

The Influence of Belief in Offender Redeemability and Decision-Making Competence on Receptivity to Restorative Justice

Gregory D. Paul 

Department of Communication Studies, Kansas State University, Manhattan, KS, U.S.A.

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Correspondence

Gregory Paul, Department of Communication Studies, 702 Mid Campus Drive South, 234 Nichols Hall, Manhattan, KS 66506, U.S.A.; e-mail: gregpaul@ksu.edu

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Abstract

Restorative justice (RJ) processes offer a way to address multifaceted harms caused by wrongdoing. Yet, questions remain about people's attitudes toward restorative processes such as victim–offender conferences (VOCs) and the factors that influence those attitudes. This study examined whether beliefs about youth and adult redeemability and decision-making competence influence perceptions of justice outcomes, VOC effectiveness, VOC appropriateness, VOC support, and VOC participation willingness. Analysis of survey data gathered from 207 participants through Amazon MTurk suggests that perceived redeemability and to a lesser extent decision-making competence significantly shape outcome- and process-related beliefs and evaluations. Namely, the more people believe that offenders are redeemable, the more they are likely to support restorative outcomes, perceive VOCs to be effective and appropriate, support the use of VOCs, and be willing to participate in a VOC. The study's findings are useful for potentially shaping people's understanding of and support for RJ.

When someone is accused of violating the law, the normative response in the West is to let the conventional criminal justice system investigate the situation, evaluate that person's guilt or innocence, and decide on any consequences that should be levied. Conventional justice processes, such as trials, emphasize principles such as procedural fairness, objectivity, and evidence-based reasoning (Rieke & Stutman, 1990; Wenzel, Okimoto, Feather, & Platow, 2008). Theoretically, the emphasis on procedural justice heightens the likelihood of arriving at a just outcome (i.e., distributive justice) for all parties.

Critics of conventional processes, however, argue that the criminal justice system is deficient in its outcomes, procedures, and treatment of the parties. To address these deficiencies, some critics advocate for the use of restorative justice (RJ) processes that they claim are more effective at addressing the personal and relational dimensions of conflict sparked by offensive behavior. Generally, RJ in the context of wrongdoing emphasizes the repair of material, emotional, and relational harm by the wrongdoer, typically through the use of facilitated dialogue among stakeholders (Paul, 2015, Paul & Borton, 2017; Bazemore & Walgrave, 1999; Borton, 2009; Daly, 2016; Marshall, 1999; Ruge & Cormier, 2005). There are many processes that fall under the RJ umbrella, including victim–offender mediation (VOM), victim–offender conferencing (VOC), family group conferencing, and peace circles (McCold, 2000; Raye & Roberts, 2007). These processes, while different, have a common value system that prioritizes personal and relational restoration of all parties, positive accountability, and dialogic communication (Paul & Borton, 2017, Paul & Swan, 2018; Bolívar, Aesrtsen, & Vanfraechem, 2013; Borton & Paul, 2015;

Braithwaite, 1999; Doolin, 2007; Newbury, 2008; Okimoto, Wenzel, & Feather, 2009; Roche, 2003; Tsui, 2014; Van Ness & Strong, 2010; Zehr & Mika, 2010).

Even as practitioners work to grow the use of RJ processes in communities, a central question connected with that work concerns ripeness for growth. Ripeness in this context pertains to people's receptivity to and support for the use of RJ processes in their communities (general ripeness) and to their willingness to participate in an RJ process if they are the victim of an offense (situational ripeness). A handful of studies have explored such ripeness by evaluating attitudes toward RJ, RJ processes, and RJ goals (Paul, 2015, Paul & Borton, 2017, Paul & Schenck-Hamlin, 2018; Ahlin et al., 2017; Bazemore & Leip, 2000; Roberts & Stalans, 2004). What remains largely unknown, however, is the factors that shape those attitudes.

Given the interpersonal nature of RJ processes, examining interpersonal beliefs people hold about one another should shed light on the roots of attitudes toward RJ participation and RJ goals. Research suggests that beliefs people hold about the other party in a conflict influences both conflict goals and practices (Adair, Taylor, & Tinsley, 2009; Lewicki, Saunders, & Barry, 2006). This likely extends to people who are presented an opportunity to meet with someone who has harmed them. In offense situations, victims tend to stereotype their offenders based on beliefs into which they have been socialized (Paul & Schenck-Hamlin, 2017; Haegerich, Salerno, & Bottoms, 2013; Okimoto et al., 2009; Shapland et al., 2006; Zehr, 1990). These stereotypes, developed over time from numerous sources, include beliefs about the redeemability of offenders (i.e., whether offenders can change) and beliefs about the decision-making competence of offenders (i.e., whether offenders were capable of making sound decisions). Both beliefs are connected to core restorative justice aims of helping offenders to learn, grow, and take responsibility for their behavior (Paul & Swan, 2018).

Thus, this study examines not only people's beliefs about the redeemability and decision-making competence of youth and adult offenders but also the extent to which beliefs about youth and adult offenders' redeemability and decision-making competence influence perceptions of the importance of offender-related outcomes, the effectiveness and appropriateness of RJ processes, and willingness to participate in RJ processes. Examining the influence of these stereotypes helps to move research and practice forward in terms of individuals' general and situational RJ ripeness. In terms of general ripeness, there is little research, particularly when it comes to the influence of offender stereotypes. If RJ processes are indeed collaborative (or at least co-constructed) (Paul & Borton, 2017), then it is beneficial to understand how individual factors as well as beliefs about the "other" in RJ processes influence receptivity. It also is beneficial to explore socialization processes that shape such beliefs (Gavin & MacVean, 2018; Nowotny & Carrara, 2018). In terms of situational ripeness, when it comes to considering whether or not to participate in an RJ process such as victim-offender conferencing (VOC), research is developing a fairly clear understanding of the role that goals play in influencing participation (Paul, 2015, 2016, Paul & Schenck-Hamlin, 2018; Borton, 2009; Ruge & Cormier, 2005; Umbreit, Coates, & Vos, 2004; Van Camp, 2017). Less clearly understood are the factors that shape those goals. This study contributes to filling that gap, exploring how offender stereotypes influence participation willingness and the justice goals that shape such willingness. In all, this study contributes to the growth of systematic, "second-wave" RJ research (Hansen & Umbreit, 2018) and to efforts to increase receptivity to RJ.

