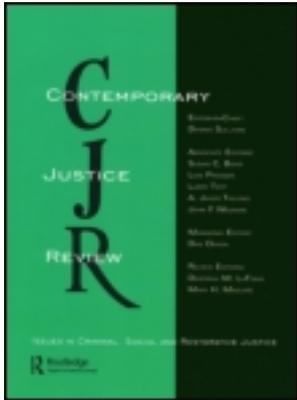


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### “To not hate” : reconciliation among victims of violence and participants of the Greensboro Truth and Reconciliation Commission

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## **“To not hate”: reconciliation among victims of violence and participants of the Greensboro Truth and Reconciliation Commission**

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The Greensboro Truth and Reconciliation Commission (GTRC) was an intervention promoting reconciliation among the victims and community affected by the 1979 Greensboro Massacre in North Carolina. An exploratory qualitative research design was used, in which in-depth, open-ended interviews were conducted with victims of the Greensboro Massacre who subsequently participated in the GTRC ( $n = 17$ ). Findings revealed a typology of reconciliation that includes cognitive–affective, behavioral and social reconciliation. Respondents displayed different orientations in how they prioritized reconciliation with the twin goals of seeking truth and justice. The GTRC did contribute to interpersonal reconciliation, and can be a useful model of communities working to recover from violence. The cognitive–affective, behavioral and social typology of reconciliation can be used to assess other interventions aimed at promoting reconciliation. Individuals’ personal orientations towards reconciliation can also be used to explain different reactions among people to restorative justice efforts.

**Keywords:** Truth and Reconciliation Commissions; restorative justice; reconciliation; victims; Greensboro

### **Introduction**

This study investigates the Greensboro Truth and Reconciliation Commission (GTRC), an intervention aimed at cultivating reconciliation and promoting well being among the victims and community affected by the 1979 Greensboro Massacre in North Carolina. In 2004, non-profit and grassroots organizations launched a Truth and Reconciliation Commission to address social trauma persisting from that violent event. Truth and Reconciliation Commissions are increasingly popular interventions promoting restorative justice and are among the primary mechanisms for fostering social well-being after mass violence, yet their effectiveness in promoting social recovery after conflict remains largely unexamined. The GTRC is the first Truth and Reconciliation Commission established in the United States, and the first anywhere to be operated solely by community organizations instead of a government sanctioned entity.

### **Historical background**

On the third of November of 1979, a caravan of Ku Klux Klan and American Nazi Party members fired into a crowd of labor union activists during a public demonstration in

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a low-income neighborhood of Greensboro, North Carolina. After 88 seconds of gunfire, 10 demonstrators had been injured, five killed, and a community divided by what became known as the “Greensboro Massacre”. The demonstrators were members of the left-wing group, Worker’s Viewpoint Organization, with close ties to the Community Worker’s Party. They were a racially mixed group from both inside and outside of Greensboro. They had been organizing for labor rights and social justice in North Carolina, and some members had gained union leadership roles in local textile mills. The perpetrators were members of the white supremacy groups, the Ku Klux Klan and American Nazi Party. Earlier that year, they had screened the Ku Klux Klan recruitment film, *Birth of a Nation*, in a nearby community theater. To protest this, the Worker’s Viewpoint Organization burned a confederate flag and held a “Death to the Klan” rally. As evidenced by this slogan, there was an escalation of provocative and violent rhetoric prior to the demonstration.

After the attack, city authorities clamped down on subsequent protests and the police harassed the victims; some were arrested and others surveilled. Under pressure from the city, the local media distorted their coverage and framed the incident as an equal shootout between two radical fringe groups, rather than a one-sided attack. The victims were portrayed as dangerous communist agitators, outsiders without community ties. The perpetrators were prosecuted in two criminal trials – the attack was videotaped in broad daylight. However, the District Attorney was not supportive of the victims, equating them to the North Vietnamese Army. All-white juries acquitted the perpetrators in both trials. Many suspected police complicity in the attack, and distrust of the city government deepened, particularly among low-income and African American residents. These events negatively affected economic, social and political dimensions of life in Greensboro, and the lingering racial tensions contributed to a climate of animosity.

In the intervening years, many of the victims dedicated themselves to exposing their story, discovering the truth behind the violence, and pursuing justice for those killed. In 1985, the victims won a federal civil suit against the perpetrators and the Greensboro Police Department for the wrongful death of one of the victims, and used the settlement to further fund their organizing. The victims formed two organizations, the Greensboro Justice Fund and the Beloved Community Center. The Greensboro Justice Fund was started with a portion of the 1985 civil suit settlement money, and worked to promote racial tolerance and human and civil rights in the US South. The Beloved Community Center was founded in 1991, and is named after Dr Martin Luther King Jr’s vision of a “beloved community”. The Center has been involved in educational reform, advocacy on behalf of the homeless, labor organizing among K-Mart workers and criminal justice reform.

### **Birth of an organization**

In 1999, on the twentieth anniversary of the violence, the victims discussed launching a re-examination of the Greensboro Massacre. Influenced by the success of the South African TRC and other international truth and reconciliation projects, and at the prompting of a philanthropic organization in New York (Andrus Family Foundation), they decided to organize a TRC model. The GTRC also received significant consulting and advice from the International Center for Transitional Justice, an NGO in New York focused on assisting transitional justice mechanisms such as prosecutions of war crimes and truth commissions around the world. The GTRC originated at the grass roots community level, and was not officially connected, sponsored or endorsed by

any government or private agency. While being a grassroots commission had some benefits, there were some clear limitations associated with the lack of state sponsorship. Chief among them was that the GTRC lacked subpoena power, and thus could not compel the participation of individuals, nor obtain official records.

