

Embodied Dialogic Love: How Restorative Justice Facilitators Perceive Power and Offer  
Meaningful Disruptions

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**Abstract**

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As Restorative Justice (RJ) programs emerge throughout the U.S. as alternatives to the Western adjudication system, I examine an understudied yet impactful element of RJ: facilitators. RJ itself is a framework rooted in Indigenous worldviews to reveal intersectionality in our relationships especially after a harm has occurred in order to restore harmony and pursue justice in the community. Nevertheless, when situated within or in partnership with the domination systems of the U.S. that intersectionally oppress such as the criminal-legal system, significant tensions emerge. RJ facilitators are a locus of sociopolitical and institutional frames whose positionality and role are not only a unique, understudied perspective from which to critically examine the relationship between RJ programs and state institutions but also can interrupt historically oppressive power dynamics. This dissertation examines how RJ facilitators

navigate the complexities of power, identity, and institutions to create dialoguing environments focused on self-determined healing. Through in-depth interviews with 23 RJ facilitators across the U.S., I investigated how facilitators conceptualized themselves and RJ in relation to power. From the data and through women of color feminist and grounded theory analysis, a grounded framework emerged to conceptualize the localized practices and perceptions of RJ facilitators: Embodied Dialogic Love (EDL). This framework provided an understanding of how facilitators engage with their own identities and situate themselves in relation to power through RJ processes and programs.

Ultimately, I argue that Embodied Dialogic Love is a reflexive and communicative framework practiced by restorative justice facilitators that guides how they create meaningful disruptions to craft healing environments while navigating complex tensions they face when addressing systems of power. Facilitators adopting an EDL framework demonstrated an orientation to care for others and centralized the needs of the parties, meaning facilitators also held a heightened awareness, understanding, and curiosity for their own embodied social identities and the ways in which their social location and historic institutional power and relationships impacted their work. Facilitators communicated embodied love by co-creating a dialogic environment where they sought to empower parties to pursue healing while also interrupting institutional power and navigating tensions. By conceptualizing RJ and RJ facilitator practices and perceptions through EDL, this project contributes to larger discourses on social change (particularly in restorative justice), the future of RJ and its relationship to state institutions, and how facilitators operate as powerful players who interrupt power, co-create dialoguing spaces, and foster collective empowerment for self-determined healing.

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*To my husband y mi familia*

## Introduction

The afternoon sun peeked through dense cloud cover, bringing much needed light to a gray Seattle day. The sunlight streamed through the windows, illuminated my dining room where I sat at the table with my laptop open to a Zoom meeting.

“You can do it,” said Edith, a restorative practice and justice facilitator, counselor, and artist based out of California, as we concluded our Zoom interview. After nearly three hours of dialoguing, Edith and I had engaged in very honest and loving conversations about what draws us to restorative justice work, the kind of toll it takes on our bodies, and what it looked like to be resilient and continue to nourish our communities through service while finding nourishment ourselves. Edith has a long history of employing restorative practices in schools in order to uplift the voices of youth and to create environments where communities can support one another through harm.

We concluded our conversation by commiserating on our experiences with burnout when conducting social justice work. Edith shared that one of her strategies to stave off burnout was to find nourishment in the work she does rather than constantly let it eat away at her or deplete her. Letting out a long, deep sigh, I paused, wearily smiled and said, “I will take your advice and try to find nourishment in it.” Edith matched my weary smile and offered encouragement coupled with a loving offer, “That's right. Let it feed you. That way you won't burn out.” With a rueful laugh, Edith added, “And if you do, call me, we'll just catch up.”

“Yes, we'll stave off burnout together,” I responded.

“That's right. That's community. You gotta lean on each other,” Edith affirmed.

“Yeah, and vice versa. You feel that burnout coming,” I said, “We can do a little check in.” Edith was giggling before I finished my sentence. “That's right!” she exclaimed. Her

laughter was indicative both of finding levity in struggle and joy in building a community that knows our pain and makes us feel seen and supported.

In this interaction, Edith and I represent Embodied Dialogic Love (EDL), a framework and practice that emerged consistently through reflective dialogues I had with restorative justice facilitators. EDL consists of three elements: 1) Love: being oriented to care for and with others who are similar to and different from us in a way that centralizes needs, understanding, and compassion because we recognize our interconnectivity, 2) Embodiment: feeling and enacting that love through and with our bodies because physically being present means we recognize the value of our bodies to developing knowledge and understanding, that we exist to build embodied relationships, and support to centralize needs requires presence and risk, and 3) Dialogue: the manifestation of embodied love because dialogue is an interaction which requires compassionate, radical listening, curious questions, vulnerability, and a willingness to be wrong and to work collaboratively to find healing, understanding, and community. EDL is both theory and method; mindset and action; thinking and doing. Put succinctly, Embodied Dialogic Love is defined as an *orientation toward others that centralizes needs of marginalized individuals, prioritizes understanding between social groups, and values interconnectivity of all human beings for the purpose of developing relationships and actions for social transformation and healing from interpersonal and systemic harm.*

Edith and my actions and communication together exemplify EDL because we express to one another that we are there to support each other and oriented to seeing each other in our time of need (i.e. stress and burnout from work). We build a relationship through dialogue where we listen closely to one another and recognize the interconnected nature of our social justice work and humanity. Despite being on Zoom we are still embodied in our laughter and feeding off each

other's joy. We enact EDL by being oriented toward one another's different and similar needs, communicating our understanding of each other through dialogue and embodied actions to express our support of one another, and building an interconnected community because of embodied love.

EDL is a grounded theory which unfolded within the data and study methodology of this project, and offers a way to understand how restorative justice facilitators adopted a structured approach to fostering compassion, interconnectivity, and embodied presence—elements essential for navigating the complexities of power, social identity, and inter-organizational tensions that shape the RJ landscape and dialoguing spaces (it's a way to understand praxis: theory in action). *I argue that Embodied Dialogic Love is a reflexive and communicative framework practiced by restorative justice facilitators that guides how they create meaningful disruptions to craft healing environments while navigating complex tensions they face when addressing systems of power.*

Facilitators adopting an EDL framework demonstrated an orientation to care for others and centralized the needs of the parties, meaning facilitators also held a heightened awareness, understanding, and curiosity for their own embodied social identities and the ways in which their social location and historic institutional power and relationships impacted their work. Facilitators communicated embodied love by co-creating a dialogic environment where they sought to empower parties to pursue healing while also interrupting institutional power and navigating tensions.

Additionally, as exemplified by Edith, EDL is a meta theory and methodology that not only guided my own work in this project but also emerged as a framework within how restorative facilitators conceptualize their own role, commitment to the work, and engaged in reflection with me about their approach to RJ. Like my dialogue with Edith, facilitators I spoke

with represented EDL in the way we oriented ourselves to care for and understand the other's embodied experiences in a dialogue for the purpose of reflecting on our social justice work, commitments, and opportunities for growth. Embodied dialogic love saturates this project – from the grounded theory that emerged from the data to the abstracted meta theory that impacted data collection and analysis.

## Theoretical Congruence, Genealogy, & Methodology: Embodied Dialogic Love

While EDL has not been defined before, its tenets and facets have been present throughout many historical methodologies and practices. Black feminist, Chicana feminist, and Indigenous scholars and communities have developed and engaged embodiment, love, dialogue, interconnectivity, community, and decolonization for centuries (brown, 2017; Hill Collins, 2009; hooks, 1994, hooks, 1999; Lorde, 1984; Lugones, 1987; Moraga and Anzaldua, 2002; Tallbear, 2014, Smith, 2022; Yazzie 1994; Yazzie 1996). EDL joins these projects, theories, and methodologies and becomes another way to understand and practice dialogue-based social change. In other words, I am standing on the shoulders of giants to conceptualize EDL. For this project, I conceptualize and operationalize specific women of color feminist methodological and epistemological assumptions to trace the genealogy of EDL and construct its three interrelated components: Love, Embodiment, and Dialogue.

### *Love*

In this project, Love<sup>1</sup> is a mindset which orients us to care for one another because we recognize we are interconnected. I use the word love rather than “interconnection” because of the

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<sup>1</sup> Love often defies definition. It cannot be bound in a static or rigid conceptualization; rather it challenges and resists efforts to bind it and package it into professional language. Love is a powerful emotion and value that is often undermined and belittled for being too mushy or soft. It is also exploited for capitalist gain (Jaffe, 2022). I struggle with using the word and creating a framework with it for these reasons. However, I

ethic of care implied in the word love. Interconnectivity means that an individual acknowledges that their actions are connected to others (i.e. how someone might toss a pebble into a pond and see how their actions create ripples across the pond surface). Love means that the individual understands the impact of their actions as they are connected to the world around them (i.e. how someone might hesitate before tossing a pebble into a pond because they care about the ecosystem below the surface of the pond that might be disrupted by their actions. They care deeply about who they are connected to and make decisions that reflect their care).

My conceptualization of Love relies heavily on Maria Lugones' (1987 & 2011) discussion of love. Maria Lugones (2011) conceptualizes embodied love as an "inclination to others" that is "powerfully motivating, inspiring, and energizing as it inclines us to learn from each other in complex histories of interdependence, including betrayal, as we respond to multiple oppressions" (p.72). Lugones' (2011) demonstrates EDL because of her focus on how love impulses us to not only recognize our interconnectivity but also inspires us to care for one another, learn from one another, and advocate for one another because of our interconnectivity. It is through love that we not only recognize the complex interconnections of individuals and systems but also act and respond to those interconnections. Put another way, love opens our eyes to see and care for those who are different and similar to us which means we are also awakened to notice the differential and stratified treatment of others.

Love is the motivating force that drives us together and propels us toward change because we are responding to multiple oppressions and yet it isn't just those interlocking oppressions that

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persist and include this word as an essential element of EDL because it is challenging and requires deep reflection into ourselves and understanding of others. I use the word love as hooks (2001) uses and examines it as a value, orientation toward interconnected community from which to develop mutuality, healing, justice, care, and understanding that impulses us to act in collective.

connect us; it is our visions and radical recognition of our interconnectivity and the collectivity of our liberation that connect us and sustain our connection.

Thus, love is also conceptualized as an inclination to others for the pursuit of social transformation. For instance, my conceptualization of love that is inclined to creatively imagine and pursue liberation emerges from Cherrie Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa's (2002) *El Mundo Zurdo* (The Left-Handed World) – the name for their vision of a liberated society rooted in love for self and collective. Audre Lorde (1984) refers to something akin to love that is inclined to care for self and others for the purpose of social change in her discussion of the erotic and how we must pursue that which makes us feel whole and creates more spaces for holistic joy and to be seen in our joy as much as our struggle. adrienne maree brown (2017) refers to love as an inclination to pursue a collective vision of social change in her conceptualization of emergent strategy to “grow a compelling future together through relatively simple interactions...[and] intentionally change in ways that grow our capacity to embody the just and liberated worlds we long for. And... it's a philosophy for how to be in harmony and love, in and with the world” (p. 24). Scaffolded together, these theorists reveal the imaginative capacity/element of Love because we don't just develop an awareness of our interconnectivity through interlocking oppressions but through our collective visions and actions to those oppressions to create social change.

In embodied dialogues, we get a chance to practice/access the world as it could be; it isn't some distant future but a liberatory present. EDL thus holds space for dialogue that embraces the fullness and complexity of our interconnected different human experiences with power and oppression while also facilitating holistic collectivity that is empowering and uplifting. The key to such spaces conceptualized by embodied dialogic love is that embodiment and dialogue make love actionable, felt, and tangible.

## *Embodiment*

Embodiment is “simultaneously and holistically cultural/biological/spiritual/artistic/intellectual/social/emotional, with recognition of difference in terms of race/gender/sexuality/ability/history/experience/environment” (Barbour, 2016, p. 230). In other words, embodiment is *both* a keen awareness of lived experiences in the body which shape our understanding of ourselves, others, and the world depending on how social systems differentially value and treat different bodies *and* actions taken by bodies to enact a role, behavior, or communication; it is both what we are and do.

Embodiment as a keen awareness of lived experiences means that the body becomes a site for knowledge generation because it is through our bodies that we experience the world and one another.<sup>2</sup> Thus, the physical consequences of living under social systems which privilege and marginalize are felt in and by the body. Moraga and Anzaldúa (2015) argue that it is through the physicality of living in bodies that the individual recognizes their Self and positionality in society. Othering and marginalization rely on physical differences to create social hierarchies to value some bodies over others. Othering and marginalization also create environments for violence and harm meaning that marginalized individuals form a self-conception under these systems of exclusion and dehumanization, and experience physical consequences of these systems. Privilege is also embodied by relying on physical differences to create environments and opportunities to offer advantages to privileged individuals and experience the benefits of

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<sup>2</sup> Feminist research approaches challenge Cartesian Dualism which “suggests that clear differences exist between the outside world and inside perception and that the distinction between the two – object and subject – allows for the unbiased observation of the social world. Similarly, Cartesian dualism argues for a distinction between mind and body that privileges rational thought processes over emotional or bodily experience” (Miller, 2004, p. 47). In other words, where Cartesian Dualism rejects the body as a site to generate knowledge, embodiment embraces the connection between the mind and body because it is through lived experiences that we understand ourselves, relationships, and the world.

systems built to enfranchise them. Thus, embodiment allows us to position ourselves in the world based on our lived experiences.

When coupled with love, embodiment extends that keen awareness beyond self and toward others who have similar and different lived experiences. When we are oriented toward embodied love, we see the ways in which structures impact our lived experiences differently and have physical impacts. We also have a heightened awareness of how different bodies move through the world and experience control or exclusion. From this awareness, we position ourselves within interconnected relationships that have impacts on one another. Privilege and marginalization are like two sides of the same coin; By the very fact one has unearned privilege means someone is being marginalized as a result. Embodied love consists of situating ourselves within interconnected systems of privilege and marginalization and working to understand the material realities of those systems on ourselves and others.

At the same time, our embodied love is not simple knowledge exchange or increased awareness but a commitment to one another: “I am not free while any woman is unfree, even when her shackles are very different from my own” (Lorde, 1984, p. 127-28). Lorde (1984) represents embodied love because of how she discusses how love drives us to be aware of and connect our whole embodied selves to one another and, through that connection, fight for one another and create a world not just based on our own needs but everyone’s. We practice embodied love by not only being aware and feeling love throughout our bodies but also by actions that invite others together and demonstrate our love through dialogue and advocacy and mutual aid.

Embodiment is necessary to EDL because it requires action. It makes our love real and tangible. We must be present and visibly show up to support one another. We must use our

bodies to communicate by turning to one another and use our eyes and smiles and nods to indicate we are listening and leaning into what is being said. We must use our voices to offer our stories and testimonies. If we have privilege, we must put our bodies at risk by standing up for those who are marginalized at the threat of being ostracized ourselves. If we experience marginalization, we must extend ourselves to others who are marginalized and offer mutual aid and build support so we can achieve collective liberation. Embodiment isn't just being aware of our own lived experiences in our bodies and how they connect with and are different from others' lived experiences but acting in our bodies to make a difference.

### *Dialogue*

In EDL, embodied love is manifested in dialogue. Dialogue is an embodied communication interaction between two or more individuals who seek to learn about and understand one another to foster greater interconnection, vulnerably and safely share and take accountability, and develop tangible collectivity that will drive actions for social change.

Dialogue is love because it is a space where communicators must be inclined to listen and understand one another.<sup>3</sup> This is because dialogue is a space where human relationships and webs of meaning interact for participants to bring the interconnected nature of humanity and socially constructed meanings and systems of power to the forefront of their relationships

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<sup>3</sup> My experience with dialogue is in practice through the Center for Communication, Difference, and Equity (CCDE) at the University of Washington in Seattle. Founded by Dr. Ralina L. Joseph, the CCDE is a resource that creates programs for community dialogue about racial-equity. One such program was the Interrupting Privilege series which I participated in as a dialogue participant, facilitator, and archivist. The dialogues run through Interrupting Privilege brought community members together in groups of 2-3 people talking about difficult topics such as race, politics, the 2020 pandemic, etc. The dialogues were loosely structured with a few guiding questions but one of the main goals was to foster deeper understanding of one another and different experiences through radical listening (Brekke, 2020; Joseph, forthcoming; Joseph-Briscoe-Smith, 2021), a listening strategy that attends to power, difference, and understanding to facilitate spaces that centralize the needs of students and community members. Most of the dialogues were recorded and uploaded to a digital archive which are then used to stimulate more dialogues in different settings and among different groups (i.e. I play audio clips of dialogues to ground discussions for my students in class when we dialogue about race). As a participant and eventual facilitator, I gained embodied, experiential knowledge of dialogue as an environment and practice designed to foster understanding and a way to listen to the checked one's own assumptions and instead was entirely devoted to fully absorbing the different points of view. Dialogue did not shy away from difference but celebrated it. Dialogue did not acquiesce to power but confronted and addressed it. Dialogue did not engage in a back-and-forth about validity or competition but valued belonging and voice and inclusion. Practicing this form of communication catalyzed my curiosity about dialogue as a communication event which led me to understanding scholarly discourse about dialogue and conceptualizing it for this project.

(Bakhtin, 1981; Buber, 1970; Waisbord, 2019).<sup>4</sup> Our interconnectivity is made salient and enacted in dialogue which allows us to generate knowledge based on our different and shared lived experiences. Dialogue also embodied not only because of the verbal communication but also because of the act of creating a space for dialogue to occur, preparing and regulating our minds and bodies as well as preparing a room to gather and how we nonverbally behave in the dialogue and after the dialogue. We craft spaces where we can come together to recognize and foster interconnectivity and, in those spaces, we work to understand one another and generate knowledge.<sup>5</sup>

Because dialogue is an opportunity to confront shared and different meanings and identity for the sake of understanding, participants in dialogue become hyper-aware and reflexive about their perceptions and assumptions and embodiment. Being hyper-aware is loving because it “is a critical opportunity for participants to closely examine the socially constructed norms and ideologies that guide their (often unconscious) beliefs” that dictate their behaviors and communication (Dessel & Rogge, 2008 p. 213). When we interrogate our assumptions and norms, we create new webs of meaning, making the very dialogue an enactment of a transformed present. These new webs of meaning are only possible if participants can share their perspectives, values, and stories openly and “without limitation” (González and Cramer, 2018, p.

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<sup>4</sup> Buber (1970), operating from a Jewish cultural framework, theorized that dialogue creates and maintains human relationships by turning from thinking about ourselves as related to objects separate from ourselves (I-It relationship), to thinking about ourselves as related to other selves (I-Thou relationship) (Buber, 1970; González and Cramer, 2018; Yankelovich, 1999). In turning to one another and recognizing the interconnected nature of the human experience, dialogue “[implies] a state wherein all parties were mutually... viewed the other as a “Thou” rather than an “It” – recognizing... the other person’s full humanity” (DeTurk, 2010, p. 567-68). Bakhtin (1981), operating from a (non-practicing) Orthodox Christian framework theorized that dialogue is a space of interaction where societal and personal webs of meaning collide to be interrogated, reflected upon, challenged, and remade among participants. To engage in dialogue is to engage other webs of meaning and create a space where “meaning is established in the ‘in-between’ of perspectives” (González and Cramer, 2018, p. 218).

<sup>5</sup> In dialogue, participants embrace a number of conditions to enact embodied love: vulnerability (Dessel, et al, 2006); active and radical listening (Brekke, 2020; Joseph, forthcoming; Joseph and Briscoe-Smith, 2021; Rowe, 2010); reflexivity (Tourage, 2005); suspending biases and assumptions (Dessel & Rogge, 2006; Gurin et al, 2013; Joseph, forthcoming); openness to what is unfamiliar/discomforting (Gurin et al, 2013; Joseph, forthcoming); accountability (Umbreit & Armour, 2010); exploration of differences (Joseph, forthcoming); goodwill (DeTurk, 2010); and commitment to positive change on behalf of all participants (Dessel et al, 2006; Nagda & Zuñiga, 2001). Ideally these conditions coalesce to create a democratic environment and facilitated process in which everyone is respected, acknowledged, equally participating, safe, and enters community to pursue understanding, healing, and transformation. Of course, even if these conditions are met it doesn't guarantee that there will be unilaterally equal participation and interaction especially if there are power imbalances between participants. Often, participants learn these conditions during dialogue and facilitators can't always assume that the conditions exist before dialogue.

219) which means that not only is each “side” able to share their perspective, but each side is also able to challenge the other.

Thus, dialogue is also a “mode of confrontation – where the marginalized *other* may dialogue with colonizing structures. Dialogue becomes a technique of liberation - of decolonization - a method whereby one can ‘speak back to power’” (Willink et al, 2014, p. 295). Because dialogue is a space where participants are openly able to confront meanings and assumptions equally and without hostility with the goal of seeing one another’s humanity and interconnectivity, it is a radical space where historically disempowered groups can speak to historically empowered groups and confront assumptions and social constructions that maintain inequity and injustice in our society. At the same time, while participants are empowered to co-create meaning and relationships, they must also address the extent to which webs of meaning that form power differentials are at play within dialogue and might impede the conditions necessary for dialogue by replicating environments of power and oppression.<sup>6</sup>

Knowledge must be developed in collaboration because survival, resistance, and social change are developed in collaboration. Dialogue is a communicative space in which we share our embodied experiences and are inclined to understand others for social transformation.

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<sup>6</sup> Critical intercultural communication scholar Sara DeTurk (2010) cautions against over inflating the promises of dialogue as a radically liberatory space. When placing marginalized groups in dialogue with dominant groups, DeTurk noticed that dialogue became an educational space where marginalized members educated dominant members. This exchange would superficially seem equalizing if not for the fact that the dominant groups maintained power by being “consumers” of marginalized group stories and perspectives essentially able to “accept or reject the others’ teachings” (DeTurk, 2010, p. 579). DeTurk found that the equalizing conditions of dialogue that create space for participants to engage openly, vulnerably, and holistically was good in theory but required a lot more work in practice because such equalization remained “*only for that dialogic moment*” (DeTurk, 2010, p. 579). Turning toward the other requires a lot of effort on behalf of the participants instead of simple “goodwill” if dialogue seeks to actually dismantle systems of oppression and webs of meaning that are oppressive (DeTurk, 2010, p. 579). It is a careful balance where groups interact in ways that “encourage cultural distinctiveness and relationship building while also explicitly recognizing the differential impact of unequal power relations on participants” (Nagda & Zuñiga, 2003, p. 112).

*Bringing Love, Embodiment, and Dialogue Together: EDL*

EDL is cyclical because love is what drives us toward embodied dialogue because we need each other and are interconnected, and embodied dialogue is where love is manifested and where we are driven to understand our interconnectivity which is love. EDL emerged in my dissertation as a way to understand RJ facilitator practices and experiences/perceptions of/with power as they operate in and outside powerful, historically oppressive Western systems.

While I see opportunities for EDL to influence and emerge in different areas of social justice, its emergence within this study on RJ is significant because it provides a localized and nuanced practice to help understand facilitators working in institutionalized RJ programs. EDL's respective concepts aren't new and have been the roots of Indigenous peacemaking approaches for centuries. Throughout this project I found that the way scholars, academics, and theorists referred to these concepts – embodiment, dialogue, and love – was like how RJ practitioners and facilitators referred to these concepts, yet they didn't cite one another, use the same language, or speak to one another despite having shared values and orientations toward social justice work, the criminal-legal system, and justice. EDL is a bridge between these populations to identify shared values and language. At the same time, it is specifically located within the localized phenomenon of RJ facilitator practices. Therefore, it is a theory and method emerging from and around the RJ facilitator and can potentially inform larger dialogues about social justice, advocacy, community, and love.

## Origins of Institutionalized Restorative Justice

Institutionalized Restorative Justice (RJ)<sup>7</sup> is a decolonial peacemaking intervention of African and Indigenous origins (Davis, 2019) that is a rising alternative to the Western adjudication system.<sup>8</sup> In practice, institutionalized RJ is an intimate interpersonal exchange consisting of a small group dialogue between the person responsible for the harm, the harmed person, and additional supportive community members, facilitated by a third-party neutral community member also referred to as the facilitator (Umbreit, 2002; Umbreit and Armour, 2010). Institutionalized RJ itself is a framework rooted in Indigenous worldviews to reveal intersectionality in our relationships especially after a harm has occurred to restore harmony and pursue justice in the community.

As a peacemaking and justice intervention that responds to harm, RJ elevates “the voices of survivors, families, communities, and responsible parties... by bringing together all members

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<sup>7</sup> Professor of Law Donna Coker (2006) describes a clear distinction between Indigenous Peacemaking and the institutionalized Restorative Justice Movement because Indigenous Peacemaking practices remain entirely controlled by Indigenous practitioners while the institutionalized Restorative Justice Movement is the appropriated version of Indigenous Peacemaking into dominant state systems.

<sup>8</sup> Indigenous Restorative Justice (also known as Indigenous Peacemaking) is founded on values and concepts of “relationships, reciprocity, solidarity and process, as opposed to hierarchy” found in Indigenous spirituality and clan systems. This is why Indigenous communities view crime as disrupting community harmony that already exists and is the default (Mirsky, 2003, p. 4). Navajo Chief Justice Robert Yazzie (1994) explains that from the view of Indigenous justice and peacemaking, “if my relative is hurt, that concerns me; if my relative hurts another, I am responsible to the injured person. In addition, if something happens in my community, I am also affected” (p. 182). The interconnectedness that Yazzie describes is an explanation of the Navajo concept of *k’e* which “can be loosely translated as ‘solidarity and reciprocity’ or ‘what I do has an impact on you and what you do has an impact on me’” (Mirsky, 2004, 4). *K’e* is the foundation for Indigenous worldviews which frames and shapes their justice practices. In an interview with the International Institute for Restorative Practices, Yazzie shares that *k’e* is a mindset and way of life that serves as the roots for how Navajo families raise their children: “In Navajo families, parents and grandparents, ‘your mother’s clan, your father’s clan—mainly your mother’s clan—all the aunts and uncles, everybody participated in the upbringing. Somebody said, ‘It takes a community to raise a child,’ and that’s exactly what we did” (Mirsky, 2004, 1). The community is at the heart of everything in Navajo tradition and establishes solidarity and relationships from childhood. In other words, Indigenous justice is focused on prevention rather than reaction because creating strong communal bonds and interconnected relationships is a way to involve individuals in a community where their needs can be met because everyone is responsible for attending to and supporting one another’s needs. There is inherent respect and valuing of every life because everyone is interconnected. Similarly to Yazzie, in an interview with the International Institute for Restorative Practices, Judge Joseph Flies-Away of the Hualapai Nation further explains that environments and communities built on solidarity and interconnection thus lay the foundation for tribal justice: “The purpose of law is to bring the person back into the fold, to heal him. ‘People do the worst things when they have no ties to people,’ said Flies-Away, adding, ‘Tribal court systems are a tool to make people connected again’” (Mirsky, 2004, 6). Because Indigenous communities such as Native American tribes, First Nation communities, and other Indigenous folk such as Indigenous Africans already have culturally situated environments of relationality, recognizing interdependence, openness, goodwill, and commitment to change, they craft a justice system that is rooted in those values and thus allows for healing. Additionally, RJ is a deeply embedded part of daily life and practice and is an expansive worldview and lifestyle beyond a particular approach to justice. The American justice system is very distinct from the Indigenous justice system because it is founded on different values and concepts. For instance, the U.S. criminal-legal system is founded on individualism, laws, punishment, and strangeness. The State is responsible for keeping strangers from hurting one another and using the law as the standard to measure harm and punishment. When RJ is applied to the U.S. criminal-legal system it is like fitting a square peg into a round hole because the values and principles that structure daily life and worldviews in American culture are different (if not completely antithetical) to Indigenous worldviews, making RJ a special justice oriented practice rather than a way to structure relationships, communication, and community as it does in some Indigenous communities.

impacted by wrongdoing to identify harm, assess needs, meet responsibilities, and heal and repair harm to the degree possible” in a dialogue led by facilitators (Davis, 2019, p. 27). Put another way, restorative justice relies on relational frameworks to “[move] us from an individualist ‘I’ to a communalist ‘we’ thereby strengthening communities” so that the needs of parties can be met and the conditions and environments which allowed harm to occur are thoroughly investigated and transformed (Davis, 2019, p. 27). Mark Umbreit (2010) defines RJ as a “relational framework that has the potential to transform difficult conversations into profound experiences of connectedness...out of recognition that we live in a relational universe” (p. 83). In other words, restorative justice is both a process and a mindset that is rooted in values such as collectivity, interconnectedness, compassion, and care which orient community toward non-punitive, non-judgmental approaches to preventing and responding to harm and fostering stronger communal connections.

Thus, institutionalized RJ directly counters the Western criminal justice system which dehumanizes responsible parties, values punishment and isolation, marginalizes harmed parties in a competitive “eye-for-an-eye” system, and replicates cycles of patriarchal and racist violence. RJ makes the pursuit of peace and justice a collective and relational endeavor (Hand, Hankes, & House, 2012). As RJ programs rapidly emerge around the U.S. as an attractive tangible, actionable practice to address or interrupt the harms of the U.S. criminal-legal system, it is necessary to hold intention, ask critical questions, and examine the current state and future of the movement specifically through the lens and perspectives of practitioners such as dialogue facilitators. Institutionalized RJ is ideally a practice to build solidarity to navigate and interrupt domination systems of the U.S. that intersectionally oppress. Nevertheless, when absorbed into Western justice systems as an alternative to punishment and when the demographic of facilitators

in the U.S. is primarily older, white, educated individuals facilitating in carceral systems which disproportionately target Black and Brown communities, institutionalized restorative justice programs struggle to meet the relational, interconnected, and healing values/conditions of RJ.

In some international circles, RJ was developed to “ameliorate practices of state control of people of color and colonized people” (Coker, 2020, p. 48). For instance, in New Zealand, Family Group conferencing (another form of RJ found often in New Zealand and South Africa), was used “in response to Maori concerns about the over-incarceration of Maori youth and their over-representation in child welfare proceedings” (Coker, 2020, p. 48). Nevertheless, very little consideration has been given to the implications of whitewashing of RJ and its appropriation into Western justice systems. Aside from single sentence references that point to how “the father of restorative justice” Howard Zehr “validates” Indigenous practices in restorative justice, a huge gap exists in discussions of restorative justice and how it is then reapplied to (and sometimes used against) people of color within institutions of power such as the criminal justice system. For example, Indigenous criminologist Juan Marcellus Tauri (2022) critiques some Canadian RJ programs in cases where First Nations individuals commit offenses because Canadian adjudication systems essentially have this appropriated peacemaking practice turned against First Nations communities under the guise of giving more contextually responsive justice.

When most of the literature discusses RJ cases in Western countries like Australia, Canada, the US and the UK, with little to no consideration for social identity in a practice designed for social justice, this reveals not only a huge gap in RJ work but also a huge misappropriation of RJ into white dominated spaces (despite being applied in countries with diverse and multicultural populations). There is a lack of meaningful consideration of how embodiment impact approaches to RJ. For instance, in one study that investigates facilitator

proximity to the criminal justice system and how it impacts facilitation, the researchers neglect to unpack the impact of police officers and corrections officers serving as facilitators to communities and replicating a (often violent) power differential for racialized parties that are victims of over-policing (Dignan et al, 2007).