This paper proceeds by reviewing the extant literature on justice outcomes, justice processes, and offender stereotypes regarding redeemability and decision-making competence. It then connects the literature on stereotypes with beliefs about outcome goal importance, perceived effectiveness and appropriateness of RJ processes, and willingness to participate in RJ processes. After describing the methods used, it presents the results of the data analysis using the responses of 207 participants who completed an online survey. It concludes by discussing the implications of the findings for both research and practice in restorative justice.

Attitudes Toward Justice Outcomes and Processes

In the West, offensive behavior tends to spark calls for justice to be brought against the wrongdoer, conventionally in the form of negative consequences, in order to teach the offender a lesson and provide

victims a sense of closure and affirmation (Paul & Schenck-Hamlin, 2017; Kelley, 2016; Okimoto et al., 2009; Roche, 2003; Tsui, 2014; Waldron & Kelley, 2008; Wenzel & Okimoto, 2010). RJ advocates, however, argue that conventional justice is ineffective at accomplishing those goals and does little to reduce the likelihood of recidivism (Bergseth & Bouffard, 2007; Braithwaite, 2001; Rodriguez, 2007; Johnstone, 2001; Morris, 2002; Zehr, 2002). Instead, they argue that a more constructive response involves attending to offenders' and victims' needs tangible and intangible needs. For offenders, this includes addressing the root causes of problematic behavior, learning better behavior, and being accountable for repairing the harm done (Wachtel & McCold, 2001; Zehr, 2002). For victims, this includes receiving material and symbolic reparation (e.g., restitution, apology, and answers) from the offender, experiencing closure, and feeling a renewed sense of safety (Borton, 2009; Coates & Gehm, 1989; Umbreit et al., 2004; Wachtel & McCold, 2001). The parties may also wish to pursue reconciliation, though this is not a requirement of RJ (Armour & Umbreit, 2006; Braithwaite, 2016; Fehr & Gelfand, 2012). In all, RJ processes aim to accomplish multifaceted restoration for victims, offenders, and the wider community through dialogic processes that identify and address the parties' tangible and intangible needs.

Not everyone, however, wants to participate in RJ processes. A conflict goals perspective (Canary & Lakey, 2006; Folger, Poole & Stutman, 2013; Wang, Fink, & Cai, 2012; Wilmot & Hocker, 2007) suggests that desire to participate is driven by parties' particular, sometimes competing goals (Hansen & Umbreit, 2018). For example, VOC participation and participation willingness have been associated with people's desire to share their story, ask questions, and help their offender experience restoration (Paul, 2015, Paul & Schenck-Hamlin, 2018; Borton, 2009; Coates & Gehm, 1989; Peachey, 1989; Ruge & Cormier, 2005; Umbreit et al., 2004). Moreover, if parties believe that VOCs are effective at helping them accomplish their restorative goals, they are even more likely to be willing to participate (Paul, 2016).

One question that arises from these findings, then, is what shapes perceptions of goal importance and process effectiveness. Situational factors no doubt play a role, with offense severity and length of time between the offense and the RJ process influencing people's desired outcomes and participation interest (Paul, 2015; Wyrick & Costanzo, 1999; Zebel, Schreurs, & Ufkes, 2017). Beliefs about the other party also likely play a role, as they do in other types of conflict situations (Adair et al., 2009; Lewicki et al., 2006). These beliefs, which people attribute to offenders through the process of stereotyping, are particularly salient for RJ processes that are designed to be more personal than conventional justice processes. For example, if people believe that offenders are scary and violent, they may be less willing to meet in a VOC with their own offender (Paul & Schenck-Hamlin, 2018). Moreover, conventional justice processes tend to do little to change victims' stereotypes of offenders (Umbreit et al., 2004). Thus, negative stereotypes people hold about offenders may reduce people's willingness to participate in VOCs, which in turn means that they will go through a conventional justice process that tends to reinforce those beliefs.

Redeemability and Decision-Making Competence

Given the importance of goals such as offender restoration and information-gathering on willingness to participate in VOCs (Paul, 2015, Paul & Schenck-Hamlin, 2018; Borton, 2009; Ruge & Cormier, 2005; Umbreit et al., 2004), two such beliefs about offenders are particularly relevant: redeemability of offenders and decision-making competence of offenders. Belief in redeemability, or the ability for someone to change for the better (Maruna & King, 2009), is at the heart of the goal of offender restoration. In their study of parolees in Australia, O'Sullivan, Williams, Hong, Bright, and Kemp (2018) observed that the parolees held a rather positive belief in their own redeemability. However, if victims or other community members do not share that belief, they may not perceive the prospect of offender restoration to be realistic, important, or worth pursuing.

Likewise, beliefs about decision-making competence, or the ability to understand and make appropriate decisions, are connected both to offender restoration and information-gathering goals. A conventional assumption is that wrongdoing is a conscious choice or decision that offenders make (Maruna &

King, 2009). If people do not believe that offenders have the capacity to make sound decisions, they may believe that their own offender cannot satisfactorily answer their questions about the offense. Thus, it would be ineffective to even ask an offender what or why they did what they did in a VOC, thereby negatively affecting a key factor that influences VOC participation willingness (Paul, 2015). In sum, redeemability and competence beliefs are connected to two central questions underlying RJ processes: whether the offender is capable of changing their behavior, and whether the offender is capable of understanding why and how their actions were hurtful.

Redeemability, Decision-Making Competence, and Orientations toward Restorative Justice

Working from an ideological perspective of justice attitudes (Paul & Schenck-Hamlin, 2017; Perloff, 2010), it is likely that beliefs about redeemability and competence are associated with people's attitudes toward justice outcomes and their perceptions of justice processes. In terms of justice outcomes, Paul & Schenck-Hamlin, (2017) identified three types of justice outcomes: restorative, which is based on individual and relational growth and learning; restitutive, which is based on making things right through apologizing (symbolic reparation) and restitution (material/financial reparation); and punitive, which is similar to "retributive" notions of justice that respond negatively to wrongdoing. These justice outcomes are evident in desired consequences like not wanting offenders to recidivate, hoping that offenders to learn from their actions, holding offenders accountable to provide restitution, expecting offenders to apologize, and wanting to see offenders punished (Paul & Dunlop, 2014). While punishment tends to be more conventional, the other outcomes tend to reflect restorative justice orientations to varying degrees (Paul & Dunlop, 2014). For example, whereas desires to see offenders learn and grow are more restorative, desires for restitution and apology reflect both conventional and restorative justice ideologies (Paul & Dunlop, 2014, Paul, 2015). Moreover, not only can people want multiple justice outcomes, but those outcomes exert differing influence on people's willingness to participate in RJ processes like victim-offender conferences (Paul, 2015). Thus, it is important to evaluate multiple justice outcomes.