The GTRC was funded by a combination of private donations and foundation grants totaling \$425,109.48. The primary funders were social justice philanthropic foundations: the Andrus Family Fund contributed \$185,000 and the Justice, Equality, Human Dignity, and Tolerance (JEHT) Foundation gave \$150,000. The rest of the foundation funding was made in smaller increments from the Z. Smith Reynolds Foundation (\$30,000), the Ramano Family Fund (\$10,000), the Ervin Lee Brisbon Fund (\$6,000), the Community Foundation for a Greater Greensboro (\$3,000), the Julian Price Family Foundation (\$2,000), the North Carolina Humanities Council Mini-Grant (\$1,200) and the Sprinkle Family Fund (\$200). The rest came from individual grassroots donations totaling \$36,709.48. The GTRC was also supported by a number of in-kind donations of meeting space, food and technical assistance from individuals and corporations, including Applebee's, Chick-fil-A, Harris Teeter, Outback Steakhouse, Sam's Club, Target and Panera Bread, among others.

In 2004 the Greensboro Truth and Reconciliation Commission was officially launched to examine the causes and consequences of the events of 3 November 1979, and to promote dialogue and reconciliation in the community. Although initiated by victims, a selection process was implemented to ensure that the Commissioners would be objective and independent. While the majority of people who participated in the GTRC were victims and concerned community members, other groups critical of the victims and the GTRC also participated. Greensboro police personnel, lawyers from the criminal trials, and some KKK members and a former Nazi came forward, giving statements and attending the public hearings. Throughout the process, the Mayor and City Council of Greensboro officially opposed the GTRC; however, all the African American City Council members voted to support it.

The mandate of the GTRC charged the seven commissioners "with the examination of the context, causes, sequence and consequences of the events of November 3, 1979". In their investigation, the GTRC reviewed the evidence from all three legal trials, local and federal law enforcement records, newspaper articles and academic literature. In addition, they took approximately 200 statements given in personal interviews and public hearings. The GTRC acknowledged several limitations to their findings, which included gaps in available evidence, participants' imperfect memories, inadequate time, funding and staff. Another obstacle to the investigation was the strict control of information by federal agencies. Several documents released to the GTRC under the Freedom of Information Act were substantially blacked out.

The GTRC held three public hearings; the first was focused on the events leading up to 3 November 1979, the second on the events of that day, and the third on the consequences of the violence. In 2006, the GTRC finished its work by releasing a comprehensive Final Report, with recommendations for the community (Magarrell & Wesley, 2008).

### **Truth and Reconciliation Commissions**

Truth and Reconciliation Commissions (TRCs) are temporary bodies that investigate past human rights abuses. In addition to reviewing official records, this investigation includes consulting with victims, perpetrators, and community members, and often in

a public forum setting which encourages dialogue and reconciliation between formerly antagonistic groups (Androff, 2009). Although the first TRCs were in Latin America, the most famous TRC occurred in South Africa during the transition from apartheid to democracy.

TRCs are based on restorative justice principles (seeking to repair the social fabric). However, they differ from victim–offender mediation. TRCs are community-based, and could be thought of as victim–offender mediation on a community scale. They are usually monitored not by staff, but by officially sanctioned commissioners, or in this case, commissions selected by the community and representative of various stakeholders. TRCs may have more in common with the restorative justice intervention known as “circles”, where the emphasis is upon dialogue. This form of community-based restorative justice intervention, with local ownership and investment in the process and the focus on repair and rebuilding relationships, is central to achieving reconciliation (Clark, 2008).

The critical difference between TRCs and other community-based restorative justice initiatives is the investigation. Each TRC conducts an investigation aimed at clarifying the events surrounding violence and other human rights abuses, unearthing previously silenced stories of victims, and adding them to the larger historical view.

There were many significant differences between the GTRC and the South African TRC. In South Africa, the TRC was responding to the recent transition from decades of state oppression, the TRC was sanctioned by the state, the perpetrators were offered amnesty and many did come forward and make statements. In Greensboro, the catalyzing violence was 25 years prior to the TRC, the government did not participate, there was no amnesty, and few perpetrators participated.

Despite this, the GTRC was inspired by and modeled after the South African TRC. One of the South African TRC Commissioners, Bongani Finca, traveled to Greensboro for the opening ceremony of the GTRC. Just as the South African TRC investigated decades of apartheid rule, the GTRC studied North Carolina’s legacy of slavery, segregation and violent racism to comprehend the context for the Massacre. Although the GTRC lacked state authority, it did have a moral authority based on sanction from civil society and grassroots organizations and the wider community. Even though many perpetrators did not participate, some did come forward. TRCs have proven to be malleable enough interventions to be adaptable to a range of unique contexts. While the GTRC operated on a much smaller scale than the South African TRC, it clearly fits the basic mold of TRC interventions.

