STEPPING BACK TO MOVE FORWARD:

HOW THE SKILLS OF EMPATHIC DIALOGUE

SUPPORT INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION

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A Thesis

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

in Sustainable Communities

Northern Arizona University

December 2014

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UMI Number: 1571863

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Dissertation Publishing

UMI 1571863

ProQuest®

ABSTRACT

STEPPING BACK TO MOVE FORWARD:

HOW THE SKILLS OF EMPATHIC DIALOGUE

SUPPORT INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION

DAVID R. MCCAIN

Interpersonal communication is essential for developing and maintaining

relationships. Strong interpersonal relationships undergird communities by facilitating

their formation and supporting their maintenance and growth. This study explores the

effect of training in Empathic Dialogue, a system of communication based on Nonviolent

Communication, on the interpersonal communication skills of nine participants. The

participants were interviewed prior to attending two three-hour training sessions, and

again between one month and three months after the sessions.

Before turning to the empirical study, I make sense of the theoretical strengths of

this position. First, in order to argue that Nonviolent Communication constitutes a virtue,

I outline Aristotle's definition of virtue and the process by which one develops virtue. I

then introduce the theory of McDonaldization, based on Max Weber's theory of

rationalization, and apply it to interpersonal communication. Finally, I review

Nonviolent Communication based on the dimensions of McDonaldization, the results of

which support my contention that Nonviolent Communication opposes McDonaldization.

I present my finding that Empathic Dialogue had a positive impact on the research

participants' communication skills. I then address these findings through the lens of

Aristotle's virtues and McDonaldization. Finally, I consider wider implications of these

findings on the development of sustainable communities.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I reached out to my friend Pez Owen for editing assistance and she responded by reviewing the document from top to bottom. Thank you, Pez!

And, finally, to Katie Pierce, my wife of five months and my partner of five years, for being there for me in all ways: emotionally, physically, spiritually, energetically, lovingly, playfully, enthusiastically, unceasingly, honestly, and empathically! I love you!

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DEDICATION

For my father, Len McCain, for his willingness to provide love and support for the last forty-four years, including during my initial experimentation with NVC. And for his infectious positivity, quirky sense of humor, and rock-like stability.

And for my Mother, Ellie McCain, who passed away fifteen years ago. I wish she would have been alive to help me celebrate this achievement. She instilled in me the value of education, the importance of hard work, and the significance of relationships – values that helped me complete this project.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

As powerful as compassionate communication can be when we use it in our
individual relationships, its power is magnified when we bring it to our communities . . .
A community that is committed to mindful speech and deep listening
can be very effective in making society better.

~ Thich Nhất Hanh

Interpersonal communication is a basic component of the human experience. It is

the "means through which relationships are initiated, negotiated, maintained and ended"

(Knapp and Daly 484). These relationships affect our well-being by providing avenues to

meet a myriad of human needs including friendship, love, contribution to others, and

community. Research in the field "consistently reveals communication as one of the

most important factors in determining the satisfaction of marriages . . . and close

relationships" (Knapp and Daly 484). A college communication textbook adds, "People

who are skilled in interpersonal communication are more likely to achieve career

success" and that "even modest improvements in our interpersonal communication are

related to physical and psychological well-being" (Lane 4-5). Proposals to increase the

emphasis on communication skills in school curricula point to the growing

acknowledgement that such skills are fundamental to a well-rounded education.

Recently the National Education Association (NEA) partnered with several other

education associations to publish *Preparing 21st Century Students for a Global Society:*

An Educator's Guide to the "Four Cs". In it they call for the "Three Rs" (reading,

writing, and arithmetic) to be supplemented by the "Four Cs" which include critical

thinking, communication, creativity, and collaboration (NEA 5). The guide also notes the

importance of communication skills in the workplace, given the threat of increasing

automation, stating that "because complex communication involves explanation,

negotiation, and other forms of intense human interaction, jobs that require these skills are not as likely to be automated" (NEA 13).

As Nhất Hanh says, when brought into communities, well-developed communication skills and the robust interpersonal relations they enable allow those communities to make "society better" (*The Art of Communicating* 129). At this juncture in history, when global challenges including climate change, resource depletion, and economic inequality present unprecedented threats to the sustainability of our society, change must be created by collective action through mobilized communities. Unfortunately, many of the strategies offered in public and policy discussions to address these issues focus primarily, or exclusively, on technological ingenuity while neglecting the crucial role of the community. Nhất Hanh critiques the quest for technological paths to create sustainable communities: "When we speak about creating a sustainable environment or a more just society, we usually speak of physical action or technological advances as the means to achieve these goals. But we forget about the element of a connected community. Without that, we can't do anything at all" (*The Art of Communicating* 130).

Viewed through the lens of interpersonal communication, Nhất Hanh's critique suggests two related questions: 1) What interpersonal communication skills are necessary to create a "connected community"? and 2) How can they best be developed? This project offers one answer to these questions in the form of a communication model called Nonviolent Communication, and the experiences of nine research participants learning this technique.

The purpose of this study is to understand how research participants' communication skills are affected by participating in a six-hour training program in Nonviolent Communication.

IMPORTANT TERMS

In this section, I address definitions for both interpersonal communication and Nonviolent Communication in order to clarify these two topics central to this study.

Interpersonal Communication. When beginning a study on interpersonal communication skills, it is necessary to start by defining the subject. Unfortunately, there is little consensus on the definition of interpersonal communication within either academic texts or popular sources. Regarding use of the term in academia, "there is considerable variety in how [scholars]…conceptually and operationally define this area of study" (Knapp and Daly 484). A communication skills text written for college students states that "communication is a broad and multifaceted phenomenon that can be characterized in a variety of ways" (Lane 19). Virginia Satir, a social worker and author who specialized in family therapy once said, "I see communication as a huge umbrella that covers and affects all that goes on in human beings" (Hart and Hodson, *No-Fault Classroom* 20). With little guidance from source material, I define interpersonal communication as used in this project as "the internal and external processes that enable relationships between two people, especially the verbal elements." Of particular interest is the application of these processes to attain a mutually-satisfying dialogue or conversation. My working criterion for determining that a dialogue or conversation is

"mutually satisfying" is the subjective evaluation by the participant that both parties were satisfied with the interaction.

Nonviolent Communication. Nonviolent Communication[1] (NVC) is a system of communication developed by clinical psychologist Marshall Rosenberg. It offers direction for the intrapersonal communication that occurs within an individual, and interpersonal communication between people. Rosenberg characterizes it as "a giving and a receiving of messages that center on two very important questions: *What's alive in us? And What can we do to make life more wonderful?*" (*Speak Peace* 9). The NVC model of communication is comprised of a theory of emotions, four steps, and three skills. It has been applied in a wide range of contexts including as a conflict resolution tool "in schools, businesses, health care centers, prisons, community groups, and families" (Rosenberg, *Nonviolent Communication* 215).   Rosenberg and other NVC trainers describe it as a language of connection or relationships.

For this project, I am focusing on the use of NVC as a tool to develop personal relationships which could exist in any of the above settings. As a language for relationships, the use of the verbal skills may not be appropriate in situations that require immediate behavioral action like an urgent need for self-defense. To further specify its use, I often recommend that learners use NVC in interactions when their desire for a positive relationship with the other person is stronger than their desire for any particular behavioral outcome of the dialogue, and to refrain from its use if the outcome has more importance that the relationship.

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[1]   For more information about the NVC process and training in your area, visit the Center for Nonviolent Communication which is "a global organization that supports the learning and sharing of NVC" at http://www.cnvc.org/

One NVC trainer extended the definition more broadly stating that it is "a worldview, disguised as a communication model" (Miller). After many years of practice, I have, to some degree, internalized the root intention for all parties in the interaction to have the opportunity for their needs to be met. With this intention, I apply the skills to a great majority of my own relationships in various contexts. The model will be explored in depth in the Literature Review Chapter.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

Acknowledging the importance of interpersonal communication to well-being raises this question: How competent are people in their interpersonal communications? One review of research in the field finds that "there is surprisingly little research directly addressing this question" (Knapp and Daly 487). After looking at the research on the topic, the authors conclude that "the available evidence indicates that there is a substantial need for better interpersonal skills [including communication] among a significant portion of the population. Presumably, the rest of the population also has room for meaningful improvement" (Knapp and Daly 488). This quote suggests that additional research into interpersonal communication skills is needed, as well as more widespread lay training. Knapp and Daly end their article lamenting the paucity of government resources devoted to improving people's interpersonal skills despite the value of doing so. They report that "modest improvements in people's interpersonal skills and ability to establish and maintain satisfying relationships stand to be a far more potent source of physical and psychological well-being [than programs intending] to eradicate crime, educational underachievement, smoking, obesity, and drug abuse" (506).

In her book, *The Empowerment Manual: A Guide for Collaborative Groups*, Starhawk shares her critique of communication skills used in groups: "With millions of years of evolutionary specialization in communication behind us, you'd think we would do it well. And yet too often in groups, old and ineffective patterns of communication generate conflict and hold us back from building trust and communication" (79-80). Her book presents strategies to address these concerns which include NVC.

The NEA guide cites a 2006 report from the Conference Board entitled "Are they Really Ready to Work?," stating: "Although oral and written communication are among the top four skills they [employers] seek in new hires, all graduates are lacking in these areas" (13).

Deborah Cameron, in her book, *Good to Talk? Living and Working in a Communication Culture,* describes the results of a national communication survey in which almost 1000 people in Great Britain were interviewed (1). She notes that "83% of respondents agreed that 'good communicators lead happy lives,' and 73% agreed that 'making the effort to communicate is the key to happy relationships with people'" (1). Despite the respondents' acknowledgement of the value of communication, "only half considered themselves to be good communicators, and 60% expressed a desire to do better" (Cameron 1). This study suggests that for many people there is a significant gap between their value of good communication and their capacity to practice it.

Resources from the field of Nonviolent Communication provide additional examples of people's limitations in interpersonal communication. Connor and Killian state that NVC "involves challenging a primary assumption that has informed our culture for thousands of years: That it is useful to classify people and things as 'right' or

'wrong'" (12). This assumption leads people to label others in ways that "diminish human connection," and to confuse "a person's *behavior* – the particular acts a person chooses to take—with who the person *is*" (Connor and Killian 14-15). They conclude that the common practice of right/wrong thinking and the behavior it motivates "curtail the possibilities for the kind of work we can collectively envision and create" (Connor and Killian 16-17). In his comments on people's communication competence, Marshal Rosenberg states that "most of us grew up speaking a language than encourages us to label, compare, demand, and pronounce judgments rather than to be aware of what we are feeling and needing" (Rosenberg, *Nonviolent Communication* 23). These authors argue that ways of thinking and speaking that have a negative impact on communication competence are commonplace in our culture.

Empathic Dialogue[2], based on Nonviolent Communication (NVC), is a needs-based communication system composed of three inter-related skills (empathy, self-empathy, and honesty). It offers the possibility of increasing an individual's communication competence. The research question that this study explores is: *What are the impacts of training in Empathic Dialogue, a needs-based communication system composed of three inter-related skills (empathy, self-empathy, and honesty), on individual's abilities to create mutually-satisfying dialogues?*

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[2]   I titled the training: "Empathic Dialogue: A Path to Mutually-Satisfying Interactions." I chose not to use "Nonviolent Communication" or "NVC" in the title or subtitle of the training to honor a request from the Center for Nonviolent Communication that only Certified NVC Trainers use these terms in this manner (*Guidelines for Sharing NVC*); however, the elements of the training are based on NVC. My title focused on a key element of the NVC model (empathy) and the practice of dialogue the model enables. My preferred term for this process is "Compassionate Communication" because it indicates the desired outcome of the model, the presence of compassion, rather than focusing on the absence of violence.

I did not begin my quest for a thesis topic with Nonviolent Communication. The topic

arose after I had considered and rejected a number of other directions of study. This

process parallels my experience with the NVC model, in that it repeatedly "arises" in my

consciousness, especially in my communications. I was first exposed to this novel and

systemic approach to communication in the early 1990s. Later in that decade, in the

midst of an emotional crisis, I decided to adopt this approach as a guide for my

communications and my way of being. As a means to process and accept emotions, it

helped me show care and compassion to myself as I faced the challenges of clinical

depression. Interpersonally, the model provided greater insight into other people's

motivations, and concrete strategies to develop relationships with them.

The approach NVC offered, which I will describe later in this study, starkly

contrasted with what I had learned through my upbringing as a white, middle-class male

in the United States. The contrast was particularly, and painfully, evident in my

interactions with my father about how the process might serve our relationship. A few

years later, inspired by the power of this process to change my life including my

relationship with my father, I began sharing the model with others, a practice which I

continue today. This work has shown me that many people in American culture learn

ways of relating to others that make relationships difficult, and that NVC offers new

communication tools for these people.

My dissatisfaction with the communication practices in my Master's Program

cohort was another factor in choosing this topic. For a number of reasons, my cohort,

like many groups and communities, did not spend time addressing its communication

processes. Because we lacked intentionality regarding our communications, we defaulted

to the common practice of relying on email as the prime mode of communication

between members. This mode was sufficient for information exchanges as long as strong

emotions didn't arise. Inevitably, conflicts arose early in our first semester which

triggered strong feelings. Without prior agreements to use other modes of

communication which have much greater capacity to address conflict, such as face-to-

face meetings between individuals or meetings of the cohort as a whole, the fractures in

the community were not adequately addressed. I was frustrated at our cohort's inaction

because I saw these conflicts and the issues underlying them as opportunities for the

cohort to experience and experiment with a means of addressing conflict effectively. I

held the belief that utilizing these means could strengthen ties between cohort members.

My hope is that this project will provide new tools for individuals and groups interested

in improving their communication practices.

WHAT IS AHEAD?

In Chapter two, I review literature in three areas as it relates to interpersonal

communication. First I focus on the history of, and research on, the Nonviolent

Communication model. Then I address the two theoretical frameworks that guide this

study, one from the field of Philosophy and the second from Sociology. In Chapter three,

I detail the methods I used in this study including my research methodology, research

participant information, and limitations. The fourth chapter reviews the findings and

interpretation of my field research data and the fifth, and last, chapter addresses the

broader implications of this study.

