based thinking" when it comes to dealing with offenders. Individuals tend to carry an image or even a caricature of what it means to be an offender or a victim, and by coming in and sharing who they are, participants want to break some of these stereotypes. This relates to how we label others. Joe explained that he knows from experience what it is like to be labeled, and part of his message is to avoid doing that to the youth he works with, "I'll forever be the ex-gangster, I'll forever be the recovering drug addict. I will not put a label on these kids. I will not do that." The overarching theme is to see the person, rather than the label or stereotype.

Furthermore, participants wish to encourage audiences to think about community responsibility, and the role of professionals in the criminal justice system: "this expectation that a 'system' is going to somehow look after all the problems we may encounter is a crazy notion. We are the system. We are" (Katy). Katy explained that her story speaks to the issue of community responsibility:

It's sort of a social tendency to expect social structures and agencies to look after us ... if something goes wrong we call the police, then it goes to the justice system, and it's all about systems. Where I think what we really need to do is become way more grass roots and get young people to work on conflict resolution at the root. And learn to have difficult conversations, learn to look after the behaviour as it's happening, or prevent it from happening all together. Rather than letting things go to that next level all the time, and then just expecting some system to magically drop in and look after things.

The piece of encouraging community responsibility can be accomplished by empowering audiences. Joe explained that his work in schools: "is about developing resiliency within our youth." Manjit's message to youth is about what they can do as individuals to combat youth violence in their own communities. When he and his wife present, Manjit said he "empower[s] them, I build their self-esteem ... I just give them positive feedback. Appreciate the young people, tell them that they have pressures and how they can deal with them." He and his wife intend to empower youth and their parents to take an active, positive role in their community and in situations of conflict.

Finally, Claire shared a story of an experience she had speaking at a conference for criminal justice professionals. Sharing from a victim's point of view, her presentation

was scheduled in the late evening, in part, leading to a sparse audience turnout that made her feel “dismissed.” She explains, “I was not enamored with my talk at all. I was dreadful ... And I didn’t feel I belonged there ... I was just like, ‘Yep, you’re the experts aren’t you? So here I am.’” It was difficult for Claire to present in her usual energetic and engaging way when she did not feel comfortable with the way her presentation had been handled, nor with the people in the room. This notion of not allowing ourselves to be “cowed by experts” is a lesson that Claire has been integrating into her presentations to encourage others to stand up and challenge those in power.

Some of the storytellers participated a restorative justice process to deal with the aftermath of the harm (Ben, Claire, Katy, Manjit, Michael); and this is a part of the lesson they share. If Michael is sharing with a group of victims he will talk about how the restorative justice process benefitted him. In sharing, Michael talks about how this experience has been life changing for him, “...it shows the positive power of a restorative process.” He elaborated that his story is, “beyond a story of healing between two individuals, I think there’s a bigger story of what things could look like on a bigger scale in terms of a community influence and societal processes.” Speaking about restorative justice in this way contributes to the overall message of challenging normative ways of thinking about crime and its resolution.

A final point comes out of Claire’s experience with how restorative justice is defined by various groups. She explained that some people do not see her and John as having participated in restorative justice, because the two of them did not fill out forms or consult with any “group or association or committee.” They had their encounter safely and privately.

When I saw the responses that came to a couple of talks that we did, the turnouts [were] very small. People were told that’s not actually “it” [restorative justice] anyway. It was very, very, very subtle, and in a way kind of brutal. ... So I’ve grown and changed a lot. I do speak about it more so now, especially because through my storytelling, I’m not inventing this. I’ve lived what it’s been like. So has John. To be shut out because we did not tell our story to the chosen audience -- No, no, no, to the audience that would have chosen us...

Experiencing being shut out by certain audiences, Claire and John “have infused new questions around whose story we should hear, [and] challenging that. Why we choose to

hear some and not others? Who decides?” Challenging thinking ranges from broader issues of re-thinking harm and criminal justice as a whole, to more specific issues of restorative justice itself.

#### **4.2.2.2 Offering Hope: “You’re not alone.”<sup>24</sup>**

Along with the need to challenge audience thinking, participants expressed that the lessons within their story also need to convey hope for implementing better ways of dealing with harm. When she tells her story, Rose would like people to gain “a sense of hope and inspiration.” Ben explained that part of his story is about “trying to train people in hopefulness and acceptance.” It is about sharing the message of hope that there is a better way to move forward in one’s own life in the aftermath of conflict or trauma. Jim is very aware of this piece of his story, and it is a part of his challenge to stay truthful while still encouraging hope in his listeners, particularly when young people ask him what life is like for him now,

I have to play God sometimes ... they’re really asking because they’re really hopeless and they want to have some hope. And even though I have tons of hope, there’s still segments of my life that I’m not happy with.

A balance needs to occur between offering hope for a better future, while staying true to the reality of the ups and downs we encounter in life.

Michael explained how he offers hope differently to specific audiences. He offers hope for those who are incarcerated to “know that it’s within their power to make things better for people” even if it’s not to face their victim directly, but “they still have the ability in some way to contribute perhaps towards the lives of some other people.” He offers hope for those who are in the middle of grieving, “sometimes people who are grieving need to know that there’s hope, too, for victims of homicide ... they just need to have some faith that it’s going to happen for them.” His story shows that “there’s hope for something better, and even something quite amazing afterwards”(Michael). And finally, he offers “hope for those working within the justice system that they are able to make a positive difference given the right circumstances and approach” (Michael). The two broad messages go hand

<sup>24</sup> (Joe)

in hand: first, challenge normative ways of thinking; second, inspire action through encouraging hope.

### **4.2.3. Audience Feedback: “You never dream of having this kind of impact.”<sup>25</sup>**

As discussed, audience feedback contributes to the motivation to continue sharing the story. This section serves to explore the type of feedback storytellers receive in more detail. Through feedback from the individual listeners, audiences, and communities the storytellers are able to learn how their story has affected others in various ways. This feedback also helps participants to adjust their story, or think critically about themselves, as discussed in Section 4.1.2.

Each person shared that in the majority of the time, their listeners are largely positive, respectful, and receptive. Though it is rare, Rose experienced some challenges in the beginning relating to how others perceived her motives for sharing, “I think there was some negativity. There was some feeling that I was exploiting the memory of my daughter ... or that I wanted fame or something ... But I mainly got a lot of sympathy and just courage.” During our interviews, it was uncommon for participants to share negative experiences related to their storytelling. However, when they did speak of times that could be considered negative, they always qualified it saying that such experiences will come out positive because of the level of learning that occurs for all those involved, including themselves.

#### **4.2.3.1 Changing Thinking: “Mental shifts.”<sup>26</sup>**

Much of what the participants intend to do by sharing their story is to invite critical thinking and dialogue surrounding issues of crime, harm, and the ways we can reach resolution or transformation. Ben said he enjoys the feedback round at the end of his presentations, where he is able to hear people’s thoughts on what he presented,

<sup>25</sup> (Yves)

<sup>26</sup> (Michael)



particularly in relation to breaking some of the assumptions and stereotypes people carried prior to hearing his story.

Along these lines, Yves elaborated:

The letters that I've received from some of the students and the impact that I had on their life and understanding, I mean it was just, wow! It was just mind blowing. You hope that you're gonna have an impact, but you never dream of having this kind of impact.

He said that the letters he receives can be up to 10 pages long,

These young people are ... explaining before I walked in, some of them are saying that they were scared, you know, scared shitless ... because they had an idea of who I was ... But after they heard me talk and all this, it changed their whole view about people that are incarcerated.

By listening to his story, others are able to move past preconceived notions or stereotypes about who he is and what it means to be or have been incarcerated.

From the perspective of someone who was harmed, Michael, too, shared that his story chips away at some of the preconceived notions people carry regarding what type of resolution is possible in serious cases of violent crime:

In general I've been really happy with kind of the effect that it's had on people. And people tell me that it's changed how they've looked at situations in their own life, especially the forgiveness aspect of my story. They think, well, if it's possible to forgive somebody for such a horrible crime what does that mean for them when they have issues in their lives that they think are so much less serious.