Within TRCs, the relationship between “truth” and “reconciliation” is unclear. Gibson (2004) attempted to analyze a causal relationship – does the truth lead to reconciliation? It has also been suggested that truth can lead to justice, which then can contribute to reconciliation. Alternatively, truth can lead to healing, which also can contribute to reconciliation. In the GTRC, the role of “truth” was very important. Among the victims, there was a consensus that the GTRC’s Final Report included important context, and the best account based on available information. Some victims complained that the report did not go far enough in linking the business leaders (particularly the owners of Cone Mills) and law enforcement agencies (the Greensboro Police Department and the FBI) to the perpetrators.

As to the question of if there can be reconciliation without full truth – there are some that dispute the basic notion of a full truth; all truth is incomplete. Given that the concept of truth is often disputed, the goal of the “truth-seeking” function of TRCs is to establish not an objective truth but rather an intersubjective truth – a socially

constructed truth built from the multiplicity of stories uncovered through the investigation and heard at the public hearings. Therefore it is expected that reconciliation is possible without a full truth. However, the less truth that participants perceive to result from the TRC, the less reconciliation is likely.

### **What is reconciliation?**

A reconciliation movement is taking place throughout the world. (Desmond Tutu, in Daly & Sarkin, 2007, p. ix)

Reconciliation is as popular a concept as it is unclear. Not well developed, the concept suffers from varied and ambiguous definitions. Although it is often extolled as the goal of various endeavors, there is little consensus on the process of how reconciliation is supposed to occur. Despite this conceptual confusion, there has been a proliferation in the use of the term in the literature and with projects around the world. There is a significant social psychology literature on the topics of interpersonal conflict and forgiveness (Enright, 2001); however there has been relatively little attention on the process of reconciliation among victims of violence.

### ***Defining reconciliation***

The term “reconciliation” connotes abstract ideas of social healing, inter-group cooperation and restoration to a previous state of social harmony. The word “reconciliation” comes from the Latin, *conciliatus*, meaning “coming together” (Kumar, 1999). Many have noted reconciliation’s theological heritage (Boraine, 2004; Minow, 1998; Tutu, 1999). Kriesberg (1998) defines reconciliation, in the post conflict setting, as “developing a mutually conciliatory accommodation between antagonistic or formerly antagonistic persons or groups”. Rosenberg (1994) defines reconciliation as when both victims and perpetrators are ready to normalize relations and coexist peacefully in the same area (p. 67). Minow (1998) describes reconciliation as involving “restoring dignity to victims” but also “dealing respectfully with those who assisted or were complicit with the violence” (p. 23). Kumar (1999) defines reconciliation to include “adversaries’ acceptance of each other’s right to coexist in war-torn societies” (p. 1), which he posits as the basis for tolerance. The emphasis in these definitions is upon tolerance between groups that were formerly antagonistic, and upon the peaceful co-existence of these groups. The willingness to “put up with” people or groups that one previously was openly hostile towards is an essential ingredient in reconciliation (Gibson, 2004).

### ***Achieving reconciliation***

The type of justice best suited for reconciliation remains debatable. Current discussions of how to achieve reconciliation can be divided into several groups, including retributive justice, restorative justice, psychological, political and social justice perspectives. The legal perspective advocates for justice through the application of the rule of law, of which reconciliation is a by-product. This perspective maintains that retributive justice is the main requirement for reconciliation. Within this perspective, criminal prosecutions are viewed as the best route to achieving reconciliation (Bass,

2000). In Greensboro, the perpetrators had been prosecuted and acquitted; the retributive approach failed to produce meaningful justice for the victims.

Reconciliation tends to be imbued with elements of restorative justice, including mediation and dialogue between victims and offenders. In this sense, the process of reconciliation seeks to be a process of re-humanization, promoting the generation of positive social bonds between various groups. The emphasis is on repairing the social fabric. Social psychological research indicates that a process of dehumanization occurs between “in-groups” and “out-groups” whereby groups are polarized, demonized and delegitimized to the point that individuals in the rival group become less-than-human, enabling one group to violate the other (Braithwaite, 2003; Halpern & Weinstein, 2004; Minow, 1998; Stover & Weinstein, 2004). As such, reconciliation needs to incorporate a process of re-humanization to combat the intense dehumanization that not only plays a functional role in the violence but persists after the violence has ceased to be an obstacle to normal social relations. This often involves reversing negative stereotypes (Ajdukovic & Corkalo, 2004). Through its emphasis on dialogue between victims and perpetrators, the GTRC was more within the restorative justice tradition than the retributive. The GTRC was a form of community-based justice, like community review boards, typically initiated by community groups dissatisfied with official mechanisms.

Reconciliation does not necessarily involve forgiveness, which can be controversial (Kumar, 1999; Minow, 1998; Tutu, 1999). Forgiveness, sometimes named as a desirable goal of reconciliation (Tutu, 1999), is often critiqued as unrealistic (Wilson, 2001). In a few instances, TRCs are said to promote forgiveness. One such example is the case of Eugene de Kock, a former Apartheid death squad commander who was forgiven by the widows of his victims after he participated in the South African TRC (Gobodo-Madikizela, 2003).

The political approach to reconciliation defines the process as a form of state building and democratization. This view, usually held by political scientists, entails open elections, the elimination of corruption and institutional reform (Gibson, 2004). Restoring democratic discourse, supporting social pluralism – accepting the amalgamation of diverse elements, adopting peaceful dispute management and joint participation in communal life are pieces of reconciliation that are often linked to the strengthening of civil society institutions. Gibson (2004) measured levels of reconciliation in South Africa after their TRC by assessing citizens’ attitudes to the legitimacy of their democratic institutions. Political reconciliation was not a part of the GTRC, as there was no transition of power in Greensboro, and the local government opposed the effort.