Additionally, RJ has been absorbed into Western justice systems as an alternative to punishment while still offering punishment as an option. Many RJ programs are housed in state-controlled institutions or receive referrals from court systems, thus replicating and distributing power across a process that is designed to interrupt and deconstruct power. Jeffrey Hewitt (2016) summarizes the problem with RJ programs being absorbed into the criminal-legal system, “If the problems were created by and sustained through the ongoing violence of colonialism, it is unlikely the same imperial system’s model of criminal justice can offer a remedy” (p. 327). Especially considering the violence colonization has wrought on Indigenous and African communities by destroying their justice systems and replacing them with Western justice systems, creating RJ programs that co-opt Indigenous values and practices into criminal-legal systems is the perpetuation of colonialist and white supremacist mission to control, dominate, and devalue Other worldviews and practices. Ultimately, Hewitt (2016) argues that identifying diversion programs that partner with state institutions and institutionalized RJ programs don’t meet the decolonial efforts of restorative justice because they are too reformist.

Critics of RJ’s professionalization and integration into Western criminal-legal systems have called for the settings in which institutionalized RJ is applied and operates need to be decolonized. Put another way, the criminal-legal system in which RJ often operates within or alongside needs to be decolonized. In its current form, institutionalized RJ set within the criminal-legal system is a perpetuation of settler colonialism: “From its inception, settler

colonialism's agenda has been not only to displace existing Indigenous societies with a settler one but also to maintain the outcome...Now settler descendants, i.e., US and Canadian citizens—many of whom are engaged in RJ and other social justice organizations—continue to maintain that purpose” (Valandra, 2020, p. 336). An ideal relationship between RJ and the criminal-legal system looks like self-determined processes and outcomes especially because RJ can help address the harmful history of racism and coloniality of the criminal-legal systems and attend to the needs of BIPOC communities who were disproportionately targeted by and rightly distrustful of the state. However, RJ has been subsumed by the criminal-legal system and thus another extension of the state: “restorative justice has morphed into a process and practice that deviates from its origins and purpose, which was to give voice to the voiceless. Decolonization of restorative justice is important because it fixes the colonial power imbalances and acknowledges the monstrous biases and racism deeply embedded within restorative justice” (Said, 2022, p. 56). Put another way, “restorative justice has been consumed by the criminal justice system and spit out as a settler colonial tool that perpetuates further genocide and repression of Indigenous peoples and cultures” (Said, 2022, p. 56). Because RJ programs operate within and through “the ideological confines of European institutions,” the setting in which RJ operates is considered colonized (Said, 2022, p. 56). The criminal-legal system is a perpetuation of coloniality and colonizing justice and thus needs to be decolonized for RJ to be able to operate. In addition to being in proximity and operating under the control of the criminal-legal system, RJ is colonized because of the way it not only homogenizes Indigenous practices but also excludes Indigenous communities from being involved or informing the professionalization and institutionalized conceptualization of the practice (Said, 2022; Smith, 2022).

While RJ certainly is inspired by and thus co-opts Indigenous practices, it does so in a way that erases or ignores the unique respective worldviews, cultures, and practices of the widely diverse Indigenous communities in the U.S. (McGuire & Palys, 2020; Said, 2022). It assumes that they all operate the same and thus RJ can be implemented as an “Indigenous” intervention without attending to any nuance. Such assumptions indicate a lack of Indigenous informants or advisors in institutionalized RJ to shape and provide context to RJ practices: “It is not okay for restorative justice to encompass State views and a top- down approach. Communities must be brought together in the creation of a restorative justice practice that is culturally competent and shaped to the needs of their societies rather than by state-forced practices that are not culturally competent” (Said, 2022, p. 59). Thus, when operating without cultural competency, an awareness of embodiment, and through state institutions that maintain coloniality, white supremacy, and racism, RJ cannot meet its goals and ultimately requires the setting in which RJ is practiced being decolonized.

At the same time, there is often an over-romanticizing of the Indigenous roots of RJ which creates a paradox of performatively signaling the Indigenous roots of RJ while also homogenizing Indigenous communities and ignoring other cultures and communities in which RJ finds its origins. It is also important to note that RJ is also a particular worldview and daily lived practice found in Indigenous communities as well as many other cultural communities around the world. It isn't a particular special practice but a root and pillar of how they organize their lives, relationships, communication, and culture. We must give proper credit and identify the Indigenous origins of RJ without over-romanticizing Indigenous communities and histories or over-shadowing the ways in which RJ structures daily life within Indigenous communities as well as other religious and cultural spaces.

Yazzie (1994) has consistently critiqued the Western adjudication system: “its methods do not repair damaged relationships, families, communities and society; instead this process promotes further conflict and disharmony” (p. 179). Where the Western criminal justice system “sees crime as broken laws and justice as punishment,” RJ “sees crime as broken lives and justice as healing” (Davis, 2019, p. 27). Davis (2019) suggests that “restorative justice views a vengeful and punitive response to harm unacceptable, because, on a social level, it sets into motion negative feedback loops of violence and counterviolence...it is an opportunity to transform punitive and vengeful responses” (p. 28). Thus, Restorative Justice is a practice, framework, movement, and worldview that conflicts with the Western justice system because they have different values and perceptions of justice. When RJ is institutionalized or folded into the criminal-legal system machine, it’s like putting a square peg into a round hole. Tensions arise and we must reflexively and critically examine the purpose, goal, and values of RJ.

## Restorative Justice Facilitators – A Locus of Analysis

There is a significant need to examine the current tensions faced by RJ programs who partner with state institutions and operate with conflicting values to state partners.

Institutionalized RJ programs experience power and constraints because of their relationships with the criminal-legal system in the U.S. As practitioners on the frontlines between RJ programs and the criminal-legal system, facilitators operate at the intersection of these tensions while also grappling with their own perceptions of social identity, institutions, oppressive historical contexts, contradictions, and power. In the end, by operationalizing an embodied dialogic love framework, facilitators can reclaim elements of RJ and maneuver through tensions and

challenges while also offering critiques and reflections of RJ and how they can maintain and pursue its goals.

RJ facilitators are defined as “third-party facilitators [who] work with victims, offenders, and other stakeholders to construct the meaning of the offense, restitution for the event, and their futures in community” (Paul & Borton, 2013, p. 190). During dialogue conferences, facilitators are expected to “set the tone for the meeting, keep the meeting safe, ensure that the parties show respect for one another, and make sure that they follow the rules” (Paul & Borton, 2013, p. 190).<sup>9</sup> Facilitators are primarily responsible for creating a safe environment for victims and offenders to enter into dialogue (Holden, 2021) and, in order to accomplish this, the facilitators enact a series of procedures they learn in training and communication techniques to build rapport and trust between the participants and themselves. Facilitators are crucial to the facilitation process and its legitimacy because they establish procedural norms and expectations for the environment and how the participants interact.

The facilitator role is thus a locus of power and point of entry for analysis into restorative justice practices and complexities because the facilitator exists at the intersection between different socio-political, philosophical, and institutional frames. Because the facilitator is in direct contact with parties and navigates the expectations of their programs and the criminal-legal system, their role offers a unique and valuable positionality to understand who is operationalizing RJ and how. Analyzing the facilitator role provides a unique opportunity to analyze the individual impact of embodied social identity on RJ facilitation as well as institutional impacts on RJ processes.

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<sup>9</sup> “During preconference meetings, facilitators...develop rapport with the parties, solicit and listen empathically to their stories, and inform them about what a [dialogue] would look like. During the conference, they...manage the tone of the meeting by trying to achieve conversational balance, respectful conversation, safe interaction, and conformity to the facilitator's rules...They also should be willing to empower the participants to share their stories, influence one another, express their emotions, and work toward their ideal outcome” (Paul & Dunlop, 2014, p. 260).

Firstly, the facilitator role operates on an individual interpersonal level in which their embodied social identities are salient and impact the ways in which they communicate in dialogue. Paul (2015) argues that we cannot assume “that facilitators’ practices...exist in a vacuum and are uniformly important” (p. 291). The facilitator is not removed from the social systems or identities when they facilitate. While they are neutral, they aren’t blank-slate robots who don’t impact the process at all. Their identities and histories impact their perceptions of healing and justice which then impact the way they frame dialogic environments for parties.

Paul and Dunlop (2014) conducted a recent study that suggests that a facilitator carries personal power within the dialogue because a facilitator’s personal perceptions of justice as well as the personal value systems that motivate the facilitator’s involvement in a facilitation impact the way a facilitator frames the conference and guides parties towards certain outcomes. In another study, Coker (2006) discovered facilitators in Indigenous peacemaking circles were revealed to hold anti-divorce biases which emerged when facilitating between battered women and their husbands as they encouraged women to stay with their husbands further emphasizing the impact of facilitator identity on their perceptions of justice and communication practices in dialogue. Such personal perceptions are rooted in a facilitators’ embodied social identities and lived experiences which craft their expectations and perceptions of justice; they are not free from influence of social histories, cultures, and power structures which impact the way we perceive power, identity, and justice. This not only indicates that the facilitator has power to frame with dialogue, but also that they have biases that will impact the way they respond and communicate with parties.

Secondly, the facilitator role operates at an institutional level given their relationship with RJ programs and state agencies. They are not only influenced by their own individual

perceptions and situadeness within social histories of privilege and marginalization but also influenced by their proximity to institutions which train facilitators to conduct procedures according to their own guidelines, missions, and perceptions of justice and expected outcomes. Furthermore, the closer in proximity to state institutions an RJ program is, the more influence the criminal-legal system has over the program. Thus, the organizations are also informed by the cultures and constraints of the criminal-legal system which then impact the practices and perceptions of RJ facilitators because they operate under the expectations of the criminal legal system.

Paul and Borton (2013) suggest that the personal frames by which facilitator's define their work along with their perceptions of the goals of the organization they represent impacts their relationship with parties. For example, if the facilitator viewed justice as punishment (which is what the traditional Western legal system is designed for), they sought accountability through punishment and aligned their personal values with that of the traditional justice system. If the facilitator perceived justice as personal repair or relational rebalance, they sought healing and closure for harmed parties or community repair by rebuilding trust between harmed and responsible parties (which is more aligned with RJ) (Paul & Dunlop, 2014). Facilitator's values and perceptions can determine the extent to which institutional power is maintained or resisted during the dialogue depending on their alignment with their program's values and alignment with the criminal-legal system's values. This also means that the facilitator's alignment with the criminal-legal system and RJ programs can determine the extent to which restorative justice values of healing and social transformation and decolonization are pursued during the dialogue. They have a front-row seat to observe and experience the impacts of the relationship between RJ programs and state agencies; this relationship directly influences facilitator perceptions of justice

and dialogue depending on their proximity and alignment with RJ values and Western justice values which directly impacts their communication and framing of the RJ process.

Sociologist and mediator Marsha Lichtenstien (2000) notes that raising facilitator consciousness to one's social location is critical to recognizing one's participation and perpetuation of power: "no relationship is free from power dynamics. One must develop an awareness, or a "consciousness," about power in interpersonal relationships and act to rectify those power imbalances in order to have greater equity between human beings" (p. 28). Even at an individual level, facilitators are part of a web of culture, social identity, power, histories of privilege and marginalization which they carry with them into dialogue. Because they are responsible for establishing the communicative environment, the way the facilitator communicates based on their own expectations and perceptions of justice affords them power in the process (even more so if their embodied social identities are ones in which occupy a privilege). Thus, the facilitator role provides a unique opportunity for rich analysis into the intersection between social identity, institutional power, and communication practices in restorative justice dialogues. Engaging RJ facilitators in dialogues to reflect on their role and positionality is an opportunity to raise their consciousness on their individual embodied social identity and situatedness within social systems which impact their facilitation along with their institutional relationships and perpetuation or interruption of institutional power and histories of oppression.

In a study on facilitator power and proximity of RJ programs to criminal justice systems, Crocker (2016) suggests that facilitators have the power to interrupt dominant values imposed by traditional systems. In other words, it is the facilitator who has the power to disrupt hegemonic ideologies and systems through their communication practices *because they are on the frontlines*.

Facilitators are the ones who receive parties, set expectations for communication and dialogue, and frame the process. Their role is important and understudied (Amstutz, 2009; Frantell, Miles, & Ruwe, 2019; Nagda & Zuñiga, 2001; Umbreit, 2010). They exist and operate at the intersection between RJ programs and the criminal-legal system which means they experience the clash of contradicting values and tensions from their relationship which directly impact the parties and process. I perceive facilitators as having the means to navigate, address, and even resist institutional power from their role in the process. Through an Embodied Dialogic Love framework, facilitators navigate complex tensions between RJ programs and the criminal-legal system to create environments of healing for parties. Ultimately, facilitators not only represent RJ but also enact it and reclaim it depending on their social positionality, justice perceptions, and alignment with state institutions. Facilitators are the perfect practitioner point of entry to understand and examine this unique localized phenomenon.

## Methodology

### *Employing Love*

Love, embodiment, interconnectivity and dialogic collaboration for the purpose of sharing/generating knowledge for social change are the core women of color feminist values which underlie my methodology; hence my decision to conduct 1:1 reflective dialogues with facilitators to generate and develop collective knowledge and practices of restorative justice for social change, justice, and liberation. The core values and principles of EDL guided my methodology, nevertheless EDL didn't emerge as a defined concept until halfway through my data collection. Therefore, the story of my methodology is one of growing, adapting, and learning in upward spirals, which is a core tenant of women of color feminist research – to evolve and adapt as we learn new information and remain flexible as we research to be able to

make necessary changes (de la Garza, 2014). When I identified EDL halfway through data collection, I was able to return to my notes and methodology up to that point and recognize how and where I was inherently applying the principles of EDL without having a name for it. Just like the RJ facilitators I interviewed, I was applying EDL to my methodology and research practices. Once I made this connection, EDL expanded to become a meta methodological approach in addition to being a grounded theory.

Ultimately, the decisions I made and the procedures I took at the inception of this project were rooted in love, embodiment, interconnectivity, and collaboration through dialogue. I adopted these principles and values through my training and knowledge of women of color feminist theory which espouses these values to approach research. RJ facilitators also applied the same values to their practices despite not identifying them within or with the same language as women of color feminist theorist. As the project progressed, EDL emerged within the data and became a bridge between RJ facilitators and women of color feminist practitioners, theorists, scholars, and researchers. EDL thus expands women of color feminist theory into RJ and vice versa. While EDL was defined halfway through the project, I had been practicing it and learning from it and developing it as the project progressed, making my methodology iterative. In other words, I adapted as I learned new information and identified and refined EDL. My method was intentionally flexible and adaptable to ensure I practiced with a loving eye and pursued collective knowledge that emerged from the data rather than force the data into my own mold.

A women of color feminist framework to research arose to counter positivistic and patriarchal ways of collecting and forming knowledge that assumed a rigid realist ontology, objective epistemology, and value-free axiology that are “too general, too mechanical, and too detached to capture the intricacies, nuances, and complications of human interaction” (Miller,

2004, p. 46). Positivist epistemology and realist ontology perceive the researcher to be objective, “unbiased and passive,” and the work a researcher does as explaining studied phenomena through “quantifiable variables” that the researcher has not impacted (Charmaz, 2006, p. 5). Such an approach to research is unacceptable for feminist scholars because positivists’ objective assumptions historically led to knowledge being used as a tool of power by elites to marginalize groups based on seemingly “real” and “objective” bases of gender, race, and sexuality. Research and knowledge-making is entrenched in a long history of elitism and knowledge being manipulated by an elite to dominate others (Haraway, 1988). Pursuing, prioritizing, revealing, and embodying interconnectivity democratizes knowledge by not only making knowledge and its creation accessible but also recognizing the necessity of collectivity in knowledge generation because of our own partiality.

One of the first assumptions that EDL as a methodology interrupts is the notion that knowledge is only accessible to an elite and that this elite has all the knowledge. Because EDL emphasizes interconnectivity, EDL recognizes partiality. We are interconnected because we need each other to get a full picture of understanding ourselves and one another. In other words, we cannot and should not know things in isolation and no one can or should know everything. Collins (2009) discusses the significance of partiality when writing about the significance and necessity of dialogue to Black feminist thought:

Each group speaks from its own standpoint and shares its own partial, situated knowledge. But because each group perceives its own truth as partial, its knowledge is unfinished. Each group becomes better able to consider other groups' standpoints without relinquishing the uniqueness of its own standpoint or suppressing other groups' partial perspectives ... Partiality, and not universality, is the condition of being heard (p. 290).

Knowledge is iterative and imperfect and we must humble ourselves to this reality while also recognizing that restricting who has access to knowledge isn't the answer but opening dialogue

to co-creation is. Recognizing our partiality makes us more open to different kinds of knowledge which ensures that we will not only uphold embodiment by making room for lived experiences and body knowledge but also resists historic exclusions by interrupting assumptions that knowledge can only be validated and legitimized by an elite.

Additionally, it is in collectivity that we can be more accountable to the knowledge we develop so that it serves the needs of all rather than just the dominant group's: "Not only must individuals develop their knowledge claims through dialogue and present them in a style proving their concern for their ideas, but people are expected to be accountable for their knowledge claims" (Collins, 2009, p. 280-84). Embodied dialogic love requires accountability and it is through building trusting relationships that accountability can take place. Embodied dialogic love resists distance and illusions of independence and knowledge that is dominating and collected in isolation. Instead, embodied dialogic love pursues knowledge that is collectively sought through dialogue. Such knowledge developed relationally builds trust and accountability and makes room for everyone for the purpose of social change to liberation. We collaborate because we recognize that we don't have all the answers alone or in our own perceptions. We collaborate because we collectively envision/imagine liberated futures and embodied dialogic love is how we enact those futures in the present.

Objectivity and distance are other significant assumptions that EDL interrupts. Because we prioritize dialogue and interconnectivity we must also prioritize building relationships; we build relationships that involve community in developing knowledge that is relevant, nuanced, complex, and actionable depending on their specific needs, which changes our assumptions of objectivity. In Donna Haraway's (1988) "Situated Knowledges," article, she identifies the "god trick" as a construct that feminist scholars interrupt and resist. The "god trick" is a perspective in

which scientists perceive themselves as more objective as it relates to their work because they stand in the heavens and aren't related to the work at all; their biases do not impact their data collection at all. Relating distance to objectivity is a practice that has spanned across multiple disciplines such as rhetoric, sciences, and anthropology, all falling under the assumptions that a more removed researcher is a more objective researcher and legitimizes their data/findings. Nevertheless, such objectivity has created research that ignored prevalent biases and contributed to a society dominated by patriarchy, white supremacy and heteronormativity.

Third World feminisms scholar Maria Lugones (1987) differentiates between two different perceptions - an arrogant one and a loving one – which similarly challenges the god trick. The arrogant eye is violent and judgmental because it perceives people around the beholder as “objects whose existence and character are logically independent of the seer and who may be practically or empirically independent in any particular respect at any particular time” (Lugones, 1987, p. 7). The loving eye, on the other hand, recognizes the interconnected and relational nature of reality and that they are merely one star in a massive constellation. As Lugones (1987) would put it, the loving eye is “the eye of one who knows that to know the seen, one must consult something other than one's own will and interests and fears and imagination” (p. 8). This is because, after centuries of exclusion and dehumanization and dominant knowledge being used to justify exclusion and dehumanization, WOC are intimately familiar with the effects of the arrogant perception. The loving perception is designed to interrupt and challenge this history. The key here is recognizing that all knowledge is partial and it is only in collectivity that we can piece together a full picture. That's why Lugones (1987) writes that the loving eye consults other's perceptions outside of their own because it acknowledges the limitations and biases of their own perception.

Furthermore, in challenging traditional assumptions of objectivity, WoCFT reconsider objectivity to be fundamentally rooted in collectivity and partiality. Eroding the distance between researcher and community and making knowledge more accessible allows knowledge to be more holistic. This is what Indigenous scholar Kim TallBear (2014) would describe as “standing with” forms of ethnography as opposed to “standing above” or “standing apart.” When we stand with communities and develop relationships between the researcher and community we are able to make knowledge and its development a dialogue and exchange. Kim TallBear (2014) reiterates this when she writes that feminist objectivity is “inquiring not at a distance, but based on the lives and knowledge priorities of subjects” (TallBear, 2014, p. 6). For women and scholars of color this erosion is particularly significant because it not only validates our knowledge that has been historically dismissed or excluded while also ensuring we can take an embodied approach to research by bringing our full selves and communities into the work after having been excluded.

I conduct dialogues as data collection because I recognize that I don’t have all the answers and I’m not arrogant enough to think/act like I do, and the principles of interconnectivity and collectivity require a humility to recognize the partiality of our knowledge and experiences. I perceive my methodological approach as the practice of EDL and make decisions to enact EDL’s interruptions. Therefore, in my dissertation, EDL is operationalized and practiced.

### *EDL and Grounded Theory: Compatible Methodologies*

While EDL shaped my methodological approach and procedures, so did another time-honored interpretive methodological strategy: grounded theory. Grounded theory emerged from the work of Barney G. Glaser and Anselm L. Strauss in their book, *The Discovery of Grounded Theory* (1967). Grounded theory is an inductive, bottom-up methodological approach that adopts

an interpretive paradigm to generating theories about specific, localized phenomena. It contains procedures for data collection and analysis for researchers to generate theories about “social processes that are grounded in real-life experiences” (Mohajan and Mohajan, 2022, 53). At the same time, theories developed using grounded theory as well as the procedures used to develop theories are flexible, always developing, and never stagnant, completed products because as phenomena live and evolve, so must the procedures that collect data on it and the theory that understands it (Miller, 2004; Mohajan and Mohajan, 2022). Grounded theorist, Kathy Charmaz (2006) succinctly summarizes grounded theory: “We construct our grounded theories through our past and present involvements and interactions with people, perspectives, and research practices...any theoretical rendering offers an *interpretive* portrayal of the studied world, not an exact picture of it” (p. 10). Charmaz’s reference to the interpretive portrayal of the studied world reflects how grounded theory espouses the interpretivist research paradigm. The ontological assumptions of interpretivism reject realism and instead assume that reality is multiple and we understand reality through constructed processes (Miller, 2004).

The epistemological assumptions of interpretivism thus reject universal laws about the world and instead assume that knowledge must be developed by understanding localized phenomena and pursuing understanding of how and what constructs an actor’s social reality (Miller, 2004). The axiological assumptions of interpretivism thus reject the value-free inquiry of positivism and instead assume that researchers are always influencing their data because they too have a socially constructed view of reality and their research which impacts their data (Miller, 2004). Thus, theories generated through interpretive ontology, epistemology, and axiology, adopt these assumptions as the framework from which to develop knowledge as well as methods. Interpretive theories “aim to reflect the complexity of both the social world and the social

construction process” (Miller, 2004, p. 53). The epistemological and methodological assumptions that underlie grounded theory are thus similar and compatible with feminist epistemology and methodology.

Like feminist epistemology, grounded theory counters the assumptions made by positivism. Where positivism espouses objective, realist ontology and pursues explanations, interpretivism espouses subjective, socially constructed ontology and pursues understanding. The underlying principles of the interpretive framework are “the importance of subjective experience, the intersubjective creation of meaning, the goal of understanding in social research, and the interconnections between the knower and the known” (Miller, 2004, p. 51). Additionally, like EDL which values the interconnectivity and relationality between the researcher and participant because the researcher’s positionality is acknowledged as impactful to the study and data, so does grounded theory value the “Researchers’ prior knowledge, experience, and perspectives, however, are acknowledged as influential and potentially useful components of data” (Kushner and Morrow, 2003, p. 33). Another indicator of compatibility is the way in which women of color feminist methodology examines social processes, systems, and relationships and grounded theory does the same by also attending to “setting and social relations that have not previously been the explicit focus of attention” (Kushner and Morrow, 2003, p. 33). Finally, the flexibility and reflexivity of the researcher are ways in which EDL methodology and grounded theory methodology are related in how they value intersubjective and ever-evolving development of collective knowledge (Kushner and Morrow, 2003; Mohajan and Mohajan, 2022).

Therefore, feminist theory and grounded theory traditions have long been thought to be compatible methodologies for research with some scholars even referring to feminist grounded theory as a methodological approach (Kushner and Morrow, 2003; Mohajan and Mohajan,

2022). I adopt feminist grounded theory in this project because it provides a tangible procedure for both data collection and analysis. I am drawn to the coding procedures and I also like being able to generate a theory directly from the data because it aligns with EDL that develops knowledge grounded in participant language and perspectives rather delivered through a top-down or imposed into a predetermined theory developed by researchers. Especially with a phenomenon like RJ that has been so understudied, I wanted the opportunity to learn from practitioners themselves rather than impose my assumptions as a scholar.

When combined with EDL, grounded theory attends to and generates theories that address social differences and structural power dynamics. On its own, grounded theory “may allow – but does not compel – researchers to extend their consideration of structural influences on social processes to depth analysis of the setting and context of intermediate and macrosocial organization” (Kushner and Morrow, 2003, p. 37). With women of color feminist theory operationalized as EDL, grounded theory can include a more critical lens that “is intended to result in the generation of knowledge that contributes to meaningful understandings and explanations of human interaction in the social world, these in turn potentially contributing to emancipatory transformation” (Kushner and Morrow, 2003, p. 37). In other words, feminist critical frameworks extend grounded theory to examine the social structures that impact the specific social relationships and phenomenon under study. I decided to adopt both of these methodologies for my dissertation because I appreciated the coding structure of grounded theory which aligned with my identity as a woman of color feminist scholar and researcher.

*Operationalizing EDL and Grounded Theory through Method: In-depth Interviews (Reflective Dialogues)*

From how I chose my topic and questions to how I conducted my method to how participants conceptualized their approaches and responded to questions about their restorative justice facilitation, love, embodiment, and collaborative dialogue has encircled and driven this work and is intimately intertwined with how to understand facilitators within institutionalized restorative justice work.

I conducted 23 1:1 semi-structured, hour-long recorded (though many quickly became 1.5-2 hour-long) interviews via Zoom with RJ facilitators.<sup>10</sup> Of the 23 interviews, 15 of the facilitators were white, 3 were Latine, 1 was African American, and 1 was mixed race (Black and white). 17 of the facilitators identified as women, 5 identified as men, and 1 identified as nonbinary. All of the facilitators were older than 21 and most had received higher education degrees. 2 facilitators came from community-based programs, 4 came from school-based programs, 13 came from diversion programs through Centers for Dispute and Resolution receiving referrals through the DA's office, and 4 came from victim-offender programs through the Department of Corrections. 11 facilitators were volunteers for their programs while 12 were employed by their programs (of the 11 volunteers, 6 were retirees). Facilitators were based in Colorado, Oregon, California, and Washington, with a majority being in Oregon. Such demographic details are significant because they represent the current trend of facilitator demographics with the majority being educated, white women. At the same time, they indicate a disproportionate lean toward middle class, educated individuals which reflects what I later

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<sup>10</sup> Interviews were scheduled using a calendar scheduling app which shared e-reminders and the zoom link (calendly.com). Written and verbal consent was collected before the interviews began. Confidentiality of the participants was secured through the use of self-selected pseudonyms and no real names will be represented in this dissertation along with any identifying information regarding facilitators.

analyze to be a highly privileged demographic of facilitators serving in and alongside state institutions.

I designed the entire process – from the moment facilitators contacted me to interview to the moment I emailed them to thank them for their participation – to reflect an intentional, adaptable design informed by my experiences as a research assistant as well as my identity as a woman of color feminist scholar and restorative justice practitioner (Appendix A). For instance, I created my interview protocol (Appendix B) with my training and scholarship in mind yet allowed it to be flexible and adaptable given the emergent needs of individual participants.

An example of my methodological adaptability and intentionality is reflected in a series of small, intentional scaffolded actions I enacted while in dialogue with facilitators, which I adopted halfway through the project. When facilitators appeared in zoom and we introduced ourselves, one of the first things I did was conduct a check in via these two questions: “where are your head and heart at? And what are you bringing into this space?” I ask these questions to immediately indicate that I care about their health and wellbeing (especially because the interviews are online) and I don’t see them as objects but as humans with a lot going on. Each time I asked this question, the facilitator smiled and taken a deep breath before responding. They thanked me for asking and when they answered the questions they shared their needs (i.e. needing to mute occasionally to cough because they aren’t feeling well, needing to take a breath to settle because they were just on a run, needing to explain that they have a dog who might bark while we talk). I even had one facilitator thank me for asking because they had been experiencing a lot of burnout with regard to their position as facilitator and really wanted to use this time to reflect and talk about it. One facilitator even shared that they had just received word of the loss of a loved one before the interview began and it was weighing on them and was

grateful to be able to bring it into the space. Starting in such a way is a way for me to lay the groundwork for trust which then impacts the reflections facilitators share with me because they are more honest and open. I think this is what allowed facilitators to be honest about their interpretations of the RJ Movement as a whole and where they perceived themselves.

Collins' (2009) ethic of care, Tallbear's (2014) standing with community, and Lugones' (1987) loving eye are embodied dialogic love conceptualizations that I put into practice with these check-ins. I directly challenged the distant and cold independent researcher who clinically approaches participants. Instead, with embodied dialogic love, I started by laying a foundation for collectivity and demonstrate my "inclination toward" facilitators that is based on our shared humanity, meaning that it is important to check in with our bodies and remember we aren't just facilitators but whole human beings; it's an invitation to embodiment. After the facilitator responded to the check-in questions, I shared my own responses and, in doing so, humanized myself by sharing my own tiredness or stress or joy. I think this also interrupted the power dynamic between researcher and interviewee because it's an opportunity for shared vulnerability. I didn't record these check-ins in order to build trust and show that their humanity isn't my data and I want to hear them not just for what they can give me. Here is where I perceive where I apply loving eye to practice — by making sure to actively seek and consult the humanity of facilitators and making sure that, if they share themselves with me, that I receive and see them not through my own assumptions and expectations but through their experiences and perceptions.

These check-ins are a practice that I adopted halfway into my data collection. Following the principles of emergent design in which methods evolve and grow as data is collected (de la Garza, 2014; brown, 2017), as I learned about how facilitators made sure they humanized the

people they work with, I thought about how I could do the same in data collection. Therefore, I noticed a difference between how I built trust from facilitators pre and post adopting this practice. When I started doing check-ins in the beginning of dialogues, facilitators were more vulnerable sooner and treated the dialogue as more of a dialogue than an interview. Interestingly, in dialogues when I hadn't done the check in, it took longer to build trust but I noticed I did have other practices oriented toward building trust; active listening being one such practice which I achieve through specific behaviors such as reframing, summarizing, checking for understanding, and asking curious and brave follow up questions.

Active listening is an enactment of embodied dialogic love because it is a way to reinforce my commitment and “back up” my commitment to humanization and achieving understanding. Whenever facilitators responded to a question I posed, I made sure that I either reframed or summarized their response in order to check for understanding. In other words, I restated their response in my own words to make sure that I confirmed that I heard them correctly and we share the same meaning. I then gave facilitators the opportunity to respond to my check for understanding and they typically confirmed my interpretation or correct/add to it. This exchange continued until we collectively co-created meaning and understanding with one another. Such a practice is rooted in bell hooks' (1994) practices of classroom engagement. Creating a culture of trust is achieved through active listening because it demonstrates that what students say matters and will be received without judgment. bell hooks (1994) does this in the classroom in order to interrupt the power dynamic between teacher and student where the teacher has all the knowledge and students have none. She also enacts this practice to provide a safe space for empowerment for students (especially students of color) who otherwise spend the rest

of their lives unheard and silenced. Active listening empowers voices. I took the same approach in dialogue with facilitators in providing nonjudgmental and empowering space.<sup>11</sup>

Once we achieved some level of understanding, I asked a follow up question that would push facilitators to think differently and deeply about their practices. I had facilitators who have made comments such as “oof that’s a good question” or “I’ve never thought about that before” which indicated that they took the questions as an opportunity to be pushed to reflect in ways they didn’t normally get a chance to do and they were taking the opportunity seriously. They also sometimes even smiled and thanked me for asking these specific types of questions about power because they think about them a lot and don’t get to talk about it. I recognized that, in these moments, facilitators are trusting me with their imperfect reflections in real time. They weren’t polished or perfect responses; instead, they were honest about whether or not they’ve ever thought about the questions and offered me the gift of their immediate thoughts.