In terms of the influence of redeemability and competence, it is likely that they are positively correlated with support for restorative outcomes such as nonrecidivism (i.e., getting on a better path), learning, and making things right through apologizing. However, they likely are negatively correlated with more punitive outcomes such as punishment and possibly restitution, given that restitution tends to be more impersonal in nature. For example, Maruna and King (2009) observed that people with low belief in redeemability tended to report higher degrees of punitiveness. In short, the more that people perceive that there is room for growth in terms of redeemability, they are more likely to perceive that growth-oriented outcomes also are important. Additionally, perceived competence may also be a signal that people believe that offenders can learn from their situation, making it at least somewhat more likely that they will prioritize growth-oriented outcomes.

Hypothesis 1A. Perceived redeemability will positively influence perceived importance of more restorative outcomes (not recidivating, learning, apologizing) and negatively influence perceived importance of more punitive outcomes (being punished and paying restitution).

Hypothesis 1B. Perceived decision-making competence will positively influence perceived importance of more restorative outcomes and negatively influence perceived importance of more punitive outcomes.

In terms of perceptions of RJ processes, beliefs about offender redeemability and decision-making competence also are likely correlated with people's perceptions of the effectiveness and appropriateness of those processes. For example, people who believe that offending is a matter of not having learned right from

wrong may feel that RJ processes provide an opportunity to teach the offender right from wrong, and thus may look more positively on such processes (Moss, Lee, Berman, & Rung, 2019). Moreover, if people believe that offenders are redeemable, they may look at dialogic processes like victim–offender conferences, which they may already view as opportunities for growth (Paul & Schenck-Hamlin, 2017), as mechanisms that facilitate redemption, thereby also heightening perceptions of effectiveness and appropriateness as well as support for VOCs and willingness to participate in VOCs. In short, it is likely that beliefs about offender redeemability and decision-making competence are associated with a number of factors related to support for VOCs, including orientations toward justice outcomes, perceptions of VOC effectiveness and appropriateness/evaluation, support for VOCs, and willingness to participate in VOCs.

Hypothesis 2. Perceived redeemability and decision-making competence will positively influence ratings of (a) VOC effectiveness, (b) VOC evaluation, (c) support for the use of VOCs, and (d) willingness to participate in VOCs if the victim of an offense.

Perceptions of Adult and Youth Redeemability and Decision-Making Competence

Moreover, these beliefs likely vary based on whether offenders are youths or adults. Theories of cognitive and moral development (e.g., Gibbs, 2009; Kohlberg & Kramer, 1969) hypothesize that people’s behavior and evaluative frameworks evolve over time. Kohlberg, for example, identifies three stages of moral development—preconventional, characterized by largely egocentric concerns of avoiding punishment and gaining something; conventional, characterized by a more relational emphasis on harmony and approval from others; and postconventional, characterized by overarching values. Development corresponds (at least roughly) with age and human experience, with adolescence being “a developmental period of increased moral sensitivity owing to more abstract thinking skills, greater perspective-taking abilities, and greater knowledge about social issues” (Krettenauer, 2017, p. 581). It is likely, then, that people expect adolescents to be less developed and mature than adults, who “should know better.” One implication of this belief is that people may believe that youth are more capable of changing—that is, that youth are more redeemable than adults. Moreover, even though people tend to overestimate youth decision-making competence (Haegerich et al., 2013), people also are likely to believe that youth have less decision-making competence than adults. Relatedly, then, it also is likely that there are differences regarding support for the use of VOCs for first-time youth and adults, with people being more supportive of using VOCs for youth given their greater believed potential for redeemability and competence growth.

Hypothesis 3. Participants will perceive youth offenders as being more redeemable and as having less decision-making competence than adult offenders.

Hypothesis 4. Participants will be more supportive of the use of VOCs and will be more willing to participate in a VOC in cases of youth offending than adult offending.

Materials and Methods

The study reported on here is also described in Paul & Swan (2018). The following provides a summary of the information outlined in that article.

Sample

Using Amazon’s Mechanical Turk (MTurk), participants were recruited to participate in an online survey assessing perceptions of justice outcomes and justice processes. As noted by Mason and Suri (2012)

and Burhmester, Kwang, and Gosling (2011), using MTurk provides a way to obtain a more externally valid and diverse sample than does relying on convenience sampling on higher education campuses.

After eliminating three responses for noncompletion and three responses of participants located outside the United States, the final sample consisted of 207 participants. The sample was largely male ($n = 129$, 62.3%) and Caucasian ($n = 159$, 76.8%), with an average age of 33.84 (between 18 and 70 years old). As noted by Paul & Swan, (2018), participants in the sample had varying political affiliations, religious affiliations, levels of education, marital statuses, and employment statuses. The sample tended to be unfamiliar with RJ ($m = 1.74$, $SD = 0.75$) and victim-offender conferences ($m = 1.32$, $SD = 0.53$).

Procedures

People who agreed to participate through MTurk were directed to a Qualtrics website which hosted the online questionnaire. Participants were asked to think about their justice attitudes in the context of a first-time offending youth (between 10 and 17 years old) and a first-time offending adult who had committed an offense such as theft, simple assault, vandalism, or robbery. The purpose of providing these offenses was to help give people a more concrete situation to contextualize their responses. The specific offense types were chosen because they are commonly addressed in victim-offender conferences (VOCs) (Peachey, 1989; Umbreit et al., 2004; Wyrick & Costanzo, 1999).

