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Communication coping strategies of victims of crime

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Communication Coping Strategies of Victims of Crime

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A Project Presented to

the Faculty of the Undergraduate

College of Communication Studies

James Madison University

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in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

for the Degree of Bachelor of Science

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by Katherine Nicole Leeds

May 2014

Accepted by the faculty of the Department of Communication, James Madison University, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Bachelor of Science.

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Acknowledgements

Abstract

This study offers an analysis of the reflections of victims of crime about the strategies they used to cope with their experiences. Interviews with seventeen victims of crime were conducted and analyzed qualitatively. Six major themes were discovered based on the analysis including the victim recalling having had an initial instinct or gut reaction about their perpetrator, a change in their attitudes, beliefs and behaviors as a result of the crime, the desire for monetary reimbursement for the crime, the desire to restore emotional balance, advocating the importance of victims' rights, and finally the consideration of a risk-benefit ratio when disclosing to others.

Keywords: communication, coping, victims of crime, monetary reimbursement, emotional balance, risk-benefit ratio

Introduction

Every year, the Federal Bureau of Investigation completes a Uniform Crime Report (UCR), a collection of crimes that have been committed in the United States and reported to police throughout the country. In 2012, over 1.2 million violent crimes were committed nationwide (FBI 2012 crime statistics). The UCR also reported that there were over 8.9 million property crime offenses in the United States that same year. There has been a continuing trend that young people, between the ages of 16 and 24, are the most highly victimized group (Green, 2007). Additionally, men between these ages are the most heavily victimized since they are more likely to spend time in public places, especially late at night without taking precautions to prevent becoming a victim (Green, 2007). The victim of a crime is often referred to as the forgotten person in the criminal justice system (Green, 2007). However, the development and study of victimology has led to a better understanding of victims of crime.

There has been significant research in the communication field regarding different communicative styles of coping. Criminal justice scholars have also focused much attention on victims of crime and the ways in which they manage their experiences. However, there has not been significant research in a collective analysis of both of these fields, especially from the victim's perspective.

Literature Review

Communication and Coping

The Value of Narratives. Individuals often talk about their experiences in the form of narratives, or stories. Riessman (1993) states that people make their personal experiences into narratives when there has been "a breach between ideal and real, self and society" (pp. 3). Victims of crime experience this breach as the offender deviates from the norm and victimizes the individual.

Labov and Waletsky (1967) claim that there is always a structure by which an individual forms a narrative. This structure has six common elements including an abstract of the story, an orientation, complicating action, evaluation, resolution, and finally a coda. According to Labov and Waletsky, the first part of the narrative, the abstract, is where the individual provides a summary of the substance of the story Next, the person provides orientation, including details about the time, place, participants, and situation. The complicating action provides the sequence of events for the story, and the evaluation examines the significance of the action as well as the narrator's attitudes about it. The storyteller then provides the resolution to the story. Finally, there is a coda which means that the person providing the narrative returns their perspective to focusing on the present. Social scientists claim that victims of crime talk about their experiences in the form of narratives as well. Some claim that telling stories provide therapeutic value for individuals (Dignan, 2005/2007). Story-telling, dramatizations, and making accounts allow individuals to come to terms with events that they find distressing (Dignan 2005/2007).

The current research will examine how victims of crime formulate the stories of their experiences in terms of the interview and in discussing their disclosures with others. The

research will examine the ways in which the interview participants form their stories around their victimization and how they managed the experience.

Communication Privacy Management. The foundation of this research is based on the theory of Communication Privacy Management. This theory discusses the way that individuals manage their private information and how they choose to weigh the risks and benefits of either disclosing information or keeping it private (Petronio, 2002). An individual's level of privacy changes over time, maximizing in adulthood and then decreasing again into old age (Petronio, 2002). As the level of privacy changes over time, the personal rules that people create to decide whether or not they wish to disclose private information change as well. This theory proposes that there are five fundamental criteria people depend on to create these rules including their culture, gender, motivations, context, and risk-benefit ratio (Petronio, 2002). Context and risk-benefit ratio will be extremely important factors for this research. Because traumatic events are so different and personal, individuals often must use the context of their situation or experience to create new privacy rules (Petronio, 2002). Additionally, many people feel a need to disclose to others about their traumatic experience in order to feel as though they have recovered from the situation (Petronio, 2002). The other factor, risk-benefit ratio is defined as the calculated advantages and disadvantages of disclosing information (Petronio, 2002). This research listened for participants to discuss the factors they took into consideration when deciding to whom they wished to disclose information about their victimization.

Both of these criteria are central to the disclosures of victims of crime. Victimization is a highly isolated context and there are a number of risks and benefits involved in discussing the experience. This research will examine the disclosures of victims while considering the context

of the crime as well as the victim's perceived risks and benefits to discussing the crime with others.