I think we achieved this trust because I demonstrated my desire to understand facilitator perceptions rather than trick them or judge them. Starting from a place of curiosity helped me interrupt the power dynamic between researcher and interviewee because I didn’t set myself up as an arbiter of knowledge that determines the validity or invalidity of what they say. Instead, I started from a place of embodied dialogic love enacted through curiosity and pursuing collective knowledge because I recognize the partiality of my own knowledge and experiences and sought others to create a more holistic representation of truth. These questions came from a recognition that true understanding doesn’t just occur from a place of constant similarity. It came from embracing differences as well which is what Lorde (1984) and Collins (2009) discuss in their theorizing about embodied dialogic love. I did not privilege my own knowledge or isolate myself

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<sup>11</sup> I also learned the power of summarizing and repeating back during my training to become a mediator and facilitator.

in my own knowledge and assumptions. Connection and community were achieved in brave dialogue that pushes thinking and isn't threatened by difference.

Another way that I practice embodied dialogic love is by kairotically and appropriately sharing my own personal experiences and perceptions of facilitation when in dialogue. I did this because I learned from Kim Tallbear (2014) that to be loving in research doesn't mean distancing and being independent and removed. I learned the same from Amira de la Garza (2014) who writes about resisting the traditions that make the researcher superior and "more objective" the less they can connect to or share the community of the interviewees. I put this in practice because aside from just reading about facilitating, I actively practice facilitating as a community mediator and university instructor. I am, therefore, intimately familiar with what other facilitators experience and can dive deeper into questions about their practice because we have a shared language and understanding.

At the same time, I was very intentional about when I shared my own interpretations and experiences because I prioritized facilitator's voices and knowledge in dialogue. Such a practice is rooted in humility and recognizing the partiality of my own experiences. Rather than espouse the arrogant eye and overvalue my own facilitating and simply theorize from my own experiences and positionality, I engaged the loving eye because I wanted to be expansive in my understanding of facilitating. I shared personal experiences when I wanted to have another way to connect with facilitators aside from active listening. Whenever I shared how their practice reminded me of my own teaching or resonates with my own calling to facilitate, I noticed a shift in the way facilitators engage in the dialogue. They stop seeing it as a one-sided exchange and feel more comfortable asking me questions and co-creating understanding. Additionally, they

become so much more conversational because we start commiserating on different challenges we notice in the work as individuals who have shared lived experiences in a similar practice.

I also ensured that I start and end each dialogue with gratitude for the facilitator and the time they spent speaking with me, their interest in the project, their honest, open, trusting, and thoughtful reflections, and their work in RJ as a whole. I don't want to be exploitative, and I recognize that their time reflecting with me might be extractive emotional labor so I work to honor it by recognizing and naming my gratitude to them. Gratitude is another way I practice embodied dialogic love through Lugones' (1987) loving eye because I regarded facilitators as fellow community members who are collaborating with me by sharing their knowledge and expertise; they are not objects that I observe from a distance and will simply extract information from. Facilitators also thanked me for doing the work and many of them even left the dialogue feeling more energized and committed to taking these reflections to their organizations. For instance, four facilitators shared that they intend on continuing to think about the questions I asked and be more intentionally reflective in their practice as well as bring these questions to their organization to think about collectively. This indicated that this interview wasn't just a simple hour long exchange of information; it was a dialogic reflection. It is a "harvesting" moment where facilitators can pause and cultivate their thoughts on their practice and take a break from the doing in order to think about the doing and return to doing it better (Collins, 2009; de la Garza, 2014). That's why I am shifting from referring to this method as "interviewing" and instead conceptualizing it as "dialogic reflection."

### *Data analysis*

I concluded my data collection when I had reached saturation which I had determined when participant responses to questions became repetitive and salient coding patterns emerged.

Then, I began analyzing the data using grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006). I began with an initial round of qualitative coding which “categorizes, summarizes, and accounts for each piece of data” (Charmaz, 2006, 43). I first went line-by-line through the Zoom-generated transcripts to define and identify exactly what was happening within the data of each interview. From there, I identified patterns that spanned across the transcripts which is where I generated my first round of codes. I followed Charmaz’s (2006) grounded theory approach closely where I conducted an initial phase of defining what I saw in the data and then more closely focusing on “most significant or frequent initial codes to sort, synthesize, integrate, and organize large amounts of data” (46). Additionally, following Charmaz’s conceptualization of initial coding, I made sure to remain “open to all possible theoretical directions indicated” by the data (46). I labeled *in vivo* and focused codes that were rooted in the participant’s language.

Once I had completed the initial coding, I was able to recognize the initial patterns emerging from the data as well as gaps that I still had questions about and wanted to turn to facilitators to follow up to answer. More specifically, I learned what gaps facilitators themselves identified in their practice and had questions they wanted to explore further. Because I wanted to make sure I was interpreting the data according to participants’ meaning and I wanted to ensure I was democratizing knowledge and creating opportunities to collectively co-create knowledge, I put together a preliminary analysis including my initial codes in a practitioner-oriented format. This was also reflective of my grounding in EDL methodology which orients data to be accessible and actionable for practitioners and scholars to work for social change. I put together a 5-page document (Appendix C) highlighting key patterns reflected in the data with representative quotes from participants. At the bottom of each page, I included follow-up questions for participants to consider in preparation for the follow-up interview if they chose to participate in

the follow-up. I emailed this document to every participant and invited them to conduct a follow-up interview where they could share their reflections to the data and where they found themselves aligning or diverging. I gave them the option to share their thoughts on the questions I included in written format, via an audio message, or through another Zoom interview. 11 facilitators responded thanking me for sharing the preliminary data, four did not have the bandwidth to conduct a follow-up, one shared that they did not have anything additional to add, and six facilitators took me up on the offer and completed a follow-up interview (none opted for the written or audio response options).

Interestingly, the facilitators who followed up were primarily concerned with discussing the critical tensions regarding race, age, and the goals of RJ and the criminal-legal system. While they didn't have clear answers for themselves on how to address or unravel these tensions, they took the opportunity to follow up and reflect more deeply on them and how they impacted their practice.

After completing the member checks, I continued the coding process to complete more focused coding where I narrowed down the initial codes to my top 18 codes. From there, I began writing memos about each of the codes, defining them in order to understand their relationships to one another and help me to create subcategories of codes and continue narrowing down the number of codes so I could identify the theory developing from the data. As I wrote my memos, I noticed how the data spoke to ways facilitators navigated the tensions they faced and thus I began to form the grounded theory of embodied dialogic love from the data.

## Conclusion

Throughout this project, I consider the following questions – To what extent within the following patterns – disruptive, resisting, or collaborating with existing power structures – do facilitators view their role and RJ depending on their relative proximity to state institutions? Given the racial and gender hierarchy that persists in the U.S. how do RJ facilitators perceive their maintenance of the objectives of RJ and offer meaningful disruptions of the carceral state? Ultimately, the main question I aim to answer with this research is: *What kinds of meaningful disruptions to oppressive systems can institutionalized RJ facilitators give?* Through interviews with twenty-three restorative justice facilitators from Washington, Oregon, California, and Colorado, I sought to answer these questions. Embodied Dialogic Love emerged as an answer.

The results present a nuanced, complex array of practices enacted by facilitators to provide meaningful disruptions to institutional power, foster interpersonal dialoguing environments where parties can build trusting, self-determined relationships, recognize the interconnected nature of harm, and address historic and continued impacts of the criminal-legal system in perpetuating harm on communities while also grappling with RJ's entanglement with state institutions alongside their differing experiences of privilege and marginalization. The data offers a compelling and timely examination of the current state of the Restorative Justice (RJ) Movement and its inter-organizational partnership with criminal-legal systems in western U.S. states. I attend to multiple, intersecting and competing perceptions of social identity and power within the facilitator positionality to not only understand this unique, inter-organizational role, but also highlight the tensions facilitators face when serving as stewards of interpersonal communication dialogues where relationships are fraught with conflict, trauma, and harm, and serving between organizations with competing values such as RJ and the criminal-legal system.

## Chapter 1

# Navigating the Nexus with EDL: Facilitator Approaches Through Systems of Power

*“So what happens when you get tired or lazy or overwhelmed? ...You want to go back to the status quo, and the status quo is the power dynamic of the criminal justice system...I'm frankly worn out. If you're trying to facilitate a restorative process, based on and married to principals of the criminal justice system..., people will just want to say, 'Well, why? Why are you offering this in an agreement? Why are you doing this?' They're tending to wanna just go back to like a watered down criminal probation idea. Everything is so ingrained in them. So, it's exhausting work. I was told it would be exhausting by others who have experienced it with these entities combined. So I would say that it does alter the work. It's not as pure of a facilitation process when you have bossy entities.” - Chloe*

*“I don't think that what we are doing with the [program] is in the heart of restorative practices. Because it's from the DA's office and so it's much more formulaic and it's more accountability driven. Really what they're looking for is their measure of success is recidivism, rather than satisfaction with a process or feeling heard, or any of these other metrics.” - Violet*

*“I came into this so excited to be doing restorative justice work and have been hit with these reality checks and big disillusionments of what you think restorative justice is. This is what it actually looks like here, and sometimes even to the point of feeling maybe what I'm doing can't always really be called restorative justice. So just feeling like I'm out of alignment with my values sometimes and feeling like I don't have the power to change that.” -Daisy*

RJ's origins and purpose of healing and community are very different from the U.S. criminal-legal system's origins and purpose of punishment and strangeness. Thus, a tension emerges between RJ and the criminal-legal system which is closely felt by facilitators who operate on the nexus point in which RJ and the criminal-legal system interact. Chloe and Violet's comments represent this tension. They face challenges when implementing RJ interventions while partnering with the criminal-legal system because the goals and values of RJ and the criminal-legal system are very different. Chloe shared how she and her program enact a compromised or watered-down version of RJ as a result of their state partnerships because state partners tend not to understand or value RJ processes. Violet's comments reflect how she perceives the “heart” of RJ practices being more open and about feeling heard and finding

healing and less rigid adherence to strict procedures and outcomes. She observes that because the criminal-legal system prioritizes formulaic procedures and outcomes, her RJ program can't fully meet the heart of RJ given its relationship to state partners. These contextual tensions not only reinforce the literature covered in the previous chapter but also exemplify the impact of these tensions on facilitators.

At the same time, individual facilitator perceptions of RJ, its purpose, the U.S. criminal-legal system, and practices to foster social change heavily impacted the way they practiced RJ and navigated tensions with system partners. For example, Daisy's comments in the epigraph reflect her observations regarding the tensions between RJ and the criminal-legal system *as well as* tensions regarding her own values and perceptions of RJ. She perceived RJ to be an abolitionist practice but working within a diversion program she has found RJ to be more reformist and collaborative with state institutions than she expected. Thus, she is disillusioned because she had a personal perception of the purpose and enactment of RJ which didn't match the purpose and enactment of RJ according to the program she works with. So, it's not only external constraints that impact facilitator practices but also their own internal orientations and expectations of RJ and its capacity. In other words, the purpose and practices of RJ are incredibly varied for two reasons: 1) RJ program's proximity and relationships with state partners and 2) individual RJ facilitator perceptions of RJ and their role in fostering social change. Operating RJ within the context of the American justice system creates a critical tension which impacts how RJ facilitators create dialoguing environments and their perceptions of the goals of RJ as a whole.

To address and navigate these tensions, facilitators practiced EDL by reflecting and conceptualizing themselves and RJ work along a spectrum of change – collaboration,

transference, and revolution – which allowed them to compartmentalize, adapt, and/or reclaim RJ from tensions they faced.<sup>12</sup> This spectrum represents facilitators practicing EDL through their reflection and awareness of their embodied identities and capacities to enact change while also demonstrating an orientation to care for others given their positionality and differential impact on lived experiences with institutions.<sup>13</sup> Introducing the spectrum of RJ is a significant grounded sub-theory that emerged from the data because it expands the reform-abolition binary of social change. Rather than perceive only two options/routes for social change, RJ facilitators introduce a third option and reshape the possibilities into a spectrum along which individuals can operate at different levels and degrees. *My argument in this chapter is twofold: 1) facilitators generate nuanced perceptions on the mission of RJ and the complex tensions they face when operating between the criminal-legal system and RJ programs, and 2) facilitators utilize EDL to navigate and persist through these tensions by conceptualizing a spectrum of change where they position themselves to offer meaningful disruptions to systems of power while creating healing environments based on their identities, capacities, and perceptions of RJ and justice.*

This chapter ultimately generates larger scholarly and practitioner discourse regarding the current state of RJ, its future, and how we think about options for enacting social change as a spectrum of possibilities as exemplified through RJ and RJ facilitators.

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<sup>12</sup> While this pattern emerged during initial data collection, it was only made salient during the initial coding phase; therefore, this chapter leans heavily on the reflections made by those 6 facilitators who participated in member checks because we were able to dive deeper into the tension. Each of the facilitators who participated in the follow-up interviews worked for or volunteered with diversion programs which means that they have the most experience operating within this nexus between RJ and the criminal-legal system.

<sup>13</sup> Where facilitators fall under the spectrum of patterns is constantly evolving because not only is RJ evolving but so are the facilitators. If this chapter reads as though facilitators are unclear about their pattern of participation, positionality, and perceptions of RJ, it is because they are and the data collected and presented here reflects their real-time reflections on things they likely had never had the opportunity to speak out loud or engage with a thought partner to dialogue about.

## The Impact of RJ Within the Criminal-Legal System

### *“Permission Instead of Power”*

When absorbed into and made part of the criminal-legal system as an alternative yet still under the authority of the criminal-legal system, facilitators perceived their work as diminishing in power leading to what Mary, a facilitator for an RJ program that operates with schools and juvenile court systems, called “operating with permission instead of power.” Such a phrase resonated greatly with Mary’s fellow facilitators. Facilitator sensitivity to the power of the criminal-legal system on the process reflects their embodied love because they not only developed a keen hyper-awareness of the embodied impact of the criminal-legal system as a whole and its influence over RJ processes but also practiced a loving orientation to care for and protect their parties from oppressive systems.

Daisy shared how she perceived her program as operating with permission instead of power: “I definitely perceive the organization and the diversion program as being under the power of that court system, because there are things we can and can't do because they say so. Whether or not we understand it, we have no say whatsoever.” Daisy is referring to how system partners are primarily responsible for referring cases or identifying cases to divert to RJ and RJ programs not having a say in which cases get diverted. Daisy’s comments indicated that the criminal-legal system is still perceived as the deeply rooted default and thus the main authority which legitimizes RJ programs because it grants them permission to divert cases from the system. When receiving referrals from the criminal-legal system, the DA offices get to control which cases are suitable for RJ which often means that the criminal-legal system defines the capacity of RJ.

From a Department of Corrections (DoC) perspective, Willow shared that the control the DoC has creates a contradiction in the way she communicates with parties: “Because it's a victim

driven program, they're in charge. They're in control. That's what you want to relate to them. You are the driver of this bus. The reality is: the [state] Department of Corrections is in charge, and they are the driver of the bus.” While Willow worked to help participants reclaim agency, she experienced constant reminders from the DoC that they have all the agency because they created the scheduling windows and approved processes and allowed parties entrance into the facilities. These logistics were subtle reminders that facilitators were invited guests rather than equal players to system partnerships.

Chloe, shared how RJ programs that collaborate with the criminal-legal system have to make certain compromises to RJ such as receiving clients who had to admit guilt before entering RJ and being under a time pressure to move through the RJ process quickly:

It seems like the systems feel comfortable. With that I feel less comfortable... The purpose of a restorative practice and dialogue is to individualize the plans based upon the needs of harmed parties... so that's one thing I've noticed that just takes time to notice. And so there's a constant push for me to be faster, quicker on things. They want efficiency, and they want quickness.

Chloe understands RJ dialogue as needing time in order to establish trusting relationships and getting individuals to recognize and take accountability and talk about the impact of the harm. The criminal-legal system is concerned with efficiency which doesn't prioritize the time and patience necessary to build trusting relationships necessary to RJ. Thus, Chloe identifies a salient difference in values between the criminal-legal system and RJ: time. Where the criminal-legal system wants efficiency and knocking out as many cases as possible, RJ requires patience to build relationships and establish trust and not rushing healing. Collaborating with the criminal-legal system places limitations on RJ and its facilitators because the dominant mode of operating is still the default.

Edward, a facilitator for a youth diversion program and school-based RJ, reflects on the futility of working against such a powerful self-replicating system: “a big part of what I feel is exhausting is it's like a brick wall that just keeps replacing itself every time one every time a brick gets dismantled.” Edward’s words demonstrate the pervasiveness of the criminal-legal system in the U.S. which makes it difficult to dismantle or abolish it, leaving facilitators exhausted. Edward, Chloe, Daisy, and Willow represent develop a heightened awareness of the embodied impact the criminal-legal system has on RJ programs and participants, thus exemplifying EDL. They care about the experiences of the participants and want to prioritize participant healing yet also must remain aware of the constraints they and the participants face. Edward’s comments especially represent embodied love because his commitment to social change is one that he feels in his own body given his exhaustion. He cares deeply about the work and implicates himself in the efforts to facilitate institutional change. At the same time, Edward’s comments reflect the double-edged sword of embodied love when love is capitalized for social change.

By continuously asserting its dominance as the default through logistical control over the referral system, the criminal-legal system works to maintain its control over justice by employing colonial tactics of undermining alternative practices that threaten its existence. Facilitators reflected on the impact that the top-down punitive structure of the criminal-legal system has on RJ processes and procedures directly impacts facilitator practices and how they understand their relationship with the RJ program, state institution, and the parties. For example, Daisy shared that her clients are so used to operating within a hierarchical context that the more horizontal and open dialogue approach through RJ is unfamiliar and they tend to default asking her to simply tell them what to do:

They're really looking to us as these authority figures, because they were referred by this court system. So many times we hear, 'what do I need to do? Please just tell me what I need to do or like? Yeah, sure, I'll do that if it will help me with the diversion.' We're really trying to make this like voluntary and participatory and really honoring and respecting and embracing people's agency. We repeat that, and it's still hard to understand, because at the end of the day we are the ones who decide whether or not they've completed the program to satisfaction.

Daisy's description of the clients she works with experiencing a desire to be told what to do is, in her view, a direct result of her program's proximity and relationship with the court system.

Because they receive referrals and the cases are diverted from the criminal-legal, she acknowledges that the RJ program can be perceived as an extension of the state and in fact might even be so considering that the RJ program gets to determine whether or not the client has completed it to satisfaction thus perpetuating a hierarchy or authoritative power over participants. Daisy's comments reflect the beginnings of how she employs EDL to interrupt institutional power and help parties unlearn oppressive hierarchical systems. She cares to empower parties to make self-determined decisions for their healing while recognizing that parties carry anxieties about the material consequences of the relationship between RJ programs who still operate under the umbrella of the criminal-legal system.

Daisy had a lot to reflect on how she perceived her work with her RJ program as being "an active participant in this net widening of the criminal legal system" which left her feeling "guilty" because she feels she is "contributing to something that is actually having negative impacts on the movement on the individuals participating in it." Rose, a facilitator for a community-based program, similarly shared that increased criminalization of substance abuse and possession of substances in Oregon has led to increased funding for RJ to widen the net. Rather than fund social services and treatment services, Rose sees RJ being funded to "recriminalize low level offenses" by still bringing people in contact with the criminal-legal

system. Violet, a facilitator for a diversion program, echoed Rose's observations when discussing how the net widening approach impacts juvenile justice. Violet shared that there have been cases she's worked where "if there wasn't this [RJ] program, they probably would have just let the kid go... but now that there's a diversion, they can keep their eye on somebody even longer. So, we get more people into the system that way, which we should not be doing." Thus, these reports by facilitators demonstrate that facilitators have a front-row seat to observe the tensions of the relationship between the criminal-legal system and RJ programs. Facilitators perceive system partners misusing, abusing and weaponizing RJ to have more people interact with the criminal-legal system and serve the goals of the criminal-legal system. Facilitator awareness and understanding of the net-widening of the criminal-legal system through RJ represents EDL because they are sensitive to the social histories of oppression and the material consequences of interacting with the criminal-legal system for participants. Daisy's feelings of guilt represent that she is not only aware of the embodied impact on other but also has an embodied reaction driven by her care for others. She is inclined to care about the needs of the participants and desires for them to not experience the trauma of the criminal-legal system.

Henry, a facilitator in a diversion program, shared that he also observed a net widening and RJ being used as a "catch all" for whatever the criminal-legal system couldn't handle. He commented that while he would like to see system partners have a better understanding of RJ and improved screening practices for referring cases to RJ, him and his team still accept cases because it's still an opportunity to draw power away from systems and offer positive outcomes in the eyes of system partners. Thus, Henry represents the nuanced perceptions different facilitators adopt. The facilitators shared an awareness of the harms of the criminal-legal system and a desire to draw participants away from it. However, their perceptions regarding the relationship between

RJ programs and the criminal-legal system differed with Henry perceiving the relationship more positively due to what he saw as an opportunity to interrupt participant's further interaction with the criminal-legal system. Henry is also representing EDL through his heightened awareness of impact on the lived experiences of participants. He demonstrates embodied love by reflecting on his care for participants by still offering RJ processes to those who need it. He demonstrates embodied love in dialogue by perceiving the dialogue as an opportunity to help participants unlearn and for him to communicate a new healing environment that is equitable and democratic. Henry perceives RJ program partnerships with state agencies as an opportunity to intervene on the harms of the criminal-legal system.

Contrastingly, Archer, a facilitator in a diversion program, shared that receiving a higher caseload isn't always indicative of reaching more positive outcomes or doing better work. Instead, it is indicative of harmful retraumatizing net widening to enact more judgment and controlling measures on youth and communities of color. Henry and Archer both identify the harmful effects of interacting with the criminal-legal system and both demonstrate an inclination to care for participants by protecting them from or drawing them away from that system. Nevertheless, their reflections represent a nuance to how RJ programs and facilitators perceive the role of their programs in intervening, interrupting, and navigating the systems.

### *Collaboration with Minimal Oversight*

While some facilitators perceived themselves as operating under the permission of state institutions, facilitators also shared that their collaboration with state institutions often came with minimal oversight. That is, while the culture of punishment of the criminal-legal system is pervasive and the dominating control of the criminal-legal system on RJ programs is real and impactful, it is also the case that some programs work under the auspices of the criminal-legal

system but do not experience their complete control. I think this is why some facilitators are comfortable with collaborating or partnering with the criminal-legal system because it is a partnership in name only and RJ facilitators get to reclaim and reshape the process once a case is referred. Thus, these facilitator's experiences add to the complexity of operating between the criminal-legal system and RJ programs and the nuance of facilitator perceptions.

Gary, a facilitator in a diversion program shared that in his program, the arrangement they have with the DA is that the DA accepts the "decisions made in a circle" which makes Gary "comfortable with that arrangement." Amenable system partners such as individual judges and DAs really make a difference regarding how much or often the criminal-legal system exerts control over RJ processes. They demonstrate that they not only understand the goals of RJ but support them. A sympathetic gatekeeper that is willing to be hands off allows and respects the RJ process, allows facilitators more flexibility in reclaiming the RJ dialogue to live up to the values of RJ and be taken seriously while advocating for the participants when reporting back to the criminal-legal system.

Facilitators in programs where their system partners aren't aggressively managing them were able to help their clients unlearn the power of the criminal-legal system. Facilitators communicated to their clients that the criminal-legal system has no power over the RJ process. For instance, Annie, a facilitator in a RJ diversion program, shared that she makes it very clear that the "criminal justice system doesn't really have any say in what happens." While she acknowledges that there are some administrative details such as a timeline for the agreement and some fees to pay, the important relationship is the one between the RJ program and the client and the criminal justice system is no longer involved. Gary and Annie demonstrate how facilitators perceive the dialoguing space as a radical opportunity to interrupt the power of the criminal-legal

system. Because their system partners aren't involved in the dialogue or RJ process, Gary and Annie feel they are able to reclaim the process and, from that point forward, can accomplish the work of restorative justice. They as facilitators essentially become gatekeepers, locking system partners out of the process and keeping them from being part of the dialogue which not only interrupts institutional power but also ensures participant healing is the main priority.

Phil shared that his program gets a lot of low-level cases and “a fair amount of freedom with our relationship to the juvenile justice program to basically work our process the way we see fit. And then we just refer them back about whether they've completed or not...so they don't really interfere too much with how we do it, gratefully.” Phil goes on to discuss how the system partners that his program operates with really believe in the research that the longer youth interact with the juvenile system, the worse their chances are so they are interested and willing to apply alternatives. At the same time, what is striking about Phil's comments is the fact that he ends them with the word “gratefully.” This reflects that such minimal oversight and willingness to collaborate is a rare find and his gratitude indicates his awareness of the precarity of his program because things could change if system partners changed their minds. Additionally, reflected in Phil's comments is his perception that the RJ program and local criminal-legal system they partner with have the same goals rather than opposing ones. Again, this provides more complexity and nuance into facilitator perceptions of tensions and the mission of RJ because rather than view the criminal-legal system as having contrasting values, some facilitators identify individual system partners who share RJ values of pursuing justice that is transformative.

Facilitators themselves experience a sense of power because of the minimal oversight that their programs experience. Facilitators can advocate more for their clients and maintain more

control over the RJ process while interrupting any input or involvement from system partners.

Such is the experience of Steve, a facilitator with a Department of Corrections:

We don't have a lot of pushback from correctional officers or administrators trying to nose their way into our processes. But it depends on where you go. When you go to a smaller, more rural prison people try to nose their way in. And then, as a facilitator, we have to assert ourselves more to maintain control of our freedom of process and not disclose what's happening behind the closed door, but maybe give generic descriptions of what a process might look like or what the purpose of it is. Cause that's really what it is, is curiosity from the systems themselves.

In Steve's experience, being able to interrupt the involvement of the criminal-legal system affords a sense of power. Steve is aware of the facilitator positionality as the frontline peacemaker that interacts with system partners most often and represents RJ. Steve isn't coerced by the system partners but instead enacts embodied love on behalf of the clients to maintain the freedom of the dialogue. She puts herself in between the participants and the state partners and becomes the point of contact between them, thus representing her embodied dialogic commitment to the process by implicating her own body while maintaining an awareness of how different bodies are privileged or marginalized within these systems. What's interesting about Steve's comments is the fact that she assumes that system partners are simply curious which indicates a benign interest on behalf of the system partners. Steve carefully indulges their curiosity through strategic ambiguity but still gatekeeps for the sake of protecting the clients and the RJ process from a curiosity that could turn malignant and controlling. Despite saying system partners are merely "curious," by placing herself in between system partners and participants, her actions indicate she still perceives systems partners as being capable of perpetuating harm and she is aware of how that harm has physical consequences for participants lived experiences. She thus represents EDL through her protectiveness which exemplifies her love, her physical gatekeeping of system partners from the dialogue which exemplifies her embodied commitment

to protecting participants, and her perception of the dialogic space as one free from institutional influence.

Occupying the middle space between clients and system partners affords facilitators a sense of power which Steve recognizes. Nevertheless, where Steve understands that power in the form of allyship and advocacy and protection, other facilitators like Daisy understand that power as a replication of the “power over” that the state has. Being the ones to determine a satisfactory completion of an agreement is an extension of dominance which Daisy is uncomfortable perpetuating. Daisy perceives RJ as a process that prioritizes the self determination of participants which means there needs to be shared power. Determining a participant’s satisfactory completion of the process and reporting back to system partners doesn’t meet the requirements for self-determination and essentially maintains system partners as the main authority. It runs counter to Daisy’s values *and* her perception of RJ. Simply having amenable state partners isn’t enough to meet the conditions of RJ for Daisy. For other facilitators, the hands-off nature of some of their system partners is enough for them to reclaim RJ and carry out its mission of healing for participants because they can shape the dialogic environment for participant’s needs and interrupt the institutional influence. Once again, facilitators demonstrate nuanced personal perceptions/expectations of RJ and the conceptualization of RJ by programs and state partners emerges, highlighting a significant difference in how they navigate tensions and operationalize RJ.

Individual facilitators reconcile their own understandings of power, the purpose of RJ, and system partnerships. It is individuals within the criminal-legal system that have the power to be amenable to RJ partnership. The individualization of power reflected here is compelling because it can be empowering for making accessible change. At the same time, depending on

individuals doesn't always address systemic policies that ensure that the criminal-legal system still operates as the dominant oppressive system no matter how many sympathetic allies partner with diversion programs. The system is self-sustaining. Therefore, facilitators make decisions for themselves regarding the extent to which they compartmentalize and are comfortable operationalizing RJ with state agencies. As discussed above, facilitators share common discomfort and tensions regarding the relationship between RJ and state agencies, and they reflect heavily on whether RJ can meet its goals through such partnerships while actively working to reclaim and reconceptualize RJ's goal during dialogues and individual interruptions.

Given these institutional challenges, facilitators position themselves and their values as individuals in relation to institutions. From these positions, they conceptualize their role in fostering social change and conceptualizing the purpose of RJ. Understanding these perceptions helps to provide necessary nuance to how RJ is operationalized while also opening opportunities for dialogue within the RJ community regarding the purpose and capacity of the movement.

## Operationalizing Institutionalized RJ Across a Spectrum of Collaboration, Transference, and Revolution

To understand facilitators operating across the spectrum of collaboration, transference, and revolution, we might think of each approach enacting different strategies to fix a "road" to justice. The current road to justice in the U.S. criminal-legal system is very dilapidated. It has many potholes, sinkholes, cracked pavement, broken down cars, and other obstacles in the way that make it difficult to achieve justice.

There are those who adopt a collaborative approach to try to fix the road by filling in potholes, removing obstacles, and repaving certain areas. These collaborators notice the problems with the road and work on the road itself to improve it so people can travel along it

more smoothly. There are those who adopt a transference approach to try to fix the road to justice by constructing an off-ramp. They create an exit for people to pull folks off the road and get them to use a parallel side street that is newly paved. They still collaborate with the original road to an extent but ultimately want their side road to become the main road folks will use. Finally, there are those who adopt a revolution approach. They don't want to use the road at all and instead opt to use another means of transporting such as a hot air balloon. They want to leave the road behind and take a different means of achieving justice; however, they are only able to fit a few people at a time into the hot air balloon.

In the end, each approach can agree that the road is not a safe place to drive and isn't working. They also are all trying to reach the same goal: justice. Where they differ is the extent to which they rely on the road's resources to pursue justice and whether they perceive the road as necessary to achieving justice. They also differ in their perceptions of the best tool and method to create change, and how their choices will impact the kind of change they make and the kind of future road they want to see. The road construction metaphor is a useful way of understanding how and why different facilitators conceptualize RJ differently – because of their different relationships with the criminal-legal system, their different perceptions of their individual capacities and values when working to achieve the goal of justice, healing, and social change, and their different expectations of RJ as a method to foster social change. Examining each of these approaches reveals significant nuance to facilitator practices and larger expectations of RJ.

### *The Collaborative Approach*

Facilitators adopting a collaborative approach are interested in partnering with the criminal-legal system to change it. They perceive the systems as broken, and that RJ can help to change systems that need it. They are comfortable with collaborating with systems because some

perceive the systems as permanently necessary albeit a bit askew of their original intent; thus, they believe to some extent that the criminal-legal system needs RJ's help. Some facilitators believe that it is part of their responsibility to change systems because if they resisted them, it would mean abandoning folks who are still impacted by them, thus letting the systems continue to cause rampant harm. Ultimately, adopting a collaborative approach is a way to navigate through the tensions facilitators observe in the criminal-legal system by situating RJ as helping to improve the system and the people most impacted by it. Thus, this approach represents EDL because of the ways in which facilitators position themselves in close proximity to state institutions out of a love for those impacted by them. They recognize that the systems continue to cause harm in their current form and take an embodied stance to dive deeper into the systems to help protect individuals within them to affect change. Facilitators utilize EDL to persist through the tensions they observe in order to position themselves where they believe they can create change and where they believe RJ to be able to create change by crafting healing environments and oases while also being in direct conversation with systems of power.