A NOTE ON VISUAL "REST-STOPS" BETWEEN CHAPTERS

It is important to note that most people have experienced mutually-satisfying interactions. These experiences provide a foundation on which to increase people's communication capacity. I find it important whenever one embraces the challenge of learning new skills (especially when those skills are used frequently) to start from a foundation of gratitude for one's current abilities. This enables learners to view the learning process as adding to their already effective skill-set rather that seeing the new information as a replacement for dysfunctional skills. To stimulate appreciation for their current communications skills, I asked participants during their initial interview to recall an example of a mutually-satisfying interaction. They all were successful! I then asked participants to create a visual representation of that interaction. Four of these visual representations are placed at the transitions between chapters (fig. 1-4). I named the drawings based on the participants' descriptions of the interactions. They are intended as "rest-stops," inviting the reader to take a break, appreciate that communication is a process more vital and dynamic than words on a page can reflect, and contemplate his or her own capacity to experience mutually-satisfying dialogues.
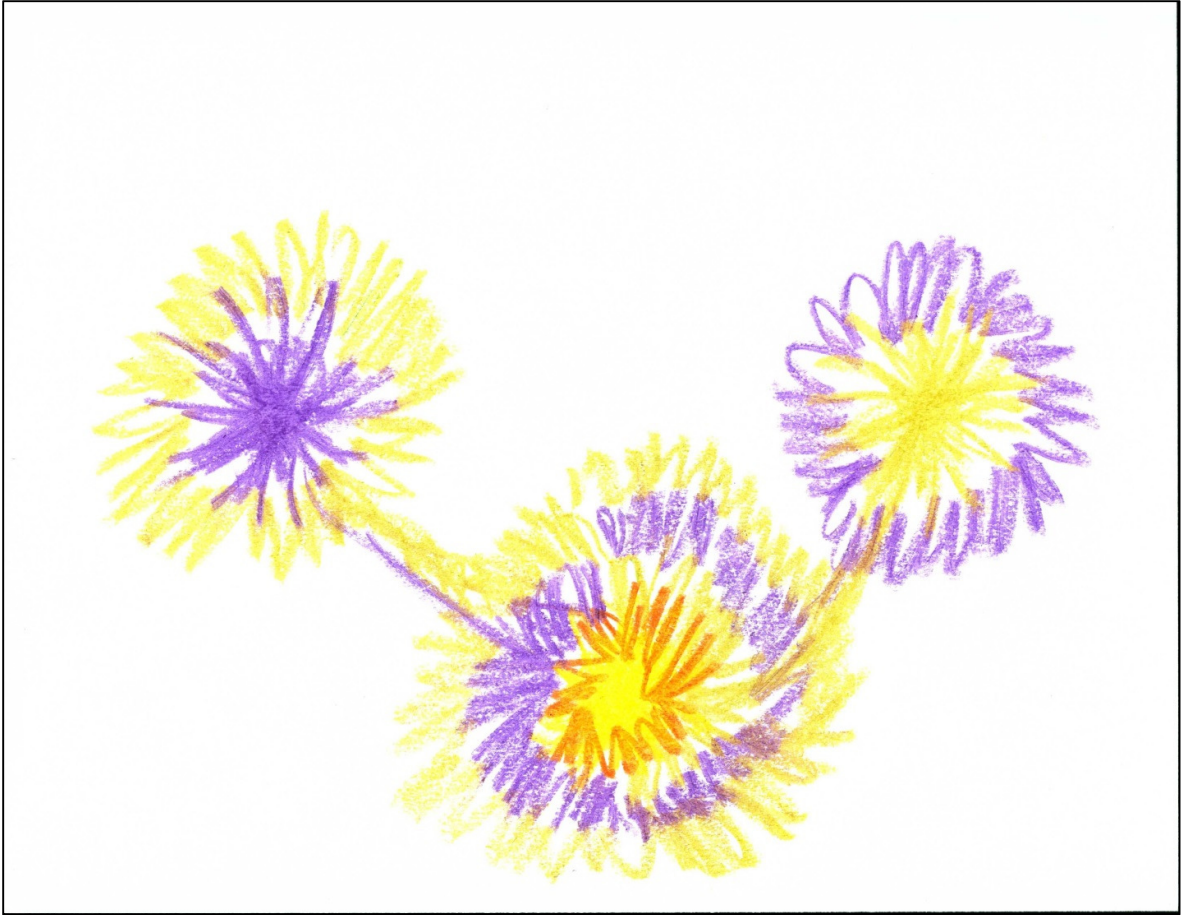
Fig. 1. *Fireworks*: Michele's Visual Representation of a Mutually-Satisfying Dialogue

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

In this chapter I review the core literature that will be used to explore my research question. I start by going over the history of the Nonviolent Communication model, research studies addressing it, and critiques about it. Next I explore the work of the Greek philosopher, Aristotle, focusing primarily on his book *The Nicomachean Ethics*. I describe Aristotle's perspective on the importance and character of friendship, and his definition of virtues and the process of acquiring them. I then propose the argument that Nonviolent Communication meets Aristotle's criteria for being considered a virtue. In the final section I discuss George Ritzer's theory of the "McDonaldization of Society" which is based on Max Weber's concept of "rationalization." I describe this theory's major concepts and use additional sources to describe its relevance to interpersonal communication and NVC.

NONVIOLENT COMMUNICATION

History. Marshall Rosenberg, a clinical psychologist, developed the NVC model while "facilitating racial integration in schools and organizations across the Southern United States during the 1960s" (Little 21). He drew from the work of Carl Rogers, the founder of Humanistic Psychology, with whom he worked "at a time when he [Rogers] was researching the components of a helping relationship" (Rosenberg, *Speak Peace* 1). The skill of empathy was central to Rogers' work from the early development of his theory in the early 1940s and continuing into his later research (Juncadella 10). A Master's thesis that reviewed literature on NVC argues that, "Nonviolent communication rises directly out of Carl Rogers' tradition of Humanistic Psychology, which identifies empathy as the fundamental key to human psychological development and fulfilling human

relationships" (Little 21). Similarly to Rogers, who broadened the focus of his work after 1968 to include other fields "such as education, facilitation, group and cultural conflicts," Rosenberg applied the NVC model outside of the therapeutic milieu "in conflict resolution, interpersonal skills training, and violence prevention" (Juncadella 9; Little 22). Later in his life, Rogers "spontaneously wrote to Rosenberg congratulating him on his work in NVC and gave him his wholehearted endorsement" (Sears 63).

Professor Michael Hakeem influenced the conceptual departure Rosenberg took from clinical work by helping him see "the scientific limitations and the social and political dangers of practicing psychology in the way that [he] had been trained: a pathology-based understanding of human beings" (Rosenberg, *Nonviolent Communication* xiii).

Rosenberg's choice to bring NVC out of the counseling setting and into large-group and community contexts was affected by the work of other scholars interested in individual and community well-being. Erich Fromm's contention that "individual mental health is dependent on the social structure of a community," and George Miller's "insistence on giving psychology away to the community, thereby making knowledge about human behaviour as widely and readily available as possible," are two prime examples (Little 22). In his writing, Rosenberg highlights his desire to broaden the reach of his work, stating "that the enormity of suffering on our planet requires more effective ways of distributing much-needed skills than can be offered by a clinical approach" (*Nonviolent Communication* xiii).

Rosenberg used a range of pedagogical strategies to address the challenge of exposing large groups to skills "he had been accustomed to facilitating in one individual,

in a clinical setting, over the course of months or even years" (Little 23). Some of these

approaches include "establishing measurable learning objectives . . . including interactive

teaching techniques, . . . employing visual recording as a feedback tool for workshop

participants, . . . and providing supplementary reading materials" (Little 23-24). When I

trained research participants in Empathic Dialogue, I borrowed from this list of strategies.

Sears points out that Martin Buber's work also influenced the development of

NVC:

> Rosenberg taught his students how to be present to others. He said that
>
> equality is an essential element of presence. A therapist, who sees himself
>
> as the one with all the answers, will not be able to meet his client in the
>
> way that Buber speaks of. Buber describes the characteristics of a true
>
> dialogue: In a true dialogue there is a moment of surprise. Buber compares
>
> it to a chess game. "The whole charm of chess is that I do not know and
>
> cannot know what my partner will do. I am surprised by what he does and
>
> on this surprise the whole play is based" (Kirschenbaum. 1989, p. 57).
>
> (70)

This quote points to Rosenberg's acknowledgement of the importance of bringing

"presence" to the inherently uncertain content of conversation.

The broader purpose of NVC was influenced by Mahatma Gandhi's concept of

ahimsa, translated as "the overflowing love that arises when all ill-will, anger, and hate

have subsided from the heart" (Little 25). Rosenberg reflects this influence when he

reports that he calls "this approach Nonviolent Communication, using the term

nonviolence as Gandhi used it – to refer to our natural state of compassion when violence

has subsided from the heart" (*Nonviolent Communication* 2). An NVC practitioner

reflecting on the connection between Gandhi and Rosenberg suggests that, "The [NVC]

model is simple enough that anyone can learn it and apply it. It makes readily available

the grace that Gandhi was accessing and engaging. This [process] accesses what Gandhi

called loving-kindness" (Little 25-26).

Academic Research on NVC. I was able to locate only a very small number of

published research studies on Nonviolent Communication. A literature search using

Academic Search Complete for articles published in peer-reviewed journals in the last ten

years using the term "nonviolent communication" yielded seventeen articles. Of these

seventeen articles, all but one were purely theoretical; a mix of interviews, critiques of

NVC, and book reviews. The article that included a research study addressed the effects

of a Peace and Nonviolence Course that employed NVC at a University (Baesler and

Lauricella). Due to this dearth of published research into NVC available on the

Academic Search Complete database, I have focused my review on dissertations and

theses. A search using ProQuest Dissertations and Theses Global for the period from

2004-2014 using the search term "Nonviolent Communication" yielded eight results with

the term in the title or in the body of the resource. I supplemented these articles with

other dissertations and theses, listed at the Center for Nonviolent Communication website

on the NVC Research Page. Several of these works originate from outside the United

States.

Quantitative and Mixed-Methods Studies. There are a handful of studies that offer

quantitative evaluations of Nonviolent Communication training programs. Based on a

review of the four studies that fell in this category as of 2008, Marion Little concluded:

These four studies provide the only program evaluation research currently

available which assesses the impacts of Nonviolent Communication

training. While they are all relatively small, they indicate some positive

effects that practitioners are experiencing from learning and applying the

model. (30)

Little's own study looked at the impacts of "a conflict resolution and empathy

development program called Total Honesty/Total Heart" based on NVC, on fourteen

adolescent girls "identified as 'at-risk' because they [were] parenting, and/or on probation

" (1). She concluded that her "research has more or less established that empathy plays a

crucial role in conflict resolution and violence prevention" (Little 171).

Another study, completed in 2012, explores the effect of an 8-week program in

which NVC was taught. Its results

suggest that NVC training may (a) be a useful addition to substance abuse

treatment programs for parolees, (b) be effective in addressing problematic

coping and communication styles resulting from incarceration and

criminal behavior, and (c) assist paroled individuals in building and

sustaining positive social support networks. (Marlow, E. et al., 2012,

abstract) (Sears 53)

Melanie Sears' study looked at the impacts of NVC training on a "group of

inpatient psychiatry patients in order to discern universal principles that could elicit either

cooperation or elicit resistance" (80). Her most notable finding was that using

"Nonviolent Communication, especially the empathy model, is healing and inspires

cooperation even when used on the most psychologically impaired patient" (Sears 101).

She found that when she "listened to a patient and heard what they were trying to communicate [using empathy], their behavior started to improve" (Sears 101). Sears noticed that along with behavioral improvements, her use of empathy made her job easier "because patients would cooperate with [her] instead of reacting against [her]" (Sears 101).

Carme Juncadella undertook a systematic review of the empirical research done up until 2013 about NVC and its findings concerning empathy development. Her review using a multi-step systematic process surfaced fourteen studies which met her inclusion criteria (Juncadella 27). She concluded that "research shows that NVC potentially fosters empathy, in spite of the shortcomings present in the studies such as a small number of participants and inadequate measures, also found in other systematic reviews" (Juncadella 60).

Qualitative Studies. Here I detail a handful of qualitative studies that relate to the study undertaken for this thesis.

Case Study on NVC in e-Mentoring Relationships. Elaine Cox and Patricia Dannahy explored the use of NVC "as a way of developing the openness needed for successful communication in e-mentoring relationships" (39). Using a case-study model, the project studied three students involved in the "practice based Online Coaching and Mentoring module being developed as part of a Masters (*sic*) Degree at a British University" (Cox and Dannahy 42). The authors found that the "evidence presented demonstrates that NVC does have the potential to encourage trusting personal relationships characterized by openness, and also that the students began to try out using NVC to resolve their own issues" (Cox and Dannahy 49). In particular, they discovered that "NVC's ability to

facilitate electronic dialogue is illustrated through the speed at which in-depth relationships were forged" (Cox and Dannahy 49).

Case Study on the Impact of NVC Training on Conflict Resolution. Andrea Nash authored her master's thesis to determine "whether training in NVC for staff members in a juvenile delinquent treatment-oriented facility would affect the likelihood of staff members using nonviolent verbal resolution to settle a conflict" (2). The research methodology was a blind study in which researchers observed two groups of staff members at a boys institute, one that had received NVC training and another that had not (Nash 16). Nash found that "receiving training was correlated with an increase in nonviolent resolution" and that "NVC trained staff's involvement in violent resolution would decrease more than the no-NVC training residential staff" (Nash 36).

Case Study on the Impact of NVC and Mindfulness Training for Former Prisoners. In her doctoral dissertation entitled "Can you see the Beauty? Nonviolent Communication as Counter Narrative in the Lives of Former Prisoners," Debbie Dougan, created a series of "literary portraits" of three former prisoners who participated in a program teaching NVC and mindfulness while incarcerated (iii). She intended to "bring into focus the relationship between personal narrative and public discourse" (Dougan 189). Among her conclusions, she indicates all three men "were moved not so much by the content of the NVC classes they took in prison, but by the methods that these teachers employed" (Dougan 191). She also reports that her dissertation "provides testimonial evidence of their [the pedagogical methods used in the program] effectiveness in facilitating perspective transformation" (Dougan 192).

These studies show the diversity of ways in which Nonviolent Communication has been researched. All three of these studies engage participants who belong or belonged to a particular institution where NVC training was offered. The first study reviewed members of a college master's program, the second study's participants were staff members of a treatment facility for juveniles, and the third study explored the lives of individuals who received the training while incarcerated. My study takes a different approach, gauging the effects of NVC training on a group of adults who do not share membership in a certain institution.

Overview of the Elements of NVC. In this section, I provide an overview of the elements of NVC as shared with participants in the training sessions.

Foundational Concepts. The NVC model is founded on three concepts: (1) An intention for mutuality in interpersonal relationships; (2) The concept of human needs as motivators for behavior; and 3) The status of feelings as indicators of whether needs are met.

An Intention for Mutuality in Interpersonal Relationships. One essential precursor for the application of the skills of Empathic Dialogue through the NVC model is a specific intention held by the communicator. Marshall Rosenberg introduces this intention as "compassion, a flow between myself and others based on mutual giving from the heart" (*Nonviolent Communication* 4). This mutuality means becoming aware of the other's experience and valuing their needs as much as one values one's own. Rosenberg describes this mutuality in more depth, stating that when "we give from the heart, we do so out of the joy that springs forth whenever we willingly enrich another person's life. This kind of giving benefits both the giver and the receiver" *(Nonviolent Communication*

5). In his workshops, Rosenberg uses the terms "power-with" and "power-over": The former resonates with NVC while the latter describes "domination systems" in which a small group of people get their needs met at the expense of others. He refers to systems of domination "where the people who think they are superior control others," and suggests that "NVC offers people caught up in domination systems a way of thinking and communicating that would make their life much more wonderful" (Rosenberg, *Speak Peace in a World of Conflict* 106, 108).

At its root, the intention of NVC asks a communicator to move out of a domination or "power-over" paradigm to consider the needs of others. Only by valuing each other's needs as highly as their own can two people have the potential of developing a mutually-satisfying relationship.

<u>Needs: Life Energies that Motivate Behavior.</u> NVC offers a non-exhaustive list of more than forty human needs that motivate human behavior (Rosenberg, *Nonviolent Communication* 54-55). Rosenberg expands the work of other theorists, including Abraham Maslow and Manfred Max-Neef. Maslow's hierarchy of needs holds that "once our lower-level needs (i.e. Physiological, Safety) are met, we are prompted to satisfy our higher-level needs (Belongingness, Esteem, and Self-Actualization)" (Myers 355). Though Maslow's hierarchy is "somewhat ambiguous[,]…the idea that some motives are more compelling that others…provides a framework for thinking about motivation" (Myers 355). Since the early 1970s when Maslow published his theory, research on the role of needs in motivating behavior has expanded.

Manfred Max-Neef, writing about the connection between human development and human needs, takes a slightly different view than Maslow when he argues that

"human needs must be understood as a system: that is, all human needs are interrelated and interactive. With the sole exception of the need of subsistence, that is, to remain alive, no hierarchies exist within the system" (Max-Neef, Elizalde, and Hopenhayn 17). He also offers two postulates that correspond with the NVC approach: "First: *Fundamental human needs are finite, few and classifiable*. Second: *Fundamental human needs* (such as those contained in the system proposed) *are the same in all cultures and in all historical periods. What changes, both over time and through cultures, is the way or the means by which the needs are satisfied* ['satisfiers']" (Max-Neef, Elizalde, and Hopenhayn 18). The needs he proposes, in non-hierarchical order, are "subsistence, protection, affection, understanding, participation, idleness, creation, identity and freedom" (Max-Neef, Elizalde, and Hopenhayn 32).

NVC adds to Max-Neef's list of needs and proposes a parallel concept to his "satisfiers" in the form of a request or strategy that is a "practical and negotiable proposal for action" to meet a need (D'Ansembourg 37). The central contention of this communication model, "that everything we do is in service of our needs [,] . . . has no corollary in mainstream thinking" (Rosenberg, *Speak Peace* 11). An awareness of needs as the motivating force for all actions is one of the four steps of the NVC model (described below) that provides a process for both listening to others and expressing oneself.