Others argue for a compensatory or distributive justice, and hold that reconciliation would be best achieved through reparations and structural adjustments in the economic system (Minow, 1998). This perspective recognizes the role of inequality in perpetuating violence, and as a form of structural violence. However, past efforts to compensate victims of political violence have been criticized as “buying off the victims” for their justice (Hayner, 2001). Furthermore, reparations and the redistribution of economic resources are problematic in the context of material deprivation that frequently accompanies violence.

Despite the myriad meanings and methods of reconciliation, there is common ground. Many elements of reconciliation revolve around communication and dialogue between the groups to be reconciled. Also, it is clear that reconciliation involves some measure of mediation and cooperation. The willingness to coexist with others that one

dislikes or disagrees with, or mutual tolerance, achieved through a process of social contact and dialogue, forms the basis of reconciliation (Stover & Weinstein, 2004).

Staub (2006) presents a social psychological perspective on reconciliation. Extending the notion of mutual tolerance, Staub writes of the importance of seeing the humanity and being accepting of others. There is a notion of evidencing a readiness to reconcile that includes a tone of respect and an attitude of openness. Two critical elements of Staub's conception of reconciliation are a changed psychological orientation toward the other, and the possibility of a constructive relationship. These elements convey the internal psychological process of reconciliation, as well as the interpersonal dynamic of repairing relationships.

### **Methodology**

An exploratory qualitative research design was used in which in-depth, open-ended interviews were conducted with victims of the Greensboro Massacre who subsequently participated in the GTRC ( $n = 17$ ). Purposive sampling was used to include the population most affected by the violence who also participated in the intervention. A qualitative research design permitted the fullest exploration of the victims' and participants' experiences. No research has studied this population; therefore open-ended interviews were appropriate for data collection.

Interviews were conducted solely with victims; interviews with perpetrators were beyond the scope of this research. Fewer perpetrators participated in the GTRC than victims, and those who did participate were less willing to share their experiences. The lack of perpetrator's perspective is a limitation to this study and to the understanding of reconciliation stemming from the GTRC. Victims were selected for inclusion in the sample from a sense of priority that if the GTRC was to meet the needs of any population, at a minimum the intervention should work for the victims.

An open-ended questionnaire was developed for this research, and covers themes related to how participants came to participate in the GTRC, the nature of their participation in the GTRC and the impact of their participation upon their overall well-being, as well as basic demographic information related to their socio-economic status (occupation and education). Participants were also asked about their perspective on reconciliation, what it meant to them, any experiences they may have had with reconciliation, if they felt the GTRC contributed to reconciliation and their attitude toward the perpetrators. Interviews took approximately 2 hours on average.

### **Sample**

The sample includes two generations, the 14 original members of the Worker's Viewpoint Organization who were in their twenties and thirties at the time of the demonstration in 1979 and are now in their fifties and sixties; and three of their children, who were either very young or not yet born in 1979 (the oldest was 9), and are now are in their twenties and thirties. Nine of the respondents were female, and eight were male. Thirteen respondents identified themselves as white (four of whom identified as Jewish), and four respondents identified themselves as African American or black. The racial groups were equal along gender lines (both African American and Jewish racial groups were evenly male-female). The respondents were a highly educated group; most had been to college, and 12 had graduate degrees. Three had only completed high school; two had completed bachelor's

degrees, five master's degrees, two medical degrees and five had PhDs. All the respondents were employed.

Fourteen respondents had high levels of engagement in the GTRC, which means they participated by doing more than just providing a statement, by serving on a task force, advisory board or planning committee in some capacity, and generally attending all GTRC events. Three respondents had low levels of engagement and only participated minimally in the GTRC, that is, they did not attend any meeting or events beyond giving their statement. Seven respondents had a high geographical proximity to the GTRC, meaning that they lived in Greensboro. Ten respondents had a low geographical proximity to the GTRC, meaning that they lived outside of Greensboro.

## Findings

Analysis of the data revealed three general categories of reconciliation – cognitive–affective, behavioral and social. This typology is defined as follows:

- (1) Cognitive–affective reconciliation is a change in people's thoughts, attitudes, and beliefs as well as changes in emotions, feelings and gut reactions. This is limited to an individual's internal experience.
- (2) Behavioral reconciliation is a change in people's behavior. This is when one individual makes a gesture towards another. This behavior, or gesture, is an act of conciliation, and could include a sign of respect, indicate a good faith effort to reconcile, or constitute an apology for a previous harm or reparations. Such a behavior may be the result of experiencing cognitive–affective reconciliation; however it may be motivated by other concerns independent of cognitive–affective reconciliation.
- (3) Social reconciliation is a change in an interpersonal relationship based upon cognitive–affective and behavioral reconciliation. This is when an individual acknowledges or accepts another's behavioral reconciliation. This may result in cognitive–affective reconciliation, but also may not.

These three levels of reconciliation are interconnected but nonlinear. They can be progressive, but do not necessarily build on each other. An individual can experience cognitive–affective reconciliation without having witnessed an act of behavioral reconciliation, or without having performed such an act.