Underlying this collaboration seems to be an assumption or acceptance of the criminal-legal system's permanence as the default justice system. For instance, both Edith and Willow shared that the criminal-legal system "needs" RJ. Edith said, "we *need* these practices in the criminal system" (emphasis added). Willow shared examples of facilitators she knew who worked with both community-based programs and Departments of Corrections: "They stick their hand in this pool too because it's their chance to be involved in this big power dynamic which *needs* it the most" (emphasis added). I interpret Edith and Willow's comments as representing the collaborative approach because of how they discuss a dependency between RJ and the criminal-legal system. It's as if the criminal-legal system has a gap in how it addresses justice

and RJ is there to fill that gap while still reinforcing that the criminal-legal system is the default. RJ fills a pothole within the criminal-legal system. Edith and Willow are aware that the criminal-legal system isn't working well and because of the reach of the system, they feel the need to collaborate with it and improve it from within. Their recognition of the criminal-legal system needing RJ processes stems from their inclination to care for those most impacted by the harms of the criminal-legal system. Their embodied love positions them close to participants who are most impacted by diving deeper into systems of power. Interestingly, the dependency of the criminal-legal system on RJ from their perspective seems to position RJ in a state of agency or power within the criminal-legal system. Therefore, they perceive RJ as being in a collaborative partnership and a necessity for change that the criminal-legal system relies on.

When asked to explain further about her perceptions of the relationship between the criminal-legal system and RJ, Violet also shared that she ultimately doesn't perceive RJ as "dismantling" the criminal justice (CJ) system: "I don't think that restorative justice is dismantling the CJ system. I think that it can work in tandem with it. There is absolutely a need for protecting communities and protecting individuals, and the CJ system can be there for it. But it can also work with survivors and harmed parties, and the people who cause harm to have accountability to work through the issues. And if the CJ system is necessary, it's there." When pushed to explain what she meant by the CJ system as being there to protect communities, Violet shared, "the whole purpose of the carceral system [is] for the protection of society more so than the punishment of the individual. But I think that's where the CJ system has gone off the rails – it's looking at punishment rather than protection." In other words, Violet perceives the original intention behind what she refers to as the CJ system as being necessary yet recognizes that the original intent has been distorted. She shared that the current operation and reality of CJ needs to

be “dismantled” because it is dehumanizing and treats people like cogs in a machine, but that CJ is still itself a necessary part of justice. RJ can help to address the reality of CJ because CJ is not operating under its original intent. Perceiving the criminal-legal system as depending on RJ is a way for facilitators to persist through the tensions wrought by the relationship between CJ and RJ because it affords RJ and the facilitators a sense of shared power to affect change.

During a follow-up interview with Edith, she pushed back against the word “resist” and my assumption that she would even want to resist or perceive herself as resisting the criminal-legal system:

when I resist something I don't have a relationship to it. I kinda have a divide or I push. How could I change something or someone if I don't have a relationship to it? ...What is it that I'm resisting? And why? And is that resistance serving any purpose to the ultimate goal of being a community? And if I treat this high school like I treat the jail, and I leave it on the outskirts of my world, then it's never going to be part of my vision...being ultimately inclusive.

Edith explained that in her program she works with a school and the environment within the school is very entitled and the students in the school have a lot of privilege which has made RJ difficult for her to enact because the culture within the school isn't suited for it. She felt herself “resisting” the environment and wanted to distance herself from it as a result. Yet, she perceived resisting and subsequent distancing as a form of abandoning and not living up to her inclusive values; therefore, she found herself returning to the school and, ultimately, to systems of oppression to change those systems:

Previously I would distance myself from systems of oppression...But in that...felt like I was abandoning... The oppressed need to have some level or some distance for us to have introspection and awareness. So it is an effective approach, but it needs to be moderated. I can't just isolate forever or check out completely from the map...when I take distance or resist, I am giving myself the gift of self-awareness to then go back and recharge and have a different contribution.

Reflected in Edith's comments seem to be an assumption like Violet's regarding the permanence and dominance of systems. At the same time, Edith's approach stems from her perspective as a

woman of color, reflected in the way she describes herself as one of the “oppressed” that experienced harm by the systems. Edith is an example of a facilitator whose positionality makes her approach porous and thus is mobile along the spectrum between collaboration and revolution. On the one hand, she adopts revolution in order to distance herself from harmful systems and regroup by setting boundaries and building her own self. On the other hand, she adopts collaboration because she feels the need to return to change the systems so she doesn’t leave other folk who are oppressed under the systems behind or abandon the systems so they continue perpetuating harm. So, she has a relationship with systems of oppression because she is driven by her goal of building community and to resist those systems means she is perpetuating exclusion and abandoning those who still are impacted by those systems and not including them in her community. I value Edith’s nuanced perception of collaboration because it complexifies assumptions that reformist goals are entirely dedicated to the maintenance of oppressive systems. Additionally, her reflections as a woman of color indicate a significant difference in the ways facilitators practice allyship and power which indicates an intertwining of facilitator role and social identity and perceptions of RJ (which I will discuss more in depth in Chapter 2).

Facilitators adopting a collaborative approach represent EDL because they are unwilling to abandon or neglect those who are still impacted by the criminal-legal system. They understand that the criminal-legal system is causing harm, and they recognize that it is still a reality which has material and embodied consequences. Thus, they continue to care for those who still are impacted by it so as not to abandon them. They continue to critique the system because they know that in its current form it is causing disproportionate harm and does not live up to its pursuit of justice, but they are also oriented toward attending to those in need within it. So, it

could be said that they collaborate with the participants who still are impacted by the system more than collaborate with the system itself.

### *The Transference Approach*

Facilitators adopting a transference approach are like collaborative facilitators in that they also work in partnership with the criminal-legal system. However, transference facilitators ultimately perceive RJ and their role with RJ as transferring energy away from the criminal-legal system and into RJ. They aren't prepared to fully resist the systems because they see them taking up so much space and being deeply rooted in the U.S. culture. At the same time, they are patiently drawing energy away from those systems while simultaneously using the system's resources for cases in order to make RJ a the default justice system in the U.S. Ultimately, they hope to dismantle the criminal-legal system because they know it's broken and won't change but they don't think RJ can successfully stand on its own yet. The transference approach recognizes that RJ's current capacity isn't able to fully replace such a deeply embedded system and therefore collaboration is necessary to play the long game.

Like the collaborative approach, the transference approach practices EDL to navigate tensions they observe. They remain in close contact with participants who are impacted by the system thus demonstrating their embodied love. At the same time, through designing and establishing an alternative "route" in dialogue, the transference approach enacts embodied love into creating something new and transformative. Unlike the collaborative approach that provides a brief oasis using dialoging before eventually releasing participants back into the main system, the transference approach invests in making an entirely new path so participants don't have to return to the criminal-legal system road because they can access something new and sustainable.

Transference is something that came up during follow-up interviews with facilitators who saw themselves as having the end goal of dismantling systems while taking a collaborative approach. For instance, Annie, a facilitator in a diversion program, shares her begrudging acceptance of the criminal-legal system as a partner who sponsors the program but avoids representing the criminal-legal system when she's facilitating: "I don't want to represent that power right? That's not my power and I may not agree with it even. I respect it because it's what's allowing us to have [a] restorative justice alternative to the criminal justice system. So, I respect that's necessary. I'm not going to be the symbol of that in the room." She perceives that the criminal-legal system is the authority which allows RJ diversion programs to operate within it and use its resources, but as soon as participants enter dialogue with her, she begins working to interrupt the power of the criminal-legal system and help participants unlearn the expectations of the criminal-legal system. In other words, Annie uses the signage of the road to help divert and create a detour for folks to get off the road. Once they are on the side street, she starts using different signage and billboards to communicate new environments and expectations. She uses her embodied love to position herself close to systems of power for the purpose of being a bridge or holding an exit sign for participants to take the off-ramp to RJ.

Henry shared that he perceives himself and his role as in an "intermediate stage" between collaboration and revolution because he can't currently "imagine that in any of the foreseeable generations, even best case scenarios, that there's no version of policing or prisons in this society. But I can envision that in maybe a couple of generations the non-punitive or community help options are built up so strongly that everybody knows that they have a choice about which system to enter when they've been a part of something hard." Henry represents the transference approach because he emphasizes building up RJ in order to give the community an option and a

choice which is empowering. Henry doesn't dedicate his energy toward changing the system in the same way facilitators in the collaborative approach do. The transference approach doesn't believe the systems will change and thus works to build up RJ as an option. At the same time, he still deems working with system partners as useful to provide access to cases and participants. Henry explains how he reconciled his approach with collaborating with system partners because he knows that the alternative (solely having the criminal-legal system as an option) is much worse: "When we start to get caught up with compromises in the way that we get to do RJ, don't forget to ask compared to what. And then you're brought back to how poor the other system is at meeting any needs at all, and how it makes most things worse." Providing an alternative to harmful systems is Henry's transference approach.

In his early adulthood, Henry shared he was more excited to dismantle and mobilize movements to resist systems of oppression because he was involved in direct action nonviolent interventions in conflict zones. Yet, he also experienced big disillusionments when those movements, from his perception, failed to stop things like the invasion of Iraq:

The word dismantle doesn't get me excited. My energy collapses around this idea. I'm glad that some people get energized and can stay committed by that, but I think I was crushed by our failure to prevent that invasion and so kind of ...If we can build the alternatives and get enough energy and visibility behind it, then the community as a whole will withdraw most of its energy from those systems and just stop sustaining them. Henry's experiences influenced him to rededicate his energy toward building the replacement once the system is dismantled. He is still abolitionist in his goals, yet he is focused on the creative aspect of abolition which imagines something different and is running toward something different rather than the dismantling aspect of abolition. Henry represents how facilitators in the transference approach utilize EDL to navigate their partnerships with state agencies by investing in and actively working to create an alternative form of justice dedicated to healing. He sees the harmful effects of the criminal-legal system and doesn't want to leave the criminal-legal system

as the only option for participants no matter how many benevolent individual system partners there are. He doesn't want RJ to simply patch the system from within but be a separate alternative. The transference approach demonstrates its inclination to care for others by dedicating energies and embodied practices into building up RJ and physically investing in RJ as the preferred justice process.

What's interesting about Henry's demonstration of the transference approach is how he reflects on his individual capacity for social change which influences where he positions himself along the spectrum. He thought long and hard about where and how he as an individual felt capable of enacting change, yet he still feels connected to a larger movement. He essentially compartmentalizes his relationship with system partners because he depends on their resources to help access participants. At the same time, he compartmentalizes his relationships with system partners because he situates himself as part of a broader RJ movement where other facilitators adopt a revolutionary approach and share his goal in removing power from institutions but have different practices to accomplish it. Thus, he perceived RJ as decolonizing and ultimately having contrasting goals from the criminal-legal system but had different practices to achieve decolonization which meant he relied on system partners for some resources (but ultimately drawing power away from system partners).

Phil concurrently conceptualized his relationship with system partners based on his perception that social change takes time: "I think in the long term, we're working on decolonizing this world, which is not something that happens overnight. We have to be patient. We have to think about the lifetime of a mountain as my Elders often say, and what can we do here that will grow roots over years and generations?" Phil is focused on change that happens over a long period of time because he wants the foundation of change to be sustainable. Like

Henry, Phil represents the transference approach because he also perceived decolonization as the goal and building up the alternative as the best route to take even though it would take longer. Phil's dedication to patient, sustainable change represents his embodied love to commit to building that alternative one dialogue at a time.

Edward was the first participant to use the word "transference" when describing how he perceived RJ as drawing energy away from systems of power and to building up RJ and the community. Edward perceived transference as not just pouring into a different justice process but pouring into the community rather than systems. For Edward, he is transferring energy into the community for the purpose of healing and social change: "I have this mode of: I've been burned from this community, so I want to heal it, and if I heal it, then I could sleep better...it is relatively exhausting. But like I said, it's worth it at the end of the day." As a Black man who grew up in a predominantly white community which made him feel excluded, Edward seems to feel responsible for making change in his community to improve it for future generations and thus reconciles his lived experiences with oppression and his partnership with oppressive systems in order to accomplish his goals of healing. Similarly to Edith, Edward's approach is porous and dynamic given his lived experiences as a person of color. What links Edith and Edward's approach is their reflection on how they make the choice to respond or act within these partnerships and to work in relationship with state partners. Rather than obligated or coerced or forced, they are empowered in their choice to return into system and that is what guides their collaboration despite having different understandings of the permanence of the criminal-legal system (where the collaborative approach considers it permanent while the transference approach considers it unstable and eventually obsolete). Edward differs in his perception because he doesn't do patchwork within systems but deliberately returns to system for the sake of

transferring energy away from them. Edith and Edward's identities demonstrate how lived experiences with oppression create different burdens of responsibility for facilitators of color thus their motivations to facilitate and participate in RJ are different and have more significant consequences for changing systems (which I will dive more into in Chapter 2).

Edward represents EDL through his approach because his lived experiences and identity help him reflect on his position and proximity and capacity to identify and navigate tensions while also creating environments for social change. He is incredibly loving in his dedication to "heal" his community and his dedication to work to pour energy into improving it for future generations. At the same time, Edward again exemplifies how love can be abused and commodified for social change. His love and dedication to the community create exhaustion in his body because he gives so much (and the labor is disproportionate for him as a person of color). Thus, love must be protected and moderated in order to prevent facilitator burnout and to keep us from being used by capitalist systems.

The transference approach represents EDL because of the ways in which facilitators perceive their efforts to invest in liberatory future. They make embodied efforts to craft dialoguing environments and spaces in which participants can practice healing and reclaiming agency. They are loving because they create an off ramp or bridge to divert energy from the criminal-legal system while also pouring energy into the RJ as its replacement. It is an active love that is firmly rooted in imagination that drives change.

### *The Revolution Approach*

Finally, facilitators adopting a revolution approach are more abolitionist and tend to be very open about their critique of the criminal-legal system and their desire for something new. They aren't interested in taking a collaborative or transformative approach because it is too much

of a compromise that still affords the dominant systems power. The revolution approach found more opportunities to engage in community-based organizations and received referrals entirely from the community. They perceived RJ as being a powerful way to resist and remove power from the criminal-legal system. They are like the transference approach in that they both hope to make the criminal-legal system obsolete, but they differ in their perceptions that they need to rely on the criminal-legal system's resources to accomplish this goal. Ultimately, all three approaches are aligned in their perceptions of the brokenness of the criminal-legal system and their desire for something different. RJ seems to be the vehicle to accomplish that change yet the end goal is where they depart from one another because the collaborative approach upholds the permanence of the criminal-legal system while the transference and revolution approaches would see the criminal-legal system dismantled.

The revolution approach is concerned with a more radical and transformative approach to RJ. Rather than relying on system partners, the revolution approach desires a new way to build up the power of RJ on its own. The revolution approach was expressed by younger facilitators whose identities occupy a marginalized position. For instance, Monica, a facilitator at a youth diversion program, shared, "I think that's like my life statement is to disrupt those systems. I think just by rolling out these programs. It's, you know, it's doing just that." Monica's comments reflected her own desire for revolution which she then transferred onto or assumed that the program she works with operates in the same way. Here is an example of the importance of RJ programs aligning with the values and goals of the facilitators. Tensions between facilitators, RJ programs, and the criminal-legal system are alleviated when facilitators and their programs are aligned in their expectations of RJ and its relationship with state partners.

Archer reflected on their time working within a diversion program where they observed collaborative and revolution ideals and goals creating conflict about the direction and purpose of the program. Archer shared that they perceived a lack of clarity or articulation regarding what the goals of RJ were which perpetuated confusion regarding how to practice RJ:

That was actually a big frustration that I had in my last job: we had people within the same organization within similar programs operating with reformist values and abolitionist values but we never talked about it. And it just created so much conflict because we wanted to practice differently. We couldn't figure out a way to make it work together... We need to work on that ourselves within the RJ world, articulating our values, and not assuming that everyone has the same values as us and are using the same practices because of the same values.

I appreciate Archer's comments because they offer a contrast to Henry and Phil's assumptions that every facilitator has the same mindset and thus the same values and goals. Archer's reflections represented the revolution approach because they were focused on centralizing difference rather than sameness and their desire for clear, honest articulation of goals. More specifically, because Archer perceived RJ to be radical, resistant, and revolutionary, they assumed that the work would not be as integrated in system partnerships. When they entered the field and worked with system partners in their diversion program, they were disillusioned because RJ wasn't operating in the revolutionary approach, they assumed it would. I interpret Archer's comments as representing EDL because of how they not only care about the experiences that participants have but also about the RJ movement. They reflect deeply in our dialogue how tensions emerge within their own program and their desire to continue engaging in dialogue for the purpose of facilitating understanding even between facilitators.

The current mode of operating RJ in that particular diversion program was what Archer perceived to be a "kinder way to increase the capacity of the carceral system. It's kind of the idea of, 'oh, maybe we should incarcerate less people, but just put more people on probation and parole' is sometimes kind of the vibe that I get from restorative justice processes. I think if your

goal is to be a tool of the State, to just do kinder responses to harm, then that's okay. But, be honest about it.” Archer’s critique of the collaborative and transference approaches exemplifies the need to examine RJ practices and approaches more closely because facilitators enact a lot of different assumptions about the nature and purpose of their work which then is reflected in how they communicate with systems and participants. It is work and dialogue that needs to occur within RJ programs themselves because there is a critical distance not only between RJ and the criminal-legal system’s goals and values but also between RJ programs and some facilitators.

Rose, a facilitator formerly affiliated with a diversion program who now works with a community-based program that doesn’t receive any referrals from the criminal-legal system, shares that she perceived RJ as having only “friendly and self-determined relationships with institutional powers and system partners where we are willing to share what we're finding and willing to have some cooperation, but I don't think that it's a necessary partner in order for cases to be addressed meaningfully.”<sup>14</sup> Rose explained that diversion means “receiving cases where the responsible party has already gone to jail or has experienced really severe harms through the legal system that made that procedural element a lot harder because so many people are not willing or able to think about the harm they've caused to others before.” Rose’s comments reflected that she perceived even being involved in the criminal-legal system itself is a harm for participants. Therefore, she must unpack the harm of the environment and system in addition to unpacking the respective harm that brought them to RJ in the first place. Rose represents utilizing EDL to navigate tensions she observes by 1) being hyper aware of the embodied harms that the criminal-legal system causes and 2) removes herself and participants from those systems

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<sup>14</sup> At the same time, Rose refers to this vision as one of her “wildest fantasies” rather than a reality. Rose perceives RJ as having power to not rely on the criminal-legal system and instead be self-sustaining and even a force that competes with the default system. However, Rose refers to this as a fantasy which indicates the complexity of putting such self-determination into practice because of the context in which RJ is operating – it is undermined from the beginning, and this is largely due to financial limitations.

to prevent further harm and instead focus entirely on healing. Through her awareness, she deliberately positions herself away from the criminal-legal system because she perceives that any contact is harmful. Rose is a young Latina woman who conceptualizes her revolution approach through her lived experiences and those of her community. She does not want to collaborate or be in partnership with systems because that would mean legitimizing their authority. She desires to work solely within the community and build up her community utilizing communal networks. Like Edith, Rose distanced herself from institutions in order to build her own power; unlike Edith, Rose focused her efforts on building power outside of systems to help those outside of it rather than within it. The revolution approach means that participants never encounter the criminal-legal system. The revolution approach would use the hot air balloon to fly over and circumvent the harm and trauma of the criminal-legal system thus allowing for participants to recognize that the criminal-legal system is obsolete and they can still achieve their goals of justice that are meaningful to them.

The revolution approach represents EDL because of how facilitators work to centralize the experiences and needs of marginalized folk as well as their efforts to recognize that the “master’s tools will not dismantle the master’s house” (Lorde, 1984, p. 110). It is clear that those who adopt a revolution approach also are guided by their visions of liberatory futures and enactments of it through RJ dialogues. Additionally, there is love in the revolution approach because they not only care deeply about examining RJ and critiquing it for its improvement but also for those who participate in RJ to prioritize their healing and avoid perpetuating any further trauma by circumventing the criminal-legal system as a whole. Finally, the resistance to oppressive structures represents love because they do so not only because they are aware of the

lived experiences of those impacted by those structures but also because they are driven by a pursuit of community and sustainable transformation.

## Conclusion

I started this dissertation with the assumption that RJ was a disruptive radical impulse and that all facilitators felt the same way. This chapter has revealed the dynamic and nuanced perceptions of facilitators that complexify our understanding of the purpose and goals of RJ. Adopting a collaborative approach represents those who perceive the systems as harmful and working to utilize RJ to change them from within to care and protect the people who continue to be impacted by them. Adopting a transference approach represents those who perceive the systems as harmful and dedicating energy to building up an alternative (while still utilizing the resources of systems) and investing in a liberatory future. Adopting a revolution approach represents those who perceive the systems as harmful and working to circumvent interacting with them entirely and create something entirely new.

This chapter shows us how EDL allows facilitators to reflect on and hold intention when enacting RJ and consider the different perspectives that impact how RJ is operationalized. Practicing EDL fosters systemic and relational awareness among facilitators as they observe and navigate the tensions between the criminal-legal system and restorative justice. Practicing EDL also allows facilitators to engage in personal reflexivity regarding how they perceive their own capacity and pursuit of justice through RJ and system partnerships. Ultimately, their reflections reveal that facilitators conceptualize themselves operating along a spectrum of change where they position themselves depending on their individual capacities, identities, and perceptions of RJ and state agencies. Thus, they represent nuanced and diverse approaches to RJ.

This chapter advances my larger argument the facilitators practice EDL as a reflexive framework in which they engage in a heightened awareness of how power impacts self and others and orienting self to care for others in different capacities. The spectrum of change that emerged in this chapter addresses how facilitators adopt EDL as a reflexive practice to navigate complex tensions they observe and addressing systems of power.

At the same time, RJ is a practice that is being enacted within a criminal justice system that overpolices and disenfranchises Black bodies and uses white bodies as extensions of the state; the racial hierarchy doesn't disappear but to a degree the system gets replicated. In the next chapter I apply a critical race theory lens to continue to analyze the perceptions of facilitators. I examine the ways in which facilitators enact allyship that looks like radical accompaniment and stewardship to meaningfully acknowledge inherited wounds and lived experiences with racialized oppression of the criminal-legal system. The next chapter will build off the scaffolding of this one by analyzing facilitators reflections on how their identities impact their processes and navigation of institutional tensions. Thus, I will build on the hyper-awareness they display in this chapter by adding a critical race lens and examining how facilitators practice EDL to adopt embodied loving practices to craft environments of healing in dialogue.

## Chapter 2

### Enacting EDL through Sacred Accompaniment and Radical Stewardship: A Racial Consciousness to RJ Facilitating

*“[RJ] was like foreign work...I didn't understand the work at all. I was very leery of it. It felt like it did not have any blackness, any culture to it. It felt very corny, very white... and I didn't see myself reflected in the work at all.” -Cindy*

*“Restorative justice just seems like one big hypocrisy here in the United States... we're going along here in the US saying we're doing restorative justice and yet we're sitting on two major, yet unacknowledged atrocities.” -Sophie*

In this chapter, I examine facilitators' racial consciousness to understand how their awareness of their own and participants' embodied intersectional identities impact their perceptions and enactment of RJ as a *decolonial* practice within a larger sociopolitical history of racism and coloniality. I continue my discussion from the previous chapter of how facilitators situate themselves in relation to institutional power by adding a critical race element to my analysis and resituating RJ as a decolonial practice with a decolonial mission. Including a critical race lens into this chapter means I can examine how the social construction of race intersectionally shapes lived experiences with the criminal-legal system and how RJ as a movement has been co-opted by whiteness (The Editors of Encyclopedia Britannica, 2025). A critical race lens also allows me to examine how facilitators employ a racial consciousness within their RJ practice to navigate the social political histories of racism and coloniality that influence the criminal-legal system, RJ participants, and partnerships.<sup>15</sup>

While some facilitators don't perceive RJ as a resisting or decolonizing practice, adding a critical race lens makes RJ's situatedness within larger social structures of racism given its partnership with criminal-legal systems and RJ's decolonial mission hard to ignore. The quotes

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<sup>15</sup> While race is a social construct, it still has material consequences for nonwhite lived experiences given the ways in which whiteness and coloniality continue to structure our criminal-legal system. Phenotypic differences in skin color are used to stratify our society and classify those with whiter skin as superior to those with darker skin (Irwin, 2022; Hunter, 2005).

in the epigraph reflect the necessity of a racial consciousness in RJ and for facilitators. Cindy, a Black woman and facilitator for a community-based program, shared that when she was first introduced to RJ it felt “foreign” to her because of how whitewashed it was. The process and mindset, despite being Indigenous and African in origin, were very white and Cindy did not see herself and her community represented which made her suspicious of the work as an extension of whiteness and a white state. Cindy’s comments are indicative of an urgent and significant challenge RJ practitioners face – RJ is being subsumed by state institutions in a seemingly benign way; it is being colonized and its decolonial capacity is not only undermined but completely removed from Black and Indigenous communities who founded the work. Additionally, as discussed in the previous chapter, the decolonial capacity of RJ is in flux because not all facilitators perceive RJ as a decolonial practice.

Given the history of how white supremacy is embedded in the U.S. and our constructions of state institutions to serve whiteness, when white facilitators take over RJ and are its main face, then white facilitators become extensions of the state to perpetuate and maintain whiteness within those systems. The majority of the facilitators I interviewed for this study were white and reported that older, educated white men and women were the majority demographic of facilitators in the U.S. Sophie, a white woman and facilitator for a diversion program, shared an awareness of the “hypocrisy” that is RJ in the U.S. because RJ is being used to address interpersonal harm and yet has the capacity and should be used to address the colonial and institutional harm caused by enslavement of Black folk and genocide of Indigenous peoples. Her awareness is important because it means that she is equipped with a race-conscious lens which impacts the way she facilitates dialogues for people of color because she is aware of that larger history and its impact on her participants.

Understanding the maintenance and perpetuation of coloniality and racism through the criminal-legal system complexifies the environments in which facilitators operate and how facilitators perceive their role and their communication practices depending on their different awareness of their and participants' racialized identities. *I argue that some facilitators practice EDL with a racial consciousness which allowed them to manifest their roles as either sacred accompaniment or radical stewardship. From this consciousness, facilitators generate communicative practices in dialogue to utilize RJ as a decolonial movement and create meaningful disruptions to whiteness, coloniality, and racist histories.* This heightened awareness of embodied identities in relation to social structures means that facilitators specifically design a dialoging environment geared toward healing from the immediate harm and the larger social histories of colonization and racism perpetuated by the criminal-legal system.

This chapter aims to examine the ways in which both facilitators of color and white facilitators enact EDL to resituate RJ as a decolonial movement. Facilitators of color enact embodied dialogic love through their conceptualization of their role as sacred accompaniment and thus infuse their practices with a racial consciousness that reclaims RJ from settler colonialism and racism and returns it to a decolonial practice. At the same time, white facilitators enact embodied dialogic love through their conceptualization of their role as radical stewardship/accomplicing and thus infuse their practices with a racial consciousness that interrupts whiteness and centralizes participants of color. While not all facilitators in this study were prepared or equipped to talk about race or their racial consciousness, they took the time within the interviews to reflect on their racial consciousness capacities and honestly consider the ways in which whiteness emerges in their practices. Thus, the facilitators of color in this chapter generate a grounded sub-theory of sacred accompaniment in which they conceptualize their

facilitating role through their positionality and thus decolonize themselves, participants, and institutionalized settings of RJ. White facilitators in this chapter generate a grounded sub-theory of radical stewardship in which they conceptualize their facilitating role through historically unearned privilege and thus decolonize themselves and the colonial setting in which RJ operates by interrupting whiteness and colonial structures. Both facilitators of color and some white facilitators participated in decolonization through EDL.

## Standpoint Theory, Decolonization, and Whiteness

Examining how racialized individual and institutional power relations impact restorative justice participants, facilitators, and processes means starting my inquiry from the standpoint of marginalized facilitators who observe power and develop knowledge from locally situated lived experiences which inform their critique of power (Bowell, n.d.; Collins, 1990; Harding, 2004). RJ practitioners of color have expressed critique and concern regarding white facilitators and how their settler colonial mentalities and whiteness intentionally or unintentionally impact RJ and its participants of color.<sup>16</sup> In *Colorizing Restorative Justice* (2020), twenty RJ practitioners of color critique the proximity between RJ and state institutions, calling it a contradiction given how “situated [RJ programs] are in white supremacist settler societies that sustain deep roots in European invasion and colonizing” (Valandra 2020, p. 1). They call for increased analysis into racism and colonization and the ways in which they operate within and around RJ because without a critical racial analysis “RJ/RP will itself function in racist and colonizing ways, because that is the default” of systems such as the criminal-legal institution (Valandra 2020, p.

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<sup>16</sup> “Communities of color have historical and contemporary experiences that differ from White communities... Both systemic racism and colonization account for these disparities in experiences. The most disconcerting disparity is the sanctioned, structural violence ubiquitous throughout communities of color. Yet the RJ movement, while doing some good in many areas, has not produced a critical awareness about race” (Valandra, 2020, pp. 326-27)

2). This chapter aims to address scholars and practitioners' concerns by examining how individual facilitator's perceptions of racial consciousness impact their practices and self-awareness. I examine the ways in which facilitators of color apply a racial consciousness to practice micro-decolonization of themselves and RJ through their own practices developed from their locally situated standpoints. In other words, I utilize Standpoint Theory, a feminist theory which argues that marginalized groups operate from particular social and political positions from which to develop knowledge on and critique of power. From their locally situated knowledge, facilitators of color offer valuable contributions to understand how coloniality and racism structure power relations around and within RJ dialogue. By conceptualizing their role as sacred accompaniment, facilitators of color utilize their standpoint to transform their knowledge into meaningful disruptions of power to reclaim RJ from coloniality and pursue healing from systems of oppression. Thus, for facilitators of color, EDL works with and as an extension of Standpoint Theory and Decolonization.

Adopting a racial consciousness means engaging in micro decolonization. Micro decolonization is the freeing of one's mind and behaviors from coloniality and colonial structures and assumptions of white supremacy (Asadullah, 2021). Micro decolonization is about building self-awareness of one's own situatedness within coloniality as target or agent (Nieto et al., 2010) and finding healing from coloniality.<sup>17</sup> Thus, micro decolonization partners with Standpoint Theory to not only having heightened awareness but also acting in ways that pursue decolonization within one's personal life (Said, 2022). In other words, Standpoint Theory and

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<sup>17</sup> This type of decolonization is arguably the hardest to achieve because the colonial system also worked to brainwash settlers and Indigenous peoples into believing there is only one cultural reality, and this persists in postcolonial States. The one cultural reality that was presented consisted of Western ideologies. These Western ideologies are based on status, an unquestioning approach to authority and celebration of individual self-interest... Moreover, the decolonization of individual minds will also depend upon a reimagining of the colonial power structures that keep this thinking alive... A questioning of such power structures in postcolonial states and why is paramount in bolstering individual cognitive awareness. Not only do individuals' minds need to be open to the concept of decolonization, a collective push for the systemic change needed to decolonize society will also be required (Smith, 2022, p. 99).

micro-decolonization are compatible conceptualizations to understand how facilitators of color develop knowledge regarding their role from their locally situated position and generate practices through EDL to decolonize themselves and RJ dialogue settings.

