

ARTICLE

# From ‘what works’ to ‘how it works’ in research on restorative justice conferencing: the concept of readiness

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## Abstract

*While many empirical studies on restorative justice conferencing have been conducted in the context of ‘what works’, research on ‘how it works’ is scarce. Little is known about how, in what conditions and for whom restorative justice conferencing ‘works’. In this article, I aim to fill this gap in the literature by developing a concept of readiness. It refers to participants’ attitudes and emotional dispositions towards, and knowledge about, restorative justice conferencing and the other parties prior to the face-to-face dialogue process. I suggest that the concept of readiness may be a key independent variable to understand how restorative justice conferencing works because it reminds us that a restorative journey may begin before a face-to-face dialogue between participants take places. This article concludes by offering how it can be used in research on restorative justice conferencing.*

**Keywords:** readiness, orientation, emotion, preparation, research methodology.

## 1 Introduction

Many studies on restorative justice<sup>1</sup> conferencing have been conducted in the context of ‘what works’ (Doak & O’Mahony, 2018; Maruna et al., 2007). This literature has offered knowledge on what restorative justice conferencing can offer participants,<sup>2</sup> such as satisfaction and fairness for victims, and accountability and legitimacy for offenders (for example, see a meta-analysis by

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1 Following Daly’s (2016) definition, I focus on restorative justice practices that involve a face-to-face dialogue between a victim and an offender. Additionally, unless necessary, I primarily focus on the form of conferencing, which is mainly used in Anglophone countries, because, as Wood and Suzuki (2016: 164) noted, ‘Anglophone countries are generally those where RJ [restorative justice] has had the longest and most comprehensive development and implementation’.

2 When referring to the term, ‘participants’ in this article, it indicates a victim and an offender.

Strang et al., 2013 and a narrative review by Braithwaite, 2016). Yet, there is a lack of knowledge about 'how it works' (O'Mahony & Doak, 2017; Rossner, 2008). Little is known about how, in what conditions and for whom restorative justice conferencing works (Bolitho, 2017; Saulnier & Sivasubramaniam, 2015; Suzuki & Wood, 2017b).

Three reasons exist about why it is important to understand how restorative justice conferencing works. First, there is little understanding of how restorative justice conferencing can produce 'positive' outcomes (Bazemore & Elis, 2007). As mentioned above, research suggests that restorative justice conferencing can benefit participants in multiple ways. Yet, as Bazemore and Green (2007: 291) observed, researchers are still 'less than certain' about why restorative justice can offer these outcomes. Bazemore and Green (2007) went on to point out that the reason it has certain outcomes remains unclear without understanding how it works. Second, some research indicates 'limits' to outcomes of restorative justice conferencing. For example, these include mutual understanding between victims and offenders and a gap in the perceived sincerity of apology (e.g. Daly, 2002), reoffending (e.g. Livingstone, Macdonald & Carr, 2013) and victim recovery (e.g. Daly, 2008). These limits have not gained much attention in the literature except for Daly (2006); however, understanding why these 'negative' outcomes occur is important because it will advance our understanding of how restorative justice conferencing works. Third, understanding how restorative justice conferencing works will contribute to the development of 'best practice' for facilitating a face-to-face dialogue between a victim and an offender. This knowledge will help to improve the quality of restorative justice practices because it offers reasons as to why they experience the restorative justice process as meaningful.

In this article, I aim to fill this gap in the literature by developing the concept of readiness, which refers to participants' attitudes and emotional dispositions towards, and knowledge about, restorative justice and the other parties prior to a face-to-face meeting. This concept can be used to unpack the dynamics of interaction in restorative justice processes. I first review current empirical research on how restorative justice conferencing works. I then discuss what constitutes the concept of readiness. I conclude with the reasons why the concept of readiness matters in research on restorative justice conferencing.