Feelings: Indicators of Whether Needs are Met or Not. Nonviolent Communication holds that our emotions reflect the degree of satisfaction of our needs. This perspective connects displeasurable feelings to the subjective experience of a need not being met and pleasurable feelings to the experience of a need being met. One NVC trainer who

undertook an extensive analysis of literature relating to the connection between feelings

and needs, determined that

> the recognition that emotions tell us something of vital importance is a
>
> common thread linking the various sources I have consulted, although
>
> none of the academic ones explicitly point out the crucial link between
>
> emotions and needs, and the ability of our emotions to point our attention
>
> to our needs, which is their deepest gift. (Kashtan, *Beyond Reason* 396)

This link between feelings and needs is a cornerstone of the NVC process; it provides a

practical, learnable method for understanding and describing both one's own inner

experience and that of others.

The Building Blocks of the Model: Steps, Key Distinctions, and Literacies. The four steps

of the NVC process are: "Observation, Feeling, Needs, and Request" (Rosenberg,

Nonviolent Communication 7). They are connected to one another in this way: 1) "The

concrete actions we are *observing* that are affecting our well-being, 2) How we *feel* in

relation to what we are observing, 3) The *needs*, values, desires, etc. that are creating our

feelings, and 4) the concrete actions we *request* in order to enrich our lives" (Rosenberg,

Nonviolent Communication 7).

A key distinction is paired with each step to clarify its practice. In her book*,*

Spinning Threads of Radical Aliveness, Miki Kashtan describes these distinctions as ways

NVC focuses our attention in communication (369). The first distinction is between

observing and *evaluating*: "This simple tool has the power to wake us up to the fact that

we continually engage in internal storytelling. Then we can open up to the possibility

that despite the conviction we have in our interpretation of reality that interpretation is

not necessarily so" (Kashtan, *Spinning Threads* 370). The distinction corresponding to the second step, feelings, is between *feelings* and *thoughts*. Feelings are "an expression of what's alive in you . . . not a diagnosis of others—or thoughts about what they are" (Rosenberg, *Speak Peace* 35). Separating *needs* that motivate behavior from *strategies* which are specific means to meet needs is the third key distinction: "This practice for me is the absolute core element of NVC. Because needs are the primary force of life, the source of energy that motivate us to do anything we do, truly understanding what they are provides peace and inner openness like nothing else" (Kashtan, *Spinning Threads* 370). The fourth and final distinction is between making *requests* and making *demands*: "This practice supports us in two moves at once, and I often think of it as the most difficult aspect of the NVC practice. One the one hand, this practice supports us in asking for what we want . . . At the same time, this practice supports us in being able to meet a 'no' with openness to dialogue" (Kashtan, *Spinning Threads* 371).

To provide more texture and clarity to the means of developing the steps, I have expanded on the concept of "literacies" mentioned by Marshall Rosenberg in *Speak Peace in a World of Conflict* (27-28, 32-24, 37, 59-60). Adding to Rosenberg's use of the term, I put forward four "Literacies of Compassion" which are associated with the four steps. These literacies segment the steps into two parts, in order to facilitate the learning process: (1) A particular awareness; and (2) Associated language. Observational Literacy, connected with the first step of the model (observation), promotes an awareness of the lenses or biases through which we see the world, and language that describes what we observe as objectively as possible. The second literacy, Emotional Literacy, corresponds to the second step of the model (feelings), and contains an awareness of the

sensations we experience in our bodies, and the ability to verbalize those sensations.

Motivational Literacy consists of an awareness of the life energy that drives behavior,

and the ability to put a name to that energy; it corresponds to the third step of the NVC

Model (needs).   Finally, Invitational Literacy, which corresponds to the fourth step of the

model (requests), comprises an awareness of choice, and the acceptance of what is

happening in the moment. The language aspect of this literacy is the ability to verbally

convey a clear, doable, present request.

The Skills of NVC. In this section I describe the three skills of Empathic Dialogue taught

in the training sessions: self-empathy, empathy for others, and honesty, and how they

interact in practice. The skills are inter-related as they apply the awareness of needs in

three different but complementary ways. Self-empathy is the root skill through which

one becomes aware of one's own feelings and needs as a precursor to engaging in the

outward processes of empathy for another person or honest self-expression. Through

empathy for another person, needs-awareness is applied to another person's inner

experience, often with a verbal guess about the other's feelings and needs. This guess

stimulates a dynamic, self-corrective process focused on understanding the other's

experience and helping them to understand their own. Honesty is the process of sharing

one's own feelings and needs, identified via self-empathy, with another person. When

used in relationships, these skills facilitate connection and collaborative decision-making.

These qualities are fundamental parts of a mutually-satisfying relationship.

Self-Empathy. Self-empathy is the core skill needed to enable connection with others.

References to self-empathy and its application abound in the Nonviolent Communication

field. Marie Miyashiro, a NVC business consultant, defines self-empathy as "a process in

which we pause and empty our own thoughts to connect with our own feelings and

needs" (63). Ike Lasater and Julie Stiles highlight the primacy of this skill: "I view self-

empathy as the fundamental practice of NVC. Even if you did no other practice,

consistently meeting your need for empathy would be life-changing in and of itself" (18).

Developing the capacity for self-empathy allows an individual to know his or her

emotional state which then allows him or her to understand the emotional state of the

other. In his description of self-empathy in *Speak Peace in a World of Conflict*, Marshall

Rosenberg offers this tool as the first step toward a peaceful world, stating that "NVC

helps us learn how to create peace within ourselves when there's a conflict between what

we do and what we wish we had done. If we're going to be violent to our self, how are

we going to contribute to creating a world of peace? Peace begins with us" (71).

I have found self-empathy to be a powerful tool in and of itself and in

combination with the other two skills of NVC.

Empathic Listening to Another Person (Empathy).   In NVC, empathy is a process of

"focusing full attention on the other person's message" (Rosenberg, *Nonviolent*

Communication 92). In keeping with NVC's focus on feelings and needs, this attention is

directed toward "the unique feeling and needs a person is experiencing in that very

moment" (Rosenberg, *Nonviolent Communication* 126). It is distinguished from

sympathy in that through sympathy "we are attending to our own needs and experience,

not the feelings and needs of the other person" (Connor and Killian 76). While empathy

regards where we focus our attention, there are situations when a verbal reflection or

paraphrase can aid the communication process. NVC "suggests that our paraphrasing

take the form of questions that reveal our understanding while eliciting any necessary

corrections from the speaker" (Rosenberg, *Nonviolent Communication* 96). Rosenberg encourages a paraphrase when "we are unsure that we have accurately understood the message" and when a speaker is "expressing [an] intensely emotional message" (*Nonviolent Communication* 97, 98).

Empathy requires a blending of cognitive and affective elements to connect with another person as expressed by Miki Kashtan:

> Empathy requires a quality of open-heartedness, as well as a mental focusing on the other. When only one is present, empathy collapses into one or the other of its constitutive elements. This unique quality of empathy makes it one of the key areas of human functioning which specifically call for a joining together of emotion and reason. The gift of empathy is that it integrates mind and heart in the very same act as it brings together self and other. (*Beyond Reason* 416)

Another book written by NVC practitioners emphasizes the challenges that practicing empathy presents given our culture's disposition toward problem-solving in interpersonal relationships:

> When empathizing, we are connecting with the person's internal experience; we are not doing anything directed toward changing that experience or the outside world. At first, this can be frustrating. We're accustomed in our culture to taking action – to changing, fixing, and taking charge. When someone is in need or in pain, it can be challenging to simply be present with what they are feeling and needing. We want

movement and relief . . . Yet as you gain experience in practicing

empathy, you'll see that it is also an effective strategy for creating change.

(Connor and Killian 101-102)

In my experience of using and teaching NVC for more than ten years, I have

found empathy vital to increasing the effectiveness of an individual's overall

communication approaches and, in particular, to managing conflict and developing

relationships.

Honest Self-Expression (Honesty). The third skill in NVC, operating under a number of

labels including "honesty," "self-expression," "expressing honestly," "transparency," or

just "expression," is sharing one's feelings and needs directly in a way that can be

understood by another person. Marshall Rosenberg calls honesty "the empowering

honesty that enables us to learn from our limitations" (*Nonviolent Communication* 55).

In expressing our honesty, he encourages people to refrain from expressing needs

"indirectly through the use of evaluations, interpretations, and images," instead

suggesting that "if we are wishing for a compassionate response from others . . . the more

directly we can connect our feelings to our needs, the easier it is for others to respond

compassionately to our needs" (Rosenberg, *Nonviolent Communication* 54).

In the training session, I made a clear distinction between practicing honesty and

empathy. Honesty is a focus on the expression of one's own needs and empathy is

attention to the other's needs (while consciously placing less attention on one's own

needs). One principle explained in NVC trainings is the importance of "empathy before

education [honesty]" meaning that when "we want to 'educate' someone about our own

experience (our feelings and needs), we want to see that they get the empathy and 'hearing' they need first" (Connor and Killian 100).

In my experience, balancing the application of empathy and honesty facilitates both healing, through empathy, and growth, through honesty.

Limitations of the NVC Model. In her review of research into the shortcomings of the NVC Model, Carme Juncadella highlights four: (1) Describing an observation can be challenging "because a particular behaviour can have multiple interpretations;" (2) Expressing feelings and needs "requires a certain level of self-knowledge;" (3) Often, the use of the model makes people feel awkward, "prompting them to cease using it, and a certain level of trust is necessary in the interaction [which is] often absent in everyday life;" and (4) Stating a request is difficult as "it often takes a long time to . . . achieve an appropriate NVC wording" of the request (21). She reports two other points of concern raised by one researcher: first, about the difficulty in reaching the endpoint of the process "because it requires so much time, discipline and patience to achieve," and secondly, the possibility that NVC practitioners, in coming together with other practitioners, may develop "a sort of prejudice towards lay persons" (Juncadella 21). The last criticism she mentions is the potential for the subject of empathy to perceive the paraphrase provided as "too directive or 'suggestive', whereby a critical quality of receptivity . . . [is] lost." (Juncadella 21).

Three of these concerns: the challenge of making an NVC observation, the requirement of a certain level of self-knowledge, and the difficulty of stating a request, involve developing the capacity to use the four steps of the model. Proficiency in applying these steps requires new and unfamiliar ways of relating to both our internal and

external worlds. Changing how we relate to the world is not an easy process but it can be achieved with practice. The literacies that I described earlier are intended to facilitate this learning by emphasizing the change in awareness that accompanies each skill. With clarity about these particular awarenesses, the learner's ability to develop them increases.

I am personally familiar with the concerns about the awkwardness of the model and the perception that empathy is too direct. Here again, with practice guided by a trainer, these obstacles can be overcome. The NVC learning process is often compared to learning a new language: proficiency occurs over a significant period of time, as the learner becomes familiar with basic elements before becoming effective at day-to-day use. Concerns about the awkwardness of the model often relate to the use of the "classical form" of NVC which is also known as the "training wheels sentence: 'When I hear . . . , I feel . . . , because I need . . . Would you be willing to . . .?'" (Lasater and Stiles 9). Trainers suggest new learners use this sentence because the key "distinctions [of the model] are embedded in [its structure], and thus using the sentence prompts awareness of them. . . . [Once] these distinctions are embodied, . . . the specific words [a learner uses] become less important" (Lasater and Stiles 9).

The practice of empathy presents similar challenges. When first developing this skill, learners may use the basic form of empathy without incorporating the intention of the model. In some cases, the result "can become what [NVC trainers] call 'empathy from hell'. . . [which] is so unpleasant to receive that it's worse that getting no empathy at all" (Connor and Killian 313). In these circumstances, empathy will likely not support relationship-building. As learners navigate these potential pitfalls and integrate the intention of the skill, they are able to experiment to find language that works best for

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them. Speaking in familiar language increases the speaker's level of comfort which decreases the likelihood that the recipient of the message will perceive the interaction as awkward or directive. In cases where the recipient expresses these concerns about the message, the speaker's increased comfort and confidence allow them to stay present to the interaction rather than reacting in ways that might break the connection.

The concern about the difficult reaching the endpoint of NVC is a valid one. Coming to a mutually-satisfying agreement often requires significant time and diligence, and this can be an impediment to using the model. Developing prejudice towards non-NVC users is another possible limitation of which practitioners should be aware.

Another potential limitation of the model is that it can be used to manipulate, rather than cooperate with, other people. However, intending to employ the model to get what you want at the expense of others is at odds with the core intention of NVC to support mutually-fulfilling dialogues. While the tools may be used in this manner, doing so would violate this core intention. There is a risk that one may unintentionally ignore the needs of another person in dialogue, especially if the other person is unaware of their needs or unable to express them clearly. In such an instance, the practice of empathy provides a bridge to help both the empathizer and the other party develop a better understanding of all the needs at play in the interaction. In situations where the other party is not able to communicate verbally, one should focus on other cues such as body language to decipher their needs. For example, dialoguing with a pre-verbal child would require one to pay close attention to the child's body language and develop an awareness of its behavior patterns to understand what needs are motivating it at a given time.

Another limitation of the model is that the majority of certified trainers are well educated, middle-class white people. As a process developed by a middle-class, well-educated white man, it has been passed on primarily to people who share the founder's social class, though, in my experience, more women than men seem to be drawn to it. This means that the bulk of trainers are more likely to offer their training to other people of similar socio-economic backgrounds. As mentioned, the prison population has been exposed to NVC, in limited number. There are additional efforts to expand the reach of NVC to a broader audience that includes other under-represented groups.

ARISTOTELIAN ETHICS: VIRTUES AND FRIENDSHIP

Writing in the fourth century BCE, Aristotle offered his perspective on a range of issues which affect human well-being. For this study, I focus on his views on virtues and on friendship. I then argue that NVC, or Empathic Dialogue, can be viewed as a virtue according to Aristotle's classifications and descriptions.

Virtues. Aristotle begins his inquiry into virtues in Book I of *The Nicomachean Ethics* by defining and describing the goal that ethics enables people to reach: The "human good." He states that the good is that which "we desire for its own sake" and that, for large groups of people, politics guides "the pursuit of the good" by legislating "what we are to do and what we are to abstain from" (3, 4). He disagrees with Plato's argument that the good is universal, stating that "since 'good' can be examined and perceived in many different ways, clearly it cannot be something universally present in all cases" (8). His analysis surfaces two qualities that characterize the highest good. One is that the highest, or chief, good is "always desirable in itself and never for the sake of something else" (Aristotle 10). The second quality is that it be self-sufficient, which he defines as

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"that which when isolated makes life desirable and lacking in nothing" (11). Using these criteria Aristotle marks happiness as the highest good and "the end of action" (11). Connecting the "human good" to the expression of virtue, he concludes that "human good turns out to be activity of the soul exhibiting virtue" (12).

Next, Aristotle expounds on the means of acquiring happiness, refuting arguments that it is "god-given" in favor of a position that it is acquired through action (15). Bringing virtues back into the discussion, he finds that "virtuous activities or their opposites are what determine happiness" (17). He perceives happiness as a constant state that, once achieved, enables the happy man to "never become miserable." (17). Aristotle then describes different kinds of virtues concluding that "some are intellectual and others moral" (21).

In Book II, Aristotle turns his gaze to moral virtue and the process by which it is developed. Distinct from intellectual virtue, he concludes that "moral virtue comes about as a result of habit" (23). The acquisition of moral virtue is compared to the means of developing an art or craft: "The virtues we get first by exercising them, as also happen in the case of the arts" (Aristotle 23). He indicates that developing these habits at a young age is crucial to acquire virtues: "It makes no small difference, then, whether we form habits of one great kind or of another from our very youth; it makes a very great difference, or rather *all* the difference" (24).

