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The Power of Restorative Apologies (Real and Imagined) for Victims and Offenders

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Shame can be felt after causing harm and after being harmed by wrongdoing. Failure to address shame can increase the possibility of the victim-offender overlap, making victims more likely to offend and offenders more likely to be victimized. An online, individually applied, restorative apology process could help prevent the victim-offender overlap by helping heal harm. People who have caused harm are given the opportunity to be accountable and explore how they might help repair damage they have caused, while those harmed can address any violation and shame felt. Anecdotal evidence indicates restorative apologies delivered either personally, or only imagined, can help individuals heal from harm and trauma. Open access to restorative apology processes is provided at www.apologyletter.org. The purpose of this paper is to show how the confidential apology program can help people address harm and shame. Appendices A and B provide an imagined apology exercise and guidelines for preparing a combined apology and gratitude letter, which can assist individuals affected by wrongdoing.

Key words: *apology, shame, victim-offender overlap, restorative apology, solution-focused brief therapy, forgiveness*

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Introduction

Authors Ben Furman and Lorenn Walker developed and provide a free, confidential, and open access website www.apologyletter.org. The website provide an on-line program that engage users in restorative apology processes that apply solution-focused brief therapy principles (De Jong, Berg, 2013). An apology letter writing process and imagined apology processes for both victims and offenders¹ are provided.

Often people who are harmed from wrongdoing do not have the opportunity to engage in an apology process because the people who caused the harm are not identified or otherwise are not accountable and responsible. Apology is typically within the control of the person who caused the harm. Apology is left to offenders who provide them for victims. When no one is accountable for causing harm, and no apology is offered, giving power to the victim to engage in an imagined apology process can assist in healing their emotional harm. Additionally, providing an offender with the opportunity to imagine engaging in a process with the person that they harmed can provide a learning experience and the opportunity to address shame and guilt they may feel.

Users of the www.apologyletter.org program report that they experienced positive emotions from the processes that can be considered as *healing* experiences. Restorative apologies assist victims in identifying what they need to heal from any suffering from shame, while also offering offenders processes to address their shame and guilt. Anecdotal evidence from case studies also suggests that restorative apologies are beneficial. It is hypothesized that engaging in an apology process could help reduce the victim-offender overlap by addressing the shame associated with being both an offender and a victim.

This article describes the rationale for apology and the processes provided by www.apologyletter.org, including the victim-offender overlap and the healing needs for both victims and offenders. How preventing victimization and criminalization can save significant monetary costs is discussed. The practical application of the www.apologyletter.org programs is explained along

¹ The terms "victim" and "offender" are used only for simplicity here. The authors believe that these kinds of labels, which define individuals based on their experiences and behavior, are shortsighted. Every individual is more than what they have experienced. Human behavior and experiences are not permanent, and labels limiting an individual's potential, overlooks the possibility of all people.

with users' comments about the program's value. How addressing shame can help promote forgiveness and healing is discussed. Case examples of how apologies are delivered through a victim and offender meeting, and when no meeting occurs, are also provided. Finally, information about an apology and gratitude letter is provided along with an explanation of its usefulness.

What is the victim-offender overlap?

The victim-offender overlap describes the alternating relationship between being both a victim and an offender. The victim-offender overlap is one of the most consistent findings in criminology (Lauritsen, Laub, 2007). Shaffer reports that: Offenders are 1.5 to 7 times more likely than non-offenders to be victims, and victims are 2 to 7 times more likely than non-victims to be offenders (Shaffer, 2003: 1).

Entorf, who prepared an in-depth economic and "ecological rationality" analysis of German survey data covering victimization experiences and criminal activities, found that: "As regards the overlap of victimization and offending, anger seems to be the key motivation of retaliatory behavior, as stressed by many criminological and psychological research papers" (Entorf, 2013: 6). When a victim suffers continuous victimization, he or she may commit offenses in order to survive (Gaffney, 2012).

Many who commit crime suffered from victimization and hardship in childhood. According to Gaynes "adults and juveniles in trouble with the law are likely to have been victimized as children; to come from chaotic, troubled, and economically marginal families and neighborhoods; and to have failed at school" (Gaynes, 2005: 15).