## 2 Current approaches to understanding how restorative justice conferencing 'works'

A variety of theoretical approaches has been taken to understand the inner workings of restorative justice conferencing. For example, some scholars suggested borrowing theories from psychology, such as affect theory (Gavrielides, 2015; Kelly & Thorsborne, 2014). Using empowerment theory, O'Mahony and Doak (2017) built an agency-accountability framework to understand the link between the process and outcomes of restorative justice. Recently, Suzuki and Jenkins (2020) proposed a model about the relationship between restorative justice and desistance by focusing on the role of self-forgiveness.

While these theoretical approaches offer important knowledge, in this section I focus on empirical and exploratory (qualitative) research on how restorative justice conferencing works. I limit my focus to empirical research because, as Walgrave (2011: 135) noted, 'it is time for a second generation of research that would ... refine the image of what restorative justice can achieve or not'. To achieve this aim, reviewing empirical research is needed. I also focus on exploratory research rather than explanatory one. Some scholars have attempted to test existing theories in restorative justice conferencing, such as reintegrative shaming (e.g. Kim & Gerber, 2012; Scheuerman & Matthews, 2014). Given the scarcity of knowledge on how restorative justice conferencing works as well as the complexity of restorative justice, however, exploratory research may better offer key insight on this matter (Bryman, 2016). Although the number of empirical and exploratory research is limited, reviewing them will help to establish a current understanding of how restorative justice conferencing works.

Perhaps, one of such early empirical attempts to understand how restorative justice conferencing works was made by Braithwaite and Mugford (1994). They utilised Braithwaite's (1989) reintegrative shaming theory. According to this theory, there are two types of shaming. Stigmatising shaming involves the disapproval of offenders and is less effective in dealing with a crime because it labels them deviant. In contrast, reintegrative shaming, which values the offenders themselves while disapproving the offenders' act, may be more effective because it may motivate them to reintegrate into the community. Drawing on this theory, Braithwaite and Mugford (1994) observed restorative justice conferences in New Zealand and Australia. They found that restorative justice conferencing helped to achieve reintegrative shaming because it encouraged offenders to confront their victims and made offenders feel guilt and because offenders' supporters were present to support reintegration.

Rossner (2012: 218) argued that while emotions are facilitated 'both at the individual and at the group level' in restorative justice, extant studies have focused on emotions at the individual level, such as shame (Rossner, 2008). She argued that 'the current theory of does not go far enough in exploring how collective emotions can lead to emotional and behavioural transformation' (Rossner, 2008: 1742). She then suggested using the interaction ritual theory proposed by Collins (2004). According to this theory, 'the sequence and flow of ... interactions are patterned, ritualized and relatively predictable', which makes it possible to

isolate the components of a 'good' conference, such as the development of conversational and bodily rhythm, a balance of power and perspective among participants, and a shared focus of their emotions (Rossner, 2011: 96).

Rossner (2013) argued that the rituals are key to understanding the interactive perspective of how restorative justice conferencing works. To examine this hypothesis, Rossner (2011) analysed one video-recorded restorative justice conference in the United Kingdom. She identified key elements of interaction rituals that were considered to be associated with a 'successful' conference,

including shared focus through conversational rhythm, conversational and power balance, turning points and public displays of solidarity (Rossner, 2011). Additionally, Rossner (2013) reanalysed a reintegrative shaming experiment (RISE) and showed that ritual elements, such as solidarity, were linked to reduced reoffending.

Van Camp and Wemmers (2013) examined what factors of restorative justice may contribute to victim satisfaction. Interviewing victims of violent crime who participated in victim-offender mediation in Belgium and Canada, they found two types of factors that were linked to victim satisfaction. The first are factors related to the procedural justice theory (Tyler, 1990). Their finding indicated that that restorative justice was procedurally just contributed to victim satisfaction because victims valued the procedural determinants in the restorative justice process, such as voice, respect, trust and neutrality. The second are factors unique to restorative justice. For example, victims were satisfied with restorative justice because the decision to participate and timing for the intervention were flexible for them. Victim satisfaction was also attributed to the provision of care during the restorative justice process and meeting their needs, such as receiving answers from the offenders.