Micro decolonization requires that individuals have an awareness of what the white settler colonial ideology is, how deeply embedded it is within oneself, and engage in critical questioning of what maintains this ideology (and if/how the individual is complicit in its maintenance). While the individual mind scours itself for an understanding of how white settler coloniality exists within the individual, it will also turn to act in ways that pursue decoloniality for oneself and for society. RJ practitioners of color urge for the decolonization of RJ which requires an urgent awareness of the ways in which RJ and they as facilitators have been colonized in the first place. Therefore, micro decolonization is something that not only colonized cultures and individuals must partake in but also colonizing cultures and individuals as well to interrupt their own assumptions of Western superiority and the inferiority of Indigenous practices (Said, 2022).

Goens-Bradley (2020) calls for white folk and facilitators to educate themselves about the racialized and settler colonial history of the U.S. and how they are implicated in that history in order to engage and participate in understanding how RJ is colonized and operates in colonized settings and actively participate in its decolonization. She calls for white facilitators to develop a race-conscious lens, meaning “to see how one’s lived experience in the US is largely dominated by one’s racial place” where some are marginalized and others are privileged based on a racial hierarchy (Goens-Bradley, 2020, p. 40). She suggests that being aware of the history of racialization and the impact it has had not only on participants of color but also on the privileges

that white facilitators have received means asking oneself specific, critical and self-reflective questions:

How can I ensure that, despite my being White, I am genuinely assisting those in my Circle, empowering them independent of their relationship to me? Am I the best person to be doing this work? Would it benefit these [youth of color and Indigenous youth] if someone else worked with them? (Goens-Bradley, 2020, p. 51).

At the core of these questions is a challenge to whiteness's assumptions of entitlement. They also interrupt the need to centralize whiteness and instead centralize the needs of the people of color by removing whiteness.<sup>18</sup> Simply asking oneself if one is the correct person to facilitate is only one piece of the puzzle. If white facilitators proceed to facilitate dialogues, there are ways to interrupt whiteness even within dialogue itself by making room to talk about race, being open to racial dialogues, and complete their own individual education and self-regulation to address the racial dialogue without centering their whiteness.

Consequently, I include the perspectives of white facilitators who claim not to collapse around race and instead operate with a race-conscious lens and a willingness to learn and change to respond to Goens-Bradley's call for white facilitators to understand their implication in racial history, develop a racial consciousness, and develop practices to interrupt whiteness. Some white facilitators within this study shared their hyper-awareness of their whiteness and their relationship to power through white privilege. From their positionality, their awareness of their implications in a stratified society, and their struggles with reconciling their whiteness within the facilitator role to decolonize the dialogue setting and centralize participants of color, some white facilitators contributed to a critique of power. Thus, some white facilitators were able to achieve

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<sup>18</sup> Goens-Bradley also calls for white facilitators to not perpetrate microaggressions, not place the burden on participants to placate white facilitators, and not be defensive when race is brought up because avoiding a racial consciousness and understanding of whiteness and the history of racialization or maintaining a lack of awareness or eschewing it in dialogues "contributes to the level of inequity between White and other communities" (Goens-Bradley, 2020, p. 49).

a standpoint.<sup>19</sup> I utilize Standpoint Theory to also understand how white facilitators develop an awareness of their location and relationship of their privilege to those who experience marginalization. White facilitators transform their knowledge into meaningful disruptions by interrupting histories of oppression and whiteness within dialogue, thus participating in decolonizing themselves and RJ. They use EDL as an extension of Standpoint Theory to practice decolonization and participate in and achieve a standpoint from which to “become part of the process of helping reach a shared critical consciousness with respect to the effects of power structures” and interrupting those effects in and facilitators dialogue (Bowell, n.d., n.p.).

Discussed together, both facilitators of color and some white facilitators reveal how they reclaim RJ from colonization and address the concerns RJ practitioners expressed above through specific practices generated by EDL. Therefore, EDL as a communicative framework guiding facilitators works in tandem partnership with Standpoint Theory and Micro-decolonization efforts to understand the specific practices employed by RJ facilitators to interrupt colonizing power within RJ and ultimately offer meaningful disruptions.

At the same time, this chapter also unpacks opportunities for growth and continued pursuit of intersectional and decolonial racial consciousness for facilitators. Goens-Bradley (2020) acknowledges that there are some good intentions of white facilitators because coming to RJ work means they had a desire for community and upholding the value of every individual, operating without knowledge and with “passive (but willful) ignorance and unwillingness to change” will continue to harm participants despite wanting to support them (p. 51). Therefore,

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<sup>19</sup> “it is not impossible for those who occupy non-marginalized perspectives to become part of the process of helping reach a shared critical consciousness with respect to the effects of power structures on epistemic production” (Bowell, n.d., n.p.); “Only through such struggles can we begin to see beneath the appearances created by an unjust social order to the reality of how this social order is in fact constructed and maintained. This need for struggle emphasizes the fact that a feminist standpoint is not something that anyone can have simply by claiming it. It is an achievement. A standpoint differs in this respect from a perspective, which anyone can have simply by ‘opening one’s eyes’” (Harding, 1991, p. 127).

Valandra (2020) warns that “without this awareness, RJ’s core values and principles...become little more than tools in the service of settler colonialism” (Valandra, 2020, p. 326-27). Goens-Bradley argues that white RJ facilitators operating without a race-conscious lens and perpetuating whiteness within RJ practices “tragically [nullify] RP’s revolutionary core goals of upholding the value of every person, building relationships within community, and repairing harms” (p. 38). The nullification occurs because whiteness silences and Otherizes members of the community by creating a racial hierarchy in which operating with a colorblind and race neutral mentality which means that white facilitators without a racial consciousness can’t see the whole person in front of them, only a partial view is available to them depending on what they want to see. This is because the logic of white supremacy means that white folk get to control conversations around race or whether to have them at all (DiAngelo, 2018). Sheryl Wilson (2020) also argues that white facilitators operating without a racial consciousness impose their own understandings of race and racialization onto participants of color: “[they] tend to be convinced that their ‘understanding’ of the experiences of POC is entirely accurate” (Wilson, 2020, p. 106). Again, whiteness centralizes whiteness to the extent that even the perspectives of people of color are filtered through whiteness and how white folk understand people of color’s experiences. When whiteness structures dialogue, it excludes any other worldviews and ways of communicating because whiteness is superior.

Some facilitators within this study exemplified how whiteness dictated how they approached their role and practice as facilitators. They operated with a partial awareness and racial consciousness which impacted their perception of facilitation and RJ. While they were aware of how race impacted the lived experiences of participants, they did not see themselves as

facilitators implicated in racialized history and thus represented Goens-Bradely's concern that facilitators centralize whiteness and white understanding of race when facilitating.

## Sacred Accompaniment

Cindy is the facilitator who coined the term "sacred accompaniment" and used it to describe the framework that guides her facilitation practice. She conceptualizes sacred accompaniment by asking herself: "What if I could just walk alongside you? You just need a companion.' It's kind of that sacred accompaniment where you just are with someone and watching and helping and assisting when they are on their journey. And it feels like that's what facilitation is for me." She describes her facilitation as being with and watching someone to indicate she doesn't dominate or dictate their journey but witnesses it, compassionately empathizes, and ensures they aren't alone (especially when social structures are deliberately isolating and the work of racism and coloniality perpetuate Othering that marginalizes and disconnects). I read Cindy's question as representative of EDL because she doesn't remove herself from facing the participants' problems; instead, she participates in their pursuit of healing by helping them recognize they aren't alone. Furthermore, her question doesn't centralize her own needs, and it also doesn't take on the needs of the participants and make her solely responsible for addressing them. By using the word "alongside," Cindy indicates that she recognizes the interconnectedness of their experiences and that they can work through struggles together without ignoring their respective differences or assuming control over one another. They are empowered to be alongside each other.

The facilitator operates *alongside* participants and collaborates with them because the work within dialogue isn't just focused on the specific incident of harm that brought them together but across a larger movement toward decolonization from/of systems of oppression. It is

specifically located within a facilitator of color positionality because the accompaniment stems from a place of deep understanding of standpoint or lived experiences with systemic oppression under racist colonial power. Sacred accompaniment because runs counter to the hierarchical and dominating ways in which the criminal-legal system operates where power is unevenly distributed and there is no room for trust or vulnerability. The facilitator doesn't dictate what healing looks like for anyone; the facilitator's sole responsibility is walking alongside individuals and communities as they discover their own healing, so they feel less alone and more empowered to determine their own futures in a way that is healthy and holistic.

Thus, sacred accompaniment represents how facilitators of color employ a racial consciousness to their role for the purpose of reclaiming RJ from colonial forces. Their sacred accompaniment represents EDL because of how facilitators of color craft spaces oriented toward lovingly receiving and being aware of the embodied experiences and needs of participants through a racial consciousness while also establishing a collaborative and democratic healing environment which pursues collective healing.

### *Laying Down the Burdens: Walking Alongside*

Enacting sacred accompaniment through laying down burdens and walking alongside one another illustrates embodied dialogic love because it first makes space for both participants and facilitators to acknowledge and address their lived experiences and the burdens they carry into their communication and dialogue. Because the facilitator participates in the practice of vulnerably laying down their burdens and learning to self-regulate, they also practice embodiment by implicating their own bodies and being aware of their own standpoints within the larger histories of colonization and racism. Participants and facilitators can name the weight they carry from living under systems of oppression and see and understand one another in those

experiences; they create an environment in which to care for one another and collectively carry burdens by walking alongside one another. Walking alongside one another exemplifies caring interconnectedness because they not only name burdens but also make sure that they don't face them alone. A racial consciousness makes this dialoguing environment doubly impactful because it comes from a shared standpoint and intimate recognition of struggle. The dialogue space is the container in which embodied love is manifested and the laying of burdens and walking alongside is communicated to interrupt systems of control and instead create a space dedicated to healing and decolonization.

I noticed laying down burdens and walking alongside one another reflected in Cindy and Edith. They described sacred accompaniment as being able to set aside their own burden of responsibility, unlearn the white supremacist value of hierarchy, and instead walk alongside participants in their pursuit of healing. Cindy described the feeling and impact of not having the burden of responsibility placed on her while facilitating:

I got to set my power down and that felt good in that way where I felt like I didn't have to make any decisions. I didn't have to do anything. I could just be and be held...I think this was the only space in my last 20 years of existence where I got to be just me. And that felt powerful... accepting that I was enough without titles, without people knowing anything about my profession and what I do. That was power for me.

Reflected in Cindy's discussion is her lived experience as a mother and leader in her community, both positions in which she is responsible for others and making decisions that put their well-being first. Her use of the phrase "just be" reflects a kind of relief found within her RJ facilitation because she can be free of labels and responsibilities that create expectations of how she serves others. Simply existing just to exist felt powerful because Cindy spent a lot of time in her life holding up others and in RJ she got to be held and didn't have to carry the burden of responsibility or representation or decision making on her own. Rather than find her value in how she could serve others, as a facilitator who conceptualized her role as sacred

accompaniment, Cindy was able to perceive her self-worth separate from her service; her self-worth was inherent in her existence. Sacred accompaniment was a way for Cindy to operationalize her facilitation practice that meant she didn't have to tell the participants what to do and where to find their healing because that would run counter to the voluntary and self-determined nature of RJ. Cindy could hold space and walk with participants as they figured it out alongside her which reflects a shared power and speaks to the Indigenous intentions of RJ that healing is found in community; thus, Cindy's practice not only micro-decolonized herself by allowing her to exist without burdens and micro-decolonized the dialogue context and setting by empowering participants to identify their own healing rather than having it imposed.

Edith also described RJ as an opportunity for her to set her power aside and relieve herself of the burden of responsibility. As a Latine woman, Edith shared that she also experienced the burden of being the one to have all the answers and make decisions within her community. Edith situated her perception of the responsibilities she faces within her community as rooted in Latine cultural expectations of professions and hierarchy. Edith felt herself placed on a pedestal and had her community look up to her for answers given her education and profession. She used sacred accompaniment to step down from the pedestal and instead work to share power as a facilitator in her work: "I would tell them my job here is to make sure that I give you the space and also that I share the questions and prompting that you can all communicate with each other and be with each other." Edith communicated her role as sacred accompaniment to her participants. She shifted the focus away from herself and positioned herself as a companion that held space which illustrates EDL because she not only interrupts and helps participants unlearn hierarchy which comes from an intimate understanding of the lived experiences of her

participants but also lovingly scaffolds dialogue for participants to recognize their interconnectedness and collaborate collectively.

Edith's reflections of sacred accompaniment also came with an honest discussion of the ways in which she clung to expectations of her burden of responsibility. She shared that she had to unlearn and unravel a "savior complex" within herself that made it hard for her to set her power aside and be held in community. She discussed how she was constantly forming herself to and around others' needs with little regard for her own. As she shifted from saviorism and toward sacred accompaniment she experienced burnout because of her saviorism:

The needs are endless, and no matter how many hats I wear, how creative I can be, I'm limited. I'm only 10 fingers, 10 toes, and I have done a lot of work. I have done a lot of very cool, amazing things, but I broke down in very painful, tragic, severe ways. Demonstrated in Edith's comments is a relief similar to what Cindy described when she got to put her power down and simply exist rather than exist for others and to be responsible for everyone's healing. When she adopted a sacred accompaniment framework and instead allowed the work to be done in collective and shifted the decision making and power away from herself, she was able to find her own healing and better accompany others on their journey because the burden to figure it out wasn't all on her shoulders. Thus, Edith took stock of her own embodied needs and lovingly responded to them by decolonizing herself. She recognized how she had internalized the culture of dominance and hierarchy and worked to unravel that within herself to better support her participants.

Edith discussed this shift as having a more collaborative dynamic in her work where she started to ask herself and her participants how to engage in a challenge and create preventative tools together. Edith said, "And that was a huge liberatory context for us, because we were both free of the titles of the power dynamics; it became much more enjoyable." Being a companion rather than a decision maker was liberating; distributing power equally rather than hoarding

power individually was liberating, and existing without labels was liberating. By making liberation a collective and collaborative pursuit, Edith enacts EDL.

*Reclamation and Representation: Centralizing Collective Wisdom*

Part of the reason facilitators of color conceptualize sacred accompaniment in these ways is not solely due to the oppressive structures in which RJ operates or the social systems that perpetuate racism and coloniality outside of and around the dialogues. Facilitators of color conceptualize sacred accompaniment because of how they observe RJ being colonized and whitewashed on top of all the historic social structures that haunt the RJ's context. There is a significant and urgent lack of representation among RJ facilitators and RJ is becoming more and more an all-white space. Facilitators of color enact sacred accompaniment to reclaim RJ and, through their accompaniment of participants, offer necessary representation.

Edward suggests part of the lack of representation is due to the lack of accessibility and opportunity: "I think that correctly comes from the institutionalized idea that if you're a person of color, you come second, third, fourth, fifth." In other words, people of color aren't recruited first for facilitators and because whiteness takes up so much space in RJ, people of color are also averse to participating in programs that have a close proximity to state institutions. As a result, Edward often feels tokenized due to the lack of representation and says it is a real problem he navigates as a facilitator in predominantly white communities with white facilitators working with youth of color. Especially given the African and Indigenous roots of RJ, the fact that the majority pool of facilitators are white men and women speaks to larger histories of settler colonialism and the work of white supremacy in undermining practices of people of color only to appropriate and tokenize facilitators of color later.

RJ's colonization and the barriers to participating as a RJ facilitator were major components of my dialogue with Cindy. She tells the story of how she was initially introduced to RJ as a participant in a circle and she was immediately suspicious and hesitant to be part of it given how much space whiteness took up: "It was really a barrier. I didn't want to bring Black women into it...I didn't see myself reflected in the work at all." Once she learned more about the origins of RJ in Indigenous and African communities and worldviews, Cindy started taking up more space. Nevertheless, before she was able to develop her sacred accompaniment framework, she felt suspicious and wary of RJ because of the lack of representation. She felt protective over her community because she didn't want to bring other Black women into more all-white spaces which speaks to the whitewashing of RJ that she assumed was another white practice being imposed onto her. Even if the white folk within RJ aren't explicitly enacting racism or are deliberately anti-racist, the threat of whiteness as a mindset remains very present and menacing for facilitators and participants of color that white folk are operating as an extension of the state. Facilitators of color have a heightened awareness of whiteness and its construction of spaces (even if those spaces are meant to be equitable) and thus create frameworks such as sacred accompaniment to adapt and interrupt that socialization (Cohen, 2022).

Cindy reflected and critiqued RJ work in its current colonized and whitewashed form that creates barriers for people of color to participate. One of Cindy's most significant critiques was how RJ facilitators and RJ work used language that was far too academic and had no cultural competency. Cindy ensured that she communicated with Black women in dialogue from a culturally specific way that drew them in and connected them to the work rather than force them to learn a whole new language of whiteness: "I think the work is like coming to yourself again. It was hard as a Black woman to come to myself with white language...It's our work...we were

studied in order for the language to be written. And so what I say is, ‘y'all got it in you.’” Cindy reclaimed RJ through her own recognition of its African and Indigenous origins along with her efforts to bring in culturally specific representations and language into RJ. Cindy told another story of a Black woman participant who was leery of RJ and wasn’t going to continue circle work. Cindy made a point to reach out to her and translate the work and be a bridge to draw this woman closer to RJ:

I was like, ‘I need you to call me, because I can explain that to you. I can help you bring some of that street in this. There is room for you here as well. If I could be the bridge to help you understand, connect you with the right person, walk you over there’... That's my whole role in life is always being this damn bridge. I'm always trying to explain, interpret.

Despite situating herself through sacred accompaniment, Cindy still found herself engaging in labor to draw more people of color into RJ work and reclaim RJ from whiteness. She returned to her familiar service role of bridging and facilitating connections for participants because RJ’s current operationalization is so disconnected from its origins and decolonial purpose that folks of color are not only not represented but also don’t recognize RJ as their own. Edith similarly described herself as a translator who had to find ways to explain RJ work and facilitate the unlearning of hierarchy for her community. In these ways, women of color must carry a burden that sacred accompaniment alleviates yet the current conditions and environments in which RJ operates make it difficult to sustain because settler colonialism and whiteness prevail.

While Cindy and Edith’s labor is rooted in love for her community, the language of love often masks the weight of the labor involved in being a bridge between institutionalized RJ and community. Facilitators of color such as Cindy and Edith have the added responsibility of translating the work back to their communities which can nullify their “laying the burden of responsibility down” discussed earlier. The challenge of love is how it is often exploited and used as a scarce resource from which to fuel social activists such as facilitators. This is why

Edith experienced burnout – because she felt the burden of responsibility and that her love for the work was extractive. EDL works to conceptualize love as an abundant and collective resource, meaning the burden of responsibility isn't placed on a single individual to be exploited. Nevertheless, with so few facilitators of color in the field, the risk of exploitation is heightened. Tokenized facilitators of color bear the burden of being “the only” who must consistently disclose and be vulnerable and be bridges for the community. Their embodiment is different from embodiment of white facilitators with privilege because facilitators of color continue to live under systems of oppression which seek to eliminate them which is only increased by their involvement in social justice work. Facilitators of color can't retreat to the safety of privilege and thus their love produces labor. EDL through sacred accompaniment shifts responsibility, makes love an abundant resource, and distributes power to the collective. But it can still create disproportionate labor which exploits love if only enacted by the few and if they only create superficial change rather than transformative, sustainable institutional change.

Facilitators of color reclamation of RJ represents EDL through sacred accompaniment because they are rooted in their commitment to create spaces where participants can feel seen, heard, belonging, empowered, whole, and healed. They do this by maintaining an awareness of the current state of RJ through its relationship with white supremacist and colonizing institutions and having an intimate understanding of the lived experiences of participants within those social structures. Through representation and infusing their practices with cultural relevance and connection, facilitators of color are able to not only reclaim RJ and foster belonging but also challenge whiteness and colonization. They are embodied in their efforts because they actively participate in the creation of culturally relevant dialoguing spaces and they can bring their own lived experiences into the dialogue to address the needs of participants and build trust with them.

Their love for their communities is reflected in their reclamation and representation because they are actively involved and driven to facilitate these environments out of a care for the collective healing and liberation of their communities. However, that love runs the risk of being exploited because of the disproportionate labor facilitators of color carry in being the ones to have to reclaim and decolonize RJ from colonial settings and translate for the community. They are responsible for not only facilitating spaces for individual healing of harm but also healing from institutional harms. Love is a powerful motivating force to accomplish liberation yet only when done so as an abundant resource and collective responsibility. EDL offers a way to conceptualize love as abundant and facilitators in this project are already reshaping power to the collective through EDL. At the same time, there is plenty more work to be done given the disparities in facilitator demographics and domination and maintenance of systems of oppression.

## (Radical) Stewardship

Radical stewardship is a framework that emerged from within the data which reflects how white facilitators conceptualize their role. I use the word “stewardship” because it means “the careful and responsible management of something entrusted to one's care” (Merriam webster, n.d.). Therefore, while stewardship means that one manages a space, managing does not mean dominating or controlling it. Additionally, to steward a space means that the individual has the trust of those within it to act with care and responsibility to centralize and meet the needs of those within it in a way that does not oppress or steamroll because a steward isn't the authority in the room but a keeper.

I conceptualize some facilitators as enacting *radical* stewardship when they adopt a racial consciousness because radical indicates that the steward is attending to the root of harm, connects individual experiences to larger structural power, and impulses an action toward change

(Joseph, forthcoming; Davis 1984; Brekke, 2021). Thus, radical stewardship is a decolonizing role within RJ. Radical stewardship represents micro-decolonization of white facilitator's mindsets because they decentralize themselves and thus whiteness, centralize participants, and make space to address historical and current social harms.

A radical stewardship pushes the facilitator and RJ into a decolonial space because it attends to power and intersectionality and doesn't just focus on the individual incident of harm but the racist and settler colonial conditions and environments that created harm. In radical stewardship, white facilitators interrupt whiteness by giving up control and entitlement, taking the cues from the community rather than imposing whiteness, and are invested in change by not only being aware of the histories and actualities of privilege and oppression but also actively interrupt the perpetuation of those systems and advocate for change in an embodied way that requires risk (Wilson, 2020; Zuercher, 2018).

Engaging in these internal interruptions and decentering of whiteness is a way to enact EDL through radical stewardship because facilitators who experience privilege are oriented towards understanding and checking their own biases, assumptions, and expectations which might cloud their perceptions. This means they must be aware of and prepared to address how they are implicated in/by those systems given their unearned privilege. It is loving because the facilitator does internal work to raise their racial consciousness to recognize how their whiteness is implicated in social structures, and they interrupt whiteness from taking up space in dialogue. Crafting a dialoguing environment which seeks to respect and uphold the dignity and equality of all means that facilitators with privilege must work to interrupt possibilities for perpetuating dominance or control over those with historic marginalization. They do this by decentering whiteness and taking up less space in the room.

### *Decentering Whiteness*

Facilitators who practice radical stewardship embrace discomfort and have developed mindsets to interrupt whiteness. RJ is a space to address harms, and racial harms are very prevalent especially in the criminal-legal system in the U.S. White folk need to be prepared to be implicated and to hold the trauma of the history of racialized harm in the U.S. because it involves them. Adopting a racial consciousness allows them to do just that. Operationalizing it through EDL as radical stewardship means that facilitators are willing to critically analyze their relationship to power through their privilege, micro decolonize themselves by interrupting any internalized white supremacy and embracing dialogue about race because it is necessary for interconnected healing.

Sophie, a white woman, facilitator, and RJ leader, shared how she is able to really address and receive racialized differences within dialogues when she describes how she orients herself toward humility and curiosity: “When I've hosted spaces where racial wounds have emerged, I simply want to listen and if the heat's coming right at me then that's an honor because maybe by sitting with it and letting it play out and be heard, there's something that will shift for that circumstance, for that person for the trauma line that is legit and has been unacknowledged.” Rather than see racialized dialogue as a hindrance or obstacle, it is an opportunity for Sophie to learn more and to allow herself to be exposed or at risk which is crucial to accomplicing. She recognizes that her positionality as a white woman means that she not only represents social histories of power but also is implicated within social histories due to how she experiences racial privilege.

There might be part of what is shared that feels uncomfortable or disturbing to her sense of self as a person who wants to help but is feeling attacked. This fear represents white fragility which recoils and behaves defensively around race. Rather than lean into fear, Sophie opens

herself to discomfort and expands her understanding of how different experiences impact her and others. She engages witnessing without having to solve it or defend herself because she knows it is and isn't about her while also remaining open to embracing a new opportunity to address the harm of racialization, coloniality, and unearned privilege. Her discomfort is part of the embodiment of EDL because she doesn't interrupt opportunities for herself to be implicated in the dialogue and larger social histories. Race isn't something that only matters or happens to the participants but her as well and in this way, she represents their interconnectedness and her care for them. Sophie practices EDL through her radical stewardship because she demonstrates a heightened racial consciousness toward the experiences of Black and Brown participants while also recognizing her whiteness as implicated in those experiences given social histories of privilege and marginalization. Her commitment to lean in and care for participants reflects how she practices embodied love and creates an environment in dialogue where participants feel safe enough to address the larger impacts of colonization and racism with her. She doesn't shut down the dialogue or try to control it but welcomes it and embraces it as part of collective healing for both her and the participants.

Chloe also reflected on the discomfort and insecurity she felt as a white facilitator who perceived practitioners of color to be suspicious of her involvement in RJ. She told the story of an experience she had attending an RJ event and feeling "judgment" from Black women: "which was new to me. I get it. They don't know me. But I get the initial, 'who are you? Just another one of these [white people who] think they're gonna save us, think they know everything.' No, that's not me. But that equates to their life experience." To be clear, this is Chloe's internal monologue and assumptions of how Black women perceive her. It's new for her to be aware of being perceived as a "threat." She wants to distance herself from those assumptions and reduce the

threat of her whiteness. Chloe elaborated on the practices she enacts when she perceives such suspicion is present:

I probably get quieter than I typically am, cause I try to be respectful and I don't need to talk my way out of this. So, let people speak...I try to be humble, and then I try to not do that thing. If you're talking about racial inequalities or tensions that's so much bigger than me in this sort of justice movement. It's been going on for so long that I'm like, 'get over yourself,' if I feel uncomfortable. In my own inner dialogue like, 'Get over yourself, because this is what people are saying. They deal with it all the time.'

Chloe interrupts her own impulse to explain or interject or respond defensively. Instead, she sits in her discomfort and even chastises herself for feeling it because she realizes that she is centralizing herself and her own emotional responses rather than attending to the needs of those in dialogue. She shifts to radical listening and humbles herself to decentralize the way in which her internalized whiteness would seek to control the conversation about race. Chloe uses her discomfort as an opportunity for self-discovery which helps her to better meet the needs of participants because she learns how to identify her biases and interrupt them. While there is still opportunity for Chloe to extend her inner monologue to be more curious and ask questions of herself like "why am I feeling uncomfortable?" or "how can I be uncomfortable and still listen to understand what they're saying?", it is still important to recognize her self-awareness and desire for self-removal because it is loving. She knows she doesn't deserve an award for radical listening, and she knows her embodied actions such as being silent are what make a difference rather than her defensiveness. Chloe's internal reflections demonstrate her work to understand the embodied experiences of marginalized individuals in a way that centralizes them rather than her whiteness. She demonstrates EDL through this reflexivity because she leans in to curiosity and interrupts white fragility, thus interrupting the perpetuation of white entitlement or supremacy. Chloe understands her radical stewardship through her whiteness and is hyper-aware of how her whiteness takes up space. Thus, she engages in a kind of self-critique of how she is

positioned within larger social histories which speak to how she generates a standpoint from which to examine her practices and role in RJ. She demonstrates sensitivity to other's embodied experiences and reflects on how she not only perpetuates power through privilege but also interrupts it.

When he facilitates parties who don't share his constellation of privileges as a white man, Henry doesn't pretend to know what their experiences are and instead creates space for them to tell their stories. In this way, he interrupts whiteness and the white supremacist imposition and prescriptive narratives on people of color. Henry shared a number of examples of how he behaves curiously or communicates to participants that he is prepared to listen by removing himself from the conversation. For example, Henry shared, "There are certain parts of the dialogue, especially early, or at really key moments of deep sharing, where I have trained myself to leave 3 times as long of a pause as I might naturally do or might earlier have done." For Henry, silence is a powerful way to communicate that he is listening. Rather than immediately jump back into the dialogue and insert himself into the conversation, he restrains an impulse that he identified as part of the patriarchy. Rather than play into the patriarchy and settler coloniality by steamrolling, mansplaining, or constantly commenting on things he knows nothing about but is confident from his framework that he can speak on it, Henry practices self-silencing and radical listening to make sure his voice isn't perpetuating historic patterns of silencing others.

Another way that Henry practices powerful self-removal is by quite literally removing himself from the facilitating team or strategically building/designing a facilitating team that best serves the participants' needs. Self-removal was a way for him to demonstrate that participants had choice or agency because they could decide who their facilitator was and uphold the component of radical stewardship that emphasized trusting representation for community. He

tells the story of a case he was working on where one of the participants was a young woman of color and she asked that he be removed from the case because it was essentially too much work to “help a white guy understand what it’s like.” Henry and his team received that feedback and removed him from the case in order to centralize what was best for the participant and to listen to her when she advocated for her needs.<sup>20</sup> Henry and his team take their radical stewardship seriously and respond to the call of being aware of what Henry calls “inherited inequities” and taking action as a result to decenter themselves and ensure they are stewards that are entrusted by the community because they accurately represent the community.

Similarly, Phil reflected on how he navigates his embodied identities to communicate with participants: “I realized that a lot of the work that I try to do nonverbally at the beginning of an intake or relationship with a youth client is to try to make myself smaller.” Phil is aware of how his body conveys privilege as a white man which might be off-putting or suspicion-inducing for his participants and thus perpetuate the trauma of living in a society that privileges and values some bodies over others. To make himself smaller he sits further back in his chair, he doesn’t talk as much, and he doesn’t interrupt or speak in a loud voice or tone. Phil’s self-awareness is loving because he understands how social hierarchies use his body to historically privilege his identities over the identities of his clients. By making himself “smaller” he not only seeks to interrupt that unearned privilege but also demonstrates to participants that he is aware of their lived experiences with social systems that oppress them and how bodies such as his have been

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<sup>20</sup> Henry applies a similar approach when facilitating cases with significant gender differences and where there has been intimate partner violence against women. He and his team make sure that the facilitation team in those cases consists of someone who identifies as a woman and someone who identifies as a man to accurately represent the parties. It was also because Henry had noticed that having a man as a co-facilitator meant that “certain kinds of communications and certain kinds of questions [seemed] to land in a more useful way with participants if they came from the male.” In this way, they relied on socially constructed differences regarding gender to communicate more effectively by attending to the parties’ preconceived assumptions about gender. The co-facilitator who was a man could enact allyship. Including a co-facilitator who was a woman served the same purpose to empower the harmed party who was a woman and make sure she felt represented and seen. It wasn’t just about having an ally in the room because that wouldn’t be enough to make her feel safe but to have accompaniment as well from someone who could relate to her lived experience. Such deliberate design choices around social identities is a powerful interruption of the ways in which patriarchy and white settler colonialism not only have no regard for who is in the room but also design a room to centralize privileged identities and thus communication.

responsible for creating and perpetuating those systems. Furthermore, Phil recognizes that he is a body in the room and must take his embodied presence into account and not ignore his own physical impact on the space and relationship-building with the participants. He isn't an abstract entity but an embodied one and while he doesn't make himself the center of attention in the container, he doesn't ignore his impact.