The victim-offender overlap is robust, having been found in the United States as well as other countries, over time, across various contexts, and within various demographic subgroups. Further, the relationship has been observed with numerous victimization and offending measures despite a variety of control variables (Lauritsen, Laub, 2007; Jennings, Piquero, Reingle, 2012). The victim-offender overlap appears greatest for the "most severe crimes" (Tillyer, Wright, 2014: 34).

Despite what has been learned about the victim-offender overlap over the last few decades, it remains a complicated phenomenon that requires further research to better understand and prevent (Berg, Mulford, 2017).

Victim healing needs and the victim-offender overlap

Victims often suffer from trauma and a range of difficult emotions including shame and guilt (National Center for Victims of Crime, 2008). Ignoring suffering and the healing needs of harmed people can model that response as acceptable social behavior (Bandura, 1973). The maltreatment of children illustrates this. Being maltreated as a child approximately doubles the probability of engaging in many types of crime as an adult (Currie, Tekin, 2006).

The high percent of incarcerated people who suffered child abuse also validates the victim-offender phenomenon. According to Harlow, “between 6% and 14% of male offenders and between 23% and 37% of female offenders reported they had been physically or sexually abused before age 18” (Harlow, 1999: 1). An informal survey of imprisoned men under the care of a former Hawai’i state prison medical director showed that over eighty percent reported being sexually abused in their youth (Thorburn, 2016).

Offender healing needs and the victim-offender overlap

Restorative processes help repair harm and generate understanding. When someone who has harmed another understands how their behavior impacted the other person’s life, livelihood, and the lives of others, the opportunity to experience empathy arises. Brain research of people identified as psychotic that participated in restorative justice processes indicates that these individuals too have the capability of experiencing empathy (Reisel, 2015).

Additionally, being labeled an *offender* can influence one’s belief that she or he is inherently unredeemable and more likely to engage in wrongdoing (Schur, 1984). It is likely too that an offender could have been previously labeled *victim*.

Restorative processes help prevent labeling people as victims and offenders. Instead, restorative processes focus on addressing the harm and individ-

ual needs for healing. Removing labels removes the belief that one is unredeemable along with the shame associated with it. When one is given the opportunity to work on making things right, the focus shifts from shame of self, to the pragmatic experience of how repairing harm may be addressed.

A problem with the adversarial and autocratic criminal justice system is that it generates self-absorption of the accused instead of motivating them to care about and address the victim's plight. The mainstream criminal justice system does not generate significant opportunities for offenders to understand how they could help repair harm in practical ways. Instead, it provides disincentives for being accountable and responsible for harmful behavior (Van Ness, Strong, 2015). The criminal justice process primarily focuses on finding guilt and ordering punishment. It is shame based, autocratic, paternalistic, and lacks effective processes for offenders to learn and repair harm that they have caused. The criminal justice system stifles rehabilitation and instead perpetuates the victim-offender overlap.

Preventing victimization and criminalization saves money and resources

Communities, governments and taxpayers pay high monetary costs by failing to meet the needs of victims, and failing to help offenders rehabilitate, especially in incarceration and correction costs. Upon release from prison, social services for the formerly incarcerated and their families, and legal interventions for those who continue to offend, contribute to a myriad of financial, social and emotional costs. In the area of child abuse alone, victimization costs are enormous. "The total lifetime economic burden resulting from new cases of fatal and nonfatal child maltreatment in the United States in 2008 is approximately \$124 billion. In a sensitivity analysis, the total burden is estimated to be as large as \$585 billion" (Fang et al., 2012: 156).

The saved resources from preventing child maltreatment cases from entering the justice system could be used more wisely for educational and social programs (Roberts, 2002). For people incarcerated, shifting priorities from punishment and imprisonment to care and treatment, could help address the victim-offender overlap. One simple and inexpensive approach to help address

the victim-offender overlap is providing the opportunity for individuals to engage in restorative apologies to help them process shame and guilt.

Restorative apologies promote healing and provide redemption rituals

To prevent crime, healing opportunities for victims and redemption opportunities for offenders need to be provided. Apology is “symbolic reparation” and considered one of the most powerful strengths of restorative practices for victims (Braithwaite, 2003: 326).