By analysing twenty restorative justice conferences held in Australia, Bolitho (2017) addressed how restorative justice conferencing may alleviate emotional harm caused by crime. To examine the relationship between restorative justice and victims' emotional restoration, she used the concept of memory reconsolidation (MR) (Schiller & Phelps, 2011), which refers to

an inherent (possibly adaptive) process whereby it is possible for significant emotional learnings to be disrupted and updated with new learnings that then provide an immediate and long lasting emotional closure (Bolitho, 2015: 274).

Bolitho (2017: 238) argued that this concept may be conceptually compatible with victims' emotional restoration through restorative justice processes because:

the victim presents with an intensely negative emotional (possibly traumatic) memory, and the RJ [restorative justice] process parallels the sequences as outlined in MR (the emotional memory is reactivated by retelling of the crime event and either the RJ itself or the offender provides the required dissonance triggering the MR window), the original emotional learning around the crime event will be updated and the memory is reconsolidated in a different form. The effect would be a re-writing of the damaging implicit emotional memory attached to the crime event and its aftermath, and there should be an immediate sense of emotional shift and release from the negative state.

Bolitho (2017) argued that MR may better explain the emotional shifts of victims. While restorative justice scholars suggested particular emotions, such as shame (Pemberton, 2019), to explain the emotional transformation of victims, her

finding indicated that ‘there is no one particular emotion present, and no one particular sequence of emotions that needs to occur for transformation’ (Bolitho, 2017: 248).

### 3 Concept of readiness

Existing literature has sought to promote an understanding of how restorative justice conferencing ‘works’, while its scope is limited to either victim or offender perspectives except for Rossner (2013). Given that the key feature of restorative justice is the interaction between victims and offenders (Rossner, 2013; Van Camp & Wemmers, 2013), this lack of focus on both parties may be detrimental. This article aims to fill this gap in the literature by developing the concept of *readiness*.<sup>3</sup> It will contribute to the literature in two ways. First, with a few exceptions, such as Ahmed and Braithwaite (2012: 80) and Ward and Langlands (2008: 363), the term ‘readiness’ is either loosely defined in the literature (e.g. ‘readiness to make the process work’ in Van Stokkom, 2008: 406), or conceptualised as a single-facet concept that indicates the participants’ motivation to participate (e.g. Doak & O’Mahony, 2009: 154) and the offenders’ willingness to take responsibility (e.g. Sharpe, 1998: 22-23). I offer a clear definition of readiness, referring to it as *participants’ attitudes, emotional dispositions towards and knowledge about restorative justice and the other parties prior to a face-to-face meeting*. This definition is developed deductively because I base off of existing empirical literature as discussed below. Readiness may influence the process and outcomes of restorative justice because people may take different approaches to, and attitudes towards, managing conflict (Umbreit, 1995).

Second, to establish the concept of readiness, I take an approach different from what has commonly been employed in the literature (for example, see a variety of attempts to explain *why* restorative justice practices may work in Hopkins, 2016). Specifically, I survey empirical studies that reported ‘failures’ of restorative justice – when restorative justice practice ‘does not work’. By the term, ‘failures’, I do not mean particular outcomes of restorative justice. Rather, I focus on ‘negative’ outcomes in general that were reported in the literature such as dissatisfaction, hostile attitudes towards the other party and perceived insincerity of apology. I took this broad approach because limiting my focus to particular outcomes may result in few studies. Indeed, to my knowledge, only a few studies have explicitly sought to account for failed restorative justice cases (e.g. Breckenridge, 2017; Rossner & Bruce, 2018). By broadening my focus, I intend to make the concept of readiness an independent variable that can be used to explore a variety of restorative goals. Additionally, this approach not only enables the concept of readiness to be evidence-based but also helps to offer new insight into how restorative justice works. Most research on restorative justice has focused on its benefits, leading to an exclusive focus on ‘successful’ cases.