   Coping Styles. Different types of coping styles have been widely identified and studied. In a survey of more than 200 victims of crime, Minnebo (2004) identified three types of coping styles including actively coping, avoidant coping, and coping by seeking social support. Active coping is a cognitive process that allows the individual to reflect on the problem and redefine it in order to make it more manageable. As suggested by its name, coping by seeking social support occurs when an individual looks to others for emotional support or help with certain tasks (Minnebo, 2004). Green, Choi and Kane (2010) also studied avoidance-oriented coping, along with emotion-focused and problem-focused coping strategies. For Green et al., avoidant coping is a strategy that attempts to direct attention away from the stress in order to distance themselves from it. Emotion-focused coping concentrates on regulating distress through the management of emotions such as anger, fear, and sadness, however, this coping strategy is generally viewed as maladaptive (Green et al., 2010). Finally, problem-focused coping aims to change the relationship between the individual and their environment by cognitively focusing on regulating it (Green et al., 2010). This is done by defining the problem, as well as generating, evaluating, and implementing solutions (Green et al., 2010). The concept of problem-focused coping is most closely related to what Minnebo (2004) called active coping, which involves cognitive and/or behavioral attempts to lessen the effects of stressors.

   This present study will seek to use these identified coping strategies as a guideline for the understanding the coping strategies that victims of crime may indicate that they employed to manage their experiences. If the participants indicate one of these coping strategies, their responses may also indicate how effective the strategy was. Those who seem emotionally

troubled when discussing their story may signify that some coping strategies are not as effective as others.

Health Communication and Coping. Many scholars in the health communication field have focused on the coping strategies of patients dealing with distressing events or illness (Goldsmith & Domann-Schoolz, 2013; Shim, Kim, Han, Yoon, McTavish, & Gustafson, 2011). The presence of strong, personal relationships is very important for these individuals. Open communication in interpersonal relationships is a socially valued concept and is often described as healthy, or an important attribute of a good relationship (Goldsmith & Domann-Scholz, 2013). Goldsmith and Domann-Scholz interviewed cardiac patients and their partners to assess the overall perception of the importance of open communication (2013). The definitions of openness vary widely depending on the individual (Goldsmith & Domann-Scholz, 2013). People often state that being open is very important for good communication and can be defined as answering questions when asked, as well as having an open-minded attitude (Kirkman, Rosenthal, & Feldman, 2005). Goldsmith and Domann-Schoolz (2013) developed a contextualized profile to develop their own definitions of openness. Open communication is endorsed by many because they associate it with both individual and relational health (Goldsmith & Domann-Scholz, 2013). The present study examines the level of openness that victims report having with others and its effect on that individual's personal and relational health.

Other research has focused on studying the coping strategies of women diagnosed with breast cancer. Low-income women were surveyed about their active and avoidant approach coping strategies using three subscales of coping including Positive Reframing, Self-blaming, and Self-distraction (Shim et al., 2011). Positive reframing in this context was defined as whether the patient described trying to see breast cancer in a more positive light and look for

something good as they tried to manage their illness (Shim et al., 2011). This was considered an active approach coping strategy. Self-blaming and self-distraction were both considered avoidant approaches to coping. Patients were thought to practice self-blame when they criticized themselves or blamed themselves for circumstances concerning their illness. The women who reported self-blaming did things to escape from focusing on their illness such as going shopping, going to the movies, sleeping, or turning to almost any activity to remove focus on their breast cancer. The study revealed that women who claimed they had people in their lives to provide emotional, insightful, and/or tangible support also exhibited a higher percentage of approach-coping. Patients who viewed their relationship with their doctor to be patient-centered relied more on approach coping to deal with their experiences. Research revealed that although there are contextual and individual differences in coping behavior, approach coping can largely improve a patient's overall quality of life.

These findings have many implications for future research in communication. Any person that the individual interacts with regarding the event or experience could have an impact on that person. Therefore, this research will examine the victim's perceptions of the interactions they had with many other people in reference to the crime. The interview will ask about who the victim spoke to about the crime and whether or not they sought help from professional sources such as therapy or social support groups. The study may find that a doctor-patient relationship, even if that doctor is a mental health professional rather than a physician, is perceived to be crucial for the victim and their ability to cope.

Victims of Crime

Individuals value their interactions with others in order to cope with their experiences (Galeazzi & DeFazzio, 2009; Nguyen, Spitzberg & Lee, 2012). Many parallels of coping styles and behaviors can be found between studies in the communication field and studies that focus specifically on the experiences of victims of crime. These parallels are found in stalking victims, as well as violent crime and nonviolent crime. Additionally, the literature will examine third-party perspectives of people who have experienced crime. This provides a more complete view of the interactions that victims have with others.