Another practice of radical stewardship occurs outside of the dialogues for some facilitators who work as professionals in RJ. Phil and Henry both shared that they also spend time talking to gatekeepers and using their positions as leaders in the field to advocate and be the voices for people who don't have access to the same rooms that they do because of their privilege. For instance, Phil received the majority of his training from Indigenous communities and Elders and thus uses his privilege as a white man to enter into spaces and share the teachings he's received: "And so part, of that responsibility I was mentioning as a white presenting male body human is where I have privilege or get granted permission to be able to be in that space, a lot of the responsibility that comes with that. [I] also try to stick my feet indoors and try to open the way for others to come in who may not get granted that just by default." Henry similarly shared: "I'm a middle-aged white guy who doesn't mind speaking in front of people. So, with gatekeepers broadly that goes over well. There's also sort of noticing that as part of an overall movement for liberation that's just one of the roles and it works for me."

Both Henry and Phil represent enacting EDL through radical stewardship by their hyper awareness of their embodied identities as straight white men. They represent dominant privileged identities and their presence in dialogue has the potential to represent RJ as an extension of the state. They seek to interrupt that representation by decentering their whiteness. They adopt a racial consciousness to be hyper aware about their embodied impact by recognizing that their

whiteness is present and implicated in the room. By making themselves smaller or removing themselves from the process, Henry and Phil work to participate in decolonize RJ settings by centralizing participants of color rather than perpetuating the entitlement and fragility of white supremacy that seeks to take up as much space as possible to control the dialogue and space. Their standpoints help them to have a heightened awareness of their participation in systems of power and offer a critical self-removal to interrupt those systems.

Steve also shared an example of how she was able to practice humility and orient herself toward listening rather than controlling. She shared an example of a case she worked where she and her co-facilitator were both white women facilitating for two young women of color and how she and her co-facilitator imposed communication standards that didn't fit the needs of the participants and actually impeded their healing: "We went into it with the dominant facilitator idea of having them sit, and politely talk to each other at the table, and it just was not working. They were both getting so angry...at some point they were shutting down. They were getting angry that we were like, 'okay, did you hear what she said? Can you reframe what they said? And how does that feel?'" Eventually, Steve and her co-facilitator backed off and let the participants communicate in the way that was most comfortable for them and she said, "they just started yelling at each other, and frankly, within a minute they had gotten through it, and they resolved their conflict on their own, that what they needed out of it, and all we did was sit there and watch." Ultimately, such an experience reminded and taught Steve the importance of "approaching with a lot of humility and respect for the fact that they know their story, and they know it better than me, and they know what's best for them." What I appreciated about Steve's comments is how she represented a lack of fear and instead embodied humility toward what she didn't know. This is what Goens-Bradley encourages more white facilitators to do: "Part of

overcoming the white supremacy frame involves rejecting the need for getting-it-right perfection. The other part requires embracing a stance of humility and engagement, while engaging in the important work (consistent with our RP commitments) of promoting genuine equity and community” (Goens-Bradley, 2020, p. 50). Rather than devolve into defensiveness and double down on the participants and force them to follow their standards because they were so worried about failure and imperfection, Steve and her co-facilitator opted to be humble and engage with participants equitably in a way that centralized their needs and community engagement.

The practices white facilitators report employing demonstrate EDL because they are oriented to understanding different experiences, confronting and interrupting their own biases, and centralizing the voices and needs of those who experience marginalization. By self-silencing, radical listening, respecting the choices of participants, creating opportunities for agency, and recognizing when to not only decenter but fully remove themselves from the process so as to not perpetuate coloniality and white supremacy, are all ways in which facilitators practicing EDL through radical stewardship demonstrate their commitment to care and building relationships with participants. As radical stewards, they follow the cues of marginalized voices and work to decenter privileged identities. Henry’s self-removal is a powerful example of how embodiment means stepping out of the spotlight and risking “losing privilege” for the sake of change and collective liberation. These facilitators use EDL to shape their radical stewardship by being oriented towards different lived experiences, creating containers for shared power, and interrupting oppressive power structures and histories of marginalization to pursue healing and self-determination.

They can craft environments that are dedicated to healing from the respective harm and the trauma of social structures by self-regulating and decentralizing their privilege by

confronting it and being part of social history rather than removed from it. They make more opportunities for participants to be their whole selves and see them holistically rather than a narrow definition of human. As a result, these facilitators can contribute to the decolonial and community-driven efforts of RJ through radical stewardship through their own micro-decolonization of themselves. They are aware of their internalized privilege and radically interrupt it in their communication behaviors which then hopefully results in the scaffolding of macro decolonization of RJ settings and the social structures it interacts with. To build trust and vulnerability, discomfort and self-reflection are necessary. To create environments for healing, seeing the whole picture of participants' lived experiences is necessary. To create transformative social change, grappling with racial history, colonialism, and power is necessary. EDL does not run from these necessary elements but pursues them out of love and recognition of embodiment.

#### *Missed Opportunities for EDL: How Humanizing Ignores the Whole Human*

While some facilitators enacted EDL through radical stewardship, there were others whose discomfort with racialized identity and confronting whiteness created a barrier that hindered their enactment of radical stewardship and consequently EDL.

Gale was hyper aware and hypersensitive to her positionality as a white woman. Gale demonstrated her hyper awareness by recognizing how she needed to temper her involvement in RJ and not assume an entitlement that she would automatically benefit the participants which reflects radical stewardship because she decentralized herself and took cues from leaders of color. Gale shared that she waited to be invited to become a facilitator rather than immediately sign up because she didn't want to take up that space especially given how her program works with youth of color. She shared that she practices her radical stewardship by taking cues from the leaders and facilitators of color around her rather than imposing her own opinions and ideas of how to meet the needs of a population that she doesn't represent. Therefore, like Henry, Gale

practices radical stewardship through self-removal and decentralizing her whiteness. Gale shared, “Folks of color know what needs to be done and know what needs to be said. And so I see it as really more appropriate for them to be having those conversations and I see myself more as a support person within the organization. And I said, when I first came in, ‘how can I support your work?’” Gale decentralizes herself from conversations that she knows aren’t entirely necessary for her to be part of because she wants to interrupt how her whiteness takes up space and instead shifts to take up as little space as possible.

At the same time, Gale expressed that she didn't want participants to make assumptions about her whiteness and their perceptions about her involvement. She shared that one time, a participant of color expressed that she was there to “assuage white guilt.” Gale said, “that wasn't why I was there, but I can understand how that can be perceived. So, I was very sensitive to that.” What’s interesting about this comment is that Gale assumed her whiteness was passively communicating white guilt. Absent from her reflections is a consideration of how her behaviors or communication was portraying white guilt or the ways in which she communicated to be curious about why she was being perceived in that way. Gale wants her participants to see beyond her whiteness.

Miriam, another older white woman facilitator similarly shared her awareness of her own privileged identities and her concern with how her privilege comes across to participants as a “nice white [do-gooder] that [is] retired and living in their nice houses:

I can't change somebody's preconceived notions, prejudice is about me. But I can show I am in control of how much sincerity and honesty and directness I can show with a nice layer of compassion while I speak...Yes, I know how this looks. I get it. I can imagine it. I've been in a room of a bunch of old guys before as the only that's as close as I've come to, knowing that they can't possibly get me, and they may not want to...And I can't change that. I can't change how you feel. All I can do is with my actions and what I try to help you with, you may come to see that I actually care about what happens to you and

kids like you. And that's why I'm doing it. It's not about me. So, if you can not make it about me, we'll get more done.

Miriam's awareness of her own privileged identities is important. At the same time, her self removal or decentralization of her own identities doesn't demonstrate a willingness to address how those identities impact the relationships in the room. Her efforts to focus entirely on the participants and their harm essentially makes race their problem and not hers. She doesn't see herself as implicated in the larger structures of harm especially when she says "if you can not make it about me, we'll get more done." And yet she attempts to relate to them by situating her womanhood as a target identity which means she partially understands what it feels like to not belong or be in a room where she isn't represented. She says this to indicate that she has experience with not being able to control how she is perceived neither by agents or other targets. Yet immediately delegitimizes this positionality by saying she doesn't have control anyway and so she doesn't concern herself with it and neither should participants.

Reflected in Gale and Miriam's comments is this desire to be simply human without the labels which is similar to how Cindy, Edith, and Edward also wanted to operate in RJ without labels. The difference between white facilitator's desire and facilitators' of color desire is power and privilege. White facilitators see social identity as a hindrance and obligation and obstacle that gets in the way of human connections. This is because race doesn't structure their daily lives in the same way as it does for facilitators of color and the individual moment it does within dialogue can feel really big because white facilitators aren't accustomed to it. This is the tricky part of decentralizing self with radical stewardship; just because a white facilitator removes themselves doesn't mean they still aren't implicated by the social structures that exist around them and the dialogue. It is a necessary part of relationship-building to address social identity because the facilitator is part of the relationship. At the same time, the closer in proximity to the state the

more likely participants perceive facilitators as extensions of the state. While uncomfortable, it is important for white facilitators to sit in the discomfort and vulnerability and accountability.

Currently, Gale and Miriam seem to reflect a missed opportunity for engaging in EDL due to their discomfort in addressing their own implications of racialization. By making race something that is a concern for the participants rather than themselves, these facilitators inhibit their opportunities to practice the embodiment of EDL because they inhibit their chance to acknowledge and address their own lived experiences with privilege and the harm of living under social systems which produce unearned privilege. Additionally, by pursuing “humanness,” that ignores social constructions that make up what it means to be human and valued or not by society, facilitators are only accessing a partial understanding of humanness and the lived experiences of their participants.

The idea of pursuing participant’s humanity appeared also in Violet, Gary, and Annie’s comments. They operated from the perspective that they could understand participants because they knew what it meant to be human and to make mistakes. Like Gale and Miriam, these facilitators humanized the participants yet ignored elements of their human experience such as being racialized and the social structures that create physical and material consequences for human lived experiences.

Violet’s belief in the goodness of people is what drew her to RJ work because RJ work is rooted in assumptions of human goodness and valuing every person no matter what they do. Violet went on to explain that she tries to empathize with responsible parties by asking herself what it would feel like to constantly be defined by the harm they caused. She shared that she remembers causing harm and doing bad things as a kid but “for the grace of God” did not get caught. For Violet, being human means making mistakes and she has memories of making

mistakes that hurt others in her past. Thus, she doesn't judge responsible parties and is oriented lovingly toward them because she understands that a condition of humanity is to make mistakes but that shouldn't define anyone because everyone does it. Violet reflects a humble stewardship by not putting herself above others and instead adopts a relational and empathetic approach. At the same time, she doesn't operationalize a radical approach or framework because she doesn't mention how as a white woman she had the privilege to not "get caught." She understands on an individual interpersonal level but doesn't connect it to a larger social and structural level.

Gary, an older white man, similarly adopts the assumption that humans inherently make mistakes but should not be defined by them or isolated from their communities because of their mistakes. Because Gary believes that humans can learn from their mistakes, he is drawn to RJ because it is a space where that learning can occur. Nevertheless, when asked about race, Gary either struggled to express his racial consciousness or was strategically ambiguous and instead opted for describing his colorblind approach to respecting all people "regardless of whatever their conditions or status" because "the worst thing we can do to somebody is to ignore them."

Gary's description of how he approaches all people with respect is valuable and reflects an empathetic orientation toward RJ work. At the same time, throughout our dialogue, Gary never mentioned race despite my attempts to bring it up and ask him about it. He maintained a colorblind approach and shared experiences and stories of how he grew up in multicultural areas and maintained his belief that the criminal-legal system is the necessary authority. Gary's theoretical framework underlying his stewardship is the belief that humans make mistakes and should be respected regardless. However, absent from his framework was an awareness of how those "mistakes" affect people differently or how mistakes are even defined and judged differently for people due to racialization and colonization.

Annie, an older white woman, is aligned with Gary and Violet in that they all recognize that a condition of humanity is to make mistakes and change and grow from them. Mistakes should not define someone, and other humans have no right to judge someone because of them. Annie shared, “I like this idea of connecting with people in that we're human, always trying to do better rather than come out with these judgments of good, bad, right, wrong.” For Annie, it is important to see that someone is trying to change or do better after causing harm rather than determining as the authority what can be defined as good, bad, right, or wrong. At the root of Annie’s framework is her own understanding of her humanity and experiences making mistakes in the past. She perceives that sometimes participants assume that she comes across as “the law-abiding citizens have done everything right” and that she as a facilitator is not like participants and that there is a separation between them as a result of her identities as an older woman. Yet, she wants to convey that “We're just like you. We're just in this particular set of circumstances...In a different day, different time, different set of circumstances, it could be another one of us sitting here talking about something we've done.” Annie understands that there are different “circumstances” that impact how harm occurs and who gets caught. She wants to relate to parities by sharing her own humanity and attempt to bridge a divide by sharing that she has made mistakes in the past as well. Again, while she is aware of age differences she doesn't include a racial consciousness in her framework. By saying “we're just like you” she washes away differences and strips down to the bare bones identifier of humanity, ignoring the layers of identities in between. Searching for similarities is a very powerful way to bridge and yet it is blind to important differences that enrich the human experience and also determine the circumstances that mean some folks are “caught” and others aren't.

By desiring to set aside social identity and differences and adopting colorblind approaches that overlook structural inequity, these facilitators miss an opportunity to engage the lived experiences of their participants and thus miss an opportunity to engage in EDL. While some of them are aware of the impact of privilege and marginalization, they don't situate themselves within those histories which means they cannot enact embodied love because they aren't recognizing the interconnectedness of social structures, their participant's lived experiences and themselves. This is not to say that these facilitators aren't operating with love or care or empathy for the participants; they clearly are still incredibly devoted to and committed to providing spaces for healing and hope from harm. Their hesitation and partial confrontations of positionality and social systems may hinder the extent to which they can craft spaces where participants can heal from the harms of oppressive structures. EDL through radical stewardship includes an orientation to and centralization of participant needs which requires acknowledging and confronting power and privilege which implicate the facilitator. Without a racial consciousness, EDL falls short and doesn't have the transformative power to address individual harm and the larger harm of social structures. Embracing discomfort, addressing whiteness, and confronting the histories of social identity which impact participants are ways in which facilitators can operate under the EDL framework and foster environments for decolonization, holistic healing, and social change.

## Conclusion

Sacred Accompaniment and Radical Stewardship are two grounded frameworks that emerged from the data as ways in which facilitators employed a racial consciousness within their RJ practice to navigate the social political histories of racism and coloniality that influence the

criminal-legal system, RJ participants, and partnerships. Conceptualizing their facilitator role and practices through sacred accompaniment and/or radical stewardship are ways facilitators operationalize embodied dialogic love because they address contextual inequities between intersectional identities and social histories while situating their participants and themselves within those histories, confront power differences and redistribute power in dialogue, and lovingly position themselves to identify the needs of participants and check their own privilege in the process.

Ultimately, I think both role frameworks underscore the significance and capacity of facilitators to create containers for social change. Facilitators are at the intersection of many tensions: between state agencies and RJ programs, between social systems and participants, between oppressive sociopolitical histories of privilege and marginalization, and between their own biases and practices. From this situatedness, facilitators challenge social structures of racism and coloniality by creating spaces for equity, healing, agency, collaboration, and for participants to be seen and whole. As keepers of the containers, they have a responsibility to have self and social awareness and racial consciousness because harm doesn't just look like the immediate case but the larger social history of racism and colonialism. Sacred accompaniment and radical stewardship are both embodied love in action because facilitators care to create dialogues that take the holistic needs and lived experiences of participants into account and welcome them. Additionally, their own self-awareness and reflection and situatedness within social structures helps them to build trusting relationships and be sensitive the ways in which their own biases might influence the dialogue and interrupt them. Their individual practices represent pathways toward micro decolonization and how EDL guides their efforts and reflection. Of course, there are still opportunities for growth to interrupt the exploitation of facilitators of color and their love

and labor along with creating more opportunities for white facilitators to reflect and develop a racial consciousness. Thus, this chapter is aligned with scholarly conversations regarding the need for racial consciousness within RJ and has hopefully provided some ways in which current facilitators are addressing this need while opening opportunities to address specific issues as identified by practitioners in the field.

## Chapter 3

### Practices of Disruption: Decentering Power in Restorative Justice Facilitation

Throughout the previous two chapters, I have focused primarily on how facilitators perceive the systems they interact with and navigate their perceptions of their own identities and RJ processes to offer meaningful disruptions and social change to institutions through RJ. In this chapter, I build on my discussion of disruptions by analyzing specific communicative practices that facilitators utilize to de-center themselves and be mindful of creating self-determined environments for participants.

These strategies are reminders for facilitators to communicate in specific ways to self-regulate and not default to controlling, punitive approaches. Each of these strategies all orient the facilitator to consistently decentralize themselves and centralize the participants. They aren't about considering every possibility to create a perfect utopian dialoguing environment. They aren't controlling outcomes for participants or categorizing participants to apply certain practices because this would run counter to RJ and EDL by perpetuating static, rigid, domination over the community. *I argue that, with EDL, facilitators work to consistently create meaningful disruptions through concrete communication practices that decenter the facilitator by orienting*

*themselves to the needs of the participants thus interrupting oppressive hierarchies of the criminal-legal system and creating spaces for participants to claim agency to pursue healing that works for them.* It is clear the facilitator has power to impact the process, especially given the pervasive culture of hierarchy, white supremacy, and institutional proximity. The strategies share in this chapter emphasize that RJ is a participant-driven process and “by decentralizing themselves, facilitators can create spaces where healing is co-created by those directly impacted rather than being imposed by an external dictatorial authority that values adversarial, punitive measures” (Irwin, forthcoming). In other words, the following strategies are helpful for facilitators to create dialogic containers for healing *and* situate themselves as communicative models that are oriented toward listening and understanding and meeting the needs of participants. They are practices that help the facilitator continue to interrupt institutional power and interrupt their own capacity as individuals to perpetuate institutional power in dialogues.

## Practices

There are three different practices that facilitators shared that they employ to interrupt oppressive power, lay the groundwork for a safe container where radical listening and communication can occur, and empower participants in their decisions and accountability: (1) identification through humanization, (2) prioritizing self-determination, and (3) co-creating the container. These practices aren't one-size-fits-all or specific step-by-step instructions but elements of a toolkit to help build the respective dialogue in a way that offers meaningful disruptions to institutional power and decenters the facilitator. Not every tool will be used and not every facilitator uses every tool in every dialogue. But they are ways to be oriented and mindsets to adopt to help the dialogue run more smoothly.

### *Identification through humanization*

Facilitators identified with participants by joining with them in their shared humanity and through this shared human identification they could demonstrate that they were part of the same community. They were substantively one in community with one another and thus the facilitator was invested in the parties because they were both joined and separate from them. Facilitators built relationships with parties by dividing/distinguishing themselves from systems of oppression, countering culture of hierarchy, and finding similarities and ways to consubstantiate with parties through their shared humanity.

Facilitators reported that during their first meetings with participants, they spent a lot of time building a relationship with them where they work to identify their role to participants and foster trusting relationships with them. For facilitators who work in close proximity to the criminal-legal system, a lot of their identification work consists of dividing or distinguishing the facilitator role from every other role the participants have encountered in the criminal-legal system such as lawyer, judge, warden, parole officer, police officer, correctional officer, etc.

Alex 1 who volunteers with a state department of corrections (DoC) makes deliberate efforts to communicate to participants that she is not an employee of the DoC and takes time to explicitly distinguish her role as facilitator from every other role in the criminal-legal system. Steve did the same and offered specific language she uses when making the role delineation: “we want to remind you that we're not here representing the criminal justice system. We're not here to tell you what is right or wrong, or what you've done wrong. We're here to work with you and help you get what you need out of this process.” By dividing themselves from the criminal-legal system, both Alex 1 and Steve seek to build trust with the participants.

Facilitators working in diversion programs also find it important to distinguish themselves from the criminal legal system. Despite being more removed from the criminal-legal system, given the nature of referrals, diversion programs still are closely associated with the criminal-legal system which facilitators notice tends to create an association for clients between the diversion program and the criminal-legal system. Archer shares a “spiel” that they usually give to participant in the first meeting to identify and delineate their role as facilitator:

I am not a judge. I'm not the criminal justice system. I'm not here to make decisions for you. I'm not here to make you do anything. I'm here to support... This process is a collaborative process focused on consent. So there's not gonna be any surprises. You get to say yes or no to every decision that we make.

Archer describes this spiel as the beginning of creating a container of trust which helps upon first meetings. What's interesting about Alex 1, Steve, and Archer is how they seek to build trusting relationships with participants by drawing on participants' current knowledge and experience to introduce them to the unfamiliar role of facilitator. Because the facilitator role might be new for many participants, facilitators rely on division to identify. They perceive and acknowledge that the criminal-legal system is based on distrust, control, and judgment. Their intro spiels are an opportunity to demonstrate that they are aware of the parties' experiences up until that point with the criminal-legal system and interrupt those experiences by creating a new space for participants in the dialogue.

Distinguishing the facilitator role from other roles that perpetuate power imbalances is EDL because facilitators orient themselves to understand the experiences of the parties and thus through that effort demonstrate they understand the suffering the parties have experienced and that the facilitators are not there to continue their suffering but be the start of their path to healing. Facilitators care to know and understand their clients' experiences and deliberately work to not perpetuate those experiences in dialogue. As they introduce participants to the new role of

facilitator, they deliberately distinguish between what participants are used to – control and domination – and thus disrupt the perpetuation of oppressive cultures and systems on participants.

Facilitators take time to identify their role to directly counter the culture and ideology of domination that they observe participants are indoctrinated into (Allen, 2011). The ideology of domination is the assumption that there are groups and identities which are superior to others, meaning that the superior have power over the inferior (hooks, 1989). The ideology of domination is deeply embedded in social structures and identities where society stratifies certain groups over others and because it is an ideology, we often perceive this stratification as naturally occurring or normal rather than socially constructed (Allen, 2011). Nowhere is this more salient in schools and prisons where there is a clear hierarchy and stratification; students/youth are inferior to teachers/administrators/adults who are superior, and incarcerated folk are inferior to wardens/correctional officers/state officials who are superior. Such a relationship dehumanizes the inferior and overvalues the supposed superior. The facilitator is often perceived by participants as an extension or continuance of this ideology of inferiority and superiority. Nevertheless, facilitators work to interrupt the ideology of domination by situating themselves as equal to participants and identifying with them based on shared power, humanity, and identity.

For instance, in education-based programs, facilitators like Edward work to interrupt hierarchy and the ageism that privileges adults and marginalizes youth. He provides a hypothetical scenario to describe his perception of how youth experience hierarchy and how his efforts as a facilitator to identify himself as interrupting hierarchy create positive trusting relationships:

If that adult comes in and goes, ‘Hey, we’re on the same level. Let’s be accountable for one another.’ That to me tells me as a young person I can go to this adult, and I can tell

them how they've affected me and I won't be sent off to the principal's office, or won't be handled with a punitive measure. There's a level of that trust. There's a level of that comfort. And that lowers cortisol levels, [allowing] for better learning. It allows for engagement. When the youth feel like they are part of it, and they actually have a voice...My intent is to go into that space and immediately set the tone: We're all the same...We can collaboratively work with them without that hierarchal sense. And so I think that's what RJ tries to stand for.

What's important about Edward's comments is both his hyperawareness of the impact of the hierarchy between adult and youth, and his efforts to identify with youth to disrupt that hierarchy. In his hypothetical scenario, trust is built because Edward works to create a sense of equality among everyone in dialogue. When both adults and youth are able to hold each other accountable and not enact power imbalances, a trusting relationship is built because youth are empowered.

He also acknowledges that he recognizes the impact of stress on youth's bodies when they interact with adults in school settings because they distrust adults and do not perceive themselves as having a voice or choice. Edward engages EDL by having an awareness of the embodied impact of oppression and lovingly orients his dialogue to disrupting oppressive environments by using the dialogue as a container for something new. Like Alex 1, Steve, and Archer, Edward demonstrates that he knows the youth experience and is working to interrupt it and create a new relationship with the facilitator role. He identifies with participants not only by distinguishing himself from what he is not (a perpetuation of punitive, dominating roles), but also by identifying what he is (an ally/advocate who seeks to empower, share power, and put his own body on the line to be implicated in interrupting the ideology of domination); he doesn't just hypothesize about being an adult that youth can trust but practices it as well and that commitment to show up in embodied loving practice through dialogue is how he works to build trusting relationships with participants because he follows through. The facilitator role is an embodied practice demonstrating commitment to disrupting historic systems and patterns of

power by decentering the facilitator and identifying the facilitator as a supportive resource rather than authority.

The role of the facilitator is automatically afforded a sense of authority given how Western cultures operate with a culture of hierarchy and ideology of domination. Cindy shared that she noticed this when she first started facilitating where her participants would look to her for cues on how they should communicate and to be the authority that policed how people showed up in a circle. Cindy had to explicitly state that her role was to be in community and not a regulator or authority with the power to determine or judge the validity of anyone in a circle. Edith also worked to translate her role and deconstruct the hierarchy her participants were accustomed to: “in this pedestal the image is of a triangle with the top down pyramid. And my job as an artist is to see this human dynamic sculpture and then reshape it into a circle.” Edith doesn’t want to be at the top of the pyramid but instead connected as a link and resource of support in a circle with participants. Again, like Alex 1, Steve, Archer, and Edward, Edith and Cindy are sensitive to expectations of their participants and must first address those expectations in order to identify in a new way to identify. These efforts to disrupt ideologies of domination are as much for participants as they are for facilitators to reinforce their role as stewards rather than rulers. Identification is a strategy to decentralize the facilitator and centralize the participants because facilitators “hope these strategies demonstrate to parties that facilitators perceive RPs as more than just their mistake and HPs as more than just a victim. They also want HPs and RPs to perceive facilitators as more than just a cog in the criminal-legal system, but as a human who cares for them and is distinct from the oppressive machine of adjudication” (Irwin, forthcoming). Such framing of the facilitator role is EDL because the facilitator recognizes that participants are the ones who hold the knowledge of their experiences and thus should be empowered to make

decisions for themselves. Being a facilitator who perpetuates a hierarchy runs counter to the loving approach and mindset of empowering the participants.

Some facilitators such as Violet explicitly avoid using any titles or referring to themselves through titles if they have them in a professional setting such as lawyer, therapist, teacher, etc. Instead, they identify as mere community members wanting to make a difference. Violet's decision comes from her belief that titles would create distance or division in the relationship and reinforce the culture of hierarchy. Emily even goes so far as to share that she is uncomfortable with being referred to as an "expert" in her work setting because that title reinforces a hierarchy based on knowledge. She recognizes RJ as collaborative, and she has a piece of the puzzle but not the whole puzzle itself. Each of these choices for facilitators to carefully identify by dividing themselves from oppressive power and begin to create something new means facilitators reject the *power over* participants and instead collaborate to create *power with*.

### *Self-determination*

For many facilitators, self-determination looks like creating a space where participants feel they have a choice and voice. "That's what this work is all about: coming back to agency and choice, around what you need, what your healing looks like, what your journey looks like," said Cindy. "We really do work on trying to build a sense of self-efficacy in them and pointing out to them that they took the reins. They have power and the tools," offered Miriam. "Who has the least amount of choice? And how can I be a force for bringing that to them?" explained Anna. Cindy, Miriam, and Anna each exemplify a necessary mindset and strategy for facilitating: being "non-directive" according to Umbreit and Armour (2010). To empower self-determination, facilitators create opportunities for participants to enact agency and make choices throughout

dialogue such as having a say in who facilitates them and consenting to every decision in dialogue.

From the very beginning of the process, facilitators seek to prioritize the self determination of the participants by empowering them to have a voice and choice in who their facilitator is (if that is within the capacity of the respective program to offer). Sophie explained:

We, as facilitators, have a very critical responsibility to listen to the needs of the community. And that includes who would be the facilitators... [I] ask them the question, 'would you like to have a say in who is your facilitator? Because we want to uphold that. The facilitator is an optimal representation of your needs, of your perspectives, of your background...the most important thing is to give them that power, to give our community and our stakeholders the power to have some kind of say. Who's going to be stewarding them along here?

Reflected in Sophie's comments is her awareness that participants need to be able to identify with facilitators in order to trust them sometimes. She doesn't want to just say they're part of a community, she wants to also be able to embody it. She knows that she might not always be what the participants needs and humbly accepts removing herself from the dialogue to centralize their needs and not replicate systems that impose or control by not giving participants a choice. At the same time, her use of the word "steward" reflects her perception of the facilitator as a role that is not controlling or dominating or perpetuating oppressive traditions for parties. A steward is a representative of a community and must be trusted by the community, which is how Sophie perceives the role of the facilitator and seeks to uphold her commitment to that by giving choice in who facilitates the dialogue. Sophie disrupts the traditional expectations of the criminal-legal system's procedures by creating opportunities for participants to choose who represents them rather than having that decision made for them. Sophie also decentralizes the facilitator role and herself by conceptualizing the facilitator as one in service to the community rather than authority or judge over the community. By practicing EDL, Sophie orients herself toward what the participants need to achieve healing which means creating opportunities for participants to self-

determine such as choosing their own facilitator (which also means decentralizing herself and her own assumptions that she is the best facilitator and authority in every case).

Steve also shared that she and the people in her program work to accommodate the needs of participants as best they can when participants express their desire for a facilitator that represents them. Nevertheless, many facilitators expressed that being able to find facilitators that meet the parties' needs can be difficult given the dominant pool of facilitators is mostly educated white men and women and they don't wish to tokenize the few Black and Brown facilitators on their roster. This once again emphasizes the need to create more pipelines and opportunities for facilitators of color and collaboration with communities of color for institutionalized RJ.

Another way to scaffold self-determination is to constantly seek consent from the participants regarding every step of the process. Sophie does this by using a very strategic phrase: "would you be willing?" This phrase serves to gently nudge a participant in a helpful direction while also centering their choice:

I'll acknowledge the person who was harmed, who just shared their impacts. Then I'll turn and ask, 'would you be willing, person who caused harm, to reflect back what you think might have been the most important parts of what was just shared about that impacted them? And so then they share... I'll [ask the harmed party], 'Well, do you feel like they heard what you really meant to share? And is there anything else that you'd like to share?' So we go back and forth that way until it feels like there's a really strong connection between those 2 people of the meaning of the impact and of the specifics of it, too. And once that has been done to exhaustion, to a depth that it can go no further, there is a transformative energy there.

Sophie's "would you be willing?" phrasing seeks to empower participants by asking for their agreement and level of comfort in communicating. Rather than demand that participants share with one another or force them to disclose information that they are not comfortable with sharing, the facilitator opens the opportunity for the participant to choose what is important for them to express. Sophie isn't demanding or coercive to participants which represents her disruption of how the criminal-legal system often operates by creating intimidating and

compulsory environments where participants over-disclose or withhold information. Instead, her question reflects her EDL practice by seeking to empower participants to be in a dialogic environment that values agency, trust, and vulnerability for the sake of healing. Additionally, she decenters herself by placing the onus on participants to decide what they communicate rather than meet her standards of what they should or should not share.

Facilitators such as Archer, Emily, and Daisy focus on building self-determination through consent. Archer makes communicative connections between collaboration and consent. They explain that every decision that must be made during dialogue is one that is made collaboratively and with the consent of the participants:

That's part of what I like to do to share power and also make sure that my identities are not taking up too much space by really focusing it on participants and their voices and also centering consent. So I feel like that goes hand in hand with collaboration. Every decision that is made is said yes to or is consented to by everyone in the room. And if someone doesn't like a decision, then we talk about it more, and we talk about why. In other words, Archer constructs a collaborative space where everyone has a voice by ensuring that everyone consistently understands and agrees to the expectations and guidelines of the dialogue. By upholding collaborative meaning-making, Archer upholds a principle of dialogue and ensures that they address power differentials by making everyone in dialogue have an equal say in consenting to what the space looks like.