3 I borrow this term from Daly (2003: 48-49; 2005: 158).

However, as Hirschi (1969) put forward one of the most important theories in criminology – social bond theory – by focusing on why people 'do not' commit a crime rather than on why people commit a crime, this focus on why restorative justice 'does not work' may shed new light on enhancing an understanding of how restorative justice works.

Before turning to the details of readiness dimensions, it is important to note limitations in my approach to developing the concept of readiness. Since I focus solely on 'negative' outcomes, my approach to developing the concept of readiness may be biased because my judgement of the selected literature may be subjective (c.f. Morris, 2002). Furthermore, since the studies I draw on did not employ pre-conference surveys, whether these outcomes may be attributed to readiness remains speculative without further research. In the following sections, with these limitations in mind, I elaborate on the concept of readiness. It has three dimensions: (1) *orientation*, (2) *emotion* and (3) *knowledge*.

### 3.1 Orientation

The first dimension of readiness is *orientation*, which refers to the extent to which participants' attitudes are oriented towards achieving restorative goals prior to the face-to-face dialogue. To be eligible for restorative justice processes, both offenders and victims need to consent to participate (UNODC, 2020). This requirement may engender differences in their attitudes towards restorative justice because participants may decide to attend restorative justice processes for different reasons (Paul & Schenck-Hamlin, 2017; Pereira, 2017).<sup>4</sup> On one hand, participants may demand restorative outcomes, as recent research indicates that victims tend to decide to participate in restorative justice proceedings for 'prosocial' reasons, such as helping offenders (Van Camp, 2017). On the other hand, some participants may not necessarily be motivated to behave in a way that advances the restorative goals (Sharpe, 1998). As Daly (2005: 156) suggests, there may be 'limits on offenders' interests to repair the harm and victims' capacities to see offenders in a positive light'.

What this means is that offenders' attitudes may not necessarily be oriented towards restorative goals. In the first wave of interviews in the South Australian

4 One may say that attitudes of participants who voluntarily participate are oriented towards achieving restorative goals. However, voluntary participation in restorative justice processes, particularly for offenders, may be more complex than that (c.f. Suzuki & Wood, 2018). For instance, some offenders may voluntarily attend for self-regarding reasons, such as avoiding harsher punishment (Campbell et al., 2006). In this sense, they may be 'ready' for the restorative justice process to benefit themselves, but not for the restorative outcomes. Moreover, participants can have more than one reason to decide to participate (Shapland, Robinson & Sorsby, 2011). Offenders who feel remorse may decide to participate, simultaneously wishing to avoid harsher punishment (Eskelinen & Iivari, 2005). Several scholars have recently conducted research on reasons to participate in restorative justice processes (e.g. Paul, 2015). While such a type of research focuses on *before* (or during when) and *why* the participants determine to attend, the concept of readiness focuses on participants' orientation, emotion and knowledge *after* they make a decision to participate in restorative justice. Hence, the concept of readiness can be used to examine how the state of mind of participants before face-to-face dialogue affects the process and outcomes of restorative justice.

Juvenile Justice (SAJJ) project, offenders were asked which was more important in restorative justice conferencing, 'to make the victim feel better' or 'to get what they wanted'. Approximately 20 per cent answered that making sure they got what they wanted was more important than making the victim feel better (Daly, 2003). When asked which was more important in restorative justice conferencing, 'to do something for the victim' or 'to be treated fairly', around 40 per cent of offenders reported that fair treatment was more important than doing something for victims (Daly, 2003).

These findings are congruent with other studies showing that offenders are sometimes reluctant to act in a restorative way. Among the 31 offenders interviewed by Newbury (2011), seven were willing to offer an apology to victims in youth offender panels, but the rest of the offenders were reluctant to meet their victims, and sixteen refused to apologise. Karp, Sweet, Kirshenbaum and Bazemore (2004) observed restorative panels in the United States and found not only that the level of offenders' engagement in restorative justice process varied, but also that some offenders even denied their responsibility and attempted to minimise the impact of their offence.