Stalking Victims. Many scholars have devoted research to victims of stalking and the different ways in which they cope with their victimization (Kraaij, Arensen, Garnefski, & Kremers, 2007; Garnefski, Kraaij, & Spinhoven, 2001; Galeazzi & DeFazzio, 2009; Nguyen, et al., 2012). In one case, female victims of stalking discussed their experiences and how they managed their emotional state in terms of cognitive coping (Kraaij, et al., 2007). Cognitive coping strategies were measured using the Cognitive Emotion Regulation Questionnaire (CERQ) (Kraaij et al., 2007). This questionnaire was previously developed by Garnefski, Kraaij and Spinhoven (2001) to measure nine cognitive coping strategies people utilize in order to deal with life events. The idea of cognitive coping involves the regulation of emotions after experiencing a stressful event (Garnefski, et al., 2001). Some cognitive coping strategies that have been discovered and studied include self-blame, acceptance, positive-refocusing, rumination, catastrophizing, and other-blame (Kraaij et al., 2007). Researchers found that certain cognitive coping skills are related to symptoms of depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder (Kraaij et al., 2007). Findings show that cognitive coping skills, in which the victims actively think about what steps they need to take and how to handle their stalking experience, are not effective strategies to manage stressful events (Kraaij et al., 2007). This may be because simply

thinking about the cognitive coping steps does not mean that the victims were actually actively taking those steps (Kraaij et al., 2007). These findings may have indications for the present study. Participants who reveal that they turned to support groups or therapy for a more methodological way of coping may also reveal more emotional distress and anxiety.

According to a survey of stalking victims, approximately 73.5% stated that they turned to friends and family for help with coping before turning to any kind of support group (Galeazzi & DeFazio, 2009). Only 14.8% turned to victim support groups (Galeazzi & DeFazio, 2009). There are also gender differences between stalking victims in terms of perceived social support. For women, as the seriousness of the crime increases, social support is perceived to be less adequate (Nguyen et al., 2012). Men, on the other hand, exhibit no link between victimization and perceived social support (Nguyen et al., 2012). This may be due to the notion that males do not look to others for social support to the extent that females do (Nguyen et al., 2012).

Third Party Perspectives of Victims. A number of researchers have examined the way victims manage their experience from the perspective of a third party. Victims' testimonies and personal accounts of their crime are important to the criminal justice process and are used as "victim-impact" evidence, also known as VIE (Rose, Nadler and Clark, 2006). Researchers examined the emotional reactions of victims and compared it to the seriousness of the crime to see if viewers thought they were proportional (Rose, et al., 2006). The "viewers" in this case were participants of the study who read a description of a crime and sentencing hearing and were then asked to report about their perceptions of the victim and offender who were described in the vignette (Rose et al., 2006). The researchers found that viewers held expectations of what victims of crime were "supposed to feel" and judged the victims' emotional reactions based on their expectations (Rose et al., 2006). The present study will explore VIE in a different way

because it will be the victim's perception of others' reactions to their experience. The participants who believe they were validated by the third party in terms of what they are "supposed to feel" based on their experience may also exhibit higher levels of coping.

Green and Pomeroy (2007) examined victims of crime and how they cope based on objectively studying the social support they received from others. There is a direct impact on a victim's level of anxiety when they receive support from others (Green & Pomeroy, 2007). It is believed that social support moderates the experiences of victims because it enhances their physical as well as their mental health (Green & Pomeroy, 2007). The current study will seek to understand the ways in which victims of crime sought support from their peers, as well as their perceptions about such support.

The mass media can also be seen as a third party involved in the crime victim's experience. Karmen (1984) states, "the general public is in a position to become an expert about what it is like to be a victim. Yet the media's coverage of crime's impact can be misleading instead of enlightening". The author goes on to state that non-victims should be in the position to better empathize and understand a victim's plight based on media coverage (Karmen, 1984). Instead, the media distorts the crime and either understates or overstates the victim's reaction to it, consequently altering the public's response to it and making others unable to adequately understand his or her experience (Karmen, 1984). Other research has focused on the general fear of victimization and their perceived risk versus the actual probability of victimization. This was based on the individual's reported television viewing habits (Sparks & Ogles, 1990). The research showed that there was a significant relationship between television viewing and the fear of violence index (Sparks & Ogles, 1990). Although the present interview does not ask victims about crime about their television habits, it will be interesting to note whether or not they

mention the media in terms of their habits or the perceived support they received from their loved ones.

Personal Experiences of Victims of Crime. Often, the perspective of a third party supporter can be very different from the perspective of the victim. The social support that victims perceive may not be the same as what the supporters feel they are giving. Victims of crime have been surveyed and interviewed to make personal accounts of the social support they received from others. It has been discovered that a crime victim's level of anger after the event is directly affected by their perceived support from others (Green & Pomeroy, 2007). Social support acts as a moderator for the victim when he or she is in distress (Green & Pomeroy, 2007).

Those who report their victimization must interact with the police to make a formal report. Some research has been conducted asking victims to discuss their interactions with police in order to study their perceptions of the procedural justice system. Interviews were conducted with both personal and property crime victims to discover the value that victims placed on their contacts with the police (Elliott, Thomas & Ogloff, 2012). The offenders were not caught in all of these cases, yet participants reported that the interactions they had with the police helped them move on (Elliott et al., 2012). The research also showed that when victims were dissatisfied with the police, it was not due to the belief that their offender would never be found. Dissatisfaction rose from the victim's perception that the law enforcement officials had lost interest in their case and were not going to take appropriate action to try and find the perpetrator (Elliott et al., 2012). This research is very significant because it reflects a victim's need to feel validated that their experience is important to others, even if the "others" are strangers.