### *Cognitive–affective reconciliation*

For many, reconciliation was about changing their attitudes toward the perpetrators. Many respondents described decreased feelings of hatred and anger towards the perpetrators through their participation in the GTRC. This is an internal process, as respondent E described, "My own reconciling has been with myself", and coming to terms through the GTRC with his feelings towards the perpetrators, "I had these thoughts and feelings about how these people were monsters and giving myself permission to just process and just honor and respect feelings".

Eight respondents described their experiences with reconciliation as coming to tolerate previously intolerable people's presence, "I feel like I can approach or talk to [someone who] is in the KKK a lot easier now without the same adversarial feeling that I once had", and "I don't feel like I walk around in anger to the shooters, the

perpetrators the way I did before” (A). Respondent A connected these feelings to her experience with the GTRC, saying “I would credit that to the Truth Commission”.

Others recalled their original reactions to the shooting, “After that happened, these are my friends and I knew the government was involved in it, I still felt like I would like to get rid of the Klans, even hurt them or shoot some of them” (D). Respondent G admitted that before the GTRC, “I can’t even imagine sitting down in the same building with a Klansman who admittedly ... participated in gunning down some people that I knew”, and harbored feelings of revenge, “At one point, I had the attitude where, shit, let me go get my gun and retaliate”.

The weight of these negative emotions wore on D over time, “That’s a heavy load, and, at some point, that’s another thing with finding the truth [from the Commission], I could find myself beginning to not hate the Klans”. D’s new perspective on the perpetrators included some empathy, “I feel like they are victims too. They didn’t die or anything, but the system used them”. Respondent G’s attitude shifted away from revenge “no, I don’t have that point of view anymore”, as a result of his participation in the GTRC “it kind of forced you to listen, see their point of view; so that’s a good thing”. He concluded that “the GTRC process can help us get to that point, where violence is not something that we need to resort to, to solve our issues and problems; so that’s a great thing”.

Four respondents described a process of humanization; coming to understand, to know, and to relate to others as fully realized human beings. This process transforms former enemies into more sympathetic figures, equalized by a shared humanity. The GTRC allowed people from both sides to “be human”. For J, this process led her to “understand that we’re all in the same boat, and that we’re all here to do the best that we can, and that includes the Klan”. Respondent E described humanization as “Everyone is more than just one label and really seeing the three dimensional humanity in everyone ... That we are all people”.

Cognitive–affective reconciliation occurred through listening to the perpetrators’ testimony. One striking example came when “a Klansman said ‘I’d be a good Communist if I’d been brought up in New York’”. This made a positive impression on respondent J, “I thought that was just such an insightful thing for him to say and I think it was the right spirit”. Although some respondents felt differently, this one could relate, “I think some people didn’t really believe him but I really appreciated it because I think I could have been a good Klansperson if I’d of been born in the right place”. Understanding other people in their own developmental context contributed to this process, “who knows how you turn out because of your environment?” (J).

These respondents found that once they understood the perpetrators’ point of view, and their perspective of what happened that day, it was easier to humanize them. Respondent C described listening to a perpetrator’s explanation, “he’s saying he went there that day not intending to hurt anyone, not knowing what was going on. He thinks that he was set up too”. Hearing these feelings on the other side helped to increase people’s understanding of how the conflict escalated into violence, “I needed to hear the KKK members say it really offended me when you burned our flag” (A). To this, the demonstrators were able to add their perspective, “and we say OK, we shouldn’t have done that, admission of guilt, it offended us when you were really racist”. Understanding how the perpetrators felt used, and how they were hurt by the rhetoric leading up to the shooting represented for some, “honest truth-telling and active listening, admissions of guilt”, that results in being “able to move on” (A).

Respondent E experienced humanization by, “seeing how much we had in common”. E recalled his looking at a photograph of one of the perpetrators, “this man with a dangling cigarette”, which represented to him literally “a monster, and the symbol of how [the Massacre] was planned”. Through the GTRC process, this respondent realized “how when you don’t connect with people as human beings you dehumanize them and then you can do bad things to them”. Part of the re-humanization process was recognizing that they shared some common struggles, “We expressed them kind of differently, I internalized mine”.

Thinking of their children was another powerful way that the perpetrators were humanized. D was touched when “one of them told us, ‘please stop bringing this up’. Their children were faced with that at school”. This was true on both sides, as C revealed how the GTRC public hearing was “the first time I talked about how [the shooting] had damaged the relationship with my children”.

While some respondents had misgivings about the perpetrators’ testimony, they did benefit from their participation, “It was helpful to see [the KKK] but they had their own reasons for coming and it was certainly not to find peace” (M). Despite some reservations, this respondent agreed that the perpetrators’ participation was positive, and an important part of what the GTRC was trying to achieve, “the Commission felt it needed to get the shooters and needed to get their piece. I understand that and agree with that still”.

People who lived outside of Greensboro, and had a low proximity to the GTRC, felt less inclined to pursue individual reconciliation. Perhaps not having to interact with the Greensboro community, perpetrators, or be involved with the city administration contributed to the feeling among respondents that there was less of a need to reconcile with these groups, “Peace at heart, being able to put it aside, that’s my personal reconciliation ... I don’t know because I don’t have to deal with those people every day”, and “Greensboro is not a place I would ever go back to if I had my choice” (M). Also, M expressed how someone can experience cognitive–affective reconciliation (“peace at heart” and “personal reconciliation”) yet not experience behavioral or social reconciliation (not wanting to interact or deal with people from the opposing side).