The acts that bring virtue, in his view, are difficult to talk about with specificity because they depend on the judgment of the individual who "must in each case consider what is appropriate to the occasion" (25). He offers the broad guideline that virtuous actions "are destroyed by excess and defect, and preserved by the mean" (25).   Further

explicating the process of developing virtues by action, Aristotle states that the agent "must have knowledge, secondly he must choose the acts, and choose them for their own sakes, and thirdly his actions must process from a firm and unchangeable character" (27-28). Again he emphasizes that actions are essential to the development of the virtues and laments that most people "do not do these [actions], but take refuge in theory and think . . . [they] will become good in this way" (28).

In his next section, Aristotle takes on the definition of moral virtue, determining that it must be one of three kinds found in the soul: "Passions, capacities, [and] states of character" (28). First addressing passions (or emotions), he determines that virtues do not belong in this category because the passions are not subject to judgments, while "for our virtues and vices we are praised and blamed" (29). He also argues that passions do not involve choice, while the "virtues are modes of choice or involve choice" (29). He explains that virtues are not capacities, which he defines as "the things in virtue of which we are said to be capable of feeling these [passions]" because they are given "by nature, but we are not made good or bad by nature" (28, 29). He concludes that virtues, by exclusion, are "states of character" (29).

Aristotle proceeds to address the characteristics of the "mean" that defines virtues. He states that the mean is "the intermediate relatively to what which is neither too much nor too little" (30). He emphasizes that the mean is not universal; it is defined in relation to the individual's experiences and capacities (30). He provides the example of a trainer choosing the appropriate amount of food for both a novice and an expert in physical exercise. He states that the trainer will provide the novice and expert differing quantities of food to reflect their respective needs (30). He cites a number of acts, such as adultery,

theft and murder as exception to the rule of the mean in that they "are themselves bad, and not the excesses or deficiencies of them" (31). His comprehensive definition of virtue is as follows: "Virtue, then is a state of character concerned with choice, lying in a mean i.e. the mean relative to us, this being determined by reason, and by that reason by which the man of practical wisdom would determine" (31).

In the final part of Book II, Aristotle states that the fact that the mean is often difficult to find is evidence that "it is no easy task to be good" (36). Then he offers a strategy to reach the mean by focusing action in the direction of the extreme (defect or excess) that one is least drawn to. He introduces the analogy of stick-straightening to make this point stating that "we must drag ourselves to the contrary extreme; for we shall get into the intermediate state by drawing well away from error, as people do in straightening sticks that are bent" (36). One example regards the person who strives to attain the virtue of Generosity, whose deficit and excess might be stinginess and prodigality, respectively. To employ Aristotle's tactic to reach the mean, this person would first identity the extreme to which they are more strongly drawn and target their behavior toward the opposite extreme. In this example, if the person has identified their behavior as tending toward prodigality, to reach the mean of Generosity, they would shift their behavior in the direction of the defect, stinginess.

Friendship. In his first chapter on friendship, Aristotle highlights the importance of friends and distinguishes three types of friendship. He argues that, "even rich men and those in possession of office and of dominating power are thought to need friends most of all," and that "friendship seems to hold states together" (142). The three types of friendship Aristotle designates are: (1) Friendship of utility in which men love each other

"in virtue of some good which they get from each other" (144); (2) Friendship aimed at "pleasure" (145); and (3) "Perfect friendship [which] is the friendship of men who are good, and alike in virtue" (145). Expanding on the latter category, he writes that "mutual love involves choice and choice springs from a state of character: and men wish well to those whom they love, for their sake, not as a result of feeling but as a state of character" (148).

In Book IX, Aristotle continues his exploration of friendship. Regarding the relationship to oneself, he states that, "friendly relations with one's neighbours, and the marks by which friendship are defined, seem to have proceeded from a man's relation to himself" (168). He lists five properties of friendship and states that "each of these is true of the good man's relation to himself" (168). He continues on this theme with a discussion of the nature of true self-love. He first introduces a type of self-love that is "the prevailing type of self-love, which is a bad one," that includes a practice of gratifying "their appetites and in general their feeling and the irrational element of the soul" (174). The man who exhibits the sort of self-love Aristotle favors would "always [be] anxious that he himself, above all things, should act justly, temperately or in accordance with any other of the virtues, and in general . . . always to try to secure for himself what is noble" (174).

RELEVANCE TO NONVIOLENT COMMUNICATION.

Aristotle provides a number of conditions that describe a virtue, including that it is a good, it is acquired through action, habit is essential to its development, it is a state of character (not a passion or a capacity), it is difficult to acquire, and it lies in a mean. In

this section, I address each criterion, in order to present the argument that NVC can be viewed as a virtue.

Is NVC a Good? In the Introduction, I indicated that communication is an essential skill to support relationships that contributes mightily to our well-being. In this sense NVC, as a guide to improve communication, is a "good" that an individual seeks "for the sake of happiness" (Aristotle 10).

Is NVC Acquired by Action? Interpersonal communication exists in a sphere of uncertainty and mystery. Not only do different people communicate in different ways, the same people communicate differently at different times. Our interpersonal communications partly depend on a range of factors including both parties' moods, the context of the communication, and the perceived relationship status and history of the communicators. These communications are therefore inherently uncertain, inviting both communicators to be emotionally present to the interaction. This emotional presence, a key aspect of the skills of NVC, requires a great deal of practice before one can employ it effectively. In the training programs, participants were asked to practice the skills with other participants and were encouraged to continue practicing after the training was complete. I have been practicing NVC for nearly fifteen years, and my capacity is still developing as I apply the model to novel experiences on a daily basis. Without actively and repeatedly bringing NVC into daily communications, an individual will not develop proficiency in it.

Is Habit Essential to the Development of NVC? Communication habits, especially those of which we are unaware, make it difficult to learn and incorporate NVC into daily life. The NVC model promotes an awareness of feelings and needs, and their

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interrelationship with feelings indicating that a need is met or not. The three skills of

NVC lie outside the mainstream of our culture and ask the learner to "unlearn" old habits

and learn new ones to build their skills. Through repeated action, new habits are formed

that enable effective use of NVC skills for mutually-satisfying communication.

Is NVC a State of Character? The three kind of things found in the soul are "passions,

capacities, and states of character" (Aristotle 28). Passions (or emotions) are an

indispensable element of NVC, but not its totality; thus, NVC is not a passion. A

capacity is a natural ability to experience the passions. The practice of NVC sharpens

one's capacity for the recognition and expression of his or her own emotions and those of

others, but it is not merely this. Following Aristotle's logic, NVC must, by exclusion, be

a state of character.

Does NVC lie in a Mean? The skills of NVC, like Aristotle's virtues, lie in a mean. For

example, the excess of self-empathy might be self-absorption while its deficit might be

indifference to the self. Empathy for others, as a mean, might become co-dependence at

one extreme and neglect at the other. The third skill, honesty, might be seen as having a

defect labelled "withholding" and an excess named "over-expressiveness." Other

elements of NVC also share both the characteristic of being a mean and apply Aristotle's

suggested process to reach the mean.

In his book, *Non-violent Communication: A Language of Life,* Marshall

Rosenberg describes a three step process of moving from "emotional slavery" to a state

of "emotional liberation." This process fits Aristotle's view of virtue as a mean, and the

process he offers to find the mean (57-60). The first step in the process, equivalent to

Aristotle's "defect," is emotional slavery in which we "believe ourselves responsible for

the feelings of others" (Rosenberg, *Nonviolent Communication* 57). The third step in the process represents the mean, or virtue, of emotional liberation through which we "accept full responsibility for our own intentions and actions, but not for the feelings of others . . . At this stage we are aware that we can never meet our own needs at the expense of others" (Rosenberg, *Nonviolent Communication* 60). The intermediary stage, representing behavior in the direction of the "contrary extreme" intended to bring us to the mean, is the "'obnoxious stage' – in which we refuse to admit to caring what anyone else feels or needs" (Rosenberg, *Nonviolent Communication* 59). In keeping with Aristotle's approach, movement into the second stage, representing excess, brings the individual to the mean of emotional liberation.

Is NVC difficult to learn? Based on my own practice, and sharing of NVC with many, many people, I conclude that it is difficult to learn. The first step in learning NVC is an awareness of the intention of the process for mutually-satisfying interactions. With this foundation in place, a learner must understand the skills of the process theoretically and be able to implement them in their communications. It often takes "months or years of practice and experience to be able to manipulate these verbal skills with ease so as to sound natural and authentic" (Juncadella 22).

NVC falls squarely into Aristotle's definition of virtue. In the fourth chapter of this thesis, I look at the results of my study through this lens.

NVC and Friendship. As a communication model that enables good relationships between people, NVC is very relevant to a discussion on friendship. Here I explore the connection between NVC and four aspects of Aristotle's view on friendship: (1) its

importance; (2) that it is of three types; (3) that it is a state of character; and (4) that it is based on self-love.

The Importance of Friendship. In the NVC model, friendship is one of the universal needs that motivate behavior, as well as a strategy to meet additional needs. Viewed as a strategy, friendship enables many additional needs to be met including, but not limited to, touch, contribution, growth and learning, empathy, presence, mutuality, consideration and respect, closeness and connection, support and cooperation, acknowledgement and appreciation, and intimacy and affection.

Three Types of Friendship. Aristotle offers three types of friendship: (1) friendship based on pleasure; (2) friendship based on utility; and (3) friendship of the "good". In NVC, pleasure is a feeling that results when a need is met; thus, pleasure is a natural outgrowth of a mutually-satisfying friendship. If NVC is viewed as a utilitarian approach to human motivation in which actions that meet more needs (thus providing more benefits) are favored over those that meet fewer needs or impede needs being met, then it can be seen as promoting friendships of utility. NVC "is a process language that discourages static generalizations; instead, evaluations are to be based on observations *specific to time and context*" (Rosenberg, *Nonviolent Communication* 26). As a result, the static label "good" as applied to friendship does not fit with the model. Instead, the model would suggest that the fixed label "good" be translated by describing a specific action and the feelings and needs that arise in relation to that action.

Friendship as a State of Character. This topic was addressed above.

Friendship is Based on Self-Love. The view that self-love is a precursor to friendship fits well with NVC. Self-love is operationalized in the model through the skill of self-

empathy (which will be outlined later in the Literature Review), and is the process of focusing attention on one's inner experience. Applying empathy to oneself allows for an awareness and acceptance of one's feelings and needs and makes the choice of strategies to meet those needs possible. Self-empathy clarifies what one is experiencing and paves the path to meeting needs. This is a similar endpoint to the one Aristotle posits in his definition of self-love, which enables a person "always to try to secure for himself what is noble" (174).

Conclusion. Aristotle provides insights on virtues and their development and on friendship. Applying these insights to NVC shows that NVC can, using Aristotle's criteria, be seen as a virtue. In addition, NVC is a process that aids in the development of friendship, in that "friendship" is one of the universal needs that motivate behavior in this communication model.

THE "MCDONALDIZATION OF SOCIETY"

Derived from Max Weber. George Ritzer's theory of the McDonaldization of Society is an application of Max Weber's Theory of Rationalization. Weber's Rationalization is of two types: "One concerns the development of bureaucracy" and the "other refers to the subjective changes in attitude that he [Weber] called formal rationality" (Ritzer and Stepnisky 155). Formal rationality, where motivation is derived from "universally applied rules, laws, and regulations," is opposed to other forms of rationality that are based in tradition or emotion (Ritzer and Stepnisky 137). A major element of formal rationality is its denial of personal choice in favor of a mandate for people to "make the same, optimal choice" (Ritzer, *McDonaldization of Society* 26). While the other forms of rationality are present in a variety of civilizations and time-periods, "formal rationality

arose only in the West with the coming of industrialization" (Ritzer and Stepnisky 137).

Formal rationality is "especially in conflict with substantive rationality," in which

motivation emanates from values (Ritzer and Stepnisky 139).

Weber employed the concept of the "iron cage of rationality" to underscore the

deleterious impacts of rationalization. He reasoned that "bureaucracies are cages in the

sense that people are trapped in them, their basic humanity denied" (Ritzer,

McDonaldization of Society 28). He feared that they would increase such that "society

would eventually become nothing more than a seamless web of rationalized structures;

there would be no escape" (*McDonaldization of Society* 28). In his application of

Weber's theory, Ritzer highlights five dimensions of Rationalization: 1) efficiency, 2)

calculability, 3) predictability, 4) control, and 5) the irrationality of rationality

(*McDonaldization of Society* 12).

McDonaldization defined. Ritzer defines McDonaldization as "the process by which

the principles of the fast-food restaurant are coming to dominate more and more sectors

of American society as well as the rest of the world" (*McDonaldization of Society* 1). It

is classified as a theory of globalization whereby "cultures of the world are seen as

growing increasingly similar, at least to some degree and in some ways" (Ritzer and

Stepnisky 581). As such, McDonaldization concerns the "spread of worldwide practices,

relations, consciousness, and organization of social life" (Ritzer and Stepnisky 571).

Weber focused on bureaucracy as the quintessential example of Rationalization, while

Ritzer places the fast-food restaurant as McDonaldization's ideal form. Ritzer provides

multiple examples of the expression of the five dimensions of Rationalization in a range

of commercial organizations. Below I outline Ritzer's presentation of these dimensions.

Efficiency. Ritzer defines efficiency as "choosing the optimum means to a given end"

(*McDonaldization of Society* 43). Since the optimum means is elusive, the quest for

greater efficiency is constant and based on hopes that the institution or business "will at

least be able to progressively increase their efficiency" (Ritzer, *McDonaldization of*

Society 43). Ritzer points out that, though the goal of efficiency pre-dated fast-food

restaurants, these restaurants provide the most salient and most wide-spread example of

the application of this value (*McDonaldization of Society* 44). The three prime examples

of efficiency in practice are "streamlining various processes, simplifying products, and

having customers do work formerly done by paid employees" (Ritzer, *McDonaldization*

of Society 44). I address the first two elements.

Ritzer cites examples of modern technology that have streamlined a range of

processes. The search engine and email are two technologies that have increased the

efficiency of such diverse undertakings as "political campaigning, medical symposia, and

even romance" (Ritzer, *McDonaldization of Society* 59). In reference to the internet, I

would add shopping, accessing entertainment, paying bills, gambling, and earning a

college degree to this list. Email, as a technology enabled by the internet, has streamlined

profoundly processes relating to communication in every possible sphere, including

interpersonal, intra- and inter-business, and government.

As an example of simplifying products, Ritzer refers to the limited menu options

provided by fast-food outlets and the emergence of newspapers like USA TODAY that

"edit stories to simplify and reduce narrative content . . . leaving a series of relatively

bare facts" (*McDonaldization of Society* 61).

In his closing, Ritzer mentions the positive impacts of efficiency but warns that the "mechanisms designed to increase efficiency are put in place by organizations to further their own interests [that] are not always the same as those of the consumer" (*McDonaldization of Society* 65).

Calculability. The second dimension of the Theory of McDonaldization pertains to the rapidly increasing use of quantification "in ways that tend to affect adversely the quality of both the process and the result" (Ritzer, *McDonaldization of Society* 66). The three elements of this dimension are: "(1) Emphasizing quantity rather than quality, (2) giving the illusion of quantity, and (3) reducing production and service to numbers" (Ritzer, *McDonaldization of Society* 66-67). I focus on the first two elements of this dimension.

The pervasive trend towards greater quantity is typified by 7-Eleven's "Big Gulp" and "Super Big Gulp," and the "Super-size" option at McDonald's (Ritzer, *McDonaldization of Society* 68-69).   The loss of quality is illustrated by the transition experienced by Kentucky Fried Chicken from its "great commitment to quality" in its early years to its present commitment to "speed rather than quality" (Ritzer, *McDonaldization of Society* 69). Ritzer offers additional examples of this trend from Education, Health Care, Television, Sports, Politics and Tourism.

The next element of calculability, providing the illusion of quantity, is reflected in the packaging of fast-food items where small containers are filled to over-flowing with small amounts of food to create the perception of abundance (Ritzer, *McDonaldization of Society* 81). Observations of the increase in the "speed with which a meal [or other product] can be served" provide additional evidence for this element (Ritzer, *McDonaldization of Society* 81). On top of the list of examples is Domino's Pizza with

its goal of "eight minutes out the door" and a "mantra [of] 'Hustle! Do It! Hustle! Do It!