Participants first completed a series of items pertaining to youth outcome importance and stereotypes of youth offenders before completing items pertaining to adult outcome importance and stereotypes of adult offenders. They were then shown the following neutrally worded description used in previous research (Paul, 2015, Paul & Schenck-Hamlin, 2018) to provide them some background and information about VOCs:

In some situations, like burglary, vandalism, theft, and simple assault, first-time offenders and their victims can volunteer to participate in a process called victim-offender conferencing (VOC) run by a neutral facilitator after the offender has pleaded guilty in court. Before the VOC, the facilitator works with the victim and offender to ensure they are ready to participate and that it is safe to meet. In the VOC, the offender and people close to him/her meet with the victim and people close to him/her in a neutral setting, and the offender is encouraged to apologize. After the facilitator begins the meeting and lays ground rules, the offender tells their side of the story. The victim then asks the offender questions. The victim then shares their side of the story, and the offender then asks questions. Then, the two sides try to work out how the offender can (if possible) “make things right,” such as by financial restitution, working off what is owed, etc. They then decide what relationship (if any) they would like to have with each other going forward. Any agreement they come to is written down and given to the court.

The wording of this description highlighted key VOC components to distinguish VOCs from conventional justice practices such as trials. It also took into account participants' potential preexisting beliefs about VOCs (Paul & Schenck-Hamlin, 2017) to clarify the purposes and processes used. Upon reading the description, participants then completed measures pertaining to (a) perceived effectiveness of VOCs at accomplishing those outcomes for both youth and adult offenders; (b) perceived appropriateness, effectiveness, and safety of VOCs; (c) support for court districts using VOCs in cases of first-time offending as described above for both youth and adult offenders; and (d) willingness to participate in a VOC if they were the victim of such a first-time offense by youth and adult offenders.

Variables and Measures

Stereotypes of Offenders

Ten items were selected from the Juvenile Offender Stereotype Scale regarding redeemability (seven items) and decision-making competence (three items) (Haegerich et al., 2013). These selected items, rather than the entire subscales, were used out of design validity concerns centering on participant

mortality. JOSS items were selected based on the extent to which they directly addressed the constructs of competence (e.g., “Most youths who commit crime are able to tell right from wrong,” “Most youths who commit crime are not very mature decision-makers”) and redeemability (e.g., “Most youth offenders can change,” and “Hoping that most youth offenders can change is pointless”). Separate sets of items were used to measure stereotypes of youth offenders and stereotypes of adult offenders. Using confirmatory factor analysis and inspecting reliability estimates led to the exclusion of three items pertaining to redeemability and one item pertaining to decision-making competence. The final model had appropriate fit to the data ($\chi^2(8) = 4.77$, $p = .78$, CFI = 1.00, RMSEA = 0.00) and sufficient reliability ($\alpha_{\text{youth_redeemability}} = .79$, $\alpha_{\text{youth_competence}} = .74$, $\alpha_{\text{adult_redeemability}} = .84$, $\alpha_{\text{adult_competence}} = .83$). All items were measured on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree). Scores for each subscale were added together.

Outcome Importance

Single-item measures were used to assess perceived importance of five offender outcomes: recidivism prevention, learning, restitution, punishment, and apology. These outcomes were chosen based on previous literature (Paul & Borton, 2017; Bolívar et al., 2013; Borton & Paul, 2015; Latimer, Dowden, & Muise, 2005; Shapland et al., 2006) and based on the measure developed by Paul (2015). Items were measured on a 5-point Likert-type scale (1 = not at all important, 5 = very important). Outcome importance was assessed with separate items for youth and adult offenders.

VOC Effectiveness

Similar to Paul (2016), effectiveness at accomplishing the offender outcomes identified above was assessed using single-item measures as well. Items were measured on a 5-point Likert-type scale (1 = not at all effective, 5 = very effective). As with outcome importance, VOC effectiveness was assessed with separate items for youth and adult offenders.

VOC Evaluation

Evaluation of conventional and restorative justice processes was measured using 7 items assessed on a 5-point semantic differential scale (Paul & Swan, 2018). Items were selected based on a previous belief elicitation study (Paul & Schenck-Hamlin, 2017). Items were grouped together into three factors—appropriateness, fairness, and safety—based on factor loadings in exploratory factor analysis.

Support for VOC Use

Support for court districts using VOCs in cases of first-time youth or adult offending was measured with a single item for youth offending and a single item for adult offending. Items were measured on a 5-point Likert-type scale (1 = very unsupportive, 5 = very supportive).

Willingness to Participate in a VOC

Following Paul (2015), willingness to participate in a VOC if the victim of a first-time youth or adult offense was measured with a single item for youth offending and a single item for adult offending. Items were measured on a 5-point Likert-type scale (1 = very unwilling, 5 = very willing).

Control Variables

Given their potential influence, three demographic factors were included as control variables in the analyses: sex, age, and parent status. Sex and age were included given previous research suggesting that they might influence beliefs about justice and openness to participating in RJ processes (Borton, 2009). Parent status (i.e., whether the participant was a parent) also was included to account for potential differences in beliefs about youth.

Results

Influence of Offender Stereotypes

Hypotheses one and two addressed the influence of perceived redeemability and decision-making competence on outcome importance (Hypotheses 1A and B) and on perceptions of VOCs in terms of effectiveness, appropriateness, support, and willingness to participate (Hypothesis 2). To control for the influence of sex, age, and parent status, separate hierarchical regression tests were used to examine possible influence for youth and adults, with redeemability and competence added to the model in step 1 and the control variables being added in step 2 to see whether the addition of the control variables significantly changed the model. The discussion of results below, as well as the summary tables (see Tables 1 and 2), provides the statistics regarding redeemability and competence from step 2.

Stereotypes and Outcome Importance

In terms of outcome importance (Hypotheses 1A and B), five multiple regression tests each for youth and adult offenders suggested that both perceived redeemability and decision-making competence were influential. In terms of degree of influence, redeemability was the more influential factor shaping outcome importance for youth whereas competence was the more influential factor shaping outcome importance for adults (see Table 3). In terms of the importance of preventing recidivism, for example, redeemability ($\beta = .32$) was more influential than competence ($\beta = .22$) for youth, but competence ($\beta = .46$) was more influential than redeemability ($\beta = .03$) for adults. As hypothesized, redeemability negatively influenced perceived importance of restitution ($\beta_{\text{youth}} = -.15$; $\beta_{\text{adult}} = -.08$) and punishment ($\beta_{\text{youth}} = -.21$; $\beta_{\text{adult}} = -.25$) for youth and adults. In other words, the more redeemable people believed youth and adult offenders to be, the less important it was to them for offenders to pay restitution or be punished. In contrast, competence was positively related to restitution ($\beta_{\text{youth}} = .34$; $\beta_{\text{adult}} = .33$) and punishment ($\beta_{\text{youth}} = .18$; $\beta_{\text{adult}} = .27$) importance. In sum, for youth, redeemability was positively associated with perceived importance of restorative outcomes of nonrecidivism, learning, and apology, but was negatively associated with perceived importance of more conventional outcomes of restitution and punishment. For adults, redeemability was similarly associated with outcome importance, but less strongly. In terms of competence, again, similar influence patterns emerged for youth and adults, with competence being positively associated with importance of all outcomes, but particularly nonrecidivism, restitution, and punishment. Overall, while Hypotheses 1 A was supported in that redeemability was positively associated with more restorative outcomes and negatively associated with more restitutive and punitive outcomes, Hypothesis 1 B was not supported, with competence positively influence restorative, restitutive, and punitive outcomes.