Similar findings also emerged for victims. When victims in SAJJ were asked which was more important in restorative justice conferencing, 'to connect at a personal level with' the offender or 'to get what you wanted', only a slim majority of victims (56 per cent) answered that connecting at a personal level with offenders was more important than obtaining what they wanted (Daly, 2003). In response to the question of which was more important, 'to find common ground with the offender' or 'to be treated fairly', only fewer than half of the victims (43 per cent) reported that finding common ground with offenders was more important than fair treatment for themselves (Daly, 2003). Likewise, interviewing victims who participated in victim-offender mediation in Austria, Bahinger and Pelikan (2015: 103) reported that some victims were not inclined to 'perceive the other and oneself in a different way ... and to change one's perception and one's perspective' because they saw it difficult to 'see and hear something new [in offenders]'. Furthermore, analysing victim-offender mediation in Germany and France, Tränkle (2007: 408) reported that lack of victims' enthusiasm to speak with offenders might be the reason for failures because offering restorative justice to victims could 'give the impression that their case ... [was] deemed not serious enough to be treated by the prosecution authorities', while at the same time they demanded recognition of the impact of the offence on them.

Victims and offenders may be divided into those described as 'other-regarding' and those described as 'self-regarding' (Daly, 2003). This classification means that the former group may have interests in communicating with the other party, while the latter group may not (Armour & Umbreit, 2018; Asmussen, 2015). Some of their attitudes may already be oriented towards achieving restorative goals prior to the face-to-face dialogue, whereas others may not.

### 3.2 Emotion

The second dimension of readiness is *emotion*. In the restorative justice process, participants tend to express and experience a variety of emotions from negative to positive, and some may even cry (Harris, Walgrave & Braithwaite, 2004; Karstedt & Rossner, 2019). Given the emotionally charged nature of restorative justice, participants' emotional dispositions may need to be receptive according to the restorative justice process because they may influence the communication during the encounter (Hayes, 2017). However, not all participants may have such an emotional capacity as discussed below.

Nervousness may be one of the detrimental emotions for offenders. Due to the daunting nature of the process, many offenders have reported they felt nervous participating in the restorative justice process (Maruna et al., 2007; Shapland et al., 2007). The passage of time in the restorative justice proceeding may reduce their nervousness (Hoyle, Young & Hill, 2002; Rossner, 2013). In some cases, however, such an emotional transition may not occur. Campbell et al. (2006) observed 185 restorative justice conferences in Northern Ireland and found that 30 per cent of offenders avoided eye contact 'a lot' and about 25 per cent did so 'a bit', despite its importance for victims' perceptions of offenders' sincerity. They suggested that this failure of making eye contact related to the offenders' levels of nervousness and discomfort because, whereas most victims were observed as comfortable from the beginning, about 70 per cent of offenders looked nervous or uncomfortable (Campbell et al., 2006). Notably, the offender's nervousness may explain the gap in the victim's perceived sincerity of the apology. Observing victim-offender mediation in the United States, Choi, Green and Gilbert (2011) indicated that due to nervousness, some offenders failed to express their remorse. Further, interviewing the victims, Choi, Green and Kapp (2010) suggested that the nervousness of offenders affected victims' perceived sincerity of apology because, despite the importance of eye contact when delivering apologies, offenders were too nervous to do so.

For victims, distress caused by the crime may need to be considered in assessing their emotional dimension of readiness. In the SAJJ project, victims were asked whether as a consequence of crimes, they experienced a fear of being alone; sleeplessness or nightmares; general health problems, such as headache or physical pain; security concerns about their own property; increased suspicion or distrust; sensitivity to particular sounds or noises; loss of self-confidence, loss of self-esteem; or other problems (Daly, 2005). According to the number of 'yes' and 'no' responses to the above questions, victims were classified into a 'low' distress group (40.5 per cent) and a 'high' distress group (59.5 per cent). Daly (2005) then examined the differences in perceptions of offenders. The findings suggested that only eight per cent of victims in the low distress group had negative attitudes towards offenders after restorative justice conferencing, while the percentage in the high distress group was 43. Also, whereas 71 per cent of victims in the low distress group viewed offenders positively after restorative justice conferencing, only 49 per cent in the high distress group did so.