Hustle! Do It!'" (Ritzer, *McDonaldization of Society* 82).

As with efficiency, Ritzer concludes that the impacts of calculability are mixed: it

facilitates the purchase of "large numbers of things at relatively little cost," but relegates

goods and service to "increasing mediocrity" (*McDonaldization of Society* 85).

Predictability. The third dimension of McDonaldization encompasses a range of

approaches taken by businesses focused on removing any risk or surprise from the

consumer or employee experience (Ritzer, *McDonaldization of Society* 86).

Predictability gives the consumer "peace of mind," the employee greater ease in the

performance of tasks, and provides owners and managers support "in anticipating needs

for supplies and materials, personnel requirements, income and profits" (Ritzer,

McDonaldization of Society 86). Its downside is its inclination to remove the spark that

variety and diversity bring to consumption, work, and management (Ritzer,

McDonaldization of Society 86).

Under the dimension of predictability, I focus on two of the elements Ritzer

highlights: scripting interactions with customers and minimizing danger and

unpleasantness. He cites examples of restaurants telling employees "exactly what to say

in various circumstances [to increase] predictability" (Ritzer, *McDonaldization of Society*

91). These guidelines may give employees a clear sense of how they are to communicate

with customers but some customers and employees resist them (Ritzer, *McDonaldization*

of Society 92). Malls and amusement parks, especially those run by the Disney

organization, exemplify the trend toward minimizing danger and unpleasantness. Ritzer

sees the desire to reduce risk and increase pleasure expanding into camping. While

campers once went camping "to escape the predictable routines of life," more and more are finding their way to "rationalized campgrounds . . . with such amenities as a well-stocked delicatessen, bathrooms and showers, heated swimming pools, . . . a movie theater or even entertainment such as bands or comedians" (*McDonaldization of Society* 103; 104).

Control. This dimension regards the "replacement of humans with nonhuman technology" (Ritzer, *McDonaldization of Society* 106). Ritzer focuses on "the ways nonhuman technologies have increased control over employees and consumers in a McDonaldized society" (*McDonaldization of Society* 107). Preprepared food in fast food restaurants is one example of this trend. Ritzer also describes the changes in our health care system, primarily an increase in "third-party payers, . . . health maintenance organizations and the federal government" (*McDonaldization of Society* 111) as examples of an increase in control by and within institutions. He states that these institutions change the locus of control in health care: "Instead of decisions being made by the mostly autonomous doctor in private practice, doctors are more likely to conform to bureaucratic rules and regulations . . . [and be supervised by] professional managers and not other doctors" (*McDonaldization of Society* 111).

Irrationality of rationality. Ritzer reports that "rational systems inevitable spawn irrationalities" because "rational systems serve to deny human reason" (*McDonaldization of Society* 17). Regarding McDonald's, these irrationalities include "adverse effects on the environment" and creating "dehumanizing settings in which to eat or work" (Ritzer, *McDonaldization of Society* 17). Examples of the former include "the forest felled to produce paper wrappings [and the] damage caused by packaging materials" (Ritzer,

McDonaldization of Society 17). The practice of creating meals using assembly lines which have "been shown to be inhuman settings in which to work" is an example of the latter (Ritzer, *McDonaldization of Society* 17).

Impacts of McDonaldization. Ritzer ends his book with a chapter dedicated to resisting the trend of McDonaldization. He supports a variety of efforts to "seek out non-rationalized alternatives where possible" (*McDonaldization of Society* 235). The Slow Food movement, which arose in Italy "against the opening of a McDonald's in Rome," is put forward as one example of organized opposition to McDonaldization (Ritzer, *McDonaldization of Society* 228). In his concluding remarks, Ritzer urges the reader to find ways to resist the advance of McDonaldization to avoid "Max Weber's iron cage and the image of a future dominated by the polar night of icy darkness and hardness" (*McDonaldization of Society* 244).

Other Applications of McDonaldization. While the Theory of McDonaldization focuses on fast-food establishments, which he sees as the ideal-type of a McDonaldized organization, Ritzer states that this process also impacts "education, work, the criminal justice system, health care, . . . the family, religion and virtually every other aspect of society" (*McDonaldization of Society* 2). Some of these impacts are discussed in depth in *The McDonaldization Reader* which contains articles and essays "that demonstrate the reach of the McDonaldization thesis by extending it to bodies, ecology, tourism, architecture, and the latest developments on the Internet" (Ritzer, *McDonaldization Reader* ix).

McDonaldization Applied to Interpersonal Communication. My contention is that McDonaldization extends into commonly-used interpersonal communication practices

and that NVC offers a "de-McDonaldizing" means of communication. I offer examples

of the McDonaldization of interpersonal communication from the health care field, the

commercial service-industry, the telemarking industry, and regarding the use of

technology for communication. I conclude by comparing the dimensions of

McDonaldization to NVC to illustrate its value as a guide for de-McDonaldizing

interpersonal communication.

In the Health Care Field. Companies working in health care show an active interest in the

communication competence of their employees. A review of the research shows that

many disciplines in this field offer training programs for their staff. A sampling of the

research on these programs indicates that the training offered through them often teaches

communication tools that increase efficiency by condensing and simplifying the

communication process.

One example of this dynamic is an article that reviewed a communication training

program for Oncology Nurses. The training intended to improve the nurses'

communication skills by teaching simple protocols intended to be applied in linear form.

The first was called "SPIKES, a six-step protocol for giving bad news" (Baer and

Weinstein E48). As a mnemonic, this protocol is intended to be memorized and applied

to "gather information from the patient and family, provide medical information, and

support the patient and family" (Baer and Weinstein E48). The protocol takes a complex

interaction with a patient and family that involves a range of communication skills and

competences and condenses into these steps: "setting, patient perception, invitation,

knowledge, emotions, summary, and strategy" (Baer and Weinstein E48). Another

article in the oncology field proposes a "modification of the SPIKES protocol to include financial concerns … [called] $PIKES" (McFarlane, Riggins, and Smith 4201).

This training program for nursing offers a further condensed protocol called "Ask-Tell-Ask" to further simplify the communication process (Baer and Weinstein E48). While these protocols may be memorable and may increase efficiency in the busy health care setting, they do not provide a foundation to enable nurses to respond effectively to a patient's unique issues and communications.

A second article on communication training in the health care field reports on another program framed around acronyms. The approach is described this way: "SAGE & THYME is a mnemonic for a sequential structure … that guides learners to apply patient-centered care for listening and responding to concerns" (Connolly et al. 38). The elements of the SAGE & THYME are valuable elements of communication, including being aware of the conversation's setting, asking an initial question, gathering information, and ending the conversation with a summary (Connolly et al. 38). However, applying them in rote fashion, as the model intends, limits the possibilities to generate and respond to novel responses of the patient.

Much like the scripts provided to employees in fast-food restaurants documented by Ritzer, these acronyms rationalize the communication between health care providers and their patients, obscuring its inherently subjective and creative elements. In addition they have the potential to produce irrationalities in the form of unsuccessful interactions by favoring efficiency over effectiveness.

A third article entitled "Creativity in Clinical Communication: from Communication Skills to Skilled Communication," critiques communication skills

training programs in the health care field and offers suggestions for improvement. They

argue against the McDonaldization of communication by questioning the value of the

type of skill-based training offered in their field.   The authors state that the "concept of

communication skills [as employed in health care training programs] is inherently

reductionist inasmuch as it proposes that complex behaviour such as conducting a

consultation or building a relationship can be atomised into component skills" (Salmon

and Young 218). Directly opposing the application of strategies to create predictability

and efficiency in clinical communication, they comment: "As patients, our demands on

practitioners prove more complex, context-dependent and inconsistent than general

principles for deploying skills can allow for" (Salmon and Young 218). To deal with this

complexity, the authors propose a conceptual framework that puts "imaginative

communication at the centre" (Salmon and Young 220). This framework defines

communication as creative work that "depends on judgement rather than on following

rules, and learning means making good judgements and developing confidence in

handling uncertainty and trust in one's unique expression" (Salmon and Young 221).

In the health care field, efforts to increase efficiency and predictability in

communications, though not unopposed, offer evidence of the McDonaldization of

communication.

In the Service Industry. Adding to Ritzer's example of scripted conversation in fast-food

outlets, Deborah Cameron, in her book *Good to Talk? Living and Working in a*

Communication Culture, illustrates how businesses, especially those in the service

industry, "regulate . . . the interactions with clients, customers, users, and suppliers" (16).

As an example, Cameron cites a story told at a training session for Disney Corporation

employees, in which a sales assistant was fired "because she did not make appropriate eye-contact with customers" (16). These training programs, rather than providing staff with skills that can be applied based on their judgment, train staff "to use standard formulas, and at the extreme, to perform to a uniform script" (Cameron 16). This observation suggests that companies are using communication standards in a way consistent with Ritzer's fourth dimension of control that also have the potential to alienate customers rather than serve them effectively.

Similarly to the conclusion made by Salmon and Young in their assessment of communication training in health care, Cameron argues that communication training in businesses fails to improve communication skills "because it negates the single most important ability of a truly skilled communicator: the ability to assess what is going on in a situation and choose strategies that are likely to be effective in that situation" (179). Cameron echoes the call made by Salmon and Young, stating that the "teaching of spoken language must go beyond narrowly utilitarian definition of 'skill', embracing a much wider range of discourse functions, genres and styles" (182).

Cameron reinforces and broadens the evidence for McDonaldization in the communication processes used by businesses. These processes control employees by denying their individuality and freedom of expression by regulating their communications in the workplace.

Telemarketing. Practices in the telemarketing industry, which has expanded greatly in response to globalization, show characteristics of the McDonaldization of interpersonal communication. Like those used by fast-food companies, telemarking companies employ scripts "that workers must follow unerringly" to increase efficiency and predictability in

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communication (Ritzer, *McDonaldization of Society* 92). Adding the element of control,

telemarketing supervisors "often listen in on solicitations to make sure employees follow

the correct procedures;" employees who "fail to follow the scripts . . . may be fired

summarily" (Ritzer, *McDonaldization of Society* 93).

Due to Technology. Timothy Schmidt argues that the use of technology by his research

participants "led to many user behaviors and perceptions reflecting the McDonaldization

of society" (89). Using Ritzer's dimensions of McDonaldization as a guide, Schmidt

provides multiple examples of how the internet, cell phones, and social media rationalize

communications. Regarding efficiency, he offers social media as "an efficient way to

spread information, keep in contact with people, present one's self to the world and get to

know others" (Schmidt 89). As an example of calculability, he states that "some people

on Facebook get as many friends as possible as a sign of social acceptance; others count

pictures or how many times they are tagged in pictures by others" (Schmidt 91).

Predictability is apparent in the use of cell phones as a "reminder with calendars and

alarms" (Schmidt 91). As evidence for the presence of Ritzer's fourth dimension,

control, Schmidt states that "getting on the internet may . . . replace needs sought from

other humans, such as seeking advice, sexual arousal or socialization" (Schmidt 92).

These examples illustrate how certain types of technology, including tools used

for interpersonal communication, reflect the McDonaldization of society.

NONVIOLENT COMMUNICATION AS A DE-MCDONALDIZING MODEL

In this section, I open with some comments about NVC in relation to the

McDonaldization of interpersonal communication. I then look at the model through the

lens of Ritzer's dimensions.

The core of the NVC model is the concept of human needs being life energies that motivate all behavior. This classifies NVC as a system of substantive rationality which contrasts markedly with the formal rationality associated with rationalization and McDonaldization. In addition, formal rationality tends to deny choice, while one of the core values of NVC is free choice as reflected in the preferences for the use of requests rather than demands.

NVC is not a set of techniques or mnemonics to be used sequentially; it is a comprehensive system of communication that relies on the user to determine the sequence in which its elements are applied. NVC answers the concern raised by Salmon and Young, and Cameron about the need for communication skills training to develop judgment in the learner. It does so by teaching three inter-related skills that users apply based on their assessment of the specific situation. The three skills of NVC represent three distinct communication functions used to dialogue with others. Self-empathy provides awareness and acceptance of one's inner experience which is often applied when one is emotionally triggered or when deciding whether to offer empathy or honesty to another person. Empathy for others extends awareness and acceptance towards another's inner world, and can be applied at any point in a dialogue. Honesty allows for the expression of one's inner experience which, while the model recommends using after empathy, can also fit into dialogue at other times. Since these skills can be used in any order (though self-empathy is often the first step) the model provides both flexibility to respond to unique statements by others and leaves space for new possibilities in the dialogue. This openness to new possibilities is magnified by the awareness that any

given need can be met in many, many ways including ones that emerge from dialogue with the other person.   I will now compare the dimensions of McDonaldization to NVC.

Efficiency. The goal of NVC is effectiveness not efficiency. In any given situation, efficiency may be one need of the many that may drive behavior. NVC also focuses on relationship-building, relationship-maintenance, and relationship-growth. These activities are on-going and are rushed at the risk of damaging the relationship. However, one likely consequence of facility in NVC is greater efficiency in life. Rather than withholding honesty, or avoiding conflict around an issue of unmet needs (actions which tend to prolong the experience of unmet needs), practicing the third skill of NVC allows the conflict to be brought into the open, thereby providing a much better chance for it to be resolved.

Calculability. NVC intends to increase the quality of our relationships by providing a guide to the processes that enable needs to be met in these relationships. The focus on numbers and measurements common to McDonaldization is absent in NVC. While there is an "internal calculus" that determines whether needs are met or not, this is not a literal calculation such as Ritzer cites.

Predictability. NVC is founded on attentional presence in the moment. This presence allows one to see that each moment is new, and that the moment offers a broad range of possibilities for communicators. With its three skills applied according to the user's judgment, NVC allows for an ever-shifting sense of one's own and the other's needs, to guide communication. NVC does offer scripts that give possible language for the three skills, but these are provided a*s a learning tool only*. These scripts do provide predictability for students early in the learning process. Later, when the skills are more

familiar, learners are encouraged to use their own language for these skills while maintaining the integrity of the skill.

Control. NVC is a tool for liberating people from cultural conditioning "that implies that needs are negative and destructive. . . . When people express their needs, they are often labeled 'selfish' and the use of the personal pronoun 'I' is at times equated with selfishness or neediness" (Rosenberg, *Nonviolent Communication* 171-72).   NVC is a means "to heighten our awareness of the cultural conditioning influencing us at any given moment. And drawing this conditioning into the light of consciousness is a key step in breaking its hold on us" (Rosenberg, *Nonviolent Communication* 172). The definition and practice of the fourth step of the model, request, provides another example of the model's encouragement of choice rather than control. In NVC, a request is an invitation for another person to meet your need in a specific way that does not include a sanction or punishment if the other person is unwilling to do it. It is distinguished from a demand in which, if one says "No" to the request, he is subject to a sanction. Rosenberg's description of the conditions under which one should fulfill a request also reflect the importance of choice in the model: "Never comply with a request until you can do so with the joy of a small child feeding a hungry duck" (Connor and Killian 156).

Conclusion. The McDonaldization of interpersonal communication pushes it toward greater efficiency, a focus on quantity, increased predictability, and heightened control of people, often by non-human technology. NVC offers tools to resist these trends by placing its focus on effectiveness, quality, spontaneity, and freedom.