Stereotypes and Process Perceptions and Support

Two process perceptions—VOC effectiveness and VOC evaluation—were evaluated. In terms of process effectiveness, again, several multiple regression tests were run for youth and adults. For both youth and adults, people perceived VOCs as being more effective at accomplishing nonrecidivism ($\beta_{\text{youth}} = .41$; $\beta_{\text{adult}} = .40$), learning ($\beta_{\text{youth}} = .41$; $\beta_{\text{adult}} = .52$), restitution ($\beta_{\text{youth}} = .25$; $\beta_{\text{adult}} = .35$), and apology ($\beta_{\text{youth}} = .51$; $\beta_{\text{adult}} = .22$) the more they perceived offenders as being redeemable (see Table 4). Perceived competence, however, was limited in its influence, significantly shaping only perceived effectiveness of VOCs at promoting youth learning ($\beta = .13$) and adult apologizing ($\beta = .15$). Thus, redeemability was a significant factor influencing perceived effectiveness of VOCs at accomplishing restorative outcomes for youth and adults.

Second, in terms of evaluation of VOCs' fairness, appropriateness, and safety, multiple linear regression tests indicated that both redeemability and perceived competence were jointly influential (see

Table 2
Correlations among Adult-Related Outcome Importance, Process Effectiveness, Process Evaluation, Support for VOCs, and Willingness to Participate

	Red	Comp	IRec	ILrn	IRst	IPun	IAP	ERec	ELrn	ERst	EPun	EAP	App	Fair	Safe	Supp	Part
Red	.21**	.11	.46***	.42***	-.03	-.21**	.19**	.39***	.42***	.36***	.20**	.26***	.27***	.29***	.36***	.42***	.34***
Comp		.46***	.17*	.33***	.33***	.20**	.15*	.03	.08	.13	.01	.17*	.17*	.24***	.13	.16*	.11
IRec			.50***	.28***	.52***	.38***	.28***	.16*	.13	.11	-.02	.10	.35***	.36***	.26**	.18**	.08
ILrn				.24***	.24***	.07	.40***	.36***	.36***	.29***	.18**	.13	.29***	.31***	.32***	.41***	.31***
IRst					.58***	.33***	.33***	.00	.04	.12	.02	-.02	.15*	.21**	.16*	.10	-.03
IPun						.58***	.31***	-.10	-.15*	.01	.07	-.05	.03	.09	.06	-.04	-.11
IAP							.31***	.15*	.15*	.11	.11	.00	.12	.15*	.13	.17*	.17*
ERec								.15*	.69***	.51***	.45***	.47***	.33***	.28***	.32***	.52***	.53***
ELrn									.69***	.51***	.39***	.47***	.25***	.32***	.27***	.44***	.46***
ERst										.51***	.46***	.39***	.25***	.30***	.30***	.36***	.29***
EPun											.46***	.39***	.25***	.30***	.36***	.36***	.30***
EAP												.33***	.19**	.16*	.18**	.31***	.34***
App													.20**	.20**	.12	.31***	.34***
Fair														.74***	.60***	.35***	.25***
Safe															.55***	.30***	.20**
Supp																.39***	.25***
Part																	.66***
m	3.40	4.20	4.42	4.03	4.30	3.90	3.94	3.14	3.59	3.63	3.03	3.91	3.87	3.95	3.59	3.56	3.37
SD	0.83	0.85	0.84	1.04	0.97	1.11	1.13	1.02	1.07	1.11	1.09	0.94	0.81	0.89	0.94	1.20	1.28

Notes. App, VOC Appropriateness; Comp, Decision-Making Competence; EAp, Apology Effectiveness; ELrn, Learning Effectiveness; EPun, Punishment Effectiveness; ERec, Recidivism Effectiveness; ERst, Restitution Effectiveness; Fair, VOC Fairness; IAP, Apology Importance; ILrn, Learning Importance; IPun, Punishment Importance; IRec, Recidivism Importance; IRst, Restitution Importance; Part, Willingness to Participate in a VOC; Red, Redeemability; Supp, Support for the use of VOCs; VOC, VOC Safety.

*p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001.

Table 3

Influence of Perceived Redeemability and Decision-Making Competence on Importance of Offender Outcomes

Offender Type	Criterion	Predictors	B	SE	t	β	F	
Youth	Nonrecidivism	Redeemable	0.37	0.07	5.05***	.32	$F(5, 198) = 10.2, p < .001, R^2 = .20$	
		Competence	0.19	0.05	3.37***	.22		
	Learning	Redeemable	0.52	0.07	6.73***	.43		$F(5, 198) = 11.8, p < .001, R^2 = .23$
		Competence	0.11	0.06	1.86 [†]	.12		
	Restitution	Redeemable	-0.21	0.09	-2.30*	-.15		$F(5, 198) = 7.84, p < .001, R^2 = .16$
		Competence	0.38	0.07	5.07***	.34		
Punishment	Redeemable	-0.31	0.10	-3.02**	-.21	$F(5, 198) = 3.65, p = .004, R^2 = .08$		
	Competence	0.21	0.08	2.58*	.18			
Apology	Redeemable	0.37	0.09	4.04***	.27	$F(5, 198) = 6.93, p < .001, R^2 = .14$		
	Competence	0.18	0.07	2.49*	.16			
Adult	Nonrecidivism	Redeemable	0.03	0.06	0.46	.03	$F(5, 198) = 11.8, p < .001, R^2 = .23$	
		Competence	0.47	0.06	7.30***	.46		
	Learning	Redeemable	0.51	0.08	6.06***	.39		$F(5, 198) = 10.2, p < .001, R^2 = .20$
		Competence	0.13	0.08	1.69 [†]	.11		
	Restitution	Redeemable	-0.09	0.07	-1.18	-.08		$F(5, 198) = 6.1, p < .001, R^2 = .13$
		Competence	0.37	0.07	4.86***	.33		
	Punishment	Redeemable	-0.33	0.09	-3.68***	-.25		$F(5, 198) = 5.7, p < .001, R^2 = .12$
		Competence	0.35	0.08	4.02***	.27		
	Apology	Redeemable	0.24	0.09	2.54*	.17		$F(5, 198) = 5.0, p < .001, R^2 = .11$
		Competence	0.16	0.09	1.76 [†]	.12		