Victims of violent crime experience social support significantly differently than victims of nonviolent crime. Both types of victim need support and validation from others. However, one study suggests that there may be significant differences in the support that is actually received because victims of nonviolent crime have more difficulty asking for help (Green & Pomeroy, 2007). This is thought to be due to the fact that a nonviolent victim's incident may not be validated by loved ones or society (Green & Pomeroy, 2007). This notion of validation will be essential to this research of coping for victims of crime. Participants will be asked about the most and least helpful things they were told as a result of their victimization. Their responses will reveal whether or not they felt supported when they disclosed the information to others.

This research will strive to combine communication studies and criminal justice into one examination of how victims of crime communicate in order to cope with their experiences. It will combine these fields to bring a more specific focus to communication coping research from a unique perspective. Previous research has studied the impact of perceived and received support for victims of crime from a psychological perspective, as well as the coping mechanisms of anyone experiencing a stressful life event (Elliott et. al, 2012; Galeazzi et. al, 2009; Goldsmith & Domann-Scholz, 2013; Green et. al, 2010; Green & Pomeroy, 2007; Green & Pomeroy, 2007; Kraaij et. al, 2007; Nguyen, 2012; Rose et. al, 2006; Walklate, 2007). This study will consider previous significant research to examine the following research question: How do people use communication to make sense of having been the victim of a crime? The purpose of this research will be to bring focus to the personal accounts of coping mechanisms victims of crime used to interact with others. This research will operate from a communication perspective, examining the language they use and the differences between their interactions with others.

Methods

Interviews with seventeen victims of crime were conducted and analyzed qualitatively. Victims were asked to talk about their experience as a victim and who they communicated with in order to manage their experience. The responses were later transcribed and analyzed.

Participants

The research proposal for this study was submitted and approved by James Madison University's Institutional Review Board. Participants for this research were found through a snowball sampling method. Potential participants were solicited through both email and social media. The research project was also listed on an Academic Communication Listserv, encouraging fellow communication scholars to share the research opportunity with students and colleagues. Potential participants were recruited to complete an anonymous online screening survey using the secure survey tool, Qualtrics. Those who completed the survey were asked if they had ever been a victim of a crime. If they responded "yes" they were asked if they would be willing to complete a follow-up phone interview. There were 17 total respondents who agreed and completed the follow-up interview.

Procedures

After participants completed a brief Qualtrics survey that asked them to indicate what types of communication they used after being a victim of crime. The participants were contacted to determine a time that would be best for them to complete the phone interview. All participants gave consent to have the interviews audio-taped and the tapes were later transcribed. The interviews were semi-structured with slight adjustments made to the questions based on the victim's experience and their responses. The interviewees were asked how long ago the crime

occurred, how old they were when it happened, who they communicated with about it and their perceptions about their communication with others. Interviews were between five and forty minutes in length depending upon the victim's experience and how much they were willing to discuss.

Data Analysis

A total of 72 pages of interview transcripts were created and analyzed. The data was collected and then continually compared to new and previous data using the constant comparison methods of a grounded theoretical approach (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The coding of the interviews occurred in three steps. Data was first coded line by line to allow the categorization of data with a "short code that simultaneously summarizes and accounts for each piece of data" (Charmaz, 2006). Next, the coding became more advanced or focused by examining the "most significant and/or frequent earlier codes to sift through large amounts of data" (Charmaz, 2006). Finally, axial coding was utilized which related the categories to offer a coherent emerging analysis of common themes.

Discussion

Participants were required to complete a preliminary online, anonymous survey to provide basic information about themselves and their communication experience after the crime occurred. Most respondents reported that they often talked to their children the most about the crime they experienced. Very few respondents reported having sought a counseling professional or support group to discuss the crime. See Table 1 below for more of the statistics provided by the survey.

Table 1

Variable	n	M	SD
Their Children	22	3.73	1.61
Close Friends	22	3.64	0.85
Romantic Partner	21	3.48	1.21
Parents	22	3.36	1.36
Adult other than parents	22	3.32	1.09
Peers	21	3.29	0.90
Siblings	23	3.09	1.24
Counseling professional	22	2.00	1.23
Clergy or spiritual adviser	22	1.86	1.42
Support Group (online or face to face)	22	1.59	1.30

This indicator offered the opportunity and platform to discuss the specific communication strategies that victims used with others in managing their experiences. After collecting this data from the screening survey, the semi-structured interview questions were created to gain a better

understanding of the things that the participants disclosed to these people as a result of the crime.

This research exposed six common themes among the victims of crime in terms of how their communication determines how they make sense of the incident. These themes were: reporting an initial instinct about the offender just before the crime occurred, a change in habits and beliefs as a result of the victimization, the need for the restoration of monetary balance, the need for the restoration of emotional balance, the emphasis on the importance of victims' rights, and an account of the risk-benefit ratio when disclosing to others. See Table 2 for a description of these themes.