Restorative apologies can improve the well being of individuals who are harmed and individuals who have harmed others as well. Even when an apology is only imagined, it can help an individual reconcile harm, whether they caused it or were harmed by another. Restorative apologies are a tool that can help people heal, which has potential for preventing the victim-offender overlap.

A restorative apology considers how one was affected by wrongdoing. It asks what might be done to help repair the harm. Restorative practices offer the opportunity for expressing and receiving apologies. This necessarily requires an offender to take responsibility for causing harm when apologizing regardless of whether or not the victim will accept the apology.

Apology is a vital human ritual for those whose behavior caused harm and for those who were harmed (D’Costa, 2011). Restorative justice offers principles for making a meaningful apology whether one meets with others involved in the wrongdoing or simply goes through the process of developing an apology independently. It is a ritual process that can help bring personal healing and peace for both the victim and the offender.

Aaron Lazare’s extensive apology research of its nature, history, and importance in human relationships, shows that not all apologies are helpful. He describes a “failed apology” as one where the apologizer has not “acknowledged the offense and may not even believe an offense was committed” or suggests that the problem is the offended person’s “sensitivity” (Lazare, 2005: 8). Failed apologies include: “I apologize for whatever I may have done” and “If you were hurt, I am sorry.” These kinds of apologies are in contrast to a restorative apology, which includes specifically describing what one did that was harmful.

The restorative apology on line program

Authors Furman and Walker created and first provided the free and confidential www.apologyletter.org program in 2009, and have maintained it as an open access resource since then. The program provides guidelines on how to prepare restorative apologies. The apology program was developed after Furman made a similar program for youth. The original multilingual program, *Sorry Letter*, can be found at the *Kids' Skills Website* www.kidsskills.org under the menu heading *Steps of Responsibility*. Inspired by the novel idea of Furman's *Sorry Letter*, Walker collaborated with him to create a version of the program for adults. Together they created the www.apologyletter.org program that includes foundational elements of restorative justice and solution-focused brief therapy for both victims and offenders to engage in processes to promote healing from harmful behavior and shame.

The www.apologyletter.org website offers four programs for users to interact with. One program is for designing an earnest apology letter; a second one is for imagining an interactive process of apology; a third one is for imagining the interactive process of forgiveness; and a fourth program is provided for dealing with difficult or traumatic life events. The programs are for both those who have caused harm and those who have been harmed. They can be used by anyone who has experienced an everyday minor conflict or a serious incident of wrongdoing.

The website is provided in eight languages: English, Dutch, Finnish, German, Japanese, Spanish, Serbian and Swedish. Program users in Brazil, China, and the Czech Republic are also interested in translating it into their languages.

Imagined apology and the solution-focused approach

While restorative processes are mainly known for providing direct encounters for people affected by specific incidents of crime and wrongdoing, they can also benefit individuals who never meet in person. In 2002, Walker in consultation with Insoo Kim Berg, co-founder of solution focused brief therapy, which www.apologyletter.org also applies, developed a process to provide victims with a restorative process to address their harm without knowing or meeting with the person who harmed them (Walker, 2004).

Solution-focused brief therapy can assist individuals to independently address harm and suffering. Instead of analyzing problems, the solution-focused approach asks people facing difficulties: What would you like instead of the problem? (Bannink, 2007).

Imagining a preferred future can assist people who have been hurt by crime and those who have caused harm and crimes. Harmed individuals can imagine a restorative encounter and what it would be like to receive an apology. Likewise people who have hurt others can also imagine providing an apology. The process of simply imagining what it would be like to receive an apology, or provide an apology, can shift thinking and be a helpful healing experience.

With Berg's assistance, Walker developed a 12-week course, *Restorative Justice as a Solution-Focused Approach to Conflict & Wrongdoing*, which has been provided to hundreds of imprisoned people in Hawai'i (Walker, Sakai, 2006). During the 12-week program, participants are invited to engage in an *imagined apology exercise* based on the www.apologyletter.org program. The imagined apology exercise has eight steps, which are included on two pages (Appendix A pp. 1-2). The exercise provides the same steps in the "Help me imagine a healing encounter with someone who has hurt me" process, which www.apologyletter.org provides.