### ***Behavioral reconciliation***

Making an act of reconciliation, or a gesture, is a fundamental component of reconciliation. Behaviors that convey an openness to the prospect of reconciliation, such as being willing to listen, or that signifies a sign of respect, such as recognizing the legitimacy of the person with whom there had previously been a conflict. Examples of behavioral reconciliation from the GTRC included apologizing and admitting mistakes, and by making a statement and telling one’s story through their participation in the GTRC. Respondents discussed their positive and negative reactions to these gestures, and to those who failed to make a gesture.

Perpetrators who did not participate in the GTRC failed to make the most basic form of behavioral reconciliation: indicating a willingness to coexist with the victims or listen to their stories. Their lack of participation signaled that they did not recognize the legitimacy of the GTRC. Respondents drew a distinction between the perpetrators who did participate, and the city administration which did not: “in terms of the Klan and the Nazis, I actually think there was more reconciliation there than there was on the part of Greensboro officials” (H).

More complicated is the case of perpetrators who did participate in the GTRC, either through attendance or by making a statement, but who respondents judged as making insufficient gestures. These behaviors included failing to disclose new information about the attack, and were regarded as deliberate malicious attempts to prevent the GTRC from reaching reconciliation. N complained, “They just repeated the same crap they’d been saying [for] twenty-five years”. Most respondents felt that the majority of perpetrators failed to acknowledge their wrongdoing, thus failing to offer genuine behavioral reconciliation. B critiqued the statements of perpetrators that she felt were not forthcoming, “I find it hard to think of reconciliation with folks who have not been very candid”. These perpetrators, even though they expressed some degree of willingness to listen by virtue of their participation in the GTRC, did not express an “attitude of reconciliation” (B, J). In addition to the right attitude, perpetrators had to demonstrate some form of remorse, or that they had changed in a significant manner for their gesture or act to be considered behavioral reconciliation. N concluded that that one perpetrator had not changed from being a “devoted racist”, and other respondents questioned, “I’m not sure how really remorseful they are” (H, B). One perpetrator’s motivations for making a gesture was judged insufficient, “I think it was very self-serving on his part ... I think it was grandstanding and self-serving” (M).

### *Apologies*

Respondent C described how both victims and perpetrators were able to admit their mistakes and make gestures towards reconciliation. “It was in that setting that [a demonstrator] acknowledged the mistakes he had made”, and apologized for his role in the violent rhetoric that escalated tensions prior to the demonstration.

One particular experience of behavioral reconciliation was transformative for all parties involved, and led to the main episode of social reconciliation that occurred as part of the GTRC. This occurred when the shooter responsible for killing C’s husband and E’s stepfather, approached and apologized to both C and E. C described the interaction, “He talked for about an hour and apologized profusely and cried and said he had regretted what had happened and asked for my forgiveness, begged for my forgiveness”. The perpetrator also expressed how deeply the anniversary of the killings impacted him, “he told me ... that every November 3rd ... he was miserable when that anniversary came around”. E described, “Getting a chance to meet and talk with [the] former Nazi”, adding, “he used the word apologize and I don’t know how many times he did, but he did that”.

C and E learned that the perpetrator had been engaging in behavioral reconciliation prior to the GTRC, although he had not yet made gestures towards his victims. E described how the perpetrator had been “trying to redeem his actions”. He recalled, “About fifteen years ago he started this thing about changing his life and speaking out against hate and talking to students ... he was going to schools and talking to kids and telling them, ‘Don’t hate. Hating is bad’”.

Although it appears this perpetrator experienced a transformation prior to his participation in the GTRC, the GTRC gave him the opportunity to engage C and E in reconciliation. His own life experiences were sufficient for him to renounce his racism and violence, yet insufficient for him to contact and apologize to his victims. This suggests that the GTRC, which lacked the legal power to compel participation from

the perpetrators, benefited perpetrators who elected to participate based on their initiative and readiness to engage in behavioral reconciliation.

### *Telling your story as a gesture*

Ten respondents described how making a gesture by telling their story to the GTRC and listening to others make similar gestures contributed to their experiences with reconciliation. “Through the process of sharing their story and hearing other people share their story ... there was reconciliation” and “just being able to be able to step forward and honestly tell personal histories is part of reconciliation” (B, I). B added “the opportunity to hear these other folks sharing their truths led to some reconciliation”. Respondent I explained that these gestures were “a step towards reconciliation” because “there’s no way of going forward without addressing the pain of the past”.

B described how the GTRC facilitated this, “The intent of the Commission is the opportunity both to tell your story, and that was open to anybody; it was a very open process”, and “people in the community were invited to come forward who may have had no direct involvement, but were impacted in other ways”. The inclusion of diverse points of view could be especially empowering for marginalized people, “I think a big part of [the GTRC] is letting people’s voices be heard in the situation where people feel like they haven’t had the chance to speak their truth”, because “being able to speak truth is such a powerful thing on an individual level as well as getting to hear other people speak their truth” (I).