Continuing his reflections about audience feedback Michael said he has been "quite astounded" when hearing how his story has changed the way people think in their personal lives.

Michael elaborated that some of the strongest reactions he has gotten have been from prisoners:

...prisoners, especially people who are lifers, have a great ability in the right circumstance to be open about how something affects them. I've gotten probably the most emotional reactions from prisoners, because they just put themselves in that situation so easily. They've killed people. They have victims themselves. And for them to make the mental

shift from hearing my story into their situation they can do it. So, when they have an emotional reaction it just comes out. And they have all kinds of comments and questions ... you're going to get emotions that really easily come to the surface for people, because harm is really close to them. That's what's responsible for things going wrong in their lives.

In Rose's experiences sharing in prisons, as someone who was harmed, she noted: "I'll never forget the time when I was speaking in prison to a room that was full of people who had committed horrendous crimes. And I moved them to tears with my story." Hearing about the shifts in thinking, seeing the emotional reactions, and having listeners reflect and ask questions are moments of connection that make up the visible impacts of storytelling.

#### ***4.2.3.2 Opening up, Opening Doors: "They reach out for help."<sup>27</sup>***

After each presentation, a number of audience members will open up and share their story in return. Rose explained that she is offering her audiences a part of her story "for them to mull over." Along these lines, Katy sees her sharing as a point of departure for others: "The process is creating an opportunity for other people to consider their own stories. I'm just the set-up." Pat echoed these thoughts in saying that, especially in circle, his story "gives [the listeners] a chance to do their storytelling, and it gives them a chance to listen to something." These stories allow listeners to become active participants in considering their own stories, and in some cases, taking action to change for the better.

Jim sees the purpose of his storytelling as a way to get young people to think and talk about themselves. Sharing is not "just for the hell of it. It's not just about me ... it's for the purpose of inspiring kids to talk about themselves, sometimes for the very first time" (Jim). When kids talk about themselves, they reach out to Jim or to others they trust.

Along these lines, Manjit shared that he and his wife are able to see how their listeners are affected by the story when they become motivated to change some aspects in their own lives,

... we saw lots of tears, and after the presentation people will come and give us hugs. All the young people, you know, some of them will cry and they say, "I was a bully and I'm not gonna do it again." So the impact

27 (Jim)

was so good there, because they heard the story first hand. And it really impacted them for the good.

He continued that he and his wife can see the impact, yet “at the same time, [he] hope[s] always that these things they’ll take home.” There is a faith and hope that the audience reactions are not fleeting, but do continue to have an impact in the long-term.

Joe shares his story as part of his work with his organization, as such, he is in a position where he is able to see the changes in the kids he works with over time. He has organized his work in a way that allows the listeners to reach out if they need to. Many of the rewards of his work have come from the connections he has built with the students,

Seeing success rates. These kids crossing the stage. Graduation. Kids calling you dad on a regular basis. These kids not having a place to turn to and pick up the phone and say, “I’m thinking about using and what do I do?” These kids getting full-time jobs. These kids quitting drugs. I can go on, and on, and on.

The effects are often better observed if there is connection present, like in Joe’s case, or when audiences are smaller. Some participants reflected that in smaller groups, or in circle, the impacts become far more visible than they would in a larger setting. Michael elaborated,

... in circle with people it’s all about listening and having that connection. And I have to say that it always affects me deeply when I have prisoners come up to me and say that they would like to have a process with their victims too, if they had some ability to atone for some of the harm they’ve done. Especially some of these high profile cases, they’re in the media and you meet some of these guys and you don’t think that they’re going to be able to say that ... That they’re just listening to me talk and this has had this effect on them, they wanna do this, right.

Katy and Jim both talked about how when they, themselves, are vulnerable, it gives others permission to be vulnerable as well. “If I share what’s in my deepest heart, which makes me vulnerable, it allows you to share what’s in your deepest heart. People trust vulnerable people” (Jim). Jim uses his storytelling as “an instrument” that can help identify some of the individuals in the audience who need help. During her presentations, Claire, too, saw “that there was a trust factor that is invited.” There is a reciprocity that emerges in the aftermath of storytelling. By sharing their experiences, the storytellers are also providing an opportunity for others to share their voice as well.

#### **4.2.3.3 The Untold Impact: “Have faith sometimes that you made a difference.”<sup>28</sup>**

Storytellers acknowledged and elaborated on the fact that they do not, and cannot, always know the full or long-term impact of what they have shared. Michael reflected,

...you don't always know some people's minds at the moment, but I hear it second-hand sometimes. Because people aren't always able to process the thoughts right at that time after listening. They need some time to think about it. And then, I think, in some ways the impact for many of them becomes even greater.

Michael and Pat both talked about how it is not possible to hear from every single person who has been impacted, Michael explained that there are times when he has to

...have to have faith sometimes that you made a difference ... even though you never hear from them again. You know it's been good, because occasionally somebody does contact you and say that you made a real difference. And then you have to multiply that by perhaps the hundreds or thousands of people that had contact with, and think that, 'wow even though I don't hear from them that somehow it was important.'

Pat said he receives feedback, “every so often, not as often as I would like,” though he does recall times when people have approached him who remember him from a class he spoke to, and have shared that they really appreciated his talk.

Katy and Claire both noted that when they come into a community and share, they do not often have the opportunity to stay long enough afterwards to see the changes. Claire said she will “swoop in, drop the story and leave”; she wants “to simply plant seeds in different areas ... so that there are different conversations.” Katy said,

Sometimes there's really rich conversation that I know continues long after I've left. And sometimes [audiences] are a lot quieter and less willing to speak out. It depends on what's going on in their particular community. And because I kind of just drop in, generally I'm not privy to that unless I've had an opportunity to get to work with them in advance.

Each storyteller receives a large amount of letters and e-mails after their presentations that confirm they have created a starting point for community conversation.

28 (Michael)

However, they are often unable to see exactly what growth or change has occurred in each community during the weeks, months, and years that follow their presentation.

#### **4.2.4. Building Stronger Communities: “Community of care”<sup>29</sup>**

The impacts on individual audience members may broaden out into the community. Ben explains that with his story he breaks down stereotypes, which in turn builds human connection, “and it doesn’t mean to say that it’s going fix [everyone], because I don’t think there’s any magical pill or button or whatever that you can press. But it’s going to help a handful of people.” He continued that it is the moments of connection to his listeners when, at the end of circle, he can share conversation or a meal with them that there is a feeling of: “We’re a community now.” For Ben, if more people were willing to help, “or to be a part of something bigger than just themselves, we’d have one hell of a strong [community] fabric.”

Pat spoke about the “community of care” as compared with, “community of place.” A community of care, Pat explains, is when people come together and volunteer to make their communities safe places to live in and enjoy: “And I didn’t realize that. So, now I work hard at becoming a part of the community of care.” The more Pat has become involved with volunteering his time, and sharing his story, the more he has come to understand how his past actions have affected communities, and how he can now contribute in a positive way, “that’s how getting involved in community things and restorative justice and that, it made me open my eyes and see how my behaviour affects the whole community.” Pat has been able to take on a role in contributing to the community of care, and hopes to continue doing it to the best of his ability.

For Joe and his organization, creating community is what reinforces his ability to do his work. By being so integrated within the schools, Joe is able to create deeper connections with the kids he works with. In order for his work to be effective this connection and relationship building is very much needed. It is thanks to the rapport, relationships,

<sup>29</sup> (Pat)

and support with the students, schools, police, and administrators that has allowed Joe to come into the schools with his story, and his organization.

Jim explained how his storytelling comes full circle, wherein the effect on his listeners and their communities comes back to impact him,

It changes them, which means it changes other people's lives. So, it's like a ripple effect. And then, when that happens ... it's more of a kinder, caring community that affects me.