Table 2

Theme	Quote Example
Initial instinct/gut reaction of fear about offender	I was walking in the parking lot and I saw a woman that I immediately didn't like the looks of. I thought I was making the right decision when I didn't obey the feeling in my gut and said to myself, 'Now don't be so judgmental.' But I learned a lesson. Have you ever had a dog before? So you know when somebody's at the door it's a different type of bark. Well when they barked differently and they were backing out of the hallway it alerted me that something was going wrong.
Change in Behavior/Beliefs after the fact	I would say it made me much more suspicious. I held my purse and just held myself differently. And I just became more suspicious whenever I was out on lunch hour or out around town anywhere. I guess the most helpful thing as far as preventing something like that was the base police who told me how to secure the door that they used to get into the house. I don't leave my car doors unlocked anymore. I think I had this favorable view of human nature, and I wanted to believe the best in people.

	I said, 'Well after that happened to me, it made me very wary of African Americans period. For a while.
	…trying to be a little more proactive about hiding things that these folks might want
	it just made me more aware of my surroundings where I live.
	I have a gun. Which I never thought I would own. And I would never have one in the house when I had kids. But I do now.
	I feel like my awareness has gone through the roof. You know, some people can perceive it as almost like a nutty level and I always tell people, "You know you think that way until it happens to you."
	sometimes when I hear a creak in the house and I go around throughout the whole house
	I'm very cautious about somebody coming to my house… and my kids when they sell stuff
The Need for Monetary Reimbursement	It was a property crime so everything was insured, there wasn't any major loss.
	Well, I view this really not as any emotional upheaval. Rather it was just a matter of getting reimbursed for it.
	Frankly it increased my trust in my insurance broker because I was totally reimbursed.
	I just saw it as a kind of economic deprivation.
	I just walked over to American Express and said 'this is what happened', and they said no problem and they replaced it so you know there was never anything said that wasn't good, I mean they took care of me
The Need for Emotional Reparation	Even though she wasn't involved in any way, the fact that she was a person who cared about someone who'd been robbed and made the effort to call me, somehow that came to make me feel… it made the whole thing go away much faster than it might have otherwise.
	…the part of the story of the woman who recognized the name and reached out, that's the part that I remember most. When I talk about it, that's the part that takes on most importance.
	…that couple showed up every single time there was a court hearing or you know, they came to every day of the trial and they were very encouraging to me. So it was really nice, it was kinda like having my

	parents there to be honest.
	… once it was re-framed as not something wrong with me but something…that it wasn't inherently in my person that it was something that had happened that I had to deal with that was causing problems
	I was able find that out and look… do research later and find out and it was a huge relief to me to know that he wasn't on the street.
	I would make small strides to get over it when I was able to do something small and he would tell me that, you know, that he was proud of me and you know he recognized that that was difficult
	And my brother helped me say, 'Well that's not your fault. You were not looking for trouble, the trouble came to you.'
	I guess, like I said, it made me feel a little bit like this might be just an isolated incident and not a pattern.
Emphasize importance of Victims' Rights	… there were other car break-in victims. So because it had happened to so many people, my case was unimportant on its own.
	No empathy for what I'd been through
	I had a cold that nobody offered me any medical care or help or anything. But I was the victim…
	You know, women should be able to do what they need to do whenever they need to do it. That's not… that's not yet true in society, I don't think. I think women still are kind of… condemned by that.
	I'm happy to see that now, you know, there are some things that are going on in terms of victim's rights and I think that's important and should be done.
	… made me more willing to use my voice in other ways… advocacy kinds of ways, but not having to do it myself.
	… the system basically silences you in so many ways that it really affects your willingness to talk about it to others who are close to you
	…[the system] silences you in a really horrifying way
	… all that kind of seemed like a lot of 'squelching of the victim' kind of thing
Risk-benefit Ratio	I guess I didn't tell my parents at home… I thought they'd worry.

I told the squadron so they could take precaution.

And so I thought that I had to make a police report, and get documentation for it.

Well I try to be really careful about what I say or what details I provide because the perpetrator was an African American woman.

I never told my parents. Well I never told my mother, I told my father… my mother was very emotional

… people I don't know very well didn't get all of the details. People who I knew a better got a little bit more.

So when I've shared it with other people, I do not identify the race of the woman that tried to take my purse. And I don't think it's really… I think it continues a prejudicial train of thought.

… it took me probably 15 years to talk to someone about it and at that point it was a therapist.

… I didn't even talk to my family about it… parents, siblings, anybody like that.

I pretty much would tell anybody about it.

It's the same story no matter who I'm talking to.

if anything it strengthened the relationships because we had something to worry about together.

Just depends on the person and the conversation.

Participants who reported having had an initial instinct or a gut reaction that something was not right about their offender were those who came in contact with their perpetrator in the event of a violent crime. Those who sought the restoration of monetary balance were usually people who experienced a property crime and wished to receive the items or money that they had lost, or receive some type of monetary compensation. Respondents who sought to restore their emotional balance displayed fear after the crime and looked to others for assistance in managing

their experience. Those who discussed a change in their habits or behavior as a result of the crime mentioned increased awareness about their environment in almost any social context in which they find themselves. Participants also reported a newfound belief in the importance of victims' rights, mainly due to their treatment in the court system or others whom they found to be unsympathetic to their situation. The risk-benefit ratio was described by respondents when they talked about their disclosures with others and how they decide to either speak out about their victimization or not.