These findings for victims were in line with other studies that indicated the relationship between victim distress and 'negative' outcomes. In RISE, Strang

(2002) found that although victims tended to be more satisfied with their treatment in restorative justice conferencing than those in courts, victims who were more emotionally harmed were dissatisfied with, or felt even worse about, restorative justice conferencing than victims in courts. Morris, Maxwell and Robertson (1993) also reported that victims who were more severely impacted by crime than others were more likely to feel worse than before participation in restorative justice conferencing. Similarly, Verde, Berger, Yepes-Baldó, Ortiz and Lovelle (2014) demonstrated that victim satisfaction with victim-offender mediation was lower when the offending was serious.

Participants' emotional dispositions may be important in restorative justice conferencing. Yet, the emotional dimension may be more important for victims. It may be common – or even appropriate given the daunting nature of restorative justice processes – for offenders to feel nervous at the beginning; the point is whether their nervousness dissipates as the restorative justice process proceeds (Hoyle et al., 2002; Rossner, 2013). On the other hand, even with the same type of offending, some victims may feel more distress than others. Restorative justice is criticised for its homogenous view on victims: they suffer crime in the same way or have their experiences reduced to the legal status of 'victim' (Cunneen & Hoyle, 2010; Young, 2002). Victims may experience crime differently, and this may lead to a variation within victim distress (Pemberton & Vanfraechem, 2015; Robinson & Shapland, 2008). Given the impact of emotional disposition, such variations in the emotional status of participants, especially victims, may affect the success of restorative justice.

### 3.3 Knowledge

The final dimension of readiness is *knowledge*. In this regard, preparation plays important and different roles by promoting a level of participants' understanding of aims (Shapland, Robinson & Sorsby, 2011; Wallis, 2014) and their realistic expectations about possible outcomes (Suzuki & Wood, 2017b; Van Camp & Wemmers, 2016). Participants' understanding may be important because they have to understand the purposes of the restorative justice process in order to achieve restorative goals (Bazemore & O'Brien, 2002). Participants' expectations may also be important because meeting their expectations may be the key to success (Bolitho, 2015). Preparation seeks to enhance participants' knowledge towards what involves restorative justice procedure and what could be its outcomes (Chan, Bolitho & Barga, 2016; Rossner, 2013; Rypi, 2017).

Despite this importance, preparation is often compromised in restorative justice practices because preparation sometimes cannot be adequately provided due to time constraints (Choi, Bazemore & Gilbert, 2012; Suzuki & Wood, 2017a). Moreover, even if the preparation is properly conducted, some participants may still lack understanding or have unrealistic expectations (Vanfraechem, 2005). For participants, '[t]he existence of the two systems [conventional criminal justice and restorative justice] with different aims side by side can be confusing' (Marshall, 1992: 33). Some participants 'may not be prepared for restorative ways of thinking and acting' (Daly & Marchetti, 2012: 461).

Lack of participants' understanding of aims can result in 'unsuccessful' cases. Gerkin (2008) observed fourteen victim-offender mediations in the United States and suggested that lack of appropriate levels of understanding among participants led to failures. Without appropriately understanding the aims and goals, participants cared less about restorative outcomes than about their 'own' desires. For example,

offenders expressed an interest in the notes that mediators made throughout the mediation ... [because] they appeared to perceive the mediators as an authority figure, similar to a judge, able to make decisions and hand out judgements (Gerkin, 2008: 239).

Gerkin (2008: 239-240, 242) argued that it may be difficult for some offenders to 'view the restorative outcomes that are desired' because they may not be 'able to view the situation through a restorative lens'.