Manjit echoed this notion of the ripple effect. He and his wife wish to impart the understanding that one person's actions affect the individual, their family, and "the whole society and nation ... it's just a ripple effect that it doesn't end there." The lessons contained in the stories are meant to affect more than just the storyteller, but also individual listeners, and communities. The final word on the topic comes from Katy, "Storytelling is such a powerful, powerful way of building resiliency in community. And we have to talk about the tough stuff. We can't just tell the good stories. We have to tell the shitty stories too."

## Chapter 5.

### Analysis and Discussion

*“...this is me. This is who I am. This is my story. Take what you want, and leave the rest.” - Jim*

In this chapter the results of the study are placed in the context of the extant literature and research on storytelling and restorative justice. Section 5.1 is aimed at addressing the first research question: Has publicly sharing one’s story of restoration and/or transformation in the aftermath of traumatic violence influenced the storyteller over time? It is demonstrated that storytelling contributes to an individual’s movement past trauma by facilitating opportunities for the creation of order, connection, and empowerment. Section 5.2 serves to answer the second research question: In turn, how does the storyteller experience the impact of their story on the audiences and communities who hear the story? Much of the motivation for, and rewards of, sharing emerge from witnessing the positive impacts on audience members and communities. Such impacts include individual shifts in thinking, connection with others, and community action and empowerment. In section 5.3, the two research questions are tied together demonstrating the way in which witnessing impacts on story-listeners comes full circle to influence the storyteller’s sense of order, connection, and empowerment.

#### 5.1. Influence of Sharing on the Storyteller

In the aftermath of trauma, individuals experience disorder, disconnection, and disempowerment (Herman, 2001; Westwood & McLean, 2007; Zehr, 2002b). As such, gaining these three elements back can move the storyteller forward on the journeys towards belonging and identity. These two journeys involve re-framing, or “re-storying”, a traumatic event into a meaningful experience in a way that informs our notions of who we are and where we belong (Zehr, 2002b, p. 24). In Chapter 2, a connection was made between Zehr’s (2002b) journey metaphor and ontological security. Recall, ontological security is the ability to see one’s life events as having continuity, as well as knowing one’s

identity and group affiliation (Danermark & Moller, 2008; Giddens, 1991; Kay, 2012; Stanisevski, 2011).

The following three sections serve to demonstrate how publicly sharing the story allows the storyteller to move forward on his or her journeys towards belonging and identity and strengthen his or her ontological security through re-establishing the three elements lost in the aftermath of trauma: order (5.1.1), connection (5.1.2), and empowerment (5.1.3).

### **5.1.1. From Disorder to Order**

Storytelling and narrative processes help individuals infuse traumatic experiences with order, meaning, and purpose (Atkinson, 1998, Etherington, 2008; Kroth & Cranton, 2014; Pranis, 2002; Richardson, 2015; Shuman, 2005; Zehr, 2002b). Each participant in this study experienced trauma. Participants who speak from a harmed perspective experienced the traumatic violent offence that resulted in a family member being murdered. Those who speak from a dual perspective experienced trauma in their lives (in some cases victimization beginning in childhood) leading up to, and following, the commission of their violent offence(s). A traumatic experience can cause disorder and break the “continuity and smooth flow” of an individual’s understanding of their life experiences and themselves (Richardson, 2015, p. 23). Previously established routines are disrupted and the world suddenly becomes less trustworthy and less predictable. These four elements (continuity, routine, trust, and predictability) make up our sense of ontological security (Danermark & Moller, 2008).

Storytelling helps re-establish order. Finding order within a seemingly senseless event involves meaning-making. Two main ways in which we make meaning are *sense-making* and *benefit-finding* (Richardson, 2015). Section 5.1.1.1 serves to discuss how sense-making occurs, particularly as it is accomplished alongside transformative learning. Next, section 5.1.1.2 serves to examine benefit-finding in relation to the motivation to begin, and continue, sharing.



### **5.1.1.1 Transformative Learning and Sense-Making**

It became evident in this study that sense-making can be closely related to transformative learning. Sense-making includes gaining new understandings of the self, the experience, and the world. This involves answering “why” questions; understanding “what the experience means about the life we thought we knew”; restoring “order, security, and predictability”; and, finding “reasons for what has happened” (Gillies & Neimeyer, 2006, p. 36). Kroth and Cranton (2014) link sense-making, storytelling, and transformative learning: “If people tell and read stories to make sense out of their experiences, understand their identity, and understand social and cultural issues, this is all a part of how transformative learning takes place” (p. 10).

As mentioned earlier a disorienting dilemma can be a catalyst for transformative learning (Kroth & Cranton, 2014; Mezirow, 2000). Transformative learning may occur as a response to loss or trauma (Kroth & Cranton, 2014). In this study, the major disorienting dilemma is considered to be the traumatic harm or index crime, committed against victim or committed by the offender. Transformative learning involves critical self-reflection that results in a revision or reconstruction of our understandings of ourselves and our experiences, and subsequently, acting on these new understandings (Brown-Shaw, et al., 1999; Kroth & Cranton, 2014; Mezirow, 1990).

Participants explained that sharing their story with others allowed them to come to deeper understandings of themselves and the experience. Ben said that sharing his story allowed him to “[make] sense of something that didn’t really make sense, [and try] to find a purpose.” Defining, and re-defining identity occurs in the following ways: being driven to learn more about their roots and family history (Claire, Jim); admitting to the harmful acts they have committed (Ben, Pat); exposing the shame surrounding the experience which then allows them to re-claim a more positive identity (Ben, Manjit, Rose); coming into roles well-known to the community (Jim, Joe, Katy, Manjit, Rose); and even, defining who they are *not* (Michael). Sharing the story leads to personal developments that are tangibly tracked each time the story is re-told (Yves). Creating and re-creating the story, facilitates a continuous process of critical self-reflection necessary for transformative learning.

Due to the public nature of storytelling, transformative learning moments also occur alongside audience questions and feedback. This can include: coming to deeper understandings of others (Pat); practicing forgiveness of others and of the self (Jim, Manjit, Rose); and, engaging with audience questions and reactions in ways that create deeper reflections (Claire, Rose). These attributes combine to allow participants to see themselves as more than just victim or offender, and to see their experience as more than just a sense-less tragedy. In keeping with Richardson's (2015) research, 9/11 docents (volunteer tour guides) were able to "transform their perspective from personal tragedy to an important historical event" by sharing their stories (p. 30). This also occurred in Androff's (2012) findings where GTRC participants gained greater understandings of their role in the traumatic events.

Finally, in the process of sharing, the challenges faced create further opportunities for transformative learning. Sharing a story of trauma takes an emotional toll on the teller. Storytellers have to learn to take care of themselves and their audiences in light of this difficulty. Self-care strategies included maintaining a balance in their life (Ben), identifying their own needs (Michael) and boundaries (Ben, Claire, Joe, Manjit, Michael), drawing on their faith (Manjit; Rose), or having supportive and loving people around them (All). These self-care strategies echo Smith and Egan's (2010a) participants' advice to those who are considering sharing their story; that is, it is about knowing yourself and allowing yourself to grow with the process in safer ways.

#### ***5.1.1.2 Benefit-Finding as Motivation***

A second way that meaning-making occurs is through benefit-finding. Benefit-finding is the ability to find the "silver-lining" surrounding the traumatic experience (Holland et al., 2006, p. 176). For the participants in this study, benefit-finding encompassed much of the initial and ongoing motivation to share the story with others. They wanted to share the lessons contained within their story (All), create community awareness and encourage community responsibility (All), to help others not make the same mistakes (All), to honour the memory of the murdered person (Claire, Katy, Manjit, Pat, Rose), and ultimately, to "make good come out of bad, of ugly" (Rose). This type of benefit-finding is also found in Smith and Egan's (2010a) findings where their interviewees' motivations to share revolved around wanting to be an inspiration, and wanting to turn the story into something that could

be shared with others. Using the traumatic experience as a departure point for doing something productive and meaningful is a major way that participants have been able to gain meaning.