The exercise begins with the participant first assigning a number indicating the level of disturbance that they currently feel about the injustice they experienced. The scale goes from "1 Not disturbed (able to move on)" to "5 Very disturbed (not able to talk about it)."

The second step asks the individual to imagine that the person who harmed them comes to them and says that they regret what they did and they are genuinely sorry for having hurt them.

The third step asks the individual to imagine and write out exactly how this person would describe the harm that they caused.

The fourth step asks the individual to imagine what the person would say that they learned from their harmful behavior.

In step five the individual imagines what the person could say that would convince them that the offender was genuine and would never do similar harmful acts in the future.

Step six asks the individual to imagine that the offender suggests they do something to make up for the harm they caused. Step six also asks the indi-

vidual to imagine what she or he hopes the offender would suggest to make things right.

Step seven asks the individual to imagine accepting the apology with the belief that the person does whatever they said they would do. This step also asks the individual to imagine how this would affect her, and what one small thing would be different in her life because of this?

Finally, step eight concludes the exercise with the same scaling question asked in step one that rate the individual's disturbance level concerning the injustice they suffered after they complete the process.

The data on the scaling differences cannot be analyzed because the program is confidential and the authors have no access to it, but there is anecdotal evidence it is helpful as described below. Participants' comments indicate generally that the program is helpful for them in addressing harmful and traumatic hardships.

User responses to www.apologyletter.org

The methodology for evaluating the program's effectiveness is basic. Users are asked open-ended questions requesting feedback about their experiences using www.apologyletter.org at the end of each program.

To date, seventy-five people have submitted comments about their experiences using programs that have been reviewed. Most are short comments including: "Great!" "Beautiful" "Love this program!" and "I like it!" Other users have provided lengthier responses.

A Spanish language user said: "I am delighted. This app makes me think about my own limitations. It has given me a space for calmness and serenity. It also assures me that I am doing the right thing." Another Spanish language user said: "I love it, it made me think about my limitations. It has given me a place of peace and tranquility, plus the certainty of doing the right thing."

A Finnish language user said: "what a miracle healing." An English language user commented: "The program is incredibly productive. It put all the things I was thinking and feeling into focus. I believe after a traumatic experience, things become distorted. The path to healing even when progress is made is hard to see accurately. The program helps put mental and emotional glasses on the process."

Another English user commented: "I think that this is a wonderful program. It not only helps you organize your thoughts, it also creates an alternative path towards the healing. As you answer each question you gain another piece that you need toward your own personal healing. I am recommending this to my family and friends and will be using it to communicate with my siblings. It removes the emotion and makes your communication come across way clearer."

A third English language user said the program was, "Great. Like a 'wise' friend asking useful questions." A common theme in the favorable comments is that the program helps users organize their thoughts.

Only four users, or less than one percent of the total seventy-five comments, said something considered unfavorable. A Dutch user found the program: "Very disappointing, now feel worse than before." An English user said: "Totally unhelpful." Two comments were considered *mixed*, not either positive, negative or favorable, which were: "Not sure where this is leading" and "Don't know right now."

Case examples of an imagined apology for victims and offenders who never meet

Two cases illustrate how an imagined apology without the victim meeting with the offender can be healing. The cases each concern author Lorenn Walker. The first case concerns sex abuse and how both a personally delivered apology and an imagined apology were healing for her.

Walker's earliest memories of the sex abuse began at such a young age she cannot remember when it started, but it ended by the time she was nine years old. It was first committed by one person, and then another. When she was twelve years old the second individual who abused her personally apologized. This person told Walker that their behavior was terribly wrong, that they were deeply sorry, and they promised to protect her if anyone tried to abuse her in the future. The first person that abused her never acknowledged or apologized for the abuse.

The difference between how Walker views the abuser who personally apologized and the one who did not, is striking. While she has no on going personal relationships with either of the individuals, she feels compassion and

trust toward the second abuser who apologized and general apprehension toward the person who did not.

Walker imagined an apology from the first abuser who never apologized. She followed www.apologyletter.org guidelines under the heading *Forgiveness* to "Help me imagine a healing encounter with someone who has hurt me" that are contained in Appendix A the Imagined Apology Exercise, described above.