Note. [†] $p < .10$, * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

Table 5). However, the extent to which they were influential varied between youth and adult offense situations. In youth offense situations, redeemability was the only significant factor, positively influencing perceptions of appropriateness ($\beta = .54$), fairness ($\beta = .60$), and safety ($\beta = .40$). In adult offense situations, not only did redeemability positively influence perceived appropriateness ($\beta = .37$), fairness ($\beta = .25$), and safety ($\beta = .29$), but competence also was positively associated with perceived appropriateness ($\beta = .16$) and fairness ($\beta = .18$). Overall, redeemability and, to a lesser extent, competence positively influenced evaluations of VOCs' appropriateness, fairness, and safety.

Finally, in terms of support for VOC use (general ripeness) and willingness to participate in VOCs (situational ripeness) in cases of youth offending and adult offending, tests again indicated that redeemability and competence together significantly influenced all variables (see Table 6). However, redeemability was the only factor that significantly shaped such general and situational ripeness, positively influencing both support for the use of VOCs ($\beta_{\text{youth}} = .52$; $\beta_{\text{adult}} = .40$) and willingness to participate in a VOC ($\beta_{\text{youth}} = .48$; $\beta_{\text{adult}} = .34$).

Overall, hypothesis two was partially supported. Although the influence of decision-making competence is muted, the influence of redeemability was pervasive, positively influencing perceptions of VOC effectiveness and effectiveness, support for VOC use, and willingness to participate in a VOC.

Stereotypes of Youth versus Adult Offenders

Hypothesis three predicted that participants would perceive youth as being more redeemable but as having less decision-making competence than adults. To control for the potential influence of sex, age, and parent status, a repeated measures ANCOVA was used. Analysis revealed a significant difference in perceived redeemability ($F(1, 200) = 4.34, p = .038$) and competence ($F(1, 200) = 5.28, p = .023$). There was no significant interaction by any of the control variables on either dependent variable. Participants

Table 4
Influence of Perceived Redeemability and Decision-Making Competence on Perceived VOC Effectiveness

Offender type	Criterion	Predictors	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>t</i>	β	<i>F</i>	
Youth	Nonrecidivism	Redeemable	0.55	0.08	6.28***	.41	$F(5, 198) = 8.93, p < .001, R^2 = .18$	
		Competence	-0.03	0.07	-0.48	-.03		
	Learning	Redeemable	0.71	0.08	8.82***	.52		$F(5, 198) = 19.7, p < .001, R^2 = .33$
		Competence	0.14	0.06	2.28*	.13		
	Restitution	Redeemable	0.36	0.09	3.71***	.25		$F(5, 198) = 4.93, p < .001, R^2 = .11$
		Competence	0.14	0.07	1.83 [†]	.12		
Punishment	Redeemable	0.06	0.10	0.65	.04	$F(5, 198) = .55, p > .05$		
	Competence	0.01	0.08	0.17	.01			
Apology	Redeemable	0.60	0.07	8.36***	.51	$F(5, 198) = 16.7, p < .001, R^2 = .29$		
	Competence	0.08	0.05	1.49	.09			
Adult	Nonrecidivism	Redeemable	0.49	0.08	6.11***	.40	$F(5, 198) = 9.02, p < .001, R^2 = .18$	
		Competence	-0.04	0.07	-0.58	-.03		
	Learning	Redeemable	0.54	0.08	6.32***	.41		$F(5, 198) = 8.96, p < .001, R^2 = .18$
		Competence	-0.01	0.08	-0.01	-.01		
	Restitution	Redeemable	0.48	0.09	5.30***	.35		$F(5, 198) = 6.50, p < .001, R^2 = .14$
		Competence	0.06	0.09	-0.67	.04		
	Punishment	Redeemable	0.27	0.09	2.85**	.20		$F(5, 198) = 1.94, p > .05$
		Competence	-0.00	0.09	-0.07	-.00		
	Apology	Redeemable	0.26	0.08	3.24**	.22		$F(5, 198) = 3.96, p < .001, R^2 = .09$
		Competence	0.17	0.07	2.26*	.15		

Note. [†] $p < .10$, * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

rated youth ($m = 4.01, SD = 0.73$) higher in redeemability than adults ($m = 3.40, SD = 0.83$) (see Tables 5 and 6 for descriptives and correlations). They also rated adults ($m = 4.20, SD = 0.85$) higher in decision-making competence than youth ($m = 3.55, SD = 0.92$).

Support for VOCs for Youth and Adult Offenders

Hypothesis four predicted that participants would be more supportive of using VOCs for first-time youth offenders than they would be of using VOCs for first-time adult offenders. It also predicted that VOC participation willingness would be higher in cases of first-time offending by youth than in cases of first-time offending by adults. Repeated measures ANCOVAs were used to test these hypotheses. With regard to support, although a significant difference emerged without the control variables between support for youth VOCs ($m = 3.93, SD = 1.12$) and support for adult VOCs ($m = 3.56, SD = 1.20$) ($F(1, 205) = 35.1, p < .001$), the difference became nonsignificant after including the control variables, $F(1, 199) = 0.20, p = .65$. A similar pattern emerged with regard to participation willingness. Although a significant difference emerged without the control variables between youth VOC participation willingness ($m = 3.92, SD = 1.19$) and adult VOC participation willingness ($m = 3.37, SD = 1.28$) ($F(1, 206) = 55.9, p < .001$), the difference became nonsignificant after including the control variables, $F(1, 200) = 2.55, p = .11$.