CONCLUSION

I have provided a review of the literature related to the two theoretical frameworks

address in this research: Aristotelian Virtues and Ethics, and George Ritzer's concept of

McDonaldization. In addition, I have offered a review of the NVC process and how it

has been studied. Now I turn to a description of the methods I employed to gather data in

this project.
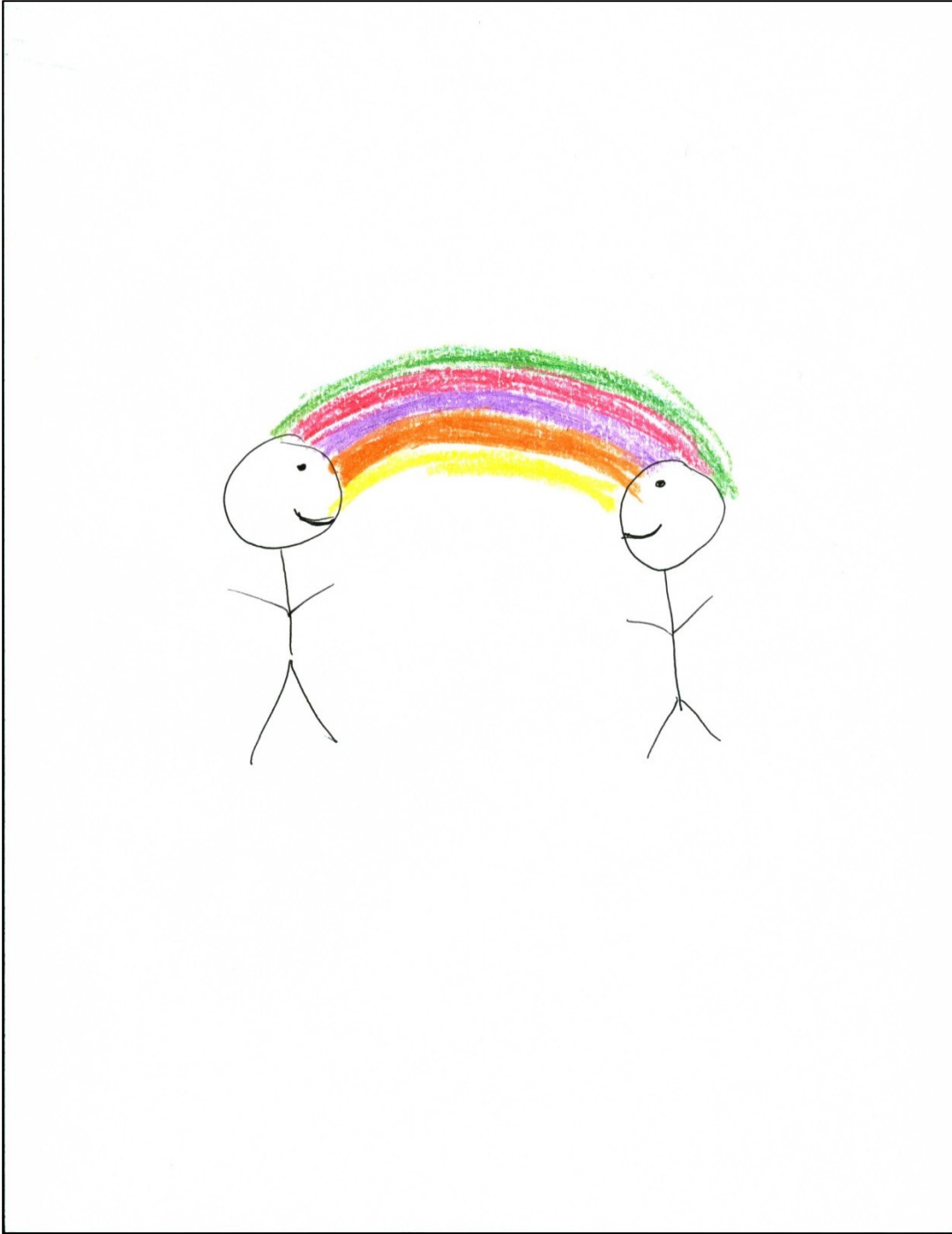
Fig. 2: *A Rainbow of Connection*: Jennifer's Visual Representation of a Mutually-Satisfying Dialogue

CHAPTER 3: METHODS

In this chapter, I delineate the research methods I utilized to address my research question: *What are the impacts of training in Empathic Dialogue, a needs-based communication system composed of three inter-related skills (empathy, self-empathy, and honesty), on an individual's ability to create mutually-fulfilling dialogues?* I begin by explaining my choice to employ qualitative in-depth interviewing. Then, I discuss the recruitment of research participants and the interview process. Next, I outline the content of the training material presented to the participants. I then describe my analytic approach, including how I coded and evaluated data. Lastly, I address limitations of my methods and my responses to these limitations.

QUALITATIVE INTERVIEWS

I utilized qualitative in-depth interviewing as the methodological approach. I chose this approach in order to gain "in-depth knowledge about particular phenomena" and experiences from participants (DeMarrais and Lapan 52). Because communication is a subjective and personal activity whose expression varies widely across different individuals, in-depth interviewing allowed each participant ample opportunity to share their unique responses. The interviews were semi-structured, "covering a list of topics common to all respondents" in order to "understand a range of perceptions" on the participant (Lapan, Quartaroli, and Riemer 93). Rather than adhering strictly to the set of interview questions, I asked follow-up questions and invited the participants to clarify or expand on their answers. Given the aforementioned subjectivity of the topic, follow-up questions invited participants to reflect more deeply on their specific perceptions and experiences.

I recruited participants from three sources: (1) Staff at a local health care business; (2)

Participants in a forty-five minute introduction to NVC I conducted at Northern Arizona

University in March of 2014; and (3) Members of a local Buddhist meditation group. My

intent was to attract no less than five and no more than ten individuals interested in

improving their communication skills. Though ease of my access to them and their

interest and availability were the criteria I used to select participants, I wanted as much

diversity in the participant pool as possible in order to have insights into a range of

experiences. I chose a health care business because its staff frequently engages in one-

on-one communication with patients; I chose the specific business because, since my

partner works at that business, I have access to the staff there. My partner indicated that

a number of her co-workers were interested in improving their communication skills.

The participants selected from the introduction conducted at Northern Arizona University

were requested to join because they had expressed an interest in learning more about

NVC. Also, they were familiar with me. I invited members of the Buddhist meditation

group because of resonances between Buddhist philosophy and NVC. Also, since I am a

member of this group, I had access to this population.

I contacted staff at the heath care business and attendees of the forty-five minute

introduction via an email introducing myself, laying out the purpose of the project,

describing the time commitment, and inviting them to contact me if they wanted

additional information. The next step for those who expressed interest was a short phone

call to further explore their intention, answer any questions about the project, and invite

them to participate in the study. To those that agreed to participate, I gave the dates of the

training sessions and set an appointment for our initial interview. From more than thirty recipients of emails in these two groups, eight people were willing to participate in the study. Three of these participants subsequently dropped out due to scheduling conflicts with the training sessions which left five participants from these groups.

I approached members of the Buddhist meditation group in two ways: I made two verbal announcements to the attendees at the weekly meeting of the group (attended by approximately 25-35 people), and I made personal invitations to specific members. Two participants responded to the verbal announcements and two responded to my personal invitation, making the total participant count nine.

The demographics of the group of participants showed diversity in gender (5 females, 4 males), and age (mean = 51 years, range = 33 to 67). Less diversity was present in the highest level of education achieved (High School – 2, Bachelor's degree – 4, Master's degree – 2, Two Master's degrees – 1) and Ethnicity (Caucasian – 8, Latino – 1). The participants' occupations were centered in health care (4 participants) and technology (2 participants) with the remaining three participants working in education, landscaping, and management.

THE INTERVIEWS

In this study, I did two interviews, one before and one after the two Empathic Dialogue training sessions and recorded the participant's responses. The content of the initial (pre-training) interview included questions about the participant's background (education, occupation, and whether they had received prior training in communication skills), regarding their interpersonal communication skills understanding and perceived competence, and their experiences of effectiveness and challenge in interpersonal

communications. I also requested that participants create a visual representation of a specific experience of a mutually-satisfying dialogue or conversation, asked about their experience with the NVC model, and asked multiple questions about their familiarity and experience with the foundations and skills of NVC (For a list of interview questions, see Appendix A: Initial Interview Questions). The last set of questions, about their familiarity and experience with the foundations and skills of NVC, provided a baseline to compare with answers to identical questions asked in the second interview. Each participant signed an informed consent document prior to being interviewed.

The initial interviews were conducted in person at locations convenient for the participants. The interviews ranged in length from twenty minutes to 110 minutes, with an average duration of sixty-five minutes. Before I began the initial interviews I conducted a pilot interview to assess the effectiveness of the interview questions and gauge the amount of time an interview might take. This interview helped me refine the wording of a number of my questions and gave me a clearer idea of the interview duration. The content of the pilot interview is not included in my analysis.

The final (post-training) interviews were conducted between one month and two months after the second training session. They also occurred in person at a location and time convenient for the participant. These interviews ranged in duration from twenty-three minutes to one hour nineteen minutes with an average duration of fifty-five minutes. The content of the final interview included questions about demographic information (age and ethnicity), whether the participant has accessed learning or practice resources since the training, memories and impact of the training, general interpersonal communication skills understanding, and four sets of questions repeated from the initial

interview: general interpersonal communication skills understanding and perceived

competence, experience with the NVC model, and multiple questions about their

familiarity and experience with the foundations and skills of NVC. I also added two

questions about the participant's future intentions. One regarded their anticipated use of

the skills they learned. The second asked about their likelihood of accessing additional

resources to develop their skills. (For a complete list of final interview questions, see

Appendix B: Final Interview Questions). I closely reviewed a transcription of each

interview as well as the notes I had taken during the interview.

TRAINING SESSIONS

I convened two three-hour training sessions for the group of nine participants. The

trainings were held at a local health care business for three hours on consecutive Saturday

mornings. Fresh fruit, trail mix, and drinks were available during each session. The

participants sat around two tables filled with scratch paper and crayons for sketching and

toys to play with.

I created the training content and materials based on my familiarity with the

Nonviolent Communication (NVC) Model. I have received over 50 days of training in

NVC, and have trained others for nearly 15 years. To add a tone of lightness and play to

the session and to aid in the transmission of training content, I offered examples using

two puppets, a giraffe puppet, which symbolizes Nonviolent Communication; and a

jackal puppet, symbolizing language that may lead to violence. These character puppets

are often used by trainers of NVC.

Both sessions followed a similar agenda (for copies of the agendas, see

Appendices C and D). Each session began with a gathering time, welcome, and time for

self-connection. This was followed by a check-in period during which participants had one minute of silence to engage their inner world, followed by an opportunity to express how they felt. The agenda for the first training day had a review of the agenda and training as a whole, a segment on the foundational concepts of Empathic Dialogue, and one covering the four literacies and steps of the model. Following a break, the agenda called for a session on bringing the steps together, and one on dialogue and the first skill: self-empathy. The first-day agenda concluded with an integration session offering reflection time for the participants, a homework request, self-connection and check-out, and a request to complete an Exit Slip. The Exit Slip asked three questions: (1) What are the key points of today's training?; (2) What are areas of confusion or points that were unclear?; and (3) Do you have any other feedback about today's training? The participants' answers to these questions were reviewed to help determine content of the second training day.

The second training session, after completing the gathering time, welcome, and self-connection and check-in, included a review of the first training session, a segment on the second and third skills of Empathic Dialogue, a break, and a segment on visualizing dialogue using the NVC Dance Floor (a tool that provides a kinesthetic experience of dialogue). This was followed by an integration session to again offer reflection time for the participants. The last parts of the agenda were a session on next steps, a time for self-connection and check-out, a presentation of a certificate of completion, and a request to complete a training evaluation. The evaluation asked three questions: (1) Considering the entire training, what information did you find most useful?; (2) How do you anticipate applying what you have learned?; and (3) Do you have any other feedback about your

experience with the training? The content of the evaluations were reviewed and added to the final interview questions where appropriate.

Participants received a training manual which they were encouraged to keep. The content of the manual, totaling thirty pages, followed the elements of the training agendas and provided additional information that could be reviewed later. It also contained suggestions about how to further develop the skills and capacities presented in the sessions and a list of resources to support continued learning. I developed the contents of the training manual based on my experience of receiving and giving training using the NVC model.

DATA ANALYSIS

I analyzed the data generated from the initial and final interviews using a general inductive approach informed by grounded theory methodologies. Inductive analysis "refers to approaches that primarily use detailed readings of raw data to derive concepts, themes, or a model through interpretations made from the raw data by an evaluator or researcher" (Thomas 238). Further, inductive analysis is a means to "allow research findings to emerge from the frequent, dominant, or significant themes inherent in the raw data" (Thomas 238). I employed coding and memo-ing to analyze data. I took these strategies from Corbin and Strauss' text on grounded theory. In his description of the inductive approach, Thomas states that this "approach is common in several types of qualitative data analysis, especially grounded theory" (239). Corbin and Strauss define coding as "taking raw data and raising it to a conceptual level" (66). I coded the interview transcriptions by reading blocks of text and generating codes that reflected the text's contents in relation to my research question.   Some codes emerged directly from

the answers to specific interview questions while others categorized topics that appeared across answers to multiple questions. During and after the coding process, I used the strategy of memo-ing to note the prevalence of certain codes, and linkages between disparate codes. I applied this analysis to the transcriptions of the initial and final interviews with participants. Corbin and Strauss define memos as "written records of analysis" (117) that "move the analysis forward" (118). They offer a list of general and specific features of memos including instructions regarding memo headings, content, and ongoing maintenance that guided my use of the tools (119-123). I used memos for three purposes. One set of memos were instrumental in compiling codes, associated text from the interview, my comments on the relevance of the text to the research question, and identifying information about the text for future access. I also used memos to review similarly coded material in order find common and unique concepts within the material. Finally, I used coding to further explicate the relevance and importance of emerging themes to the research question. For some of the interview questions, primarily those that were asked in both interviews, I also created matrices that listed the responses of all participants to the question. In these matrices, I listed the word-for-word responses by participants in order to compare answers from the initial interview to answers from the final interview. This allowed me to discover compelling themes across the data.

After coding all of the interviews I collated similarly-coded material. I then focused the analysis on twelve codes that seemed most salient and descriptive.

LIMITATIONS AND RESEARCHER BIAS

The in-depth interview methodology described above has some limitations. In asking participants to express themselves regarding the research topic, interviewing "provides

indirect information filtered through the view of interviewees" (Creswell 179). This is an inherent and unavoidable limitation to this methodology; I accepted this limitation and make no special response to it.

Another limitation is researcher bias in the interview setting which may affect responses (Creswell 179). This limitation requires particular attention in this project because I am strongly biased in favor of Nonviolent Communication and the practice of Empathic Dialogue. Biases would be more likely to appear during the final interview because I developed strong rapport with the participants through interacting with them in training sessions. This bias created the potential for me to influence the objectivity of the study adversely by unconsciously or consciously favoring answers from participants that conform to my perspective. Though I could not effectively address my unconscious behavior, I consciously endeavored to remain as neutral as possible in both my presentation of interview questions and in my reactions to participants' answers. To further address this issue and other potential biases, I kept a journal for my reflections on both my interactions with research participants and the project as a whole. I strove to make entries in the journal before and after every interview, noting my emotional and physical states and any expectations (before) or concerns (after). I employed a reflexive approach based on Feminist methodology through my journal entries. This allowed me to further consider how my "assumptions, investments and decisions shape . . . the research process" (Lapan, Quartaroli, and Riemer 397).

Researcher bias may also appear in the interview questions selected by the researcher. To address this bias, I reviewed the questions to ensure that they were not

leading participants in any direction. I also asked my thesis committee to review the questions before I started the interviews.

The effects of my race, class and gender on my ability to develop rapport with the participants introduces another potential bias. As a college-educated, middle-class white male in my 40s, I am a member of the most privileged segment of our society.   Because patriarchy and racism influence American institutions and Americans' life experience, white men, in particular, are afforded more opportunities and are subject to fewer obstacles in their day-to-day lives than women or people of color. This means that, in interactions with others, I bring assumptions about myself and my personal power and a related set of behaviors that may not be shared by others of different backgrounds. This raises the potential for unexpressed preferences that I hold, but that are not shared by a research participant, to influence our relationship. While my conscious intent was to bring the same level of interest, warmth, and openness to all my interviews, my unconscious biases most likely influenced how I related to individual research participants and how they responded to me. The most significant difference that may have played a role in the quality and tone of the interviews was my gender, as more than half of the participants were women. Through the interview process, it is likely that my standing as a white male in a position of some authority affected my relationship with these participants. With the one participant who was not white, my racial background could also have affected the quality of our relationship. My educational background may have erected blocks to creating rapport with the participants with lower levels of education. This is especially likely given the quantity of verbal exchanges I had with the participants. Class differences also came into play in these interviews.   My middle-class

standing may have impeded my desire to develop as strong a rapport as I would have liked with participants who did not share my socio-economic class.