The preceding finding is supported by other studies. Tränkle (2007) analysed victim-offender mediation in Germany and France and concluded that some cases were unsuccessful because participants did not understand the process and aims of restorative justice. Research conducted in New Zealand also showed that participants who were less informed about restorative justice conferencing tended to be dissatisfied with their experiences on restorative justice (New Zealand Ministry of Justice, 2016). Research by Stahlkopf (2009) suggested that offenders who had negative information about restorative justice conferencing prior to the restorative justice process tended to have negative views on the likely impact on themselves.

Similarly, unrealistic expectations among participants, particularly victims, of outcomes can lead to unsuccessful cases. Morris et al. (1993) indicated a link between victim dissatisfaction and lack of adequate information on possible outcomes due to inadequate preparation because unreasonable expectations of severe punishment were one of the causes for victim dissatisfaction. Likewise, Marshall and Merry (1990) interviewed victims who participated in victim-offender mediation in the United Kingdom and found that a minority of victims were dissatisfied with it because it could not fulfil their unrealistic expectations about compensation.

The concept of readiness has three dimensions. The first dimension is orientation: participants' attitudes need to be oriented towards achieving restorative goals. The second dimension is emotion: participants' emotional dispositions need to be malleable according to the restorative justice process. The final dimension is knowledge: participants' knowledge of restorative justice needs to align with its aims.

#### 4 Why does the concept of readiness matter in research on restorative justice conferencing?

Despite several empirical studies on restorative justice conferencing, the effect of the pre-conference phase remains unknown. This scarcity of knowledge is partly attributed to a lack of studies that adopted pre-conference surveys. According to Shapland et al. (2011) and Bolívar (2013), few studies on restorative justice conferencing adopted pre-conference surveys. In addition, even if a pre-conference survey was conducted, it was used mostly for before-and-after comparison (e.g. Calhoun & Pelech, 2013; Quigley, Martynowicz & Gardner, 2015). This lack of knowledge is detrimental in research on restorative justice conferencing because the effectiveness is sometimes questioned because of self-selection bias (Latimer, Muise & Dowden, 2005; Saulnier & Sivasubramaniam, 2015). Some participants may be motivated to participate in the restorative justice process, and this motivation may lead to restorative and other positive outcomes. For example, offenders may be already remorseful before a face-to-face dialogue with victims and that this remorse may affect their reoffending and desistance (Claes & Shapland, 2016; Hayes & Daly, 2003). Research by Jonas-van Dijk, Zebel, Claessen and Nelen (2020) partly supports this hypothesis. They compared reoffending between offenders who participated in victim-offender mediation, those who intended to participate but did not participate due to victims' refusal and those who declined to participate. Their finding showed that offenders who participated in victim-offender mediation had a lower risk of reoffending (Jonas-van Dijk et al., 2020).

The concept of readiness is important in research on restorative justice conferencing because it reminds us that the restorative journey may begin before a face-to-face dialogue between participants take places. Indeed, this view is consistent with recent studies on restorative justice conferencing. Research by Bruce and Bolitho (2019) showed that emotions of the victim and offender change throughout the restorative justice process. By analysing pre- and post-interviews with victims, their finding demonstrated that victims' emotions shifted from anger to future looking through restorative justice processes. Their pre- and post-interviews with offenders also showed that offenders' emotions transformed over time from guilt to relief (Bruce & Bolitho, 2019). This is why, drawing from interviews of convenors' perspectives on how restorative justice conferencing works, Suzuki and Wood (2017b) suggest that focusing solely on the face-to-face meeting process may not be enough to develop an understanding of how restorative justice conferencing works. Their finding indicated that both the preparation and follow-up phases play different, important roles. Preparation helps to address the problem of the lack of participants' familiarity with restorative justice, and follow-up helps to deal with complex issues that may hinder offender reintegration but cannot be fully addressed in the restorative justice process. Additionally, follow-up helps to ensure the agreement plan is accomplished by the offenders, contributing to victim satisfaction (Maxwell et al., 2004). Given the importance of preparation and follow-up, restorative outcomes may be produced 'throughout the entire RJC [restorative justice conferencing]

process or generated through the cumulative effect of the full sequence of activities' (Suzuki & Wood, 2017b: 287). Since the key of restorative justice is a face-to-face dialogue between participants, the restorative justice literature tends to focus on the face-to-face dialogue phase (Walters, 2014). Understanding how restorative justice conferencing works may, however, need a focus on when the restorative journey begins. This can be achieved through the concept of readiness. I conclude by discussing how the concept of readiness can be used in research on restorative justice conferencing.