The discussion to follow will take a more in-depth look at the themes expressed by the interview participants. Direct quotes from some of the participants exemplify each of the six themes including reporting an initial instinct about the offender, a change in the victim's habits or beliefs as a result of the incident, the need to restore monetary balance, the need for emotional reparation, an emphasis on the importance of victims' rights, and finally an account of the risk-benefit ratio when talking about the crime with others.

Instinct

Some victims of violent crime reflected on their initial feelings and actions moments before their victimization occurred. De Becker (1997) examines the experiences of victims of crime and how they survived by trusting their instinct. De Becker posits that there is a universal code of violence and that every person has the ability to avoid becoming a victim of crime by trusting their natural instinct and fear. He states "Like every creature, you can know when you are in the presence of danger. You have the gift of a brilliant internal guardian that stands ready to warn you of hazards and guide you through risky situations" (pp. 6). One of the participants

spent much of the interview describing her instincts about her perpetrator just before the offender revealed a knife and tried to steal her belongings. She stated,

> *It taught me to trust my gut. The whole experience. Because I saw this woman mmm wow, 15, 20 yards away and I didn't like the look of her* right then. *She made my stomach go* erghh *[laughs]. That's the only way I can describe it. But I didn't listen. And I passed her and I almost got hurt and I almost got robbed.*

> *I thought I was making the right decision when I didn't obey the feeling in my gut and said to myself, 'Now don't be so judgmental.' But I learned a lesson.*

These statements are significant examples of two elements of the narrative process that was introduced by Labov and Waletzky (1967) in the literature. This person displayed evaluation as she reflected on the significance of seeing her perpetrator and choosing not to take evasive action. She also displayed the coda, a present perspective of what happened , specifically by stating that she had "learned a lesson." This displays the fact that she uses her victimization as a lesson of what could happen to her if she does not effectively manage her experience and learn from it.

A second victim of a violent crime also expressed regrets about not acting differently to avoid his victimization. Through his conversations with his brother, he remembers stating, "'I should've been more aware of my surroundings and I should've… I shouldn't have let him hit me first.'"

These victims were adamant about this experience of analyzing the moments just before the crime occurred. They seemed to do so in order to express their acknowledgement in that moment that something was about to go wrong. The interviewees also seemed to discuss those moments because they seemed to want to demonstrate that they had learned from their experience to trust

their instinct and that they continue to make a valiant effort to be more aware of their surroundings to avoid becoming a victim of crime once again.

Change after the Crime

Change in Behavior. Participants who reported changing their behavior after the victimization displayed ideas developed by Felson and Cohen in 1979, called routine activities theory. Routine activities theory is a widely accepted theory about why certain people become victims of crime. It is centered on the belief that crime is based on opportunity. There are three important parts that essentially lead to crime including: the lack of a capable guardian, accessibility of suitable targets, and the presence of motivated offenders (Felson & Cohen, 1979). The presence of a motivated offender is thought to be a constant because Felson and Cohen argue that there will always be someone present who is willing and able to commit the crime (1979). The lack of capable guardians portion states that there is not someone present to prevent the crime from occurring in the first place (Felson & Cohen, 1979). The availability of suitable targets means that the target of the crime is accessible to the motivated offender (Felson & Cohen, 1979). One of the participants, a victim of a property crime, reported a change in her behavior after she had left her purse as a suitable target in a coffee shop near her workplace. She stated,

> *I held my purse and just held myself differently. And I became more suspicious whenever I was out on lunch hour or out around town anywhere.*

Other interviewees provided accounts of their increased awareness about their belongings because of the crimes they experienced. They made statements including,

>*I do keep my hand, when I get into crowds like that and see a bunch of little kids charging at me I do keep my hands more closer to my valuables*

>*I think we um can get a bit lazy with our security up there uh just assuming everything will continue to be um fine and nobody's going to do anything wrong and uh I guess we shouldn't be quite that lazy.*

>*it just made me more aware of my surroundings where I live.*

>*well if anybody is by themselves alone I make sure you know especially my kids that the doors are locked um you know they're aware of their surroundings um things like that.*

Another victim also reported, "I don't leave my car doors unlocked anymore" after experiencing a burglary from his vehicle.

These accounts from participants make it very clear that they once left opportunities for motivated offenders to victimize them. Now, with the help of 20/20 hindsight, many of them readily admitted to being incapable guardians of their belongings and leaving opportunities for their offenders. This allowed them to purposely make changes to their behavior in order to avoid victimization again.