The gains individuals make as a result of sharing their story is another form of benefit-finding. The previous section presented a number of gains the storytellers experienced, such as learning more about themselves and others, defining their roles and needs, and having opportunities to practice forgiveness. These gains were also framed as the benefits of storytelling. This was found in Smith and Egan's (2010a) guide, where participants stated they shared "for personal reasons, such as growth, transformation and healing" (p. 51). Richardson's (2015) research echoed this as well, where 9/11 volunteer docents were able to "[rebuild] their lives in the aftermath of their loss" (p. 30). The benefits that occur from storytelling are a part of the reason the storytellers continue to tell their story year after year. Benefit-finding is also closely connected to the opportunities storytelling creates for connection (5.1.2) and empowerment (5.1.3).

### **5.1.2. From Disconnection to Connection**

Trauma is also characterized by disconnection. For those who have had serious harms committed against them or against a loved one, the experience can be very isolating. One reason for this is because often those around us have not experienced such shattering, extreme cases of violence and are unable to relate to the depth of victimization. Michael referred to this as "victim isolation." Those who have committed serious harms experience disconnection as well - one example would be the disconnection resulting from being incarcerated and removed from society.

A large portion of meaning-making (sense-making and benefit-finding) relates to the motivation and rewards of connecting, or re-connecting, with others. Storytelling is one way of bringing individuals and communities closer together (Atkinson, 1998; Elliott, 2011; Pranis, 2000; Senehi, 2011). For participants, sharing the story was a tool to connect and reconnect with a wide range of people: the murdered loved one (Claire, Katy, Pat, Rose); the participants' family and friends (All); people in similar situations, that is, troubled youth, incarcerated populations, or victims (All); audiences who hear the story (All); and

communities (All). Michael explained that the times when he is able to connect with another person are what “[give] the most meaning... being able to share part of your life with somebody.” This connection further contributes to being able to find meaning and order within the experience. Moving past trauma “cannot occur in isolation”, for regaining a sense of trust and identity “can only occur in connection with supportive others” (Westwood & McLean, 2007, pp. 181 - 181). According to Zehr (2002b), re-connection plays an important role in our ability to transcend trauma. Connecting with others, or feeling like we belong, contributes to establishing a sense of ontological security.

These moments of connection and belonging encompass much of the benefits of storytelling. Sharing the story brings the storyteller and some members of their family closer together (All). However, this is not always the case with every family member (Claire, Michael); sometimes there is a lack of understanding regarding the decision to share, or what sharing really entails. Though the storytellers often spoke of times when sharing reinforced familial ties, they noted that not connecting on these matters was okay too, as sharing publicly is not for everyone. When Smith and Egan’s (2010a) interviewees chose to go public, they explained that “they ran the risk of creating further harm for those they cared about, and also risked damaging family and other relationships” (p. 52). These realities are dealt with by being open and honest with family members and seizing such challenges as learning opportunities.

In some cases, family members were not always able to be present to a large extent. This is when other people, volunteers or community members, became almost like family members and were important sources of encouragement, support, and connection (Ben, Manjit, Michael, Pat, Yves). The value of this type of support is expanded upon in Smith and Egan’s (2010a) work where their participants shared advice about how to be a good support person in terms of preparation, debriefing, and emotional support: “[h]aving a supportive, trusted person to affirm and uphold one’s experience can add to the sense of empowerment, and release the storyteller from self-doubt” (p. 54).

When sharing publicly, speaking from the heart was important to the storytellers as they said it allows for deeper connection because the listener is engaged emotionally, not just cognitively. Emotional engagement has been cited in the literature as a factor

contributing to connection (Pranis, 2001; Senehi, 2011). Connection with audiences and individual audience members was a major motivator for, and reward of, storytelling (All). This is echoed in Richardson's (2015) study where the most rewarding piece of being a 9/11 volunteer docent was the opportunity to meet, interact, and connect with "visitors from around the world" (p. 25). Michael pointed out that connection can occur more easily with small audiences. Those interviewed for Smith and Egan's (2010a) guide also advised new storytellers to start out with smaller audiences as trust and safety can be more readily established. Finally, connection occurs in a broader community context, especially as their role as storyteller becomes increasingly well-known and community members acknowledge and appreciate what the participants have to offer (All).

Storytelling promotes connection, belonging and social inclusion (Androff, 2012; Gardner & Poole, 2009; Soltys & Kunz, 2007). Zehr (2002b) said that the journey to belonging and the journey to identity can be thought of as a double-helix and saw identity as "in relationship to others" (p. 21). Identity is socially constructed and re-constructed through our stories and within our relationships (Etherington, 2008). Connecting with others and finding a place of belonging ultimately informs us of our identities and place in the world and contributes to our sense of ontological security.

### **5.1.3. From Disempowerment to Empowerment**

The third effect of trauma is disempowerment. The previous section established the importance of connection and belonging to the storyteller and to the process of storytelling. Empowerment can be defined as "a process of increasing personal, interpersonal, or political power so that individuals can take action to improve their life situations" (Gutierrez, 1999, p. 149 as cited in Wise, 2007, p. 9). The word, "power" is the focus here (Wise, 2007, p. 9). Pranis (2001) makes the link between story, listening, and power:

Storytelling is fundamental for healthy social relationships. To feel connected and respected we need to tell our own stories and have others listen. For others to feel respected and connected to us, they need to tell their stories and have us listen. Having others listen to your story is a function of power in our culture. The more power you have, the more people will listen respectfully to your story. Consequently, listening to someone's

story is a way of empowering them, of validating their intrinsic worth as a human being (p. 7).

Moving forward from trauma should be based on “restoring control to the individual (not controlling him or her) and the encouragement of connection” (Westwood and McLean, 2007, p. 185). The participants explained that over the years during which they have been sharing, they have become more confident in their stories, this was attributed to the ability to read an audience. This type of predictability and control is reflective of empowerment. The following sections focus on the role of the listener and their effect on the storyteller and the story.

### **5.1.3.1 Controlling the Story**

In North American society, among other places, professionals take on the role of controlling the recounting of a criminal event. In the criminal justice system we find police, lawyers, judges, and other professionals choosing which aspects of the story, or facts, are relevant to examine (Toews & Zehr, 2003). This leaves out the voices of those who were directly involved in the crime, or harm. If the crime is a particularly violent or high-profile event, which is the case for the majority of the participants in this study, then we see the media taking hold of the story and telling it in a way that is meant to sell (Shuman, 2005). As such, the professionals within these institutions hold the power surrounding how the story is told. Nils Christie (1977) wrote about the dangers of professionals stealing conflict from communities. This idea is extended to the dangers of professionals stealing stories from the individuals they belong to.

Being able to tell one’s own story allows the storyteller to control a number of aspects related to the sharing process. That is, they gain the ability to control *where* and *when* the story is told; along with *how* the story is told, which includes *what* is shared (which aspects are emphasized), and *why* the story is shared (for what purpose and for whom). Establishing this level of ownership over the story is an act of empowerment. This notion became salient when participants were discussing safety, and especially when discussing the media. The storytellers referred to having clear ground rules or boundaries when it came to choosing whether to share and what to share (Ben, Joe, Michael, Pat, Yves). Joe and Manjit both spoke about times when the media had sensationalized or misrepresented their story. Both men chose to work *with* the media to correct what was

being reported. Michael said he chooses not to speak to media altogether. The participants were careful to mention that their relationship with the media has not necessarily been primarily negative, but when inaccuracies did occur it was important to deal with them directly. When speaking about the media, Smith and Egan's (2010a) interviewees expressed that this is when "they felt they had the least control, and most vulnerability ... they found that the meaning behind their words was often distorted and parts of their life they did not want public were exposed against their wishes" (p. 57). Much like the participants in this study, they mentioned that their relationship with the media is not necessarily a negative one; however, they gave advice regarding the importance of outlining clear boundaries and expectations, along with the need for clarification or damage control when necessary (Smith & Egan, 2010a).