Discussion

Stereotyping is a common practice when encountering or interacting with someone perceived to belong to a different social group (Adair et al., 2009; Lewicki et al., 2006). Offensive situations are no different, as victims tend to stereotype their offenders (Haegerich et al., 2013; Shapland et al., 2006; Zehr, 1990),

Table 5
Influence of Perceived Redeemability and Decision-Making Competence on Evaluation of VOCs

Offender type	Criterion	Predictors	B	SE	t	β	F	
Youth	Appropriate	Redeemable	0.60	0.06	9.08***	.54	$F(5, 198) = 18.6, p < .001, R^2 = .32$	
		Competence	0.04	0.05	0.75	.04		
	Fair	Redeemable	0.72	0.07	10.34***	.60		$F(5, 198) = 23.2, p < .001, R^2 = .37$
		Competence	0.00	0.05	0.16	.00		
Adult	Appropriate	Redeemable	0.51	0.08	6.10***	.40	$F(5, 198) = 8.60, p < .001, R^2 = .17$	
		Competence	-0.07	0.06	1.14	-.07		
	Fair	Redeemable	0.37	0.06	5.72***	.37		$F(5, 198) = 9.97, p < .001, R^2 = .20$
		Competence	0.16	0.06	2.54*	.16		
Adult	Fair	Redeemable	0.27	0.07	3.69***	.25	$F(5, 198) = 5.74, p < .001, R^2 = .12$	
		Competence	0.20	0.07	2.74**	.18		
	Safe	Redeemable	0.34	0.07	4.36***	.29		$F(5, 198) = 5.49, p < .001, R^2 = .12$
		Competence	0.06	0.07	0.80	.05		

Note. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

Table 6
Influence of Perceived Redeemability and Decision-Making Competence on Support for VOCs and Willingness to Participate in VOCs

Offender type	Criterion	Predictors	B	SE	t	β	F	
Youth	Support	Redeemable	0.79	0.09	8.54***	.52	$F(5, 198) = 16.8, p < .001, R^2 = .29$	
		Competence	0.04	0.07	0.62	.03		
	Willingness	Redeemable	0.77	0.10	7.74***	.48		$F(5, 198) = 14.5, p < .001, R^2 = .26$
		Competence	0.09	0.08	1.19	.07		
Adult	Support	Redeemable	0.59	0.09	6.21***	.40	$F(5, 197) = 10.0, p < .001, R^2 = .20$	
		Competence	0.11	0.09	1.25	.08		
	Willingness	Redeemable	0.53	0.10	5.14***	.34		$F(5, 198) = 8.54, p < .001, R^2 = .17$
		Competence	0.10	0.10	0.99	.06		

Note. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

especially when they do not know who offended them. The findings of this study suggest that stereotypes of youth and adult offenders have wide-ranging influence on attitudes toward justice goals and processes. The more people believe that offenders are redeemable and competent with regard to making decisions, the more important they find restorative outcomes to be, the more effective and appropriate they find restorative processes to be, and the more supportive they tend to be of restorative processes.

Influence of Redeemability and Competence on Outcome and Process Perceptions

While both redeemability and decision-making competence are influential, redeemability appears to exert a wider and stronger degree of influence over perceived outcome-related perceptions in terms of importance of outcomes and effectiveness of VOCs at accomplishing those outcomes. Table 7 summarizes the findings regarding influence of redeemability and competence on outcome importance and process effectiveness in youth and adult offense situations. Three elements of those findings stand out. First, redeemability exerted a wider range and generally higher degree of influence than did decision-making competence. Generally speaking, the more participants believed that a youth or adult offender was redeemable the more important they perceived restorative outcomes such as learning and apologizing to be and the more effective they perceived VOCs to be at accomplishing those outcomes. Second, for

Table 7

Summary of Standardized Beta Weights of Redeemability and Competence on Outcome Importance, Process Effectiveness, Process Evaluation, VOC Support, and VOC Participation Willingness

Outcome	Outcome belief	Redeemability		Competence	
		Youth	Adult	Youth	Adult
Nonrecidivism	Importance	.32***	.03	.22***	.46***
	Effectiveness	.41***	.40***	-.03	-.03
Learning	Importance	.43***	.39***	.12 [†]	.11 [†]
	Effectiveness	.52***	.41***	.13*	-.01
Restitution	Importance	-.15*	-.08	.34***	.33***
	Effectiveness	.25***	.35***	.12	.04
Punishment	Importance	-.21**	-.25***	.18*	.27***
	Effectiveness	.04	.20**	.01	-.07
Apology	Importance	.27***	.17*	.16*	.12 [†]
	Effectiveness	.51***	.22**	.09	.15*
VOC	Appropriateness	.54***	.37***	.04	.16*
	Fairness	.60***	.25***	.00	.18***
	Safety	.40***	.29***	-.07	.05
	Support	.52***	.40***	.03	.08
	Willingness to Participate	.48***	.34***	.07	.06

Note. [†] $p < .10$, * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

several outcomes, redeemability positively influenced both outcome importance and process effectiveness. For example, redeemability was positively associated with importance of learning and perceived VOC effectiveness at accomplishing learning for both youth and adults. The same pattern is evident with regard to apologizing and, at least for youth, nonrecidivism. This suggests that redeemability may have a type of compounding effect that in turn may influence support for VOCs and willingness to participate in a VOC. Third, compared to redeemability, perceived decision-making competence had a narrower range and degree of influence. The more competent people believed youth and adult offenders to be, the more important they perceived restitution and punishment to be. (Conversely, redeemability was negatively associated with restitution and punishment importance.) One reason for this may be that participants believe that offenders who are competent should know better and thus should face the unpleasant consequences for their actions. In all, belief in redeemability tended to be more influential than belief in decision-making competence.

Influence of Redeemability and Competence on General and Situational Ripeness

In terms of general ripeness, redeemability again was the primary factor influencing perceived appropriateness of VOCs and support for VOCs for both youth and adult offenders. The more redeemable participants felt offenders to be, the more they perceived VOCs to be appropriate, fair, and safe, and the more they supported the use of VOCs in their communities. One reason for this may be an underlying belief that offenders are capable of changing, that their behavior may make them ripe for change, and that VOCs are an effective way to help that change come about. This might apply to perceptions of certain offenders as simply being “wayward,” defined by Greene, Duke, and Woody (2017) as “a fundamentally good person who, as a victim of impoverished social and economic environments and lacking peer and family support and educational opportunities, strayed into delinquency” (p. 4). Another reason may be rooted in a general ideology of restoration that underlies a more hopeful, positive orientation toward offenders and toward processes that can help realize those hopes (Paul & Schenck-Hamlin, 2018). Thus,

if people tend to see offenders more as wayward individuals than as “superpredators” (Greene et al., 2017), they likely will be more receptive to RJ processes such as VOCs.

The differences in support for VOCs in cases of youth and adult offending are also noteworthy. The higher support for use of VOCs in youth cases as opposed to adult cases likely corresponds to beliefs about the development and redeemability of youth as well as to reasons that people have for participating in VOCs. If VOC participation (at least in cases of youth offending) is driven to some extent by the desire to help the offender learn, it may be that people believe that adult offenders already should know proper ways of behaving and that VOCs would not do them any good. Thus, people may be more supportive of VOC use for youth cases because of the compounding effects of belief in redeemability regarding key justice outcomes such as offender learning, offender apology, and prevention of offender recidivism.

Implications for Research and Practice

In all, the findings have a number of implications and raise a number of questions for RJ researchers and practitioners moving forward. From a research and theory perspective, one of the more interesting questions surfaces a chicken-and-egg issue with regard to RJ participation. One hoped for outcome of RJ involvement is that victims (and offenders) will be able to reality-check the assumptions and stereotypes they have made about each other. For example, victims will be able to check their assumptions about how unsafe, scary, and threatening their offenders are. RJ advocates argue that participating in restorative processes tends to break these assumptions as victims interact with their offenders. The results of this study, in turn, suggest that those stereotypes might influence someone’s willingness to participate in RJ processes to begin with, perhaps filtering out those people who would make uncharitable assumptions about offenders. So, is it that RJ processes are effective at removing negative assumptions? Is it that people who self-select into RJ processes already likely do not hold those assumptions or at least do not hold those assumptions strongly? These questions are particularly relevant if people are more likely to meet with offenders they consider to be merely wayward and not “hardened criminals.” They also are relevant when it comes to assessing the effectiveness of RJ processes. If self-selection bias is at work, how much of the observed outcomes of RJ participation should be attributed to that participation? Would those outcomes have been observed regardless? Does RJ participation simply speed up the realization of those outcomes?

Additional research also can examine how stereotypes influence victim–offender interaction when they meet. Is there a significant difference in assumptions victims make about offender redeemability prior to and immediately following VOC participation? What are the implications of those assumptions for people’s interactional practices and language choices? These questions help to shed light on why (and whether) RJ processes work the way they do. Arriving at a theory of restoration driven by systematic examination of components parts of processes of restoration can help practitioners and researchers to design RJ processes that work for all and that build support for the use of those processes in multiple contexts.

In terms of practice, the findings have implications for facilitation, outreach, and evaluation. When working with victims during preconference meetings, facilitators should work to surface underlying stereotypes of offenders’ redeemability and competence held by those victim. Doing so can help facilitators to understand why certain outcomes are important to victims and can help facilitators assist victims in meeting those goals. In terms of outreach, RJ advocates would do well to address assumptions made by the public about offenders’ redeemability and competence. If part of the effort of growing the use of RJ involves ripening the context for it within communities, then advocates should be addressing beliefs about redeemability and decision-making competence, while also being mindful that stereotypes can be difficult to change. This likely represents a long-term effort that involves developing narratives that demonstrate that offenders can, in fact, change. Finally, practitioners’ assessment practices likely need to be more sensitive when evaluating the effectiveness of RJ participation on changing stereotypes.

Conducting pre- and postparticipation evaluations can help organizations get a better handle on whether or not process involvement is changing people's stereotypes of offenders.

Limitations and Conclusion

As noted in Paul & Swan, (2018), limitations to this study should be kept in mind when interpreting the findings. While previous conflict research has used hypothetical scenarios (e.g., Paul, 2015; De Cremer & Tyler, 2007; Feng & Bureson, 2008; Gollwitzer & Bucklein, 2007; Pereira, 2017; Witvliet et al., 2008; Wohl & McGrath, 2007), how people say they would act in a scenario may not match how they actually would act. It would be helpful to explore the influence of offender stereotypes with people offered the opportunity to participate in a VOC through a field experiment. Another limitation concerns the external validity of the sample (Paul & Swan, 2018). While using MTurk diversified the sample, the sample may not reflect particular communities or contexts. Thus, findings may not be generalizable to other more diverse populations. A third limitation pertains to the measurement of decision-making competence. The attempt to improve design-related internal validity by lowering participant mortality likely led to limitations in measurement-related internal validity associated with selecting only certain items rather than using the entire subscale. While the data indicate that the measure used in this study was reliable, it would be helpful for future studies to use the more robust and complete version of the JOSS subscale to measure decision-making competence and see whether similar results are obtained. Finally, as with survey research in general, common method biases such as leniency biases, social desirability, and the use of common scale anchors might be at work (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff, 2003). Use of Harman's single-factor test, a widely used (and notably "insensitive" test), suggests that such biases may not be evident in the data, at least to a problematic extent. Even so, while the study attempted to address these potential biases by maintaining participant anonymity and using neutral wording for items and VOC descriptions, concerns related to social desirability and leniency are still possible and can be explored as future studies use other data sets and methods to examine attitudes toward justice outcomes and processes.

Altogether, the findings of this study help to advance research on receptivity to RJ processes and participation. This study draws attention to the influence of people's stereotypes of offenders on their perceptions of outcome importance, process appropriateness and effectiveness, and support for RJ processes. In particular, beliefs about offender redeemability and decision-making competence play a meaningful role in shaping situational and general ripeness. Understanding the influence of these and other stereotypes not only can help to improve our understanding of the restoration process of victims and offenders, it also can help to address barriers to restoration for individuals, relationships, and communities.

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Gregory D. Paul (Ph.D., Texas A&M University, 2009) is an Associate Professor in the Department of Communication Studies at Kansas State University. His research examines issues related to restorative justice, victim-offender conferencing, conflict management, and workplace conflict. He also is a trained mediator and restorative justice facilitator. He has published articles in *Management Communication Quarterly*, *Negotiation and Conflict Management Research*, *Communication Studies*, and *Conflict Resolution Quarterly*, among others.