Change in Beliefs and Attitudes. A number of other participants discussed change after their victimization, but in a different way. These respondents reported a change in their belief about human nature after their victimization. One participant described his reaction after his victimization when he stated,

> *two guys came by on a motor scooter and the passenger uh ripped my carry-all*
>
> *bag from my shoulder and just pulled it off and a few seconds after he did that, he*
>
> *turned around too look at me. And at the time I thought, 'Wow, how nice, at least*
>
> *he wanted to see if he had injured me.' And a couple of days later I thought 'that*
>
> *asshole was trying to see if I was about to shoot him.' That was why he turned*
>
> *around to look at me. Uh, but I think I had this favorable view of human nature,*
>
> *and I want to believe the best in people.*

This person's immediate reaction to the crime was to return to his original view of human nature of people as basically good. He wanted to believe that his perpetrator was turning around to see if he was okay or if he had been injured. But as he employed the narrative process of evaluation and reflected on the incident soon after, this person developed an amended perspective of people that seemed more fitting to him in regards to his experience.

The Need for Monetary Reimbursement

One very common theme especially among the male participants was a focus on monetary reimbursement. For almost every property crime, respondents mentioned that what they cared about in order to cope with the situation was either getting the items back that they had lost or receiving some kind of monetary reimbursement from their insurance company. One man who was pick-pocketed while with a co-worker on a business trip in Paris mentioned his credit card company who had issued his traveler's checks several times throughout the interview. He stated,

> *When I looked my traveler's checks were missing and [my co-worker] had lost*
>
> *like $250 dollars' worth of cash, and so uh I just walked over to American*

>*Express and said this is what happened, and they said no problem and they*
>
>*replaced it… I mean they took care of me and that was it.*

When asked about the most helpful thing that someone told him in terms of supporting him after the crime, another male respondent responded,

>*I think the most helpful thing was that it was a property crime so everything was*
>
>*insured, there wasn't any major loss.*

These men often stated their thoughts about receiving monetary reimbursement multiple times within the interview process. This truly the emphasized the importance of reimbursement for them and their focus on this aspect of their victimization rather than receiving emotional support from others. The coping styles for these men are most similar to those studied by Green, Choi and Kane (2010) and Minnebo (2004) as they seem to employ active coping and problem-focused coping. They viewed their victimization as a solitary event that could be amended by receiving monetary reimbursement. These were very pragmatic and logical examinations of what had happened to them and how their situation could be fixed.

The Need for Emotional Reparation

Another major theme that was expressed by many participants was the need to restore some kind of emotional balance by receiving support from the people that they talked to about the crime. This theme emerged more frequently from women's talk, in both property crimes and violent crimes. These findings were very similar to what Green, Choi and Kane (2010) and Minnebo (2004) described as coping by seeking social support and emotion-focused coping. One interviewee described that her purse had been stolen and a witness had seen the people who had taken it and where the perpetrators had discarded the things that were not of value to them. The

witness retrieved the items that they had discarded and recognized the last name on the checkbook. She got in contact with a relative of the victim and the victim was able to go to the woman's house and retrieve some of the items she had lost. The victim talked about how important that woman was in helping her cope with the crime, even though the woman was a stranger. She reflected,

> *Even though she wasn't involved in any way, the fact that she was a person who cared about someone who'd been robbed and made the effort to call me, somehow that came to make me feel... it made the whole thing go away much faster than it might have otherwise.*

Another woman talked about a couple that witnessed her crime taking place, called the police, and then showed up to every day of the trial. This interaction with this couple was essential in helping her cope with her event. It was very apparent how much these strangers meant to her when she stated,

> *Now the interesting factor is, that when this crime was happening, the people that backed out of the parking place, was a couple that is about the age I am now, maybe a little younger, late 50's early 60's perhaps? They're the ones that got the license number of the car that she jumped into for her getaway. That's how she was tracked down. Uh huh, and that couple showed up every single time there was a court hearing or you know, they came to every day of the trial and they were very encouraging to me. So it was really nice, it was kinda like having my parents there to be honest.*

This example in particular is very similar to the findings reported in victims' accounts of the importance of their interactions with police (Elliott, Thomas, & Ogloff, 2012). It does not matter how close another person is in relation to an individual or how well people know each other, when one person reaches out to another in the aftermath of a traumatic event, a bond is formed that is essential in helping the individual cope.

Victims' Rights

      Many participants expressed their belief that the rights of the victim should play a more crucial role in the justice system. These were participants who reported their crime to the police and were often called to testify in court against their perpetrator. The participant whose car was broken into stated, "… there were other car break-in victims. So because it had happened to so many people, my case was unimportant on its own." This victim felt that he was being ignored by the police because it was a minor crime and there were others who had experienced the same thing. Another victim of a violent crime was even more adamant about victims' rights when she claimed,

> *I'm happy to see that now, you know, there are some things that are going on in terms of victim's rights and I think that's important and should be done. Because depending upon what happens to the victim, you could have all kinds of costs associated with being a victim of crime. Medical evaluation, medical treatment, ongoing care, all kinds of stuff depending upon the severity of what happens to you.*

As a result of being a victim, this woman realized that depending on seriousness of the crime itself, victims often have a multi-faceted need for assistance to cope with their experience. Another victim portrayed a very unsupportive view of the justice system and their treatment of victims. She made statements such as,

> *… the system basically silences you in so many ways that it really affects your willingness to talk about it to others who are close to you, does that make sense?*
>
> *…it silences you in a really horrifying way*

> *… it kind of… all that kind of seemed like a lot of 'squelching of the victim' kind*
>
> *of thing and if you weren't in a war zone, if you're not a soldier, PTSD doesn't*
>
> *apply to you… it didn't occur to me that it applied to me myself um so.. so that*
>
> *kind of thing.*

This participant was unhappy with the way she felt as a victim of crime under the justice system in the United States. However, this treatment also allowed her to state that she became "more willing to use my voice in other ways, advocacy kinds of ways." This is very important to note that some victims of crime felt that they had been silenced by the courts and the legal system. On the other hand, others held the perspective that their victimization allowed them to communicate a sense of empowerment and community.