Sharing your story in your own way re-establishes control, this is seen in the findings regarding the 9/11 volunteer docents: "[b]y sharing their true stories on their own terms, docents are able to exert a form of control over the remembrance of an event that was very much out of their control" (Richardson, 2015, pp. 29-30). GTRC participants also expressed satisfaction regarding their testimony as they had been given the opportunity to say what they needed to say (Androff, 2012). Having others respectfully listen to the story as it is told in the storyteller's own words is a form of empowerment (Androff, 2012; Pranis, 2001).

### **5.1.3.2 Safety**

Creating safe spaces for sharing stories of trauma in groups emerged in the literature and in this study as a concept of utmost importance. Pranis (2002) emphasizes the necessity of maintaining spaces that foster respect and emotional, spiritual, mental, and physical safety. In the context of LRP, Westwood and McLean (2007) explain safety as "apparent to the extent that individuals feel valued and unconditionally accepted and supported" (p. 185). Safety is something that is established in cooperation with the storyteller and the story-listeners.

For some participants, safety was a top concern when considering whether to share or not. Ben echoed Pranis' (2002) words when he explained that he considers physical, emotional, and mental safety prior to agreeing to speak. Participants explained

that they go into a speaking engagement with clear boundaries about what they will and will not talk about (All). Michael suggested that safety, for him, occurs when there is opportunity for connection, stating that when he can engage in a dialogue with another person then he can feel safe enough to go deeper with his story: “that creates a situation where I can feel more able to disclose or delve deeper into whatever feelings I have about my situation.” These self-imposed boundaries guide the participants in controlling when and how they tell their story.

Claire shared experiences where she did not feel comfortable sharing with an audience or organization: she felt “dismissed”, or felt that the organizers were not respectful of her process. These are examples of how a lack of respect or lack of safety has the potential to lead to harm, rather than empowerment. The situation when Claire felt the event organizers were not respecting her process is comparable to Androff’s (2012) findings relating to two participants’ dissatisfaction at the GTRC. He found participants expressed dissatisfaction in relation to feeling rushed during their testimony, or regarding the abilities of the interviewer. These are instances when the storyteller does not have the desired amount of control over their own sharing; therefore, these are times that do not foster empowerment.

Those who facilitate the story-sharing processes share the responsibility for creating safe, respectful spaces for all participants (Pranis, 2002; Smith & Egan, 2010a). Claire’s experience has implications for restorative justice advocates and event organizers who hope to bring storytellers into their institutions or organizations to speak. Restorative justice practices aim to address harm while avoiding causing further harm (Zehr, 2002b). In engaging storytellers, it is important to remain conscious of the need to maintain safety. Smith and Egan (2010a) outlined suggestions for how an organizer can maintain safety, these ranged from providing an adequate time frame, to helping prepare for the talk and the possible questions, to knowing who the audience is, and making expectations clear for all parties involved.

Certain participants shared times when safety was lacking, be it due to inaccurate media appropriations of their story, or organizers running the event in an undesirable way. These instances, however, quickly become re-framed as learning opportunities and, in



some cases, lessons passed on to the listener. This is another form of benefit-finding that occurs through the process of storytelling: seeing the positive within challenging experiences (Holland et al., 2006). The ability to re-frame challenges, seize them as learning opportunities and take action to mediate what has occurred is related to empowerment, that is, the ability to take control and ownership over what happens to oneself (Granger-Brown, 2014). It is also possible that these challenges and learning opportunities contribute to experiencing disorienting dilemmas that can trigger further critical self-reflection and transformative learning (Kroth & Cranton, 2014).

## **5.2. The Story-Listeners**

Much of the motivation and reward of storytelling results from seeing how listeners react to, and benefit from, hearing the story. The storytellers wish to teach others and give back to their communities. The following sections will address the second research question: In turn, how does the storyteller experience the impact of their story on the audiences and communities who hear the story?

### **5.2.1. Teaching from the Heart & Transformative Learning**

Storytelling, especially in traditional societies, is a teaching tool (Atkinson, 1998; Kroth & Cranton, 2014; Shannon, 1979; Pranis, 2001). For the study participants, teaching others made up a large portion of the motivation to begin and continue sharing the story. Each participant explained that it is important to them that sharing comes from place of emotion and heart. Jim put it succinctly in saying “storytelling is a way of communicating information from the heart.” According to the participants and the literature, emotion aids in conveying authenticity and genuineness that will engage the listener on a deeper level and create deeper shifts in thinking about conflict and its resolution (Jagger, 2013; Kuntz & Soltys, 2007; Pranis, 2001; Senehi, 2011; Shephard, 2007). Wanting to engage emotion was the reasoning behind not reading from a script, creating dialogue, and embracing the fact that the story will change and grow with them over the years (All).

The value of conveying lessons that engage emotion, not only cognition, relates to Bloom’s taxonomy and the affective domain of learning, that is, lessons surrounding

values and attitudes (Shephard, 2007; Ringess, 1975). The participants in this study were inherently drawing from this framework to engage the listener in a critical reflection surrounding values and attitudes about harm, and its possible resolution. Michael believed that “people transform more when there’s emotion involved ... if [the audience doesn’t] feel it, their understanding won’t be as great.” The impact of a story and its lessons is thus augmented through engaging emotion (Pranis, 2001; Senehi, 2011; Tyler, 1986).

From here, we make the link back to transformative learning. Transformative learning occurs for the storyteller; and, it can also occur for the story-listener. The beginnings of the transformative learning process within the listener were demonstrated in the reactions and feedback the storytellers witness after sharing their story. Ben explained he has been able to observe youth “connect with the story. They connect with the bad parts, but they can also connect with the parts that were transformational.”

Transformative learning involves acting on new insights gained through critical self-reflection (Mezirow, 1990). People are unlikely to readily question the values and beliefs they hold (Kroth & Cranton, 2014). Recall that a catalyst for transformative learning can be a disorienting dilemma (Kroth & Cranton, 2014). The stories offered by the participants in this study can be considered disorienting dilemmas that challenge our notions of how harm ought to be resolved. In offering a disorienting dilemma that challenges the dominant way we conceive of conflict, the listener may begin to recognize and identify their own tacit thinking patterns, “[t]his recognition can lead to reflection and in turn to the questioning of previously unchallenged values and assumptions” (Kroth & Cranton, 2014, p. xiv).

During the interviews, the storytellers spoke about the type of feedback they receive after they present. This feedback comes in the form of conversations, letters, and e-mails shortly after a presentation or sometimes months or years after a presentation. Storytellers often hear about how their story caused the listener to re-think their own assumptions or preconceived notions about what it means to be an offender or victim. The listeners reflect back to the storyteller about how they intend to, or how they have, changed the way they approach conflict in their own lives. The emotional reactions, reflections, anecdotes, “glimmer[s] of hope” (Ben) that storytellers hear demonstrate the shifts in

attitudes, values, and beliefs that occur when the affective domain of learning is engaged (Shephard, 2007); and in some cases the action occurs alongside these shifts, which indicates a transformative learning experience (Mezirow, 1990).

The participants were very aware that they do not hear from every listener, and often they cannot know the longer-term impacts their story left behind on an audience or community (Claire, Katy, Michael, Pat). They see their story as “plant[ing] seeds in different areas” (Claire) and beginning critical conversation that can continue after they have left (Katy). Michael explained that even though you may not hear from a listener, you “have faith sometimes that you made a difference.” These reactions, often filled with emotion, are what can encourage future learning and engagement with the information the listener has heard (Tyler, 1986).

When discussing the tangible feedback, as well as the assumed or untold impact, the storytellers recognized that audience members will take what they need from the story. The storytellers can only offer their story, and need to let go of controlling the message that is received by audience members. Kroth and Cranton (2014) explain, “the power of stories is to get quickly into our hearts and minds and to open us up to the possibility that we have been missing something in what we believe about the world and ourselves” (p. 30). In this spirit, participants spoke about trusting the audience member to be able to identify, and learn from, the parts of the story that are most relevant to them. Smith and Egan’s (2010a) work echoes this notion,

People do not just hear stories – they interact with them. They take them on; they identify with them, or differentiate themselves from them, based on their personal experiences or history. While the storyteller has control over what the audience hears, they rarely have control over how the audience reacts, interprets or experiences the story (p. 56).