Walker engaged in the process as directed without the offender's participation, and without any acknowledgement and accountability of wrongdoing on their part.

Stating what she hoped for and imagining a positive encounter with the person who harmed her had healing results. The process was a ritual confirming her self-worthiness. She felt a greater sense of agency in exercising personal control by engaging in the process, which improved her feelings. Imagining that the abuser acknowledged his wrongdoing gave her a sense of freedom and decreased the apprehension she felt about the person. It was a healing experience.

The effect of the imagined apology exceeded her expectations. She expected to find it easier to understand the offender who did not apologize, but found she was able to decrease her personal sense of discomfort and disturbance by engaging in the program. Since first doing the exercise in 2009, she has done it several more times for the abuse, and also for an assault she experienced as a young adult.

In this second case, when Walker was 24 years old, an unknown and never apprehended assailant seriously injured her in an attempted rape and murder (National Public Radio, 2014). She was intoxicated in Waikiki when the crime occurred. She felt shame believing her choice to drink alcohol was a character deficit that put her in a dangerous situation, which almost cost her life, and almost left her five-year-old child without a mother.

Walker forgave the offender about four months after the assault. Ironically the harm she experienced created a path to a new and improved life for her and her daughter, but she struggled forgiving herself for many years. She did not admit publically that she was intoxicated, or share the true details about the assault, until she forgave herself several decades after it occurred.

Case example of apology for serious crime with victim and offender meeting

The benefit of apology for serious crime is illustrated in a restorative dialogue that Walker facilitated for a mother, her daughter, and the man who murdered their husband and father.

In the late afternoon of February 24, 2004, Bob Shapel believed he was stopping his tool sales truck to help two men who needed help in rural Washington State. He planned to help the men and then head home for dinner with his wife Colleen of almost 30 years, and their adult daughter Melissa. Careful to be on time, and if not, always quick to let people know he would be late, Colleen and Melissa got worried when Bob did not call or come home for dinner. Unknown to them, the men Bob had stopped to help had robbed and murdered him. After a sleepless night and hours of worry and fear, Bob's body was found, and his family was thrown into a terrible abyss that would take them years to recover.

The men were apprehended hours after Bob's murder. The death penalty was originally sought, but the men pled guilty and were sentenced to life in prison. One of the men, William Schorr, took responsibility and agreed to participate in a July 2011 restorative dialogue seven years after Bob's murder. Walker facilitated the meeting with Colleen, Melissa, and William, which was filmed and broadcast on the Oprah Winfrey Network in 2011 (Hansen, 2013; Schorr, 2013; Walker, 2013).

The five-hour meeting was held in a high security Washington penitentiary. William prepared an apology letter for Colleen and Melissa that he delivered during the meeting. Since the restorative encounter, Lorenn has stayed in contact with Colleen, Melissa, William, and his mother.

Melissa explained in 2016 how William's apology affected her five years after she received it:

"One of the things victims do not have the chance to do is to confront the killer. I sat countless times behind him [William Schorr] in the courtroom, heard the attorneys speak on his behalf and wondered what he felt and what he had to say for himself. When I had the opportunity to sit down in front of him [seven years later], what happened next was what I had hoped I would hear for years. I heard the truth. I heard remorse. I heard someone take accountability. Our conversation began awkward as one could imagine, but I had needed

and wanted to hear details about my father's murder since it had happened. Of course I had read the confessions and spoke with law enforcement, but it meant so much more coming from the person who was there. As our time was coming to a close, William took out a letter and read what I consider to be an apology. For the first time since my father had been murdered, 7 years later, I heard him take responsibility for his actions and apologize to my face. There is this persona that I had attached to my father's killers and prior to my restorative justice process, I had likened and labeled them as monsters. It is almost easier to process that they had to be a monster—a regular person couldn't commit such an atrocious act—and yet there I sat across from a regular person who made horrible decisions one day. I think I was very open to his apology. I needed to let go of the hurt and anger I had towards him and hearing him speak from the heart allowed me to look past what he did as a murderer and view him as a person" (Shapel Hansen, 2016).

Apology can be a vital process for people to heal from the most serious kind of wrongdoing. Sometimes we do not have the opportunity to experience an apology directly, or we do not have the opportunity to give an apology directly, yet even in those cases we can still benefit from the apology process.