Another limitation of using an in-depth interview methodology is that people being interviewed differ in their ability to express themselves clearly and effectively (Creswell 179). Since my participants had a range of backgrounds and education levels, this limitation had the potential to dilute the quality of the interview responses. In response to this concern, I asked follow-up questions to clarify responses that I found unclear. For example, one participant frequently used vocalizations of nonsense words in response to questions about her emotions. In these instances I asked the participant what emotion her vocalization indicated. In addition, I noted the participant's use of these vocalizations as part of my interview analysis.

This research design is also limited due to the amount of training provided to participants. NVC is a comprehensive system of communication that includes a unique theory of emotion (the relationship between feelings and needs) and is quite different from the communication strategies generally learned and used in our society. Proficiency therefore requires learners to devote a significant amount time to develop these skills. A typical introduction to NVC takes twelve hours; participants in my study received only six. Also, without dedicated practice time after an introduction, preferably with the support of a group, it is difficult to maintain and develop these skills. I decided to provide six hours of training to strike a balance between the attractiveness of the project to participants (by limiting the demands on their time) and a desire to fully expose participants to the NVC model. The sequence of training activities I prefer in order to provide a path to proficiency in NVC begins with a two-day (approximately 12 hour)

introduction followed by several months of weekly or bi-weekly practice in a facilitated group setting, as well as periodic all-day trainings to focus on more advanced skill topics.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter I have laid out the methods that I employed to answer my research question. I began by explaining my choice of in-depth interviewing as my method to collect data. Then I gave an overview of the strategies I used to recruit participants and I detailed their demographics.   I described the interview process that included an initial and final interview for each participant.   I outlined the training that I provided to the participants, and I concluded with a discussion of limitations of these research methods.
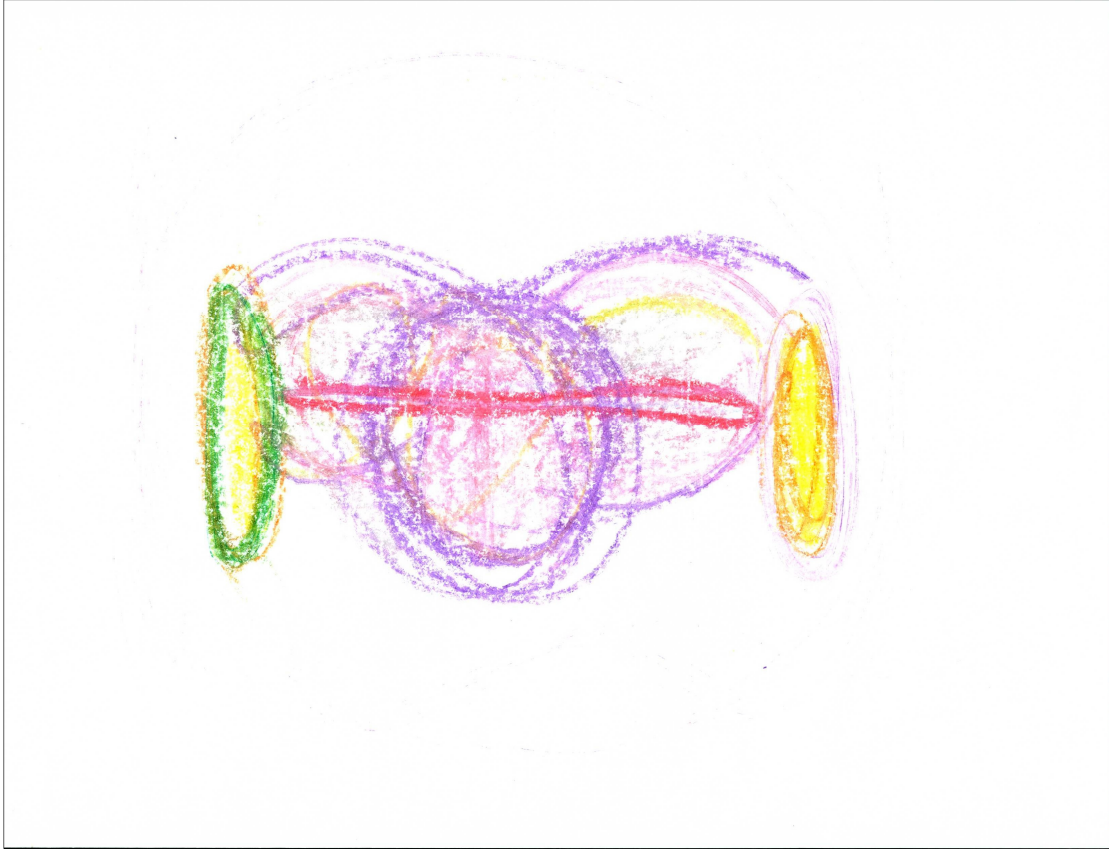
Fig. 3: *Exchanging Energy*: Rachel's Visual Representation of a Mutually-Satisfying Dialogue

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

I would say empathy for others is realizing that we're all drops in the ocean.
What I feel, what I need is what other people feel and need.
                                                    - John, Research Participant

To this point, I have introduced the topic of this thesis, described my theoretical frameworks, and provided an outline of my research methods used to examine this research question: *What are the impacts of training in empathic dialogue, a needs-based communication system composed of three inter-related skills (empathy, self-empathy, and honesty) on individuals' abilities to create mutually-satisfying dialogues?* In this chapter I share the findings obtained from my initial and final interviews with the nine research participants. All participants are identified by pseudonyms to protect their confidentiality. My analysis revealed many themes; I elected to analyze five that had particular salience to the research question. These findings are organized in the following sections: Use of the Skills: Now and in the Future; Changes Related to Self-Empathy and Empathy For Others; Understanding and Examples of Dialogue; Participants' Insights; and Characterization of the NVC Process. After describing these findings I view them through the lens of the theoretical frameworks introduced in Chapter Two.

As explained in the methods chapter, I interviewed nine participants whom I trained in Empathic Dialogue. These participants came from three different sources and exhibited diversity in age, gender, and highest level of education achieved, though not in racial/ethnic background, as all but one participant was white. The participants also shared an interest in developing their communication skills and a willingness to devote about eight hours of time for interviews and training sessions along with an unspecified amount of time practicing what they had learned.

Present Use. During the final interview, all participants reported using the skills since the completion of training. Two themes shared by a number of participants arose during my analysis: (1) Responses about participants' awareness and consideration of feelings and needs in communication; and (2) Statements about applying one or more of the steps of the NVC model.

Greater Awareness of Needs. Five participants cited a greater awareness and expression of needs as one way they have applied what they learned from the training. This concept is at the root of the NVC model and its theory of emotion, and provides the basis for the skills that support satisfying dialogue. When asked what she remembered from the training in the final interview, Wendy stated that "feeling and need are where I want to focus my communication. To be really in touch with my own feelings and to identify those, and then [ask] 'What is it I'm needing?' That helps with my intentions and my communication." Another female participant, Rachel, shared a similar response to the same question in the final interview: "In conversation with people, I have been thinking mainly about my needs and their needs and the emotions that are happening and trying to really listen for those things." As a result of the training, both participants integrated the concept of needs into their practice of communication.

Similar results were found when comparing participants' definitions of mutually-satisfying dialogues given in the initial and final interviews. While none of the participants used the term "needs" in their initial interview, several included the term in their definitions in the final interview. One participant, Jennifer, in her initial interview defined a mutually-satisfying dialogue as one "where each person listens to what the

other one has to say and allows the other person to speak." In her response to the same question in the final interview she offered this definition: "Mutually-fulfilling dialogue helps both participants meet their needs. There you go."

Michele, another female participant, had a similar shift in definition. She defined a mutually-satisfying dialogue in her initial interview as a dialogue "where both people feel heard, where both people feel seen and understood, and where both people feel respected." When responding to this question in the final interview, she shortened her response and added the concept of needs, stating: "It's where each person feels heard and where each person's needs get met." A third participant, Richard, altered his definition in a similar manner. In the initial interview he offered a lengthy definition that included "space" for both parties to "consider the question," "a sense of openness," "expectancy," and where communication is "expressed in a free manner." In the final interview, he added the concept of needs and was much more concise stating that a mutually-satisfying dialogue was one in which "both parties … [have] their needs recognized or met."

These examples show that many participants integrated concepts learned in the training into their understanding and practice of communication. This is significant because it represents a change in how these participants perceive the communication process and how they approach it. The change in their definitions suggests that the participants now enter the communication arena contemplating their own needs, and are primed to consider the other party's needs. Because needs are at the core of the NVC process and their expression provides one index to gauge whether an interaction is mutually-fulfilling, the heightened awareness of needs indicates that participants are better prepared to engage in these kinds of interactions.

Applying the Steps of the Model. Several participants highlighted their understanding and use of one or more steps of the model in their responses. Shawn, a male participant, spoke about his use of the four steps of the model: "I appreciate all four of them and hope to utilize them as I communicate with others." Michele emphasized her application of the fourth step of the model (making a clear, doable request), when she said that "another thing that stuck out in my mind…was the clear communication, clear and doable . . . That one, I'm trying to work on really hard, with the clear and doable and the requesting because that seems to be the hard part with my communication." Wendy, in talking about her use of the model, also emphasized the key distinction related to the fourth step of the model when she said that since the training sessions she has been "requesting instead of demanding."

Similarly to the awareness of needs, the use of the steps of the model indicates a greater ability to engage in mutually-satisfying interactions. The four steps of the model are the building blocks for the three skills of the process. While applying any of the steps will improve communication, when they are employed together through the three skills of NVC, their impact is magnified.

Intentions for the Future. In the final interview, participants were asked if they intended to continue using the model and, if so, if they intended to access additional learning or practice resources. All participants indicated they would continue to use the skills from the training. Six of the nine participants had specific plans to access additional resources while the other three expressed openness to accessing these resources without stating specific plans to do so.

Using the Skills. Frank, a male participant offered this response: "Yeah. I anticipate using them [the skills learned in the training] . . . because it's my goal to communicate effectively and I don't think one can communicate effectively if you don't use the skills." As a result of the training, Frank's relationship to the skills shifted from a basic understanding of two skills and no understanding of the third, to perceiving all three as essential elements of effective communication. This indicates a dramatic change in how Frank views and practices communication. Wendy expressed her intention to continue using the skills when she said in the final interview that she "can't imagine not using these skills because it's opened up a whole new world for me."   Wendy shared Frank's conclusion that the skills were essential, and she expressed gratitude that the skills gave her new possibilities to explore in her communications.

John also expressed his intention to continue using the skills: "I think reading things about compassionate communication [NVC], developing those skills, those are very important in the big scheme of life." He included developing these skills as part of the "graceful aging" process which he described as a means to "become that kind of old man that people say, 'I'm sorry he died,' instead of 'I'm glad that's over.'" John viewed these skills as tools to buoy his desire to continue developing as a person into his golden years.

Rachel shared her intention to use the skills saying that "I plan to continue to practice them and to become better." Richard saw the skills as a path toward his goal of activism: "I love the idea of NVC being a tool to help me become a more functional and skillful peace activist."

It's clear from these responses that the training made a significant impact on the participants. Rather than being discarded or forgotten immediately after the training sessions, the participants incorporated these skills into their daily communication practices. For some participants, the skills represented stepping-stones toward life goals. *Accessing Learning Resources.* Four participants expressed interest in being part of a practice group, an option mentioned at the last training session, to continue their learning. These participants wanted to develop their skills with others. Wendy shared her desire for such a group when she said: "I just want you to know that I want to somehow make a commitment to meet even if it's once a month." Jennifer was excited to be part of a practice group: "I know at the end of the group [training sessions] that they [the participants] had said that maybe they would get together and talk about [the skills learned in the training] and practice it. That would be awesome if I could figure that one out." Richard expressed a similar view when he said: "Sharing our experiences would be really helpful. I like this idea of people coming together to better their communication skills." Theresa responded to this question clearly when she said: "I would be open to possibly joining a group where we practice [these skills]." Other participants acknowledged intentions to attend additional training events, review the training material and other written resources, and access on-line resources.

Conclusion. Participants' common interest in accessing resources to continue their learning reinforces the finding that they intend to continue using these skills. This shared perspective also illustrates participants' appreciation of the challenges of developing these skills. These comments indicate that the participants value the skills enough to spend time developing them in the future.   Since these skills affect the course of

conversation, this sentiment indicates that the participants intend to continue developing their capacity to have mutually-fulfilling dialogues.

CHANGES RELATED TO SELF-EMPATHY AND EMPATHY FOR OTHERS

Participants shared a range of responses and experiences regarding the use of NVC skills. Their answers to questions about the skills of self-empathy and empathy for others, in particular, reveal how the training changed their understanding and application of these skills in their day-to-day communications.

Self-Empathy. The interview responses revealed that the skill of self-empathy had particular resonance with research participants. As the root skill of NVC, from which the other two skills sprout, self-empathy sets the stage for mutually-satisfying dialogues. Five participants mentioned this skill first when asked what they remembered from the training in the final interview. In this section, I share participants' comments about self-empathy including their definitions of the skill, comments about its importance as the first skill in the NVC model, instances where they used their own language to describe their use of this skill and an example of self-empathy in practice.

Definitions. Participants went from little or no understanding of self-empathy to having a very clear awareness of what it entails. Frank did not offer a definition for this skill in the initial interview. During the final interview, he defined self-empathy as "really being in touch with what I want and need . . . [and] what I'm feeling." Shawn provided much greater specificity in his definition during the final interview compared to his response in the initial interview, stating that self-empathy means "to make sure to connect to my own feelings and what's going on inside and pay attention to them and being able to understand that they're there and to work with them." Jennifer, in her initial interview,

said she was not familiar with the skill. In her final interview she gave a clear and concise definition: "Self-empathy is identifying your feelings and needs in a non-judgmental manner."

These responses show that the participants brought the concepts of both feelings and needs into their awareness of, and consequently their language within, their communication process.

The First Skill. In their final interview, multiple participants stated that self-empathy was the first skill of the NVC model and the basis for the other two skills. Richard articulated this perspective when he mentioned that "checking-in with myself first and then going forward is what I appreciated most of the training." Wendy made a connection between self-empathy as a precursor to honesty when she said: "I believe that my honesty practice is a lot more forthright now than ever before because I'm not afraid to be honest. It comes from accepting my own feelings and realizing that they're fine, they're okay; that when I do not accept what I'm feeling, I cannot be honest with another person."

Michele described her application of self-empathy as a means of "making sure that you check-in with yourself and make sure that you're not hearing words or actions in that communication that are setting off triggers in yourself so that you don't lose center" and as a means to "center yourself enough to understand . . . the other person's need." Rachel also emphasized self-empathy as a skill enabling her to check in with herself in order to maintain balance. In response to the question in the final interview of what skills are needed to create a mutually-satisfying dialogue, she commented, "I think the self-empathy piece is very important, knowing where I'm coming from and then the other person knowing where they're coming from and again, just allowing that time to

recognize is there anything else that's affecting my response right now or my feelings right now?"

With this grounding in the primacy of self-empathy, participants enhanced their ability to apply the other two skills of the model and increased the likelihood of developing skills for mutually-satisfying interactions.

Using Their Own Terms to Describe Self-Empathy. A variety of terms were used in reference to the skill of self-empathy. Two participants used the term "step back" to characterize it. Richard mentioned this term multiple times in the final interview. In the following quote he adds the concept of "moving forward" to his response stating that self-empathy supports his practice of "stepping back, connecting with myself, feeling that I'm accepted with myself where I'm at, and being authentic with me, and then move (*sic*) forward to check-in with someone else." Rachel used similar language when she said: "Understanding need, understanding the self-empathy . . . to just allow a little bit of time to step back [and ask] 'What's going on?'" Later in the interview, she used the term again when talking about her use of self-empathy: "Taking that step back [asking], 'What am I feeling?' and then also, trying to recognize some of those red flags [that get in the way of communication]."