Emily shares this value of consent: “the person being able to feel empowered and to show up and say yes, to the things that feel right for them, and no to the things that don't in terms of what they want to prioritize in their response.” Being able to say yes or no and holding opportunities for saying yes or no are important for Emily to begin building participant's agency after experiencing the criminal-legal environments where they were likely never given a choice or voice. Daisy explained that sometimes when drafting agreements, participants will ask for suggestions and then the facilitator will offer some with qualifiers that remind participants that

they don't have to include anything they don't want to include: “when people have no idea what to possibly include for an agreement, because they've never done anything like this before. Of course, I'll offer suggestions, and like we'll repeat so many times, ‘It's just an idea. Don't commit to it if it doesn't feel right.’” In a similar fashion to Emily, Daisy understands that participants are not usually given an opportunity to make choices for themselves, so the process is unfamiliar to them. Emily and Daisy’s compassion and patience in helping participants unlearn their lack of agency and build their self-determination is indicative of the love aspect of EDL.

Annie shared an example of how to enact the self-determination of participants in a way that honors them and centralizes their needs while also collaboratively generating agreements is a story where she drafted an Agreement with participants. She explained that they had reached the end of the dialogue and, as they drafted agreements, they were at a loss for actionable items to include that felt meaningful to the changes the participants wanted to make. Annie remembered that a participant had mentioned how much they enjoyed making music. Annie offered making and performing music as a suggestion for the Agreement and she described the participant as lighting up and excitedly agreeing to that being part of their Agreement. Annie took that as a lesson to not only make an effort to get to know who the participants are as people and to know their interests but also to tailor their communication to centralizing the participants' self-determination. Rather than impose her own suggestions for agreement, Annie relied on her knowledge of participants to create something meaningful to them. She practiced EDL by demonstrating her orientation to learn about participants and create Agreements that centralized who *they* were rather than who she wanted them to be or do.

Annie also addressed the involuntary nature of the diversion and called out the contradiction of RJ being voluntary but the diversion program feeling involuntary because the

alternative is the criminal court system. During dialogues, she acknowledges it and then adds, ““But we're doing everything we can to give you autonomy and agency in this process. So, if we start asking questions, and it feels like we're going the wrong direction, you tell us, and we'll stop. If you are uncomfortable with a suggestion we've made, we want to know that. If you wanna break, we wanna know that.’ So I really try to say, ‘You're the driver of this process. We are here to support you. We're the people that bring process, but no content.’” Annie’s efforts to reclaim the agency and self-determination of participants is EDL because she cares for the participants and creates opportunities for them to use their voice. It also demonstrates her efforts to disrupt the oppressive and controlling culture of the criminal-legal system from entering the dialogue. She acknowledges what participants are accustomed to which helps to demonstrate she is aware of their lived experiences with the harms of the criminal-legal system. Then, she clearly distinguishes a difference between the criminal-legal system and RJ dialogue by identifying the dialogue as a space for agency and voice and support.

Emphasizing the self determination of the participants is powerful because it disrupts the oppressive messaging of systems like the criminal legal system that emphasizes that people have no control. Being able to have a choice and a voice is empowering. Cindy shared that her experience with the self determination of RJ meant that she as a participant and facilitator was able to realize her own personal power:

There was this realization that I have the power to express what I need, and I have the power to show up the way I need to show up. I'm not being asked to perform and to be something, and that felt so damn powerful. And I think that's a shift that happens in circle work. I see it all the time. Every time a new circle starts. You see that power shift in people. I'm taking on my own power. But I get to choose here. But you and I know in some power places people make all these decisions for you, and they don't know you, and they don't know what you want. And so we're not trying to do that. Rather than having someone make decisions for you and impose their decisions on you without you having a voice in the matter, facilitators create a space where you can make decisions for

yourself and have a voice in how the room is constructed. For Cindy, self determination is power.

### *Co-creating the container*

What's important for facilitators to remember is that there isn't an exact blueprint or script for facilitating. This is because the self-determined, voluntary, and empowering nature of RJ is focused on what the participants need and that will be very different depending on each case and participant. At the same time, a RJ is a process and while facilitators can tailor the process as they see fit, they should trust the generations that have developed the process rather than throw it out the window completely and start from scratch with each new case (Umbreit and Armour, 2010). Facilitators had different important elements they maintained to co-creating the container for dialogue: never skipping pre-conference, having a values-oriented activity to establish shared meaning, and co-creating communication expectations.

Facilitators like Sophie expressed that it is still very important for facilitators to ensure they meet milestones during the process to set necessary expectations that can provide a sense of grounding and safety to participants. Expectations must be established to create a container that feels safe. Sophie explained that without following the process, the facilitator could cause more harm:

There are important process pathway points that you cannot skip. You must not, or it will cause more harm. Skipping pre-conferencing, and pre-work, and just bringing people together right away, will almost inevitably cause more harm. And it also increases the likelihood that we're recycling the trauma of power structures that are unequal. The pre-conference and pre-work itself is an art of de-escalating inequality power over so that that stage of an RJ harm response system in and of itself is a stand for relational trust building, listening needs and unmet needs coming to the surface.

Sophie's comments reflect the power the facilitator has to perpetuate harm if they don't trust the process and rush or impatiently get participants in a room together before they are ready.

Additionally, her comments also reflect how RJ work deliberately contrasts power structures in the way that it holds loving awareness for participants' readiness to confront the harm. Rather than immediately gather all the parties in the same room, facilitators hold pre-conferences where they get to know participants in a 1:1 setting and prepare them for entering into dialogue. Sometimes it takes a lot of work for a harmed party to be ready to confront the responsible party and vice versa. Giving each party the opportunity to meet with the facilitator and work with them until they are ready to engage in dialogue is embodied love in action because it isn't focused on speed or meeting the expectations of external forces. Instead, it is patient and entirely focused on healing as the outcome for parties which means the facilitators and the process must be participant driven. If facilitators ignore the pre-conference part of the process, they risk perpetuating trauma for the parties because they ignore the parties' needs and instead impose their own deadlines and expectations. Upholding the pre-conference is necessary for Sophie because it is a vital opportunity to set expectations for the dialogue, introduce the facilitator role, and identify with the participants. Dialogue environments that are equitable and open and vulnerable and don't just appear out of thin air, especially if people are more accustomed to breathing air that stratifies society and values competition and debate and inequality. Taking the time to prime participants and frame the dialogue and new experiences of sharing power is embodied love because the facilitators model the kind of relationship they are looking for participants to build that is trusting and vulnerable. It's also embodied love because it addresses the pain participants experience through the inequality of the criminal legal system and takes the time to help them unlearn those systems and acknowledge and de-escalate that pain.

Another way to set expectations for the process is to establish the values that participants bring to the dialogue. For example, Monica shared that during pre-conference when she meets

1:1 with the respective participants, she will ask what the collective values in the room are to start building an interconnected relationship where everyone in the room understands one another. She asks, “what are our collective values?” For Monica, she will include her own values to help lay the groundwork, model values identification, and be vulnerable by sharing her own values to build trust with the participant. She shared, “something I always say is leading with love. That's a value that we always bring up, and being respectful, and being authentic. And we always give space for the other, you to say, what are their values? How are we gonna move throughout this process?” Monica explicitly enacts EDL by incorporating love as one of the values she includes to frame the dialoguing environment. She also enacts EDL by creating a space that everyone is responsible for co-creating by seeking input from participants on their values. By taking the opportunity to establish shared meanings in the dialogue, Monica establishes that everyone and their values matter in the space and the space is designed for collaboration rather than competition. She models the kinds of communication that she hopes to see by orienting everyone toward collectivity. Furthermore, identifying values from the beginning is a way to share similarities among participants, and humanize one another because they can understand each other through their values rather than the harm. It is a loving approach to humanize and frame everyone in the room. Unlike the traditional criminal-legal system that maintains values of domination, exclusion, and supremacy, Monica creates a space where everyone’s values matter and contribute to a collective culture focused on healing.

At the same time, identifying values is a way to also understand differences. Sophie offered the example of how she might invite participants into generating a shared understanding of the word “respect” to initiate the process of identifying different perspectives rooted in different backgrounds and worldviews and how to find points of commonality between them

equally. Difference isn't scary or suppressed in order to make everyone the same and marginalize anyone who is different, as is the case in the criminal-legal system. Instead, difference is a necessary contributor to creating creative and inclusive spaces and to understand the distance between our meanings.

Edward shared that his values-orientation process usually consists of saying, "This is how I communicate. How do you communicate?" Similarly to Monica, Edward opens the space for collaboration and co-creating opportunities to set expectations in dialogue. The process also provides safety by giving anchors in accountability. For instance, Edward explained that taking time to establish communication expectations can help further down the line if anyone deviates from those expectations during dialogue. They provide a foundation on which to build as well as return to for everyone in the dialogue to be held accountable to. The expectations are something everyone agrees to and any deviation from them can be called out as a break in the collective agreement that everyone came to, not just a standard the facilitator sets. Edward said, "I also think by upholding those agreements. You're re-ensuring the safety of everyone involved." By making sure the guidelines are upheld, the facilitator can demonstrate in a concrete way that the guidelines are meaningful and not just performative. This helps to reinforce safety for participants who distrust the dialogue given their history with oppressive and untrustworthy systems. Henry added that the process helps promote safety so there are no surprises for participants especially regarding the role of the facilitator. Henry shared that when he establishes communication guidelines and expectations for his role, he will explain when and why he might need to interject during the dialogue: "If I make an intervention here would be why I would do it. Here's what it would sound like. And so I think that lessens the sort of jarring impact if I do make an intervention in the midst of a dialogue because they already know I'm going to sound

like this and hopefully, maybe they can remember the reasoning behind it.” Without taking the time to establish guidelines for communication and co-create a structure, there wouldn’t be trust between facilitator and participants.

Archer shared 3 basic communication expectations that they introduce to participants and how they open discussion for consent on those expectations:

We're going to respect each other. We're going to listen silently when people are talking...And we're going to participate in this process in good faith, meaning we're here to genuinely try to solve this conflict. Those are the 3 that I present to folks and then I give them the opportunity to say yes or no, and why? And discuss that, add more, take some away...it definitely is a power thing to be like, ‘okay, I'm making us have guidelines,’ but I try to make it as collaborative as possible; guiding people, but not making people agree to guidelines that don't work for them.

Archer sets expectations by modeling some of the communication guidelines that will frame the dialogue. In this way, Archer is able to demonstrate an unfamiliar way of communicating for parties that is different from the criminal-legal system. At the same time, Archer doesn’t just impose those guidelines but seeks consent from the participants in order to co-create the dialogue. Thus, Archer enacts EDL through seeking consent and co-creating the container. Archer also recognizes that as the facilitator they have the power to frame the dialogue and create a new space for shared meaning making. Nevertheless, this power isn’t demanding or dominating but power that is collaborative. Facilitators don’t run from the power or small influence they have because they immediately share it with the participants and ensure everyone has equal power.

Setting values is a way to model the kind of communication that facilitators want to encourage from participants in the dialogue. For instance, by setting communication guidelines, Sophie shared that they serve as an invitation to show participants how to ask questions and to “speak honestly about their concerns” and to share their doubts to facilitators. It is a way to begin unlearning the culture of hierarchy because participants can ideally hold facilitators accountable

and advocate for their needs in a way they wouldn't be able to in the criminal-legal system.

Additionally, Edward explained that setting communication guidelines help to set the tone for the dialogue and provide a base for how youth can communicate with adults and each other because everyone is held to the same standard that they co-created. Henry offered a compelling description of how he sets expectations in a way that balances the self determination of participants, decenters the facilitator, and co-creates a safe container for dialogue:

It's another opportunity to share the power to create the experience. My framing is usually something like, 'here are the guidelines that I would recommend that we use for our communication. Will all of those work for you? Are there any others that you think we would need for you to be able to have the conversation you need to have?' And so it's both that I have exerted a lot of influence by setting their expectations and hopefully naming the guidelines that over decades and thousands of cases around the country has sort of been honed down to, and also giving an opportunity for them to name even at the process level if there's something that they need to do differently...So we're very much setting up the process that we think will help. And then we're also identifying places where we can ask people to make choices if they want to not to make choices, ask people to exert their own influence on how the process goes.

Henry's process reveals the impact of how setting expectations not only creates safety but also offers an opportunity to invite participants into co-creating a self-determined space. Rather than ask them to self-determine from the very beginning, facilitators offer a scaffolding that they invite participants into building together. Henry doesn't reinvent the wheel when establishing communication guidelines because doing so would disregard the work other practitioners have put in. Additionally, reinventing the guidelines would ignore the ancestors and elders who preserved the process and the values for centuries and that we make use of today. The process has been honed over many generations and facilitators should not be afraid of being part of the RJ process. Unlike the criminal-legal system's pursuit of justice, which is punitive, oppressive, judgmental, and rigid with zero flexibility for participant input, Henry perceives RJ and his role as facilitator as continuously emphasizing the participant-driven nature of the process. Co-creating expectations where the facilitator brings some guidelines and opens opportunities for the

participants to exert influence and consent to those guidelines exemplifies EDL. The facilitator stewards the dialogue space for collaboration and co-created communication guidelines and agreements ensures that the dialogue environment is equal and focused on collective understanding and shared power.

Each facilitator, in their unique way, shifts power dynamics from "power over" to "power with," creating environments where participants feel valued, empowered, and supported. By shifting from directive to collaborative approaches, they redefine the role of facilitation as a shared journey toward understanding and growth. Co-creating the container is strategy facilitators employ to model communication behaviors for participants. It is also a way for facilitators to foster spaces for participants to reclaim their agency.

## Decentering self

Ultimately, each of these three practices –identification through humanization, fostering self-determination, and co-creating the container – are all ways in which facilitators design a participant-driven process that decenters the facilitator. Decentering the self as practice is as much an effort facilitators make for the participants as it is a reminder for themselves on how to show up in the space and check their own biases, assumptions, goals, and desired outcomes for the dialogue. One of the principles of facilitating is to not make the dialogue “facilitator-centered” (Gurien, et al, 2013, p. 53). RJ scholar and practitioner Mark Umbreit and Marilyn Armour (2010) elaborate on how facilitators must decenter themselves by moving “away from their own lives and enter a space that allows them to focus fully on what they are observing and experiencing in the present without interfering with it. This transition internally aligns [facilitators] with what is around them, opens them to see anew because thinking and judgment

are suspended, lets them view others from the heart, and grounds them in a sense of reverence for human existence, personal truth, and the healing that needs to happen” (p. 246). In other words, facilitators must remain aware of their own triggers, biases, assumptions, and lived experiences that might “clutter” their minds or come to the center of the dialogue and direct the dialogue toward facilitator goals if left unchecked. Decentering self clears room for the facilitator to truly and deeply listen to the participants because the participants are the only important element that exists for facilitators in dialogue. The client’s priorities and needs take the forefront.

Phil summarized his role and the efforts he makes to decenter himself as such: “when I’m acting as a facilitator and holding that space, my main role is to ask questions and find the best questions to ask that help shine a spotlight on what’s really going on and what they need, and to help understand impact, too.” Phil added that his only agenda is focused on how participants impact each other. Phil focuses the spotlight entirely on the participants and works to ensure that when he asks questions they come from a place of nonjudgmental curiosity and prioritizing the needs of the participants. Thus, Phil practices deep listening to decenter himself. He radically listens not to respond but to understand (Joseph, forthcoming; Joseph & Briscoe-Smith, 2021).

To communicate with participants that they are decentering themselves and centering participants, facilitators use explicit phrasing and language as signals. For example, Violet shared that she often says, “what will help you?” which she perceived as offering support rather than forcing participants to do things they didn’t want to do or that didn’t meet their needs or being judgmental. Daisy similarly shared that she used phrases such as “I’m not here to tell you what you need. I’m not here to tell you what to do. I’m here to work together, to work with you and I’m flexible.” Daisy’s constant gentle reminders are ways in which she communicates to participants that she is creating a space that adapts to them rather than them adapting to the

space. Her flexibility and collaboration are exhibited in her working around participant's schedules and transportation needs. Violet and Daisy's phrases communicate to participants that they as facilitators are not the focus of the dialogue. They desire to collaborate and meet participants where they are at without allowing their own expectations or assumptions to interfere in their work.

Phil, Violet, and Daisy's communication practices are EDL because they are oriented to the needs of the participants and truly care about them. When they listen to their participants, they demonstrate that they seek to understand in a way that their own assumptions and biases won't interfere which is also reflected in the way they ask questions that are curious and put the agency and onus on participants to share their needs. Willow summarized her own approach to decentering self:

We're just holding a space. We're just brokering a safe space for the dialogue to happen. It shouldn't have anything to do with us. We're quietly in the background, making sure things don't go off the rails in any way. I am just there listening. I shouldn't have to say anything. We will only interject if something's going to create further harm. We might recommend [taking] a break but I don't want my personal body, or anything that has to do with me to be in the way because it's not about me.

Willow's situates her "fading into the background" as something that happens once dialogue between participants begins. She perceives that if she's done the necessary priming and preparing of each party before dialogue, she doesn't have to take up any space in dialogue at all and just hold the container. Her decentering self and self-removal are embodied because she mentions she tries not to speak during dialogue. Her complete commitment to the parties' needs is embodied because she interrupts any opportunity to make the dialogue about herself by avoiding interjecting during dialogue unless absolutely necessary.

Anna explains that she has observed other facilitators who have centered themselves in such a way that she has found it to be disempowering to participants. She perceives these

facilitators as enacting a level of attachment to the dialogue and the participants as conveying, “we walked through this together, and that you only would have been successful if I were there.” Anna doesn’t want that to be the message she conveys to her participants. She seeks to decenter herself and thus she shared that the message she’d rather be conveyed to participants is, “you both chose to show up, being your best selves, and came up with a feature that works for both of you. And if you remember my name, I may have done something wrong. I should not be a personality in the room.” Anna works to humble her own expectations of her own relationship with the participants. The important relationship in the dialogue is between the parties, not between the parties and the facilitator.

Anna’s comments reflect what RJ practitioners Sheryl Wilson, Mark Umbreit, and Joel Friesz (Zehr Institute, 2023) refer to as “taming the ego” of the facilitator to not be unhealthily attached to the parties, not getting defensive in dialogue, not being paternalistic, and learning to step back and interrupt the facilitator’s personal expectations for the sake of the needs of the parties. She decentered herself.

Annie shared a similar experience where she has had fellow facilitators offer uninvited advice or counsel to participants that centralized what the facilitators wanted for the participants or how facilitators perceived the participant’s should make decisions regarding their lives. Because Annie works with youth and the facilitators she works with, including herself, are older, retired middle class folk, she identifies a privilege and power differential. She shared instances where her co-facilitators communicated in ways that suggest that they know how participants should follow the standards of the facilitator. For example, she shared that some of her colleagues might make suggestions about participants going back to school or even joining the military, which discomforts Annie because it feels like an imposition and centralizes the

suggestions and expectations of the facilitator. While she knows that her co-facilitators want to help participants improve their lives, doing so in a “paternalistic” (as Annie would call it) manner is not how she identifies her facilitator role and doesn’t decenter herself. She said, “I think that we need to honor people where they're at. They know the best about what they need and where they want to be in their life, and it's not our job to second guess that. I think it's our job to find out how they feel and what they want, and then help support them in seeing what steps they could take to get there. But it's not our job to determine what that should be for them.” Annie gave the example of having a participant who was in the military and although she is politically and socially opposed to the military, she didn’t let that appear in the way she facilitated and instead honored the desires and goals of the participant. She decentered herself.

Emily exemplified this distinction when she recalled a case where her co-facilitator commented on their satisfaction with the result of the agreement. Emily felt that her co-facilitator’s satisfaction rubbed her the wrong way because it felt like their standards were the priority rather than the participant’s sense of satisfaction. Emily perceived her role as facilitator as a guide to help the process and offering suggestions when they are welcomed but making sure that she is stepping out of the way of participants and not holding too much power that throws off the balance. She decentered herself.

Anna, Annie, and Emily each exemplify the principles of Embodied Dialogic Love (EDL) through their facilitation practices, demonstrating love, embodiment, and dialogue as interconnected elements of their approach. Anna’s commitment to decentering herself in the facilitation process reflects the love-oriented aspect of EDL, prioritizing the needs of participants and empowering them to take ownership of their dialogue without imposing her presence or expectations. Annie’s focus on honoring participants’ autonomy, despite personal or social

differences, highlights the embodied love, as she physically and emotionally engages with participants in a way that respects their lived experiences and decisions while actively checking and interrupting her own biases, expectations, and assumptions. Similarly, Emily's awareness of power dynamics and her intentional effort to guide without imposing reflects the dialogic element of EDL because she seeks to create equality in the relationships and that includes being aware of how much space her expectations and goals take up in dialogue. Together, their practices reveal how EDL is not just a theoretical framework but a lived methodology that balances humility, empathy, and active engagement to foster collective healing and empowerment in restorative justice contexts.

### Lessons Learned:

Facilitators found success in the strategies and practices they had learned and perfected and tailored to each case they worked. At the same time, those practices took time and effort to hone. Facilitators learned lessons from mistakes they'd made to develop their practice and understand their role and the mission of RJ. Some facilitators disclosed hard-won lessons they'd learned throughout their time facilitating which they felt would be useful to guide current and future facilitators.

Both Archer and Edith shared similar experiences in which they facilitated cases where they didn't have "buy-in" from the participants and thus their respective cases fell apart. Archer shared the story of a case they worked on where the harmed party did not want to participate in the process let alone be in the same room as the responsible party. However, because both parties were youths and were members of the same family, their guardians enacted power over them and still made them participate. As much as the facilitators tried to empower both parties and create a

safe space for the harmed party and brought in trauma-informed experts to make accommodations for the specific harm, it was clear to Archer that they weren't going to make any progress on the case. Archer observed that the harmed party only saw one solution (to never see the responsible party again) and only attended one dialoguing session and held firm on their position. From the responsible party, Archer observed remorse and saw the responsible party apologize and attend dialogue but their guardian had already practically disowned them and refused to participate further. It was a fraught situation with complex dynamics and ultimately without the voluntary participation from the parties, they could go no further. Archer reflected, “the biggest failures are when people decide not to participate. And that's not usually anyone's fault. It's just how it works.”

For Archer, unsuccessful RJ dialogues aren't ones where no agreement is made or ones where the facilitator's expectations aren't met or where participants don't get what they originally wanted. The unsuccessful RJ dialogues are the ones that never come to fruition because parties choose not to participate: “if people don't participate then you can't even get those potential successes of even just having a conversation.” Being able to engage in dialogue is a marker of success for Archer but it is important to maintain the voluntary nature of the process and not force people to be there who don't want to be. In the example Archer provided, not only was it an involuntary environment but there were also power dynamics involved that weren't attended to sufficiently. It is of the utmost importance that facilitators achieve the buy-in from their participants so that the process can not only run smoothly but reach the goals of healing. Without maintaining the voluntary nature of the process, facilitators risk perpetuating power dynamics and causing more harm.

Edith grappled with this dilemma and learned a lesson regarding the voluntary nature of the process when she was tasked with bringing RJ to a school environment. She described the school as private with an affluent white student body. She entered to hold circles regarding vulnerable communities, privilege, social justice, and restorative justice. Unfortunately, she shared that the students were not receptive to her or RJ and instead were intent on “bullying their teacher” as Edith described. Edith summarized, “I didn't have their buy-in. I didn't have their interest.” Edith struggled to hold circle because the students were uninterested and she felt as though she wasn't addressing the real issue in the school. She observed that her circle was superficial and didn't get to the deeper dynamics between the teacher and students which was where the root of the problems began. Edith reflected, “How do I facilitate restorative practice when there's no interest, when there's no buy-in? Otherwise I'm teaching the opposite of what it is; instead of being with and restoring, I am imposing and demanding, and being the oppressor.” Edith perceived herself as operating on behalf of or like the oppressor in this scenario because she still enforced RJ despite knowing that she had no buy-in and thus ignored the voluntary nature of the process. She centralized the expectations of the administrators who wanted the RJ process done rather than centralizing the needs of the participants. It was clear that there were other unmet needs in the relational dynamics between the teacher and students and yet she couldn't attend to them because she didn't have the trust and connection and buy-in from the individuals in the classroom to go in that direction. She had missed vital relationship-building milestones for the RJ process. She felt that she was enacting power over instead of power with by demanding that the students go forward with a process that they had no desire to participate in and a process that didn't actually address the harms in the space.

Similarly, Edith shared another account in which she entered an RJ process with a plan to present artistic solutions or outlets for participants to express themselves. She quickly realized that this was not something the participants felt comfortable doing and her efforts fell on unreceptive ears. Edith took a similar lesson from both experiences that she should always ensure buy-in from participants and remain open to the needs of the community rather than seek to impose her own solutions or coping mechanisms before understanding the relationship dynamics and individual interests and perspectives in the room.

Phil also shared an experience in which he had to learn to dive beneath the surface of an issue in order to really understand the parties and the healing needs in that case. Rather than just spend his time focusing on the immediate harm that occurred, Phil wanted to understand the background and environments that allowed the harm to occur in the first place in a way that wasn't too invasive for the parties.

Phil told the story of a case that got referred to his diversion program where the responsible party was a youth who got arrested and cited for criminally trespassing on school property after being expelled from school. Phil asked the young person questions about why they had been on school property and the young person disclosed they had been there to help a friend who's car had broken down. Because the referral and citation were for criminal trespass, the young person's responses to Phil's questions would suffice and they could create a plan to address the immediate issue of the youth not returning to the school. However, in order to make the process restorative, Phil dove deeper and asked questions that dealt with the actual harm which was the expulsion rather than just the arrest. Phil's questions revealed that the actual issue that this young person had been dealing with was a fight they had participated in at the school and the fight was the result of a racialized incident a few months prior. Phil reflected on the

importance of being able to see beyond the surface of the issue because restorative justice seeks to transform environments where harm occurs and not just address individual instances:

So there were all of these like routes that had led to this one thing but the referral was for criminal trespass. So trying to find ways of addressing in a restorative way this citation, but the citation wasn't really the issue. So if there's sort of a warning of what not to do in the room, one warning is to try to find the balance between addressing the, the written reason for why we're there, but not ignoring the long term roots of how it got to be there... We're less interested in the trespassing. We can get past that pretty quick. But let's talk about the roots of why? Because if there's gonna be some kind of shift, that's what we're here to do. So it's but it's a very delicate dance to try to find how to have those conversations without forcing the conversations. How to ask the questions that are really gonna inspire reflection while still being relevant to the issue at hand. It's a tricky, but beautiful dance.

Given Phil's training and lived experience with Indigenous communities, he references that his approach to diving beyond the surface stems from the seven generations principle, a principle originating in Haudenosaunee (Iroquois)\* traditions that encourage people to consider the impact of their actions on the future of 7 generations.

Phil's lesson on diving beyond the surface can be coupled with a lesson from Chloe who warns that doing such diving requires care and skill. Just as Phil added a disclaimer that to engage in dialogue about the roots of a harm is a tricky dance, Chloe shared that she has had experiences where such a dance is disrupted by missteps on behalf of the facilitator. More specifically, Chloe explained that she has observed facilitators who demand information from parties regarding the roots of the harm too early in the process. She said, "You need to build relationships with folks to be in restorative dialogue, but you don't need to be nosy. My facilitators try to be case managers too much. Sometimes I do, too, and they want so much of the nitty gritty of the situation that got folks there." She distinguishes facilitators from case managers in order to demonstrate that facilitators aren't there to write reports about the harm or act as judges doling out punishment or responses to harm. She urges facilitators to trust the process and not interrogate or interview parties when they first meet the parties or begin the dialogue because

building trusting relationships takes time and the information that needs to be disclosed will emerge in due time. While she understands that facilitators want to dive beyond the surface of the immediate incident, they shouldn't do so in a way that centralizes what the facilitators want to hear. It's a delicate balance because facilitators might observe dynamics beneath the surface that are relevant to address but that is something that shouldn't be rushed according to Chloe, and the RJ process is designed to take time to allow all things to come to the surface.

Another lesson learned from facilitators is to find a balance when partnering with state institutions. Sometimes facilitators feel the pressure of state partners to move the RJ process along quickly and they don't always get the necessary time to dig deeper into the roots of different issues. Other times, RJ is used as a catch-all solution where cases are sent because there is a backlog for other therapeutic services and thus RJ is not being used to its fullest or correct capacity. Henry observed this in his work where he noticed that individuals who likely needed family counseling programs or rehabilitation programs for substance abuse were being sent to RJ diversion programs because the waitlists for those programs were too long. Despite not being necessarily equipped to address mental health, physical health, or social needs, Henry's diversion program received the cases in order to provide support to the individuals involved in the best way they possibly could while knowing that they weren't able to fully address their needs. For Henry, receiving such cases was still beneficial because he perceives that something is "certainly better than nothing" and he was happy to be that solution in the moment. At the same time, Henry also observed that such cases were being sent to RJ not only due to long wait lists but also because certain parties did not agree to attend the other programs. They were sent to RJ as an alternative but it was clear that it was not voluntary and they did not want to participate. Henry shared that in those cases, "I almost wish we would have turned it down in order to force the

court, the probation officer, the social worker to double down on getting a more appropriate resource or a more long term resource, because we're just not long term.” It was clear in some cases for Henry that the parties being in the same room together wasn't restorative and their needs were not being met by being in dialogue. Nevertheless, the courts had sent them the case anyway which indicates a profound misunderstanding on behalf of the courts as to what RJ is and can do. Henry encourages facilitators to try to set firmer boundaries with system partners in order to advocate and push for what participants truly need instead of being a band aid to cover larger issues.

Archer similarly advocated for facilitators to truly reflect on system partnerships and work to understand why they partnered with state institutions. Archer explained:

creating that space with your legal systems partners to do the work, the way that you want to do it and not as a way to appease legal systems or be scared that they're gonna drop you as a partner... I think that a lot of restorative justice programs forget that we are so needed. We have more power than we think.

Coming from an abolitionist approach, Archer encourages facilitators to stand in their power and recognize that RJ is necessary and important and not beholden to state institutions. Rather than perceive RJ programs as having power and authority because state institutions granted it to them, Archer perceives RJ programs as having inherent power and being able to enact it through setting firm boundaries with state institutions regarding the kinds of cases they take and decisions they make. Archer hopes to encourage and empower facilitators to perceive RJ as a necessity for justice systems.

As someone who experienced burnout in social justice work and continues to struggle with burnout because of how extractive the work can be, Edith has learned lessons about where and how to dedicate her energy so that she isn't giving all of herself. Edith explained:

If my commitment to restorative practices is meant to be life giving, then I need to, as a facilitator, stay nourished...it's more of just being fed by the people that I'm serving as

well, which is also very new to me. I am very much fed so that I can give, and now I need to be fed by the ones that I give. What does it mean to find my source of nourishment in the recipients of my giving?