Restorative apologies address shame and promote forgiveness

Addressing shame helps prevent future harm (Braithwaite, 1999). Assisting people in reducing the harmful effects of trauma, and helping them find ways to heal from abuse and victimization, could help them avoid the victim-offender overlap.

The imagined apology process helped Walker forgive herself by addressing her shame. Going through the details of the program including imagining that the assailant was accountable for the harm he caused, thinking of what she hoped he would have learned, and what he would say he would do to repair the harm, and finally in realizing the difference in how she felt about the assault before and after she did the exercise, helped Walker forgive herself.

Forgiveness is a personal concept. For many it is simply what Gerald Jampolsky describes: "Forgiveness is the letting go of the past" (Jampolsky, 2010:

57), and nothing more. Forgiveness does not require understanding what caused the wrongdoing, and it does not require having a repaired relationship with the offender. Those forgiven do not even need to know forgiveness has occurred to assist victims. Forgiveness can simply be something the for-giver does for the self (Tutu, 2000).

Fred Luskin, who created and directed the Stanford Forgiveness Project, has studied and worked with many victims, including parents whose children were murdered. He teaches forgiveness as a learned skill. He defines forgiveness as:

“The experience of peace and understanding that can be felt in the present moment. You forgive by challenging the rigid rules you have for other people’s behavior and by focusing your attention on the good things in your life as opposed to the bad. Forgiveness does not mean forgetting or denying that painful things occurred. Forgiveness is the powerful assertion that bad things will not ruin your today even though they may have spoiled your past” (Luskin, 2003: 13).

People who harm others also need to forgive themselves. We want people to learn from bad behavior and not repeat it. We want people to know that “each of us is more than the worst thing we’ve ever done” (Stevenson, 2015: 290).

In 2011, Tangney, Stuewig and Hafez reviewed how shame, guilt and remorse may influence offender behavior. They analyzed Braithwaite’s reintegrative shaming theory, which focuses on a person’s behavior rather than their characteristics, and compared it with psychological theories about shame and guilt, and concluded that restorative justice interventions “seem especially promising” (Tangney, Stuewig, Hafez, 2011: 718).

There is a need for programs like www.apologyletter.org that do not require meetings between victims and offenders. Meetings between the people harmed and those who caused it are simply impossible often. In the United States, over seventy percent of all reported crimes go without anyone being arrested or charged (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2014). In theft cases it is understandable that the person whose property was stolen, and the person who stole it, are often unidentified, but even in non-fatal violence cases, forty percent of the perpetrators are also unknown (Harrell, 2012).

People who caused harm will not always take responsibility for their behavior or be accountable for it. In most cases victims cannot rely on offenders being responsible for wanting to make things right. It is natural to feel anger when one is harmed by another, but eventually facing a painful and unjust situation, and doing whatever is within one's control to deal with the problem, is necessary (Frankl, 1985).

As Luskin points out too: "When we blame another person for how we feel, we grant them the power to regulate our emotions. In all likelihood, this power will not be used wisely, and we will continue to suffer" (Luskin, 2003: 29). When our healing needs are in someone else's control, we give them "power to regulate our emotions." Like Luskin stresses, this is probably not wise and is unlikely to be healing.

Failing to provide people who engaged in harmful behavior with opportunities to learn from their mistakes, and to work to make things right, risks future harm. Offenders, as well as victims, often feel shame and guilt. Psychology theory distinguishes shame as being an inherent characteristic of a person, while guilt concerns a person's behaviors (Tangney, Stuewig, Martinez, 2014). Offenders need the opportunity to understand and address the harm they may have caused to address including their shame and guilt. They need opportunities for healing and some hope they can work to repair harm they caused.

Formerly incarcerated people also suffer from stigmatization in a range of areas, which makes law-abiding behavior more difficult (Moore, Tangney, Stuewig, 2016). Processes that assist offenders in helping them to analyze and understand their feelings and behaviors gives them an opportunity to gain self-insight and the possibility of cognitively addressing damaging stigma.