The story opens up a dialogue and invites the co-creation of meaning through engaging the listener’s participation in the learning process (Kunz & Soltys, 2007; Kroth & Cranton, 2014; Shapiro et al., 2012).

### **5.2.1.1 Lessons Taught**

Stories can be a catalyst for transformative learning. The lessons contained within the stories can offer disorienting dilemmas for the listener. These lessons include, but are not limited to, offering alternate views regarding: offenders and victims, that is, moving beyond labels and acknowledging our common humanity; responses to crime or harm, that is, moving beyond punishment oriented views and toward reparation of relationships; and, the role of the community, that is, moving away from relying on professionals to solve conflicts on our behalf. These are constructive stories that bring awareness to community members and encourage dialogue and collaboration (Senehi, 2011).

Each lesson encompasses the shift in our understanding of what “security” means, as discussed by Elliott (2011). Rather than understanding security as being accomplished through creating distance, that is, “razor wire and tall fences”; we can shift our understanding toward seeing security as being accomplished “with care” through attachment and strengthening relationships (Elliott, 2011, p.125). The following two sections, expand upon two broad lessons contained within the stories: defining restorative justice; and, the role of hope and community responsibility.

#### **5.2.1.1.1 Definition of Restorative Justice**

Restorative justice processes create safe spaces for dialogue to occur (Braithwaite, 2006; Pranis, 2005; Zehr, 1990; Zehr, 2015). An important point for restorative justice advocates and practitioners emerged in Claire’s interview. In some of her experiences she found that because she had not gone through official restorative justice channels to share her story, some listeners have been dismissive of her. This demonstrates the consequences related to the difficulty of defining restorative justice. If some individuals are using a narrower definition of restorative justice - for example, that an encounter may only occur in the presence of a facilitator - there is a risk of leaving out stories that do not neatly fit such a definition. Yet, the lessons within these stories potentially have much to offer listeners and communities.

It thus becomes a balancing act to embrace a clear definition, while remaining open to less common cases. The broader, more all-encompassing transformative

conception of restorative justice fit best with storytelling; however, our definitions cannot become so vague that they lose meaning altogether. Narratives, or storytelling, bring concepts of restorative justice to life “as one informs the other” (Braithwaite, 2006, p. 427). Braithwaite (2006) notes that restorative justice scholars can “learn from such critiques” and recognize that the process of defining restorative justice is “an iterative process of reconfiguring what justice means and what restoration means” (p. 426). Claire’s experience is a learning opportunity for restorative justice advocates and practitioners to re-consider their definitions of restorative justice and think about the effect this has on others.

#### **5.2.1.1.2 Hope and Community Responsibility**

An emergent theme in this study was that of hope. Much of what the storytellers intend to do is offer hope for others: for those who find themselves in similar difficult situations and hope for the community. In this way, participants also gain a sense of hope for themselves that they are contributing to the strengthening and empowering communities. They offer hope that there is potential for things to get better and that there are concrete actions that can be taken to deal with harm in a productive way and make for healthier futures. Offering hope is a lesson that can empower audiences. Having hope is believing in the possibility of “a positive future”; it is a process that “increase[s] self-efficacy, build[s] positive trusting relationships, establish[es] other social ties” and is closely related to empowerment, agency, and resilience (Granger-Brown, 2014, p. 5). Manjit draws on the link between hope and action, he explained that a part of his presentation involves empowering youth: “I build their self-esteem ... Appreciate the young people, tell them that they have pressures and how they can deal with them.”

A link emerges between hope, agency, and emancipation (Braithwaite, 2004; Granger-Brown, 2014; Kroth & Cranton, 2014; McGeer, 2004). This moves us into a more macro-level discussion of the role of hope. Hope involves identifying goals, as well as strategies to reach said goals, and “tapping into one’s willpower or agency to move along pathways to specified goals” (McGeer, 2004, p. 103). Encouraging hope within individuals can translate to individual and community action. Braithwaite (2004) states, “emancipation is about freeing people who are weakened by domination so they become strong” (p. 84). The stories can act to strengthen communities, and ultimately move them away from solely

relying on state-based interventions when it comes to conflict. Ultimately, "... stories set the stage for affecting change, for imagining otherwise... As we create new narratives we situate ourselves as responsive moral agents, enabling new ways of behaving in line with social justice goals" (Bell, 2010 as cited in Ibrahim Ali, 2014, p. 98). Stories have the power to transform individuals and societies (Androff, 2012).

This leads us into a discussion of a major part of the storytellers' message: community responsibility. Christie (1977) characterized conflict as an opportunity for participation. When professionals step in to deal with conflicts, people are deprived of the chance to participate within their own community (Christie, 1977). By sharing a vision of hope for a better future and empowering individuals, the storytellers are creating space for people to become active participants in their communities, and to take responsibility for, and ownership of, the conflicts faced within their communities.

### **5.3. Concluding Thoughts: Being the Change, Seeing the Change**

By sharing their story and teaching audiences and communities about harm and its resolution, each storyteller is living one of the core lessons they teach. They are moving communities away from relying on professionals to handle conflicts. The participants in this study are simply people who experienced or committed harms; they are not criminal justice professionals. The storytellers are taking ownership of their stories, and actively participating in bringing important issues to the forefront of community thinking. The storytellers' reflections demonstrate that the role community members play in situations of harm begins long before, and continues long after, harm has occurred. Communities can work toward strengthening bonds and relationships that will better equip them to handle conflict when it does happen, one way of doing this is through telling stories.

Sharing the story allows the storyteller to play a vital role in reframing harm and strengthening communities. In entering a helping role, meaning behind the experience is infused (order); relationships are strengthened (connection); action is encouraged and taken (empowerment). Coming full circle, this contributes to movement past trauma,

continuing the journey toward belonging and identity, and ultimately re-infusing a sense of ontological security.

## Chapter 6.

### Conclusion

*“...we have to talk about the tough stuff. We can’t just tell the good stories. We have to tell the shitty stories too.” - Katy*

The abovementioned quote is the inspiration behind the title of this thesis. Katy’s words echo the concluding idea in Zehr’s (2002b) *Journey to Belonging*: “The key is not in silencing the pain, building walls and posting guards but in giving voice to our pain, telling our truths...” (p. 30). The reflections of the ten participants in this study demonstrate the value of telling stories that are born of trauma and tragedy. There is much to be gained from talking about difficult topics, rather than avoiding or silencing such conversations and stories. This chapter begins with a summary of the answers to two research questions:

- (1) Has publicly sharing one’s story of restoration and/or transformation in the aftermath of traumatic violence influenced the storyteller over time?
- (2) In turn, how does the storyteller experience the impact of their story on the audiences and communities who hear the story?

In the latter part of the chapter I provide a list of recommendations for storytellers and their hosts; acknowledge the limitations contained in this study; and encourage a number of directions for future research.

When done safely and with care, storytelling has a number of positive impacts. Storytelling facilitates growth and transformation for both storyteller and story-listener, and is a valuable tool that restorative justice advocates can use to bring restorative ideas and lessons to communities. Publicly sharing one’s story of restoration and/or transformation in the aftermath of traumatic violence greatly influences the storyteller. It is a process that aids the individual in their journey past trauma by creating space to gain what is lost in the aftermath of a traumatic event: order, connection, and empowerment. These three components ultimately make up, and contribute to, the re-instatement of a sense of ontological security.



When sharing the story, storytellers have the opportunity to make personal and relational gains, such as: learn more about themselves and others, experience transformative learning moments, make sense of what happened, turn a bad experience into something valuable, strengthen old relationships, and create new ones. Storytelling can be an empowering experience when it is done safely, that is, when there are respectful listeners who honour storyteller's voice and process.