Scholars argued that far less is known about how, in what conditions and for whom restorative justice conferencing works (Bolitho, 2017; Saulnier & Sivasubramaniam, 2015; Suzuki & Wood, 2017b). In particular, Bazemore and Green (2007: 291) noted that restorative justice researchers are 'less than certain about the "independent variable" [of restorative justice] that has most likely produced both negative and positive results'. Bazemore and Green (2007) went on to claim that without identifying the independent variable of restorative justice, it remains unclear why restorative justice conferencing has certain outcomes. I suggest that the concept of readiness may be a key independent variable in research on restorative justice. A 'high' level of readiness may be linked to positive and restorative outcomes and a 'low' level of readiness may be linked to negative outcomes.

Nevertheless, one may argue that it is almost axiomatic that high levels of readiness are associated with restorative outcomes. More importantly, one may argue that the concept of readiness seems to negate the possibility of change in participants' mindsets through restorative justice conferencing. This is not my intention because I believe that the restorative justice process has the potential to alter participants' attitudes and behaviours. The concept of readiness can be used to examine the possibility of how the restorative justice process including preparation and follow-up does so. It can be used to investigate whether and how the 'good' interaction between participants in restorative justice processes can help participants with low readiness move towards restorative outcomes.

To address this question, I suggest borrowing an idea of a 'relational analysis' put forward by Strang (2002). In this approach, a pair of a victim and an offender who have participated in the same restorative justice proceeding is created. Then, outcomes are examined to determine which pairs 'win' (e.g. positive outcomes) or 'lose' (e.g. negative outcomes) in each case, and subsequently which case is categorised as 'win-win', 'win-lose', 'lose-win', or 'lose-lose'. This analytical strategy was originally proposed to compare restorative justice and traditional criminal justice approaches. Therefore, the relational analysis may not be appropriate to be used in research on restorative justice conferencing because participants in restorative justice conferencing should not be categorised as a 'winner' and 'loser'. Yet, as I argue below, applying the idea of the relational analysis that matches victims and offenders in the same restorative justice procedure may be beneficial in conjunction with the concept of readiness. It will help to unpack the dynamics of interaction in restorative justice processes.

When applying the relational analysis to the concept of readiness, it may be of particular importance to examine interactions and outcomes of participants

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with 'high' readiness and with 'low' readiness (c.f. Scheuerman & Matthews, 2014). It is relatively easy to predict the interactions and outcomes of the cases in which both victims and offenders have the same degrees of readiness. For example, there may be a high likelihood of good dynamics and restorative outcomes in cases where both victims and offenders experience high readiness. There may also be an equally high likelihood of poor dynamics and less restorative outcomes in cases where both victims and offenders experience low readiness. Conversely, it is relatively difficult to predict the interactions and outcomes of the cases in which victims and offenders have different degrees of readiness. Do the interactions and outcomes differ in cases where offenders display high readiness and victims display low readiness? What about cases where offenders display low readiness and victims display high readiness? While I may seem to suggest the concept of readiness is a stable element, I believe it is rather a dynamic element that can be modified through the interactions in the restorative justice process. Despite the importance of interaction in restorative justice processes, there is a lack of research on its dynamic character and its effects on restorative justice (Braithwaite & Braithwaite, 2001; Vanfraechem & Aertsen, 2010). Addressing these questions will contribute to expanding our knowledge on the mechanism of how, in what conditions and for whom restorative justice conferencing works.

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