Other participants used still different terms when speaking about self-empathy. Michele described self-empathy as "forgiveness" stating that "if you make a mistake, you forgive yourself, just like you would anyone else." Wendy stated that "self-empathy is really self-love" and said it allows her to be "in touch with my own feelings…and needs." Theresa described self-empathy as "self-awareness and courage. … I think courage is really an important part in order to move through life and the world in a way that one's

needs are met." As stated in the previous section, Michele used the terms "centering" or trying to "center" herself in her comments about self-empathy. She described why her practice of centering was important in her communications, saying: "Oh, I think that's so important because I don't think that you could even try to follow it [the other person's comments] if you weren't centered. There's no way - or at least *I* couldn't - let's put it that way. I'm too high strung."

These quotes suggest that the concept and practice of self-empathy struck a chord with participants, prompting them to apply their own terms to describe it. This could mean that the skill triggered memories of concepts with which they were already familiar, or practices they employed before the training sessions. The use of NVC-specific language in their definitions might indicate that their exposure to NVC altered how they practiced these familiar skills. The variety of terms used could also suggest that each participant integrated the skill into their individual communication processes differently based on their own past experience. These comments also reveal how participants extended their perception of the skill beyond what was taught in the training. *Experiences of Self-Empathy.* Richard, in the final interviewed, shared an experience of self-empathy happening in the moment. When asked to share an experience of self-empathy he replied, "Right now. I'm recognizing this fogginess in me this morning and saying that's fine. That's just where I'm at right now, so I'm doing that right now." This realization led him to offer a deeper analysis of himself:

> I want to be bright and shiny and productive all the time…That's a
>
> perceived condition that I want to go forward with and that's not always
>
> the case. I have more feelings and emotions inside me than just bright

happiness. It's a challenge in the sense that I desire this bright happiness

all the time, and when it's not there the challenge is [to say to myself]

"Well, that's okay. I'm more dynamic than just that one way."

In this instance, Richard's practice of self-empathy through awareness and

acceptance of his present state allowed him to reflect more deeply on his communication

processes. This exploration clarified a challenge he faces accepting his negative

emotions. This is an example how using the skills of NVC, by focusing attention on

one's inner world, can motivate people to explore communication challenges in new

ways. These explorations add to the participant's ability to engage in mutually-satisfying

dialogues by giving them a better understanding of themselves and the patterns they bring

to interactions.

Empathy for Others. This skill also resonated with participants. While most

participants were familiar with the concept and had some experience with it before

participating in this study, their definitions of this skill changed markedly as a result of

the training they received.

Definitions. A number of participants refined their definitions and included the concepts

of feelings and needs in their final interview. Theresa offered this definition in the initial

interview: "This goes back to the caring and compassion." In the final interview she

expanded her definition and added more detail to the concept of caring:

Empathy is trying to put yourself in the other person's shoes, but in this

language it's actually doing it in a very concrete way as opposed to feeling

everything that they're feeling, [or] trying to feel everything they're

feeling, which is normally how we think of empathy . . . True empathy

would be helping the person get out of a tight bind because that's really

caring about them as an individual, as a person, and not having them

expend their valuable energies in a way that isn't serving them.

Jennifer altered her definition of empathy by including feelings and needs. In the

initial interview, her definition of empathy was: "Being able to hear what they're saying

and being able to relate to what they're saying." In the final interview, she stated:

"Empathy for others is trying to identify what their feelings and needs are as a part of

your communication with them."

Rachel's definitions also changed. In the first interview, she recalled training she

had received previously through a social work program. She stated that "in . . . some of

the trainings I've had in social work we've talked about that and there was - we definitely

talked about validating where somebody is at, how somebody is feeling . . . but there was

much more of a parroting of what someone is saying and summarizing what you're

hearing and repeating that back." In her definition of empathy in the final interview she

drew parallels with self-empathy and included the NVC strategy of a guess about

someone's inner state: "Similar to just understanding what's going on with myself,

understanding what's going on with the other person, trying to recognize how this person

might be feeling, but then also, taking a step to say, 'It seems like you might be feeling

this way. Am I right about that?'"

John also emphasized the practice of asking a question, and mentioned the quality

of compassion in his answer in the final interview:

I would say empathy for others is realizing that we're all drops in the

ocean. What I feel, what I need is what other people feel and need, and it's

being able to break out of my shell or my world or my own brain … and

saying, ask the question, "What's this other person at? Where are they at

right now? What are they feeling?" and having some compassion for them.

Evidence that participants integrated feelings and needs into their final definitions

of empathy continues the trend mentioned in previous sections. For empathy in

particular, the attention applied to another person's feelings and needs is a precondition

for the use of language to offer a guess about the person's present state.

Experience of Empathy for Others. Several participants shared examples of the practice

of empathy for others in their lives. When asked how she had applied the training to her

life, Theresa shared a recent experience with her daughter that illustrated her use of this

skill:

[One] example [that] comes to mind is that I had an opportunity to

communicate with one of my three daughters who was very distraught . . .

I was able actually to reflect back, using the technique of reflecting back.

"Are you feeling . . . ," I can't remember exactly what I said but [it was

something like:] "Are you feeling frustrated because Laura isn't meeting

your need for independence?" "That's exactly right, Mom," is what she

said. That was . . . very gratifying that if I could think more, if I had more

distance maybe in certain conversations, I could apply that more because it

made her feel heard.

Theresa's success with empathy motivated her to consider how she could

implement the skill in future interactions. This sort of experience, in which a person

receives positive feedback about their use of the skills, can serve as motivation to

continue developing the skills, especially when other attempts to use the skills do not yield positive results.

Conclusion. The participants' responses to questions related to their understanding and use of self-empathy and empathy for others revealed significant improvements in their ability to utilize these skills. Better facility with these skills suggests that the participants increased the likelihood of developing mutually-satisfying dialogues.

UNDERSTANDING AND EXPERIENCES OF DIALOGUE

The dialogue process that study participants were taught is directed toward the goal of experiencing mutually-satisfying dialogues, and involves the interplay of three skills: self-empathy, empathy, and honesty. Self-empathy is the process of attending to your own feelings and needs, empathy supports a process of connecting to the other's inner experience using guesses about their feelings and needs, and honesty is expressing your own experience using the four steps of the NVC model. With clarity and near consensus, the participants, in their definitions of the process, relayed how these skills worked together. Here I share four examples of those definitions and three instances where participants engaged in dialogue using the skills.

Definition of Dialogue. I asked participants to define how the three skills of NVC could be used together in dialogue. In the initial interview almost all failed to offer a clear definition. During the final interview, their definitions all accurately articulated the interaction of the three skills. During her final interview, Jennifer offered this description: "I would say, when thinking about the whole thing, it's important to have the self-empathy and the empathy in order to identify those needs and feelings, both in you and others as you're having a conversation. Then, using the honesty to try to address them, the

feelings and needs." John's definition of dialogue was very similar to Jennifer's. He said that,

> Self-empathy, empathy, okay it's, I see myself, my needs, I try to understand where the other person is coming [from]. I could ask probing questions to make sure my understanding of their needs [is accurate]. I don't want to assume I know. I make probing questions and understand what their needs are and have a sense of empathy for them. . . . Then honesty is going to come in where I try to balance my needs with their needs to create a win-win situation.

Rachel emphasizes the interconnectedness of the three skills in her definition:

> In a way, you can't have one without the other because first of all, the self-empathy [includes] saying "Okay, this is how *I'm* feeling." [Asking] "How are *you* feeling?" That's bringing in the empathy for the others. The honesty piece is with both people being willing to share how they're feeling and taking that risk of saying I'm going to be vulnerable and share that. I think you can't have one without the others.

Richard provides another definition of dialogue using colloquial language stating,

> If I don't know what's going on with me, it's going to be hard to communicate with anybody else. If I can't understand where they're coming from, we're not going to communicate either. I'll just be shouting at them what I want and not hearing them. I guess the honesty is if I'm not being honest about what I want, I'm also not going to get it.

These examples show that the training enabled participants to develop a clear understanding of how three skills worked together in dialogue, and to articulate that understanding. The participants' increased cognitive clarity regarding the use of these skills suggests they were much more able to apply the skills in practice than before the training.

Experiences of Dialogue. Participants shared experiences of dialogues they had had since the training. Here, I offer three examples of these experiences. To elucidate the use of the three skills, self-empathy, empathy for others, and honesty, I have added angle bracketed notes to indicate their presence in these examples.

Michele. Michele was a manager who supervised a number of employees. In the first interview she stated that her biggest challenge in communication, primarily in the workplace, was that, "I come across as aggressive and I don't mean to be aggressive but I . . . I don't understand it. I don't understand why I come off as aggressive."

Very early in the final interview when asked whether the training affected her ability to develop mutually-satisfying dialogues or conversations, Michele described an interaction she had with a subordinate in the workplace about whom she had received several complaints. Michele said her first attempt to communicate using her typical approach was ineffective so she decided to "try that other trick [NVC]. I'm supposed to be nonviolent so she [the subordinate] don't (*sic*) think that I'm trying to attack her." Using the new approach learned at the training, she employed empathy and self-empathy in the conversation: "I was trying really to bring her out of the rafters up here [puts hand palm-down above head], [the subordinate was] defensive. <Empathy> She was way up there. I was like okay, I'm down here [puts hand palm-down at waist level]. <Self-

empathy> I'm here, but she is way up there." She reported, after using the skills for another twenty minutes, she made a request using honesty:

"Okay, this is what I feel is a good idea for you . . . So this is what I'm requesting from you . . . I think that you've lost touch with what these people are really doing, how hard this work is, and the time it takes to do this work. I'm going to ask you to join the team and participate as a team member so that you can feel that again, what it feels like when you're in the room and you're doing every single piece of work that needs to be done in that room . . . For the next week, I want you to participate as a team member so we can get active again and understand it."

The dialogue continued until:

Finally, we got to that after an hour, finally agreed. At that next meeting when I talked to her after a week, it was like, "You were right Michele. I needed to feel that again so that I could really understand what these people are going through." I was like, "I didn't do it to punish you. I didn't do it because you're a bad person. I did it because I think you lost touch." <Honesty> I said, "Unless you're in there doing stuff all the time, you lose touch. You forget how long it takes to do this or that." She was like, "I appreciate it, Michele. I do, I do."

When asked what skills she employed in this interaction, she offered this summary:

A lot of centering. <Self-empathy> A lot of observing, stating what I've observed. Requesting. <Honesty> Trying to state what I was feeling <Honesty>, trying to find out what or searching for what she was feeling

<Empathy> and trying to center her <Empathy> and center myself. <Self-empathy> It was tough, but I pulled it off after an hour. Yeah, I definitely need to do this better. That was a lot. It was a highly charged situation.

As noted, being perceived as aggressive in her workplace communications was a significant concern for Michele. She explained that she experienced more success in her communications with friends and family than with co-workers. This example provides insight into how Michele brought the skills she learned in the training into a dialogue in her most challenging environment. She decided to take a risk by shifting from her old way of communication to experiment with the tools she had just learned. With those skills she tended to her inner state using self-empathy, attempted to understand the inner world of her subordinate using empathy, and shared her honesty to make a clear request of the subordinate. Though she expressed concern about the length of time it took to complete the process, Michele accomplished her goal of working with her subordinate to develop a mutually-satisfying outcome.

Jennifer. Jennifer is a mother with two children. She shared an example of dialogue with her older daughter about their differing desires regarding a proposed vacation. The daughter wanted to go to the County Fair at a time that conflicted with the proposed trip to visit relatives. During this conversation:

She [the daughter] expressed that she was frustrated. She was crying, she was tired . . . She hadn't gotten enough sleep. <Empathy> . . . I knew she'd have a fun weekend with her [Grandmother]. <Self-empathy> So, we had the whole conversation. [The daughter said] "I don't really want to go, can't I just stay here alone?" We had made that plan, and she had known

about that plan before the fair. We had made that plan before the fair

happened, and she was okay with it, until she knew that the fair was

coming along. I basically said, "Okay, we're going to do these things here

with Grandma, it'll be fun." <Honesty> She said, "Okay . . ." and she

agreed that yes, it was fine for her to go, and that she wouldn't miss out on

a whole lot, and she would have fun instead down there . . . We kind of

came to a mutual understanding.

Jennifer, in her initial interview, indicated that communicating with her daughters

was challenging. This example with her daughter shows how she employed the three

skills to come to a mutually satisfying conclusion.

Wendy. Wendy had initiated a new relationship shortly after the second training session

and before the final interview. She described her practice of dialogue within this

relationship:

The way that that's helped is for me to be more honest. <Honesty> Always

check in with where I'm at <Self-empathy>, laugh at maybe not even

knowing a word he's using, and just going, "I'm going to write that down

to use in my vocabulary," I don't want to embarrass you when you're with

your friends and [saying to myself] "I'm not going to be the intellectual,"

and laughing at that. That's self-empathy, that's being honest with who I

am and I think anyone, when they're honest with who they are, it can put

us at ease to go, "I know where you're coming from and I also know that

you accept who you are and I also know that you're beautiful with that."

<Empathy> That makes for a much more honest interaction. To say "Hey,

this is great" or "We're not relating, and that's great too," just to be able to

admit it. <Honesty>

Here Wendy used the NVC model to check-in with herself using self-empathy, connect with her partner using empathy, and express her views with honesty.

Conclusion. These examples support the argument that NVC offers a distinct alternative to simply applying communication skills in a rote fashion. In these instances, participants used their judgment to determine which skill to employ at a certain time. All three examples also provide evidence that the training had a significant positive impact on the participant's ability to engage in mutually-satisfying dialogues. In the context that presented the greatest challenges to Michele in the past, she exercised the skills diligently over the course of an hour to reach a mutually-satisfying outcome. Similarly, Jennifer experienced success using the skills with her daughter with whom she reported having communication challenges. Wendy's response shows how the skills, especially her increase in honesty, improved her ability to relate to her partner effectively.

COMMUNICATION INSIGHTS

Several participants reported moments of insight or new comprehension that arose from the NVC training. These comments indicate specific elements of the training that prompted new ways of communicating or perceiving the communication process. In this section, I share seven insights mentioned by participants. Two provided insights about the training's impact on their self-worth. Two other participants shared an insight about how NVC, with its basis in feelings and needs rather than in concepts of right and wrong, invites alternatives to making apologies. The remaining insights related to individual participants' senses that feelings and needs are central to effective communication, the

distinction between "fix-it" responses and empathic ones, the importance of starting with oneself in interpersonal communication, the uniqueness of the practice of empathy in NVC compared to another approach, and the importance of being vulnerable when communicating.

Impacts on Self-Worth. Wendy talked about the impacts of the training on her self-worth in relation to communicating with her current partner:

> Without your training, this relationship would not be going as well because [I have a] past pattern of [thinking] "I am less than." And then [I had] the realization that I am whole, I am complete, I've made my own choices and they have led me down a path that has brought us to be interested in each other for a some reason.

Theresa communicated a similar theme when she said: "In a very interesting way, one side effect of this communication technique is to create a greater self-worth. It's to say, 'It's okay for me to take care of myself in this situation, this communication.'"

Wendy and Theresa's responses illustrate benefits of NVC beyond supporting mutually-satisfying dialogues. Both indicate that the model helped them affirm their own worth. A stronger sense of self-worth, as Theresa indicates, allows her permission to take care of herself. When Wendy practices self-care, for example, she is much more capable of having mutually-satisfying interactions with others. Enhancing the ability to honor one's own needs increases the likelihood that they will not be sacrificed in the attempt to value another's needs – a condition that makes mutually-satisfying interactions unlikely.

Alternatives to Apologies. Michele, when asked what she remembered from the training, stated: "The main thing that caught my attention was the 'no apology' [concept].

I thought that was awesome." When asked to offer more information on this response, she added: "I love the fact that you don't have to apologize, because feelings are feelings. There's no reason to apologize for feelings. Your feelings are your feelings. Nobody can judge them and vice versa. You really can't judge another person's feelings because they're *their* feelings."

Frank also mentioned this topic early in the final interview by saying that, "One thing that stuck out in my mind is to never apologize for anything." Later in the interview, he expanded on this comment and expressed his challenge finding effective alternatives to his habitual use of apologies when he said:

> Well, I have a desire not to be defensive. My saying "I'm sorry," is being
>
> defensive … The idea that