After giving a presentation, the storytellers receive feedback from their listeners. This informs how they perceive the influence of their story on their audiences and the wider community. The feedback demonstrates transformative learning processes inspired by the story: the listeners experience the emotion of the story; change their thinking about themselves, harm, and conflict; change their attitudes and actions; and, in some cases, reach out for help. The storytellers did caution that they do not often have the opportunity to directly witness the personal, relational, and community changes that may follow a presentation; however, some suggested that the feedback they do get can be multiplied out to the listeners who, perhaps, have not approached the storyteller directly. Seeing how their story impacts their audiences is a process of creating order, connection, and empowerment in and of itself.

This thesis has served to explore the two research questions,

(1) Has publicly sharing one's story of restoration and/or transformation in the aftermath of traumatic violence influenced the storyteller over time?

(2) In turn, how does the storyteller experience the impact of their story on the audiences and communities who hear the story?

It brought to light practical implications for storytellers, story-listeners, and restorative justice advocates, for example, the need to set boundaries surrounding storytelling, and how to maintain safety in sharing by ensuring respect for the process and the individuals involved (Section 6.1). Those in helping professions, such as social workers or counsellors, can use the findings to illuminate how storytelling can be used safely with clients to move them in their healing journeys.

## 6.1. Recommendations

The following two subsections contain recommendations for storytellers (6.1.1) and for those hosting storytellers (6.1.2). These recommendations are based out of the findings that emerged from the interviews conducted for this study.

### 6.1.1. For Storytellers

There is wide range of positive outcomes that both the storyteller and the story-listeners stand to gain from sharing, if sharing is done safely. As such, there are a number of considerations for future and current storytellers to reflect on throughout their time sharing.

*Safety in smaller audiences.* Sharing your story with a smaller audience is a good place to start. An audience with fewer people is easier to read and more readily provides opportunity for direct feedback regarding how the story was received. Starting small allows for development of confidence in your story, and can facilitate a smoother transition into speaking with larger audiences.

*Speaking from the heart.* Having an outline of what you wish to share, even just an outline in your mind, is a good way to start. The participants in this study encouraged movement away from a script towards a more flexible and spontaneous approach. An unscripted story allows the storyteller to convey deeper emotion, as well as to work with the audience so that the story can be tailored to the audience's needs.

*Establishing boundaries.* Setting boundaries early on and assessing them as you move forward in sharing is critical. The following is a brief list of questions to consider when thinking about boundaries.

What parts of your story are you willing to share? Are there parts of your story that you wish to keep private?

What types of audience questions are you willing to answer? Are any questions off limits? If so, how will you address a question that you do not wish to answer?

There are many other people's stories intertwined with your own. Recognizing that the decision to go public with your story will likely affect those around you, how will you tell your story in a way that does not speak on behalf of others? Do you need to ask anyone for permission to share their part of the story?

What do you expect from your hosts? What do you need from your hosts to feel safe?

Are you willing to share with the media? Is there a difference between what you would share with the media compared to what you would share at a speaking engagement with a live audience?

Storytelling can take an emotional toll; thus, setting boundaries includes practicing self-care and staying aware of your own needs. How often are you able and willing to share? For example, storytellers who speak from a dual perspective may begin sharing while incarcerated. However, once released their ability to share at the same rate as they did while serving time will likely decrease as they take on the responsibilities involved with living in society. Furthermore, will there come a time when you no longer wish, or are no longer able, to share? Is there anyone in your life with whom you can check-in with to help assess whether it is time to step away from sharing?

*Letting go of the message.* Having a known set of boundaries allows you to control a wide range of aspects related to your story. Even with being able to exert control over a variety of features, participants in this study emphasized that you cannot control what the audience hears. Allow yourself to trust that the audience will take what they need from your story.

These recommendations are not a "one-size-fits-all" set of guidelines. Each storyteller is different and each audience is different. It is important to learn what works for you and be open to change as you grow with your story.

### **6.1.2. For Those Who Host Storyteller**

Storytellers offer many valuable lessons to the audiences they share with. When inviting someone to share their story, it is important to maintain safety at all times. One way to maximize safety is to draw from restorative justice values as guidelines. Howard Zehr (2002a; see also Zehr, 2015) identified respect as the “supremely important” value in restorative justice (p. 36). I recommend respect as key to establishing and maintaining a productive and safe storytelling environment.

This includes respect for the storyteller, their time, their process, and their boundaries. Working with the storyteller ahead of time to get to know their storytelling process and what their boundaries are helps create a clear set of mutual expectations for the speaking engagement. This will allow the storyteller to feel empowered to tell their story how they feel it ought to be told.

The participants interviewed for this study all spoke about the appreciation they have for audience feedback. If possible (and when appropriate) it is good practice to encourage the audience you represent to reflect back to the storyteller. The deeply felt gratitude from audience members is a part of what motivates and rewards storytellers most.

## **6.2. Limitations**

As with any study, there are limitations present. Two limitations relate to the sample of participants recruited for the study. First, a sample size of ten does not lend itself to generalizability of the results to other contexts. However, it is important to note, the purpose of this study was to provide an in-depth exploration of the storytelling experiences of these ten individuals, not necessarily to generalize to a broader population of storytellers. Second, there is selection bias in this sample of participants. The sample contains storytellers who responded to the invitation and agreed to participate; this leaves out the perspectives of those who declined to participate and others who were not invited or approached. The sample included only individuals who, at the time of interview, actively

shared their story; this leaves out those who at one point shared their story, though more recently made the decision to no longer share publicly.

The sample is also skewed in terms of age, gender, and ethnicity. Eight of the ten participants were aged 50 years or older. Ben, the youngest participant, mentioned that he tells his story less frequently lately, because his focus is on building a life and career for himself. Though there were younger storytellers contacted, they declined to participate. This raises questions about why they declined, whether they share similar attitudes as Ben, and whether their experiences differ from those of the older storytellers interviewed.

Three of the ten participants were women, and all three women share from a harmed perspective. A more balanced sample in terms of gender, especially from a dual point of view, may illuminate differences in how stories are told by women, men, or transgendered individuals; and how such stories are received by the public.

Eight of the ten participants were of Caucasian descent. This raises questions surrounding the difference in experiences of storytellers who are racial minorities. Additionally, I did not inquire about socio-economic status. Balancing the sample in terms of the aforementioned demographic features, and taking in to account the intersectionality of age, gender, ethnicity, and socio-economic status would further illuminate issues related to: opportunity and accessibility of storytelling; differences in the types of stories told and lessons shared; and differences in how these stories are told and received in the public realm.

Another limitation relates to my research decision to provide participants with the choice to be anonymous. This decision was made with the intention of being a strength to increase participant choice and autonomy and mitigate the power dynamics inherent in research (Toews & Zehr, 2003). However, this can also be seen as limitation as it is possible, though unlikely, that those who opted to use their real names may have omitted negative aspects of their experiences, knowing that their name would be attached to these results.

An additional set of limitations relates to the analysis of the results. The first research question asked “Has publicly sharing one’s story of restoration and/or

transformation in the aftermath of traumatic violence influenced the storyteller over time?” In response, it was found that storytelling moves an individual past the trauma by facilitating opportunities for order, connection, and empowerment. However, it is important to note that there is a great deal of trauma-related work done prior to sharing the story. For example, participants can have participated in counselling sessions prior to, and/or all throughout, their storytelling commitments. These experiences would also contribute to the healing journey in the aftermath of trauma; as such, healing through storytelling occurs in tandem with a number of other processes.

Finally, the second research question asked “How does the storyteller experience the impact of their story on the audiences and communities who hear the story?” We must keep in mind that the answer to the second research question is a reflection of the storytellers’ perceptions of their influence on audiences. This is not to be conflated with actual impacts left on audience members, as there were no story-listeners consulted for this project. However, this is an ideal starting point for future research, as discussed in the following section.

### **6.3. Future Directions**

Many new avenues for future directions emerged from this research. The following suggestions for future directions emerge as a response to the limitations of the study; as well as from findings that remain unused for the current work.