Respondent J expressed the desire to hear stories from others, “as hard as it is I want to hear all the stories, the Klan’s, the police’s, I want to hear what they have to say”. Some respondents were touched by how hearing perpetrators’ stories led to reconciliation, including one Klansman who described being “raised anti-Communist” with this particular worldview “ingrained”. Having perpetrators show up at the public hearings made a good impression, “Some of the Klansmen regret their participation, so that’s positive. That’s great” (G). This regret expressed by the perpetrators who participated, and the remorse expressed by the perpetrator who apologized, was generally well received by the respondents because it confirmed their explanation of the events, that the shooters were manipulated by law enforcement agencies into the attack. This also served to frame the perpetrators as sympathetic to some respondents, in that they were the pawns of larger forces.

### **Social reconciliation**

Social reconciliation is an interpersonal exchange of behavioral reconciliation. This process is an interactive process between, at a minimum, two individuals. The archetype of social reconciliation is between a victim and a perpetrator. However, social reconciliation can occur between any two people who were formerly in conflict or at odds. Therefore the interpersonal process can take place between two victims, victims and members of their families, and victims and community members.

Respondent C listed the variety of examples of social reconciliation:

I was able to reconcile, not just with the perpetrators, but with other people closer to me or friends who I had had contradictions with ... including with my daughter, with the Nazi, with a woman who had been my friend and who I’d tangled with in some way, with a man who had been in a different political party, a Communist but in a different political

party who I'd viewed as the enemy at one point, with a woman who had once been the girlfriend of my husband who was killed ... it was all based on sharing some truth that we hadn't shared before. It's not like these people were my enemies ... one included my daughter who I had a discussion with I wasn't able to have before ... so there has been a lot of reconciliation.

In the most dramatic example of social reconciliation, respondents C and E forgave the perpetrator who apologized for killing their family member. The perpetrator's apology was a profound experience for C, "It was very, very emotional. I was shaking ... just shaking". These respondents were touched by his efforts to make things right. Respondent C found the perpetrator to be "repentant, remorseful and I told him I forgave him". C described how they perceived and interpreted his acts of reconciliation, "According to his own capacity, I think he was really trying to repent and trying not to be a racist". C also contextualized his comments, "I think the racist current in him is very, very deep so he was saying things that were indicating overcoming his racism. I'm not sure how deep that goes". Ultimately they were satisfied, "While he apologized for November 3<sup>rd</sup>, I don't think he was willing to really take the responsibility in a deep sense, but he was grappling with it and he was very sincere" (C).

As they shared their experience, other respondents were positively affected. Respondent A was impressed, "I feel pretty good about ... the one guy who said 'I'm sorry'". D was touched, "I know it was hard for C to hear this from this man who killed somebody she loved so dearly, but to see him broken, to forgive him, and healing started", and related this to her own understanding of reconciliation, "there is healing in reconciling ... This is a process where you can actually live that, and it's so liberating". The power of hearing the perpetrators' perspective for D was that she "began to see all the things that happened and not just, they killed my friends and I want to get back at them" which allowed her to "truly forgive".

There was also social reconciliation between the respondents and people other than the perpetrators. This included the families of the respondents, as reconciliation within families could constitute "an example of other forms of social healing". Respondents commented, "A lot of people have done it with their families – a lot of kids were furious with their parents, for subjecting them to such fear and terror ... and from putting [children] at risk" (H). Another example occurred in the community between friends. F reported befriending a white person with racist beliefs, and through their conversations about F's history and connection with the GTRC, the friend grew less racist, and now "respects the black community more than he did [before]. That's a kind of reconciliation" (F).

Another example of social reconciliation occurred when community members came to understand the victims differently from their portrayal in the media. These community members had believed the city's side of the story and had been against the victims due to this misunderstanding. Respondent N had such an interaction with a community member who was able to express "if I had been in your shoes I'm sure I would've [reacted the same way to the violence]. You just go along with what you hear on the media". The result was that "we had this nice conversation ... we reconciled with each other. That was powerful, and that's what [reconciliation] became to me".

Respondent M, who had lived outside of Greensboro for a long time, explained that she did not have any friends in the community besides other respondents, and was never comfortable in the city. Through the course of traveling to Greensboro for the

GTRC, she was able to connect with several women who said to her, “we want you to come back; we want you to feel at home”. It was so nice. To me, that’s reconciliation”. M continued, “Now I feel like I have friends in Greensboro; and I said, you know, ‘cause I just felt like every white person was against us”. This was an important piece of reconciling with the community, “it was reconnecting with Greensboro”, even though it was “not the powers that be, but the people who had stepped forward, who’d come out to a hearing, and who were trying to figure out stuff with an open mind. Now, that was powerful”.

### *Orientation*

Respondents’ experiences of social reconciliation were affected by how they prioritized either the goal of reconciliation or the goal of seeking truth and justice. The respondents divided into two general viewpoints, as reconcilers and as seekers. Factors that contributed to whether respondents displayed a reconciler or seeker orientation were their level of engagement in the GTRC and their proximity to Greensboro. Those with greater levels of engagement were more satisfied, and seemed to get more out of the process. Those who were less engaged in the process were more likely to be dissatisfied with the GTRC. All the respondents living in Greensboro were reconcilers. Respondents with a high proximity were also all highly engaged, which may suggest that the closer to the GTRC, the easier it was to be involved. Yet it may also indicate that respondents with closer ties to Greensboro felt more ownership of the GTRC from a sense of community, were more invested in the process, and thus more likely to be reconcilers and to be satisfied with the GTRC.