Today, Walker readily discusses how the childhood abuse, and the assault she suffered, motivated her justice and public health work. Her painful and harmful experiences, including feeling shame as a victim, the apology she received as a child, and the value of imagined apologies, have helped her appreciate the power victims and offenders have in working to create more meaningful and positive lives no matter what happened in the past.

Combining apology with gratitude

The need for a combined apology and gratitude letter was discovered while providing the 12-week program on restorative justice and solution-focused approaches for imprisoned people. Many incarcerated individuals not only want to make apologize to the people that they have hurt, but they also want to thank these same people for having helped them. For example, a woman who was addicted to drugs stole property from her mother. She was deeply sorry about the theft and wanted to apologize to her mother who was also caring for her children while she was imprisoned. The imprisoned woman felt both remorse and wanted to apologize, while also feeling gratitude for her mother's care of the children. A combined apology and gratitude letter was developed to serve both purposes.

The combined apology and gratitude letter in Appendix B is based on restorative apology letter guidelines. It is also based on Martin Seligman's positive psychology work. Seligman developed a gratitude letter exercise for his graduate students at the University of Pennsylvania (Seligman, 2004). His research found positive effects from writing and delivering a gratitude letter including positive feelings lasting at least one month after completion (Seligman et al., 2004). The apology and gratitude guidelines in Appendix B incorporate Seligman's work. The guidelines have been used hundreds of times by incarcerated women in Hawai'i.

Conclusion

A restorative apology and the www.apologyletter.org program are practical and useful tools that specifically describe behavior that has caused harm or an offense, which offenders and victims often feel shame and guilt about. A restorative apology describes what the apologizer has learned from their harmful behavior and how they will commit to behaving differently under similar circumstances in the future. The apology additionally offers suggestions for how the apologizer might repair the harm caused and gives the victim the opportunity to meet personally to discuss the matter and explain how they would like the apologizer to repair the harm. Unlike other forms of apologies that are not

restorative, the apologizer does not ask the victim to accept the apology. The apologizer asks nothing of the victim, not even to read the apology.

Both real and imagined restorative apologies can improve the wellbeing of individuals who are harmed by addressing shame and dealing with guilt in a healing process. Restorative apologies can also help individuals who have harmed others by focusing on what they can do to repair harm caused by the wrongdoing. By openly admitting the harm caused and willingness to address the healing needs of those harmed, offenders also take steps toward their own healing and improved self-insight.

Even when an apology is only imagined, it can help an individual reconcile harm, whether they caused it or were harmed by another. In the best cases victims and offenders develop gratitude. Restorative apologies are a tool that can help people heal, which have the potential to end the cycle of the victim-offender overlap. Further research into restorative apologies and the victim-offender overlap should be conducted.

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Moć restorativnih izvinjenja (stvarnih i zamišljenih) za žrtve i učinioce

Nakon nanošenja štete ili trepljenja štete usled nekog povređujućeg ponašanja može da se javi osećanje stida. Ukoliko se osećanje stida zanemari, povećava se verovatnoća da će doći do preklapanja uloga žrtve i učinioca, što rezultira time da su veće šanse da žrtve izvrše neko delo i drugome nanesu štetu, a da, sa druge strane, učinioci budu viktimizirani. Invididualno primenjen onlajn restorativni proces izvinjenja bi mogao da spreči preklapanje uloga žrtve i učinioca tako što će umanjiti efekte štete (povrede) koja je naneta. Ljudima koji su naneli štetu daje se prilika da prihvate odgovornost i da pronađu način kako da nanetu štetu poprave, dok oni kojima je šteta naneta mogu da se bave povredom i sopstvenim osećanjem stida. Anegdotalni dokazi ukazuju da restorativna izvinjenja, bilo da su izražena lično ili imaginarno, mogu da pomognu osobama u procesu oporavka od povrede i traume. Otvoren pristup procesima restorativnog izvinjenja je dostupan na internet stranici www.apologyletter.org. Cilj ovog rada je da pokaže kako poverljiv program izvinjenja može da pomogne ljudima u bavljenju povredom i osećanjem stida. Prilozi A i B sadrže vežbe imaginarnih izvinjenja i uputstva za pripremu kombinovanog pisma zahvalnosti i izvinjenja, što sve skupa može da pomogne pojedincima koji su doživeli neko povređujuće ponašanje.