As mentioned in Section 6.2, the majority of the storytellers were over 50 years of age. A study that focuses on the experience of younger storytellers can offer insight on how their experiences may be different from their older counterparts. It would allow us to see what storytelling is like for individuals who are in the midst of establishing a career or family, and how sharing their story interacts with these experiences. A balanced sample in terms of other demographic features (gender, ethnicity, socio-economic status) would also provide us with opportunities to analyse issues of intersectionality and storytelling. Also, storytellers who no longer share their story were not interviewed. Contacting individuals who used to share in the past may provide further insights regarding safety in sharing, boundaries, and the transition out of the public realm.

A different analysis strategy could be employed. I examined the two perspectives (harmed and dual) as a whole. If the two perspectives are examined separately there may be opportunity to flesh out whether there are differences in the experiences within each perspective, and if so, what are these differences? This could provide perspective-specific insight that may further shed light on how best to approach presentations depending on whether the presenter is someone who has been harmed, versus someone who has both been harmed and committed violent harm.

There are certain sharing-related features that the participants in this study carry that were left unexamined in the analysis. For example, many of the participants in this study have also written books about their experience; and, some participants do presentations with the counter-part in their story (be it their victim, or their offender). Future studies can look at how writing the story compares to speaking the story; or, how sharing the stage affects the dynamics and experience of sharing. This would allow us to see how the healing journey is different or the same when these features are considered.

This research examined many of the positive aspects of sharing one's story, as well as learning opportunities that come out of possible challenges of sharing. A theme that was alluded to by participants, but not examined deeper, was the "dark side" of storytelling. This includes judgments surrounding exploitation of the victim's memory by sharing the story; challenges related to sharing the story in ways that do not infringe of the privacy of individuals who do not wish to be in the public eye; and, making the decision as to whether or not to accept money for sharing a story of tragedy and trauma.

Finally, as noted in Section 6.2, the influence of the story on the listeners was established through storyteller's perceptions. A future study ought to explore the experience of the listeners directly to see how it compares with what the storytellers witness. Such a study would complement and validate the findings related to the second research question. With so many potential new directions, this is a rich area of research that can contribute to insights surrounding how we use storytelling in restorative justice practices.

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## Appendix A.

### Thesis Information Sheet

Thank you for taking the time to read this information sheet. My name is Dorota Salvail. I'm a Master's student working with Dr. Brenda Morrison at the Centre for Restorative Justice, with the School of Criminology at Simon Fraser University.

I would like to invite you to participate in a research project that aims to explore the experience of storytelling from the perspective of the storyteller. Participation will involve a one-on-one interview with me regarding your perspectives and reflections on the experience of sharing your story with public audiences. This interview will probably last between one to two hours. I would like to begin the interview by asking how you began sharing your story, and move through the years up until the present time. I will have some general themes I would like to talk about, for example, your motivations to share your story, changes you have seen in yourself or others as a result of sharing your story, and your experiences with your audiences. I am interested in hearing you talk about your experiences, and hope you will be doing more talking than me. If all this takes a lot of time, I'd be happy to make arrangements for a second meeting if that's okay with you.

Participating in this study is voluntary and you may withdraw your participation at any point during the research process. If I ask a question that you are not comfortable answering, or if you wish to stop the interview at any point, please let me know and I will respect your decision. By default, your identity will remain confidential. I will provide a pseudonym, so that you will not be referred to by name. However, I acknowledge that you have chosen to share aspects of your life publicly and I would like to make sure you are comfortable with the use of a pseudonym. If you agree to participate, we will discuss your preferences regarding pseudonyms and the removal of any indirect identifiers (for example, dates or locations specific to your story) in more detail prior to the interview. The topics and information we discuss during our meeting(s) will be used for my Master's thesis and any resulting article or book publications and conference presentations.

If you agree to participate, I will ask for your permission to record our conversation using an audio recording device. This will allow me to be as accurate as possible when transcribing the interview. If you do not wish for parts of the interview (or the entire interview) to be recorded, I will not use the recorder. If a recording is made, I will keep it secure while I transcribe the interview. Once the transcript has been verified, I will erase all of the audio recordings.

This study has been approved by the Research Ethics Board at Simon Fraser University. If you have any concerns about me or the research process, please contact Dr. Kirsten Bell at [contact information removed]. Dr. Bell is currently acting in the position of Associate Director at the Office of Research Ethics.

If you are willing and able to participate in the study or if you have any questions you would like to ask me, please contact me at [contact information removed]. If you would like information regarding results of this research, please contact me or my senior supervisor Dr. Brenda Morrison, [contact information removed].

Thank you,  
Dorota



## Appendix B.

### Coursework Information Sheet

Thank you for taking the time to read this information sheet. My name is Dorota Salvail. I'm a Master's student working with Dr. Brenda Morrison at the Centre for Restorative Justice, with the School of Criminology at Simon Fraser University.

I would like to invite you to participate in a research project that aims to explore the experience of storytelling from the perspective of the storyteller. Participation will involve a one-on-one interview with me regarding your perspectives and reflections on the experience of sharing your story with public audiences. This interview will probably last about two hours. I will have some general themes I would like to ask you about, but really I am interested in hearing you talk about your experiences, and hope you will be doing more talking than me. If all this takes a lot of time, I'd be happy to make arrangements for a second meeting if that's okay with you.

Participating in this study is voluntary and you may withdraw your participation at any point during the research process. If I ask a question that you are not comfortable answering, or if you wish to stop the interview at any point, please let me know and I will respect your decision. Your identity will remain confidential. I will provide a pseudonym, so that you will never be referred to by name. Together, we will talk about whether you would prefer for me to remove any information that may indirectly identify you. For example, dates, names, or locations specific to your story can be changed or omitted if you wish. The topics and information we discuss during our meeting(s) will be used for a current course project, and eventually may contribute to my Master's thesis and any resulting presentations or publications.

If you agree to participate, I will ask for your permission to record our conversation using an audio recording device. This will allow me to be as accurate as possible when transcribing the interview. If you do not wish for parts of the interview (or the entire interview) to be recorded, I will not use the recorder. If a recording is made, I will keep it secure while I transcribe the interview. Once the course instructor or one of my colleagues has verified the transcription, I will erase all of the audio recordings.

This study has been approved by the course instructor, Dr. Ted Palys [*contact information removed*].

If you are willing and able to participate in the study, or if you have any questions or concerns about the research or about me, please feel free to contact me:

[*contact information removed*].

Thank you,

Dorota

## Appendix C.

### Interview Topic Guide

#### A. Early Experiences

The reason I asked you to participate in this study is because you are someone who has shared your story publicly. How did you get to a place where you decided you wanted to share your story with others?

years sharing story;

motivation to begin sharing;

structuring the story presentation (decision regarding what is private, what is public & reasons for it);

recall early experiences sharing (emotions during/before/after; audience reaction);

early rewards and challenges (response to challenges);

audience/family/friend reactions to the story and the decision to share

#### B. Journey till Now

Having looked back on those early experiences, what are some of the changes you have experienced between then & now that have come up during the time you've been sharing your story?

changes in identity, self-concept, roles, personal health (physical, mental)

changes in relationships (to family, friends, community, audiences),

changes to content of the story (reasons for it);

ongoing motivation to continue sharing;

ongoing rewards and challenges in sharing (response to challenges/lessons learned);

turned down an engagement? or regret taking on one?

memorable moments of sharing (audience reaction? personal revelation?)

lessons learned;

*If book* - You've also written a book, can you tell me about how writing your story compares to speaking publicly?

...experiencing or understanding yourself, others, relationships

*If no book* – There are a number of storytellers who have also written books about their story. Do you think you would ever want to do that? Why/why not?

### **C. Future of Storytelling**

Would you ever consider ending sharing your story publicly? What would factor in to that decision?

What do you hope for the future of your storytelling?

...for self, for others (family, friends, community, audiences) for storytelling

### **D. Demographics:**

What is your age?

What is your ethnicity?

What is your vocation or employment?