*Reconcilers* valued reconciliation above truth-seeking and justice, and were more likely to interpret the perpetrators’ behavior favorably. Those respondents who valued “making an effort” were very pleased with those perpetrators who participated in the GTRC. For these respondents, the participation alone of these parties was often interpreted as an act of reconciliation, and it was accepted. The perpetrators’ willingness was enough. These respondents held a very pragmatic view of reconciliation. Reconcilers were more likely to react favorably to the perpetrator that said he would have been made a “good Communist” had he been born in New York. J took the first statement in a very positive light, and countered that she might have made a good KKK member in different circumstances. Reconcilers were also more likely to react positively to the perpetrator who apologized to the family of his victim. Many respondents with a reconciler’s orientation were pleased at the perpetrator’s apology, and expressed that they were willing to forgive him. The reconcilers, with their different expectations for the GTRC, were more likely to be satisfied with the truth-seeking and reconciliation components of the GTRC. They were more forgiving of the limits of the process, more willing to interpret the perpetrators’ participation positively, and generally more optimistic about the contributions of the GTRC to the community.

*Seekers* were unwilling to compromise their desires for justice and truth, and maintained that reconciliation would be a product of achieving these goals. Seekers in general experienced less reconciliation. Those who wanted greater behavioral reconciliation on the part of the perpetrators were disappointed by the GTRC. Particularly when they felt that the perpetrators did not own up to their faults or admit their wrongdoing, respondents with a seeker’s orientation felt that they could not reconcile until the perpetrators made more of an effort, or disclosed more truth about the

government's role that day. "I never had a need to reconcile with those people", and "We were interested in truth. We weren't so hot on this reconciliation stuff" (M, N, O). Although less satisfied with the reconciliation component of the GTRC, many seekers were satisfied with the truth-seeking. Truth-seeking is more important than reconciliation for seekers because they view establishing the truth as a prerequisite for justice.

The difference between reconcilers and seekers was illustrated through differential reactions and interpretations of statements made by perpetrators. The seekers' reaction to the perpetrator who would have made a "good Communist" was generally negative. F's interpretation was that "he basically just said, 'I'm loyal to my tribe, period'". Seekers took the statement as evidence of a distinct lack of cognitive-affective or behavioral reconciliation on the part of this perpetrator. The reconcilers were more likely to view this as evidence of cognitive-affective reconciliation on the part of the perpetrator, while the seekers were less satisfied, and wished for more behavioral reconciliation. Those respondents with a seeker orientation were more critical of the apology than reconcilers, as they wanted the perpetrator to offer something more valuable than an apology, such as information as to the role of the law enforcement agencies in planning the attack. The seekers orientation would seem to be an obstacle to these respondents' experiences with cognitive-affective reconciliation, and therefore to social reconciliation as well.

### **Conclusion and implications**

These findings suggest that the GTRC contributed to reconciliation among the victims of the Greensboro Massacre who participated in the process. As the first Truth and Reconciliation Commission to be conducted in the United States, the GTRC is a promising model for other communities seeking to engage a process of reconciliation. TRCs can be valuable tools for people and communities looking to promote reconciliation. They can provide structured opportunities for gestures of behavioral reconciliation, and may result in experiences of cognitive-affective reconciliation and even social reconciliation. Significant effort should be placed upon promoting engagement in future interventions. Community participation strategies can be used to accomplish this.

A largely unanswered question regarding Truth and Reconciliation Commissions has been to what extent they deliver on their promise of reconciliation. This question is beset by the problem of how to understand reconciliation. This typology provides the basis for how to comprehend and assess reconciliation. However, the relationship between these types of reconciliation remains in need of clarification. These three types of reconciliation are inter-related, and not mutually exclusive. They build upon one another. Although the way in which each type builds upon another is unclear, it may be that reconciliation begins with new information (cognitive) and subsequently changes the way one feels about an opposing person (affective), resulting in a gesture of reconciliation directed at said person (behavioral), to which they respond with their own gesture which is at that point accepted (social).

Conversely, it is possible that they operate in the opposite direction: making gestures, whether the actor is sincere or not, may produce a cognitive or affective internal change in the actor. The feedback loop between subjective experience and behavior is certainly a two-way street. Also, if reconciliation begins internally, it is unclear whether cognitive or affective reconciliation comes first. It may not matter. In terms of behavioral or social reconciliation, one may not precede the other. In fact, one

can accept another's gesture (social) without having made any gestures oneself (behavioral). Like recovery from trauma, the passage of time may do as much to promote cognitive–affective reconciliation as any gesture or TRC process. Overall, this typology provides a framework for recognizing and analyzing reconciliation efforts.

Cognitive–affective reconciliation is a very important component to the process, if not the very foundation. This is especially critical for its contribution to the process of humanization. Future efforts should seek to encourage gestures and behavioral reconciliation, or at least strive to create opportunities for such gestures. Social reconciliation may not result, even when gestures are made, perhaps depending on the personal orientation of the participants.

This typology of reconciliation could be studied further and used to extend our understanding of this nebulous concept. Future research must also attend to the experiences of perpetrators. While research with victims is important, community-based restorative justice interventions must work for all populations involved. Understanding perpetrators' motivations to participate in TRCs and their perspectives and experiences with reconciliation (especially in relation to making gestures) will contribute to the furthering of models of interpersonal reconciliation. Greater attention to the processes of reconciliation in the recovery from violence can aid victims and communities in the recovery from the trauma of violence.

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