Ključne reči: izvinjenje, stid, preklapanje uloge žrtve i počinioca, restorativno izvinjenje, kratka terapija usmerena na rešenje, praštanje.

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APPENDIX A



Imagined Apology Exercise

- 1) Think of a time someone hurt you and on the scale below and circle how disturbed you are about the injustice today:

1	2	3	4	5
Not disturbed (can move on)	A little disturbed (bit bothersome)	Medium disturbed (mixed disturbed & not)	Disturbed (fairly irritated)	Very disturbed (can't discuss)

- 2) Imagine the person has now come to you and says after serious thinking s/he regrets what they did that hurt you and they wish to apologize to you. You may hesitate at first but decided you want to hear what they have to say. After you listen you genuinely believe they are sorry for how they harmed you.
- 3) The person starts the conversation by telling you honestly what they did that hurt you. What do you imagine they would say that they did to you? Write out her/his what they would say they did to you:
- 4) Next s/he says s/he is truly sorry and has been thinking about it and has learned a lesson from her/his bad behavior. Write out what would you hope s/he would say to you that s/he learned:
- 5) S/he also says s/he will never do anything similar like what s/he did to you to another person again. Write below what you hope that s/he would say that could convince you s/he will never do it again:
- 6) S/he ends the conversation by saying that if you agree, s/he wants to do something to help repair the harm s/he has caused you. Write out what you hope s/he suggests that might help repair some of your harm and make things better for you:
- 7) Imagine you accept the apology and s/he actually does what s/he said they would do. How will that affect your life today? What is one small thing will be different in your life as a result of s/he doing this?

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8) Circle on the scale below circle how disturbed you are about what happened now:

1	2	3	4	5
Not disturbed	A little disturbed	Medium disturbed	Disturbed	Very disturbed
(able to move on)	(bit bothersome)	(mixed disturbed & not)	(fairly irritated)	(can't discuss)

APPENDIX B

Gratitude & Apology Letter Guidelines

Thanking people is vital for positive relationships. Some people we are grateful for have also been hurt unintentionally, and sometimes intentionally, by our actions. We can express both gratitude and make a meaningful apology in one letter. The following guidelines may be used for writing a combined gratitude and apology letter. (Please respect and do not contact anyone subject to a protective order concerning you). These guidelines are based on work by Dr. Martin Seligman, founder of positive psychology, Dr. Ben Furman a psychiatrist and trainer from Finland, and Lorenn Walker, Hawai'i public health educator, trainer and restorative lawyer. Furman and Walker developed and provide www.apologyletter.org.

[fill in [bracketed] information with the specific facts about your situation and **copy what is in bold**
[write your name & address on letter] [fill in date you are writing letter]

Dear [person's name you are grateful for and who you have also hurt. If more than one person is involved please write each person a separate letter]:

First, I want to thank you and to express my gratitude to you for *[Describe what specifically the person did that has made a meaningful difference in your life that you are grateful for]*

You have made a difference because *[Describe the meaningful difference the person you are thanking has made for others, e.g. "Your taking care of (child's name) has helped (her or him survive)..."]*

I deeply appreciate and am thankful for all your hard work and kindness in *[doing whatever they did that you are thanking them for]*

Second, I want to apologize to you for *[Describe what you did to the person named above that was hurtful, wrong, or unfair towards him/her]*

I want you to know that I truly regret my behavior.

I have been thinking about what happened and I feel that I have learned a lesson. I have learned that: *[Describe what you have learned]*

I will never do anything similar again, to you or to anyone else. I am determined to deal differently with similar situations in the future. In similar situations I will: *[Describe what you will do different in the future]*

I wish there was a way for me to try and make up for what I did to you. If you have any ideas for how I might repair the harm I caused, I will try my best to do it. One possibility I thought of is: *[Describe what you might do to make it up to the person you have hurt]*

I am also willing to listen to you and meet with you in person to discuss this situation too if you wish. Please let me know if you want to meet, or if there is anything else I can do to make things right.

You are free to accept or reject this apology. I have wronged you and I don't want you to feel any pressure from me to accept my apology. That is a different matter and totally up to you.

Yours sincerely, *[or love, aloha, etc. & your name]*