Risk-Benefit Ratio

The risk-benefit ratio was the theme that produced the widest variety of opinions and comments among the interviewees. Depending on their experience and the severity of the crime, the victims expressed differing views about the information they were willing to share when disclosing to others about the crime. Those who experienced their crime on a more personal level- often those who came into contact with their perpetrator- were less willing to share information with others. They believed that the emotional costs of talking to others about their experience outweighed the benefits and would offer less information in interviews and also reported discussing the crime with fewer people in their life. For example, one participant stated,

> *… if a friend mentions a particular thing happened to them, or a, or I hear*
>
> *somebody describe, you know…and I understand what they're talking about, and*
>
> *I can be supportive myself and I can say things and do things that I would have*

> *wanted said to me, I still don't share it...it still doesn't feel safe, whatever that*
>
> *means.*

Another victim of a violent crime stated,

> *So I never told my mother, she would've had the National Guard escort me all the*
>
> *way from Illinois to the state of Colorado and I just didn't want to deal with her.*

Those who experienced a less traumatic crime were more open to others about their experiences but they often stated that they were not the person who would mention the subject first.

> *I'm not afraid to talk about it but it's not something I go out of my way to talk*
>
> *about.*

> *Just kind of telling what happened to you so that if they find themselves in a*
>
> *similar... same circumstances, they'll know what to look for.*

> *Just depends on the person and the conversation.*

Finally, a few participants reported being careful about their disclosures due to the issue of race. These people felt uncomfortable about giving information to others because the offender had been of a different race and they made claims like,

> *Well I try to be really careful about what I say or what details I provide because*
>
> *the perpetrator was an African American woman.*

> *Because of the mentality... again of the race. I thought that the reason they*
>
> *attacked me was because of my race. Some people say, 'you have to stay away*

from them, they're just bad people' and stuff like that. Which I don't necessarily

think is true. But in this case… it was.

Others reported that they felt comfortable telling almost anybody about their experiences. It did not matter who they were talking to or what context they found themselves in, the participants stated that they did not mind talking to anyone about their victimization. These interviewees stated things such as

I pretty much would tell anybody about it.

it's the same story no matter who I'm talking to.

I tell everybody everything.

This was a very complicated theme that indicated that victims put a lot of conscious thought into how much they share and with whom they share the information about their victimization. The reports of the participants and the findings relate to the ideas set forth by Petronio (2002) regarding Communication Boundary Management. These individuals accounted for the relationships they had with others and the situations they found themselves in to judge the risks versus the benefits of disclosing about their crime.

Ongoing Questions and Future Directions

The main limitations of this study were time and the scope of the research. Because there was a time constraint, there were only seventeen interviews that were completed. If more interviews had been completed, the six major themes may have been developed more deeply and led to a more detailed analysis. One minor limitation in terms of this study was that the interviews were completed over the phone. Although in-person interviews would reduce the anonymity for the participants, it would have allowed for another important factor. As a researcher, I would have been able to witness their body language as they described their story. This would have also allowed for a more in-depth analysis of each of the interviewees.

Using this study as a guide, there are many future directions that this research would allow. One possible direction would be for future researchers to focus on just one type of crime, either violent crime or property crime. This would allow researchers to explore the themes that were already developed in this study and also discover new themes. Additionally, future research could simply focus on victims who attended support groups, individual therapy, or victims and their relationships within a family unit. This provides a more specific concentration and allows for a more in-depth analysis of commonalities between victims of crime and how they communicate in order to manage their experience.

This research is very important for the fields of communication studies and justice, as well as for people on a personal level. The study revealed six major themes that victims find important to discuss regarding their victimization, as well as the gender differences between men and women and the things that they want after they are victimized, often monetary reimbursement for men and the restoration of emotional balance for women. The emphasis on

victims' rights is also very important in terms of the justice system. Victims feel as if they are the dark figure of the court system and that their rights are virtually ignored. In reality, these people should be the most important figures in the criminal justice system. However, they feel that their rights are ignored and replaced by the importance of the rights of the perpetrators. This implicates that a major change must be made to the court system. These participants felt the need to express these matters to people in their lives as well as to me during the interviews. The qualitative approach of the study allowed them to discuss their experience in their own words and reflect on any aspect of the story that they felt was important. The process of communication allowed these victims to manage their experience in an effective manner and in turn allows them to often feel empowered rather than victimized.

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