She concluded that as a facilitator she has learned that she must also learn how to receive from the work and from the participants. She isn't just there to facilitate the healing of others, and she is a removed part of the process or community; she is an active member of the community when she facilitates and as a thread in the tapestry of the community, she is able to be nourished by her interactions with participants rather than just them being nourished by interactions with her. It is a deeply humbling perception for Edith to adopt that helps the facilitator find a balance between the extremes decentering themselves to the point that they neglect themselves and burn out, and over valuing their involvement in processes and adopting a savior complex. The facilitator decenters themselves to the point that they can focus entirely on participant needs but they don't stop being human themselves and ignore their own nourishment. Finding the right balance is important. Thus, Edith's lesson also hopes to address the exploitation of love by capitalist systems. Given her own experiences with burnout, Edith has created and reinforced more boundaries between herself and her work. She also approaches her work with a mindset that if she loves it, then it must also love her back or, at the very least, she must find ways to have herself nourished and refilled by the work. It's not a constant giving on her end which means her loving labor is abused; instead, it is more balanced and she receives something in return.

## Conclusion:

The practices and strategies shared within this chapter are EDL made manifest. Through, identification through humanization, self-determination, and co-creating the container, facilitators enact EDL. Each of these strategies reflects a commitment to building relationships and crafting healing environments all through an ethic of care. Thus, with these practices,

facilitators can not only address the immediate harm through their work but also interrupt oppressive hierarchical systems. By creating dialoguing environments dedicated to healing, facilitators are constantly oriented toward the needs of the participants which means recognizing the impact of the respective harm as well as the impact of traumatic social structures and contexts. Participants don't just have to address and heal from the original harm but also the systems which allow harm to occur, and which perpetuate harm through disempowerment, marginalization, and control.

The previous chapters have closely examined the impact of the systems of oppression on the RJ process through the lens of facilitators. In Chapter 1, facilitators shared their observations of how to navigate the external and internal tensions of RJ and the criminal-legal system. In Chapter 2, facilitators shared their perceptions of how the history of racialization impacts their practices and how they work to address histories of unearned privilege and intersecting marginalization. *In this chapter, I argue how decentering self and using communication to consistently orient oneself toward the needs of participants helps facilitators to develop environments that can promote healing from not only the interpersonal harms but also the harms of the criminal-legal system and histories of oppression thus offering meaningful disruptions of institutional power.* By modeling compassion, belonging, respect, vulnerability, openness, and embodied love, facilitators can contribute to transformative, holistic healing. Thus, the strategies shared in this chapter are reflective of both a mindset and method.

EDL isn't just a personal mentality, attitude, or philosophy that guides RJ facilitators; it is a way of living and behaving and communicating, which the strategies in this chapter illustrate. By consistently being oriented towards understanding and caring for the needs of others, facilitators can decenter themselves (without ignoring themselves entirely). It is an opportunity

for self-awareness and collective relationships. Developing a dialoguing container with EDL means decentering self through self-regulation and self-awareness/compassion, and using communication to build trusting, collaborative relationships, meet somatic needs, and reclaim and facilitate empowerment.

## Conclusion

### “Walking all the Way Up”: EDL and the Future of Restorative Justice Facilitation

As we concluded our nearly two hour-long dialogue together, Cindy reflected back on everything we’d spoken about and shared the impact of our dialogue on her mentality and the rest of her day. She explained how grateful she was to have engaged in such an invigorating dialogue that asked her to deeply reflect on why she was a facilitator, what drew her to the work, what kept her there, and how she could find more ways to support and connect with the community. The energy she received from our dialogue led her to share that she felt ready to tackle her day and enter her job with a renewed commitment to building a culture of community. With a smile she said, *“I was a little groggy. So thank you for waking me all the way up. I was thinking, ‘Oh, I’m gonna take a nap after this thing.’ But I’m feeling energized.”*

Cindy’s comments exemplify how participating in restorative justice and engaging in reflective practice on our work help solidify our embodied devotion to the work. Moving from groggy to energized illustrates a physical response to what it feels like to be in a loving dialogue with one another and reflect on the topic of restorative justice and our role in it.

My hope is that this dissertation will energize practitioners and scholars alike. While there are significant critical tensions the restorative justice movement faces and critical opportunities for growth and conversation, the data collected and analyzed here has identified ways in which individuals are addressing and confronting those tensions in their practice. The facilitators in this project are dynamic and committed and constantly evolving their practice to meet the needs of participants.

Restorative justice is an ever-evolving field and as it gains momentum among state structures and the public sphere we must remain constantly attentive and reflective to the ways in which it changes and maintains its values and canons. Thus, given the data within this project and how it reveals the nuances and dynamics of RJ through facilitators, I agree and advance Wilson's (2020) call: "For restorative justice as a practice and as a social movement to continue to evolve, the lens that we use to define it must become intersectional" (p. 111). While only a small population of facilitators participated in this project, they reveal the myriad of ways in which they operationalize RJ to adapt to meet the needs of communities. I foresee opportunities for this research to expand by including more facilitators into future study, including ethnographic and observational data collection of practices within dialogues, and conducting follow-ups and member checks with participants in order to gain a comprehensive view into every aspect of the RJ process. This research is limited in its capacity to address all of those necessary details, but I hope readers will be energized to use this work to launch more inquiries and studies to help RJ grow and evolve. My only request is that any future study remain grounded in community and practitioners to avoid further professionalization or making RJ too inaccessible.

The following section is a chance for facilitators to address one another by expressing their desires and needs to continue improving their facilitation practice. I conclude with this section to emphasize the practitioner-driven focus of this dissertation and my efforts to centralize their voices and needs. Hopefully, some of their needs are met by the data shared in this dissertation and hopefully they are energized to address the tensions using this data to expand their practices and facilitator communities.

## Desires: Building a Facilitator Network

Archer, Violet, Edith, and Phil shared specific desires they had for their future facilitating work as well as hoped they had for the larger RJ facilitator community. Archer wanted to spend more time building and being in a community of RJ facilitators in order to hear their stories of success and lessons learned and practices they use. Archer also wanted to learn more about the values and experiences which motivate facilitators to do RJ work. They additionally wanted to learn more strategies from other RJ diversion programs on how they navigate system partnerships in order to understand things that work for them that they might also try. For Archer, having this information would serve to build a more collaborative rather than oppositional community of RJ programs and facilitators. Rather than compete with other programs, they could join together and share in the fight and stand in their collective power as RJ.

Violet shared that she sometimes feels isolated as a facilitator in her program. She volunteers and isn't part of any larger organizations but wants to be. Her feeling of isolation is due in part to her own mack of being more involved in the RJ community. When she has been able to be with other facilitators in training, she has felt overwhelming support in the knowledge

that she is not alone in her work and others experience the same things she does. Violet hopes to expand the volunteer pool in her area and desires more connection, similarly to Archer, with the larger RJ and facilitator community.

Edith also wants to connect with more RJ programs because she wants to learn about how larger programs meet community needs beyond RJ. For instance, she wants to learn how RJ programs partner with community organizations that help provide legal services, clothing, food, education, transportation, etc. to the clients so they can provide well-rounded and holistic support to them. She wants to be able to meet many needs and learning how other programs either provide those services themselves or partner with community organizations would help her to expand the reach of her RJ work.

Daisy shared that she longed for more tools to navigate power differentials based on identity. She shared a story of an experience she had where she co-facilitated with someone who named racial differences between themselves and the participant and that just naming it didn't "land with the respondent" and felt "weird" and "performative." She desires more educational opportunities to learn cultural competency and improve her radical stewardship to be a better accomplice. Sharing strategies between facilitators would help her to learn more about how to make meaningful connections.

Phil desires that RJ work stays connected in Indigenous communities and continues asking permission from Indigenous communities to learn more about and practice RJ. Phil wants facilitators to talk to one another more and to hold the issue of race, representation, and recolonization central to the work of institutionalized RJ:

I think the practices will continue to grow, but the risk of having these practices co-opted and recolonized there is very, very present...I were to leave a request for other practitioners or others who are studying these ways within your work here, I think it would always it would be to stay focused on the intergenerational traditions; the long arc

of connection to not just the communities that exist now, but those who have come before, often given their lives to keep these ways alive and present and thriving. If we wander off of that road from the past generations to the future generations, then we're only serving ourselves in the political interest of the time. What we're really trying to do is heal humanity's relationship with the rest of life. And if we're too caught up in the details and the goal oriented processes, if we get sort of mechanistic, then we lose its heart and its spirit.

Phil wants facilitators to understand that the work of RJ is intergenerational knowledge that has been fought for and preserved by people who have been oppressed and essentially exterminated. Such efforts and knowledge must be respected and collaborated with in order to make RJ all it can be and preserve it for future generations. RJ isn't something that only recently emerged; it has taken centuries of molding and shaping and practicing by Indigenous people and must be given the proper respect and attention and care.

## Final Thoughts: EDL

The data reveals that embodied dialogic love is a guiding ethos for restorative justice facilitators. Through EDL, RJ facilitators offer meaningful disruptions by engaging in practices that decentralize (their) power, centralize the needs of the participants and empower their pursuit of individual and collective healing, and co-create an environment for transformation. Practicing EDL means that the facilitator perceives their own situatedness as well as their participants' positionalities within social histories and power structures through an awareness of their lived experiences. They are oriented toward caring for the differences and similarities of participants because they recognize the interconnected nature of harm, power, and social structures. They take active and embodied roles through dialogue to interrupt power and co-create containers focused on vulnerability, radical listening, accountability, trust, respect, and love which are the values and principles of RJ dialogues. RJ facilitators are frontline practitioners of RJ, and they are important components of how RJ is practiced and maintained. Understanding the ways in

which they uphold or evolve their own practices provides insight into how RJ is growing and adapting and changing. EDL is significant as a grounded theory to emerge from this study because it is another useful framework to help understand the values of RJ and how and who is enacting them.

The values and practices that make up EDL might not be new for some facilitators but maybe by identifying and defining the framework of EDL then EDL will provide a useful beacon to follow and centralize discussion about facilitator practices and RJ as a movement; EDL could be the lighthouse guiding facilitators through the sea of harm and the storm of the criminal-legal system.



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## Appendix A

### *Sampling Story*

As I was writing my dissertation proposal, I began cold emailing and contacting RJ program managers in Washington state to see if they’d be interested in partnering with me and connecting me with their facilitators to interview them. Because I wanted to conduct a cross-sector comparative analysis of RJ’s practices across different organizations, I contacted programs under three major umbrellas: education, government, and nonprofit. I wanted a cross-sector selection so as to compare the ways RJ is operationalized in different contexts. I identified these categories because they were where RJ seemed to be most popular and practiced. I heard back from five programs (WA Dept of Corrections Victim Services, The Center for Restorative Solutions Seattle, National Center for Restorative Justice, Center for Dispute and Resolution Thurston County, and Collective Justice) but only Collective Justice continued to participate in the study. The other four didn’t have facilitators available and eventually stopped responding to emails.

Given the limited availability of facilitators and RJ programs in Washington, I expanded my search across the U.S. at the recommendation of Washington RJ program managers who had knowledge of other programs in other states. For instance, the Washington Dept of Corrections Victim Services program manager recommended I contact Oregon and Texas program managers respectively because their programs were more established and had a robust selection of facilitators available. The Texas Dept of Corrections Victim Services manager was interested in participating in the study (but that fell through). The Oregon Dept of Corrections Victim Services manager was not only interested but connected me with five of their facilitators, the

majority of whom participated in the study. I also received counsel from Dr. Allison Briscoe-Smith who recommended I contact two RJ programs she was familiar with in Oakland, CA: Restorative Justice for Oakland Youth and RYSE. I cold emailed both and, while both were interested in participating, only RYSE participated in the study.

It took some convincing to secure partnerships at this stage. While I initially proposed conducting observations of facilitators during dialogues, I quickly had to drop that part of my research method design because programs were unwilling to participate in the study if I observed. They prioritized their client's confidentiality and wanted to preserve/respect the privacy of the dialogues. In order to secure participants, I committed to only interviews. Additionally, some programs weren't convinced that they would benefit from participating in the study. For example, Collective Justice in Seattle's program manager didn't think that asking facilitators about power would be helpful because their organization talks about power all the time. I managed to convince them to participate by telling them that the study is an opportunity for cross-sector conversations; even if their program talks about power, other programs might not and would find it useful to learn their strategies. Finally, programs agreed to participate only if the program managers shared my information and had facilitators contact me in order to respect facilitator privacy and make their participation voluntary. By the time my dissertation proposal was submitted, I had secured significant partnerships with RJ programs across a spectrum of educational, government, and non-profit organizations in California, Oregon, Texas (Texas fell through after the proposal was submitted), and Washington states.

When it came time to begin collecting data for the study, I had a hard time hearing back from facilitators. Despite their program managers sending them my information and recruitment flier (see below), I got very few responses. Additionally, the programs I had originally contacted stopped responding to my emails (i.e. Thurston County DRC and RJOY Oakland). I pivoted to googling programs around the U.S. which led me to the Northwest Justice Forum which had a robust directory of RJ organizations in Washington, Oregon, and Idaho. I went down that list and used the available contact information to email nearly 13 different organizations about connecting me with facilitators to be part of the study; while 7 responded, only 3 organizations had the availability and facilitators with whom to connect me. At the same time, some organizations that couldn't participate referred me to others who could. For instance, I connected with The Circle Works organization in Seattle and, when they shared they wouldn't be able to participate in the study, they connected me with RJ On The Rise in Colorado who was able to participate. Even as I connected with programs, I only heard back from 1-2 facilitators per program so I was persistent in following up and emailing and setting up Zoom meetings to recruit. Eventually, as I interviewed, the facilitators who participated referred me to other facilitators in their program and placed me in contact with them via email. I finally reached my desired snowball sampling and that's how I managed to secure 23 interviews.

My methodological journey kept hitting roadblock after roadblock where I had to detour and change directions in order to find people willing to participate and interview. Part of these roadblocks were due to facilitator availability and responsiveness. Another part of these roadblocks were due to the narrow definitions I had of RJ practices and who counted as an RJ facilitator. Initially, I pursued only programs and facilitators who were solely classified as victim-offender dialogues. Despite wanting a cross-sector of organizations, I didn't account for how differently each sector would approach RJ and its operationalizations/conceptualizations. At the same time, I didn't account for the diversity of RJ practices and approaches. Although I knew theoretically that there was no single standard mode of enacting RJ, I still tried to pursue a single

iteration of it. Such narrow purposive sampling was likely the result of my training as a researcher to have a single consistent population lest my data be scattered and unusable (citation?). But when I was attentive to what practitioners were telling me and the realities of RJ as a practice, I could loosen the rigid reigns of my sample population. For instance, Collective Justice's program manager asked if I'd be interested in interviewing RJ facilitators as a whole rather than just dialogue facilitators because they only had 2 dialogue facilitators and their availability was limited while they had many more RJ facilitators with more availability. At the same time, having a more expansive definition of RJ facilitators could help to understand the way they operationalize RJ which could inform my comparisons with other organizations.

Following the flexible and responsive principles of EDL and grounded theory, I redefined RJ facilitators to be those who had conducted 2 or more facilitations as the lead facilitator (not in training or part of a practicum) in a preventative or respondent facilitated RJ circle dialogue (preventative meaning before a specific incident occurred and were more focused on building a restorative culture; respondent meaning responding to a specific incident/harm and building the restorative culture in response to the incident/harm). This way, I could widen my parameters of participants and get a better understanding of actual RJ practices rather than a narrow subsection. I went into the field with specific, purposeful sample criteria and I think I adapted accordingly (I also adapted my IRB along the way to remove observations and include wider sample parameters). There were no specific social demographics (race, gender, class, age, etc.) I sought, meaning the only criteria for eligibility was being an experienced RJ facilitator; although as my sample began to represent mainly educated white women, I did try to pursue more facilitators of color yet received little response.

Another adaptation to my sample was the way I categorized the different sectors involved in my study. When I first started writing my dissertation proposal, I originally intended to work with only 3 organizations and complete ethnographic research with each of them serving as a case study and slotting neatly into my educational, government, and nonprofit categories. As the limitations I explained above unfolded, ethnographic research quickly became untenable especially as I realized just how few RJ facilitators existed in the western U.S. While I was still able to secure facilitators across each category, the boundaries I had placed between sectors were much more malleable than I had anticipated and the sectors were porous. Additionally, as I collected data, my facilitators described themselves differently than as belonging to a sector but instead as in relative proximity or distance from state institutions. Their program's placement on that spectrum had more of an impact on their practices and perceptions of power than their identification with a specific sector. I adapted my sample search once again to pursue facilitators across the spectrum of close proximity to distance from state institutions. I selected the programs based on the type of facilitated dialogues they offered (circles or victim-offender conferences, both preventative and reactive dialogues) as well as based on their placement on a spectrum of proximity/distance from the U.S. criminal legal system based on how they receive referrals with programs run through the Department of Corrections on one end (closest proximity), adult and juvenile diversion and school-based programs in the middle, and community-based programs on the other (most distant).



## FACILITATORS NEEDED

**RESEARCH DESCRIPTION**  
I am a PhD student writing my dissertation about Restorative Justice Facilitators across nonprofit, educational, and government sectors.

The overarching goal of this study is to better understand how facilitators perceive their values, social identities, and organizational relationships and how they translate into communication practices during RJ dialogues.

Additionally, this study seeks to understand how facilitators perceive their relationship to power, and how their frameworks and practices are implicated in power relations.

**YOUR COMMITMENT & IMPACT**  
A 1 hour interview via zoom or in person to share your experiences will help not only my research but also RJ practices as a whole.

RJ programs will be able to better understand their facilitators and different sectors can share strategies and approaches to facilitating and create more cross-sector collaboration, connection, and advocacy.

**INTERVIEW DATES**  
Jan 22 - April 26

**CONTACT LAURA IRWIN TO SIGN UP**  
laura.t.irwin@gmail.com

**OR CLICK ON THIS BOX TO FIND THE CALENDLY LINK TO SCHEDULE INTERVIEW**

## Appendix B

### RQs:

To what extent are facilitators aware of their power (procedural, personal, and institutional)?

To what extent within the following patterns (disruptive, resisting, or collaborating with existing power structures) do facilitators view their power?

Describe the study & it's goals

This interview will be recorded. Your actual name will be replaced with a pseudonym in the transcript of this interview, so that your participation and responses in this interview can be kept anonymous in any reports that are published about this project. Let's have you pick a firstname pseudonym now to use in this interview, and change your Zoom display name to that, and then that will be the same pseudonym that will be used in the transcript.

Another way to protect your anonymity is to avoid mentioning anyone else's name, or the name of any specific place. For example, please don't use the name of any cases you've worked on or the parties involved.

I will start recording in a second, and ask you after the recording starts to confirm your full, legal name, and that you consent to this interview and to being recorded. Do you have any questions for me before we begin?

[If asked why they have to state their actual/legal name on record, the answer is simply to confirm their consent: the pseudonym they chose will be used in the analysis and reports, and in the version of the transcript and audio recording in the public archive if they choose to have either/both included.]

Power:

1. Why did you choose to become a facilitator?
2. I'd like to know more about the training you received, specifically with how you were taught about power. What did you know about power before you trained? What did you learn about power that was new after your training?
3. What do you know about the history/origins of RJ? How do you know that history?
4. How do you define power?
5. How does power appear in the RJ process?
  - Between the parties?
  - In the parties themselves?
  - In yourself?
  - In the organization you represent?

Social Identity:

5. How did your training prepare you to consider your own biases and social identity?
6. Would you mind telling me about the parts of your social identity that influence your experiences and how you view the world? Which groups form your social identity? Which do you identify most with?
7. What part of your social identity do you think is most relevant to RJ?
  - Does that identity affect how you communicate during a facilitated dialogue? (i.e. how you introduce yourself, how you introduce the process, how you frame, how outline goals, what/who you value in the process)
  - Does that identity afford you more or less power during a facilitated dialogue?
8. What part of your social identity do you think people first notice about you in RJ?
  - Does that identity affect how you communicate during a facilitated dialogue?
  - Does that identity afford you more or less power during a facilitated dialogue?
9. What part of other people's social identities do you notice first in RJ?
  - Does their identity affect how you communicate during a facilitated dialogue?
  - Does their identity afford you/them more or less power during a facilitated dialogue?
10. What kind of values do you have or belief systems do you subscribe to? Do these values or belief systems affect how you communicate during a dialogue? With parties? Why or why not?
11. Do you perceive yourself as having more or less power in your social life? In the RJ process?
  - Do you feel empowered in your identity? Do you feel empowered in your identity in the RJ space? When? Why? Why not?

Institution & Procedure:

12. How did you come to be involved with [RJ org]? How would you describe your role in the org?

13. As a facilitator who works for a particular org, do you perceive your relationship with the org as affording you power?

14. Do you perceive the org you work for to have power or work with other systems of power?

What is your proximity to power given your relationship with your RJ org?

Do you perceive yourself as empowered to disrupt, resist, or maintain powerful institutions as a facilitator?

15. How does the org you represent shape your behavior and comments in the space and process, if at all?

16. How does your role as facilitator afford you procedural power during dialogues? (offers legitimacy to process, using ethos of org, etc.)

17. How do you think you, as an advocate, representative of an org, and maintainer of procedure, affect the facilitated dialogue process?

Extra Q:

Can you think of an example of when power appeared in the RJ process and how you handled it?

Or if you enacted power in any way during the RJ process and how you handled it?

## Appendix C

### HOW TO READ THIS DOCUMENT

Over the course of 3 months, I interviewed 23 experienced Restorative Justice (RJ) facilitators across a spectrum running from close proximity to criminal-legal institutions to completely removed from criminal-legal institutions (i.e. community-based programs).

I wanted to understand facilitator's perceptions of power and their communication approaches depending on their relative proximity to state agencies such as DA's offices, court referral systems, juvenile justice system, school systems, and prisons.

In this document you will find quotes that reveal a number of interesting patterns and critical tensions I identified in the data.

In order to check that I am understanding and interpreting these quotes and patterns properly, I am sharing them with you so that you can look over it and share what resonates with you, what you'd like to clarify, or what you disagree with.

The purpose of sharing this is to ensure that this study lives up to the values of collaboration and community that are the foundation of restorative justice by continuing to involve facilitators in conversations that impact their work.

You have free reign to look at and comment on anything you'd like in this document. But if you have time, I've marked critical follow-up questions at the end of each page that I would like to know more about to fill key gaps in the data.

You can respond to these questions in one of three different ways:  
Written response via email  
Voice recorded response sent via email  
Schedule a follow-up Zoom interview via calendly link

This project has yielded some incredible data and it wouldn't have been possible without your help. I am grateful to you for your time and dedication to this study as well as your commitment to RJ work.

## RELATIONSHIP-BUILDING PRACTICES

**Facilitators share power by building “agency” through collaboration. Their goal is for participants to feel “empowered” by the process to make their own decisions.**

- *“I really try to say, ‘You’re the driver of this process. We are here to support you. We’re the people that bring process, but no content.’”*
- *“The person being able to feel empowered and to show up and say yes, to the things that feel right for them, and no to the things that don’t in terms of what they want to prioritize in their response, that’s something I really value.”*

**Facilitators distinguish themselves from institutional power to build collaborative power with parties instead of over parties.**

- *“I am not a judge. I’m not the criminal justice system. I’m not here to make decisions for you. I’m not here to make you do anything. I’m here to support you.”*
- *“We want to remind you that we’re not here representing the criminal justice system. We’re not here to tell you what is right or wrong, or what you’ve done wrong. But we’re here to work with you and help you get what you need out of this process.”*

**Facilitators are “keepers” of the process with “purposeful” power that they use strategically to keep parties safe.**

- *“We’re actually holding power and we’re holding it on purpose.”*
- *“In the actual space, we have the ability to stop that dialogue if we want to call for break, interrupt it at some level. We try not to ever have to do that. We really want to empower the person who decided to do this to control that dynamic but we also know we’re bringing them into this crazy, hard core power situation.”*

### **FOLLOW-UP QUESTION:**

**Can you describe an intervention that didn't work, a scenario you would've done differently, or a practice that wasn't effective?**

**What do you need to help you grow as a facilitator?**

# ALLYSHIP AND HUMANIZING PRACTICES

2

**White facilitators attempt to demonstrate allyship by adopting a “listening” and “learning” approach to receiving parties of color and empower their voice.**

- *“I also have this feeling that white people need to be a part of this work; however, because I don't have the life experience and I never will have the life experience of students of color or adults of color, that puts me in a very different position. I just try to come at it from a place of humility, a place of respect, of empathy, curiosity, a willingness to listen and to learn.”*
- *“A large move is just to invest more time and curiosity; more seeking for me to be the student and them to be the informant”*

**White facilitators also make attempts to acknowledge differences when they arise while also strategically using privilege.**

- *And so part of that responsibility as a white-presenting, male body human is where I have privilege... to also try to stick my feet indoors and try to open them for others to come in who may not get granted that just by default.”*
- *“We give them voice and choice from the beginning, which is the first step towards removing this idea that because I'm white I have the power over you to decide who's going to facilitate for you. I have humanness in me just like you do, and I want to...give you power to decide what you want, to choose the pathway here.”*

**Facilitators who work with youth also attempt to demonstrate allyship by bridging the intergenerational divide**

- *“So when I was a younger person, I was able to identify when I was a part of a punitive measure...I didn't have a voice. I couldn't change anything...When I come into the space when I work with the youth, I can easily put myself back in that youth space...But I'm an adult now, with education behind restorative principles... I try to give them my energy as a guide on the side.”*
- *“There still are intergenerational experiences and if you can bring those then the person that you're working with realizes that, at least on some level, you have an understanding of their experience.”*
- *“If you're a kid and you're in a room full of adults...that's really intimidating. So, limiting the number of adults, and like increasing the number of kids.”*

**Facilitators perceive storytelling as another way to distribute power that is humanizing which can help address social identity differences.**

- *“a deep part of my practice as a facilitator and as a human being to listen with spaciousness, and not be crafting an idea or a supposition about the circumstances”*
- *“specifically approaching with a lot of humility and and respect for the fact that they know their story, and they know it better than me, and they know what's best for them”*

## **FOLLOW-UP QUESTIONS:**

**What does being an ally mean and look like to you? How do you practice allyship in the context of the criminal-legal system?**

**What are your previous experiences with resisting systems of oppression? What did it feel like? How does this impact your facilitation practices and reasons to facilitate?**

## CRITICAL TENSIONS REGARDING RACE 3

**Facilitators of color perceive a severe and detrimental lack of representation in facilitator pools despite RJ originating from African and Indigenous communities.**

- *“I didn't understand the work at all. I was very leery of it. It felt like it did not have any Blackness, any culture to it. It felt very white.”*
- *“There isn't a whole lot of people of color who are in the Restorative Justice realm.”*
- *“We started the work. The work comes from Indigenous folks.”*
- *“I see [RJ organization] as a white org, no matter what. And so people coming in see it as power. And so that's the whole problem. What I'm trying to describe is the journey into [RJ] circles for people: most of them, especially those who are not white, are trying to build trust because it's like, ‘Oh, this isn't a white [process] but it feels like it,’ because from the outside, I felt it was like, ‘Do I belong here?’”*

**Thus, facilitators of color feel that they often have to be a “bridge” or “translator” for communities of color to be involved and RJ to be more accessible.**

- *“I don't speak that damn language. I speak my language, my own language. I don't use their language. I translate it often into culturally appropriate language for the people who are there, and that feels really good...I think the work is like coming to yourself again. And it was hard as a Black woman to come to myself with white language.”*

**White facilitators also notice a lack of representation in certain programs both in the facilitator pool and in parties referred to dialogue.**

- *“As a white facilitator who works in an all white organization, with a predominantly white volunteer pool, we mostly work with white respondents. We also work with people of color as respondents. And so that is like a big power thing that I actually don't really feel well prepared to navigate gracefully.”*
- *“I have noticed all of the dialogues that I've been involved in all of the cases that I've been assigned, there have been no people of color.”*

### **FOLLOW-UP QUESTIONS:**

**If you are a facilitator of color, after reading this data, what would you like your white colleagues to know?**

**If you are a white facilitator, what do you think now reading some of your colleagues of color's perceptions?**

## CRITICAL TENSIONS REGARDING AGE

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**Interestingly, facilitators notice that more participants of color emerge in in youth diversion programs and in school systems. This creates a critical opportunity to understand intersectionality and how it relates to facilitator power.**

- *“it’s a little bit difficult for us to maintain an equilibrium or an equal playing field because the people who are coming in are young adults and the volunteer community facilitators are older, typically retired individuals who have the time but they don’t meet the demographics of the individuals sitting on the other side of the table. So right off the bat there’s a power discrepancy.”*
- *“Sometimes my approach is, if the kid has said it out loud, I’ll be like, ‘Yeah, I’m white. Yeah, I’m an adult. And I get that I won’t understand everything.’ So really like owning up to what I don’t know. I like to do that a lot, particularly with youth. I think it’s important for them to see folks not have answers.”*
- *“The kids that are most impacted by the criminal justice system are kids of color.”*

**Some facilitators perceive the goal of working with youth in RJ to get them to recognize their responsibility and take accountability as a formative part of their development and learning to be part of society.**

- *“It’s also it’s difficult, because with young adults a lot of time their brain isn’t fully formed yet, and so for them to take accountability is sometimes very difficult for them.”*
- *“We need to give people a chance to learn. Just because you turn 18, doesn’t really mean that you’re fully vested with all the mental capabilities of functioning and a society.”*
- *“I’m coming at it from a formative perspective. My questions are: how can we best help this young person learn about their own power? Find ways to make better more productive choices and navigate their own path through this kind of tangled jungle of conflicting cultures that we’re all part of.”*

**Some facilitators perceive the goal of working with youth in RJ to get them to recognize their own power and disrupt assumptions that youth lack power.**

- *“[We] punish students for punish use for not having knowledge and it’s not right. It’s real simple equation for me: they are in the future; let’s let’s plant this plant the way we want it so we can get the fruit that we want.”*
- *“Kids are wise, and kids deserve to hold power. And my goal as a facilitator is to help youth discover that about themselves or practice, having power and practice, using their wisdom to solve their own problems.”*

### **FOLLOW-UP QUESTIONS:**

**What are your thoughts on the different perceptions of youth participants? (especially as it relates to facilitator power, representation, allyship, intersectionality, and RJ’s goals).**

## CRITICAL TENSIONS REGARDING GOALS OF RESTORATIVE JUSTICE AND THE CRIMINAL-LEGAL SYSTEM

Some facilitators perceive RJ as a practice and movement to dismantle and replace the criminal-legal system; nevertheless their programs struggle to disrupt the system and instead operate under the power of the criminal-legal system.

- *“I think that's like my life statement is to to disrupt those systems. And I think just by rolling out these programs it's doing just that.”*
- *“I do not sense personally that we're practicing at a scale yet, or visibility that it has started to suck any power away from the default systems.”*
- *“I definitely perceive the organization and the diversion program as being under the power of that court system.”*
- *“I came into this so excited to be doing restorative justice work and have been hit with these reality checks and big disillusionments of what you think restorative justice is. This is what it actually looks like here, and sometimes even to the point of feeling maybe what I'm doing can't always really be called restorative justice. So just feeling like I'm out of alignment with my values sometimes and feeling like I don't have power to change that.”*

Some facilitators perceive RJ as a practice and movement that collaborates with a reforms the criminal-legal system because the criminal-legal system authorizes/gives permission to RJ programs and folks within the criminal-legal system share the same goals as RJ practitioners .

- *“It's almost operating with permission instead of power.”*
- *“I don't want to represent that power. That's not my power. And I may not agree with it even. I respect it because it's what's allowing us to have restorative justice alternative to the criminal justice system. So I respect that it's necessary.”*
- *“It just feels collaborative. I have built relationships with the grant manager and the DA and the people that have the power.”*

### **FOLLOW-UP QUESTIONS:**

**What are your thoughts on the relationship between restorative justice and the criminal-legal system?**

**What might help you develop more relationships with other RJ practitioners outside of your program?**

**What strategies would you like to learn more about from different programs and what strategies would you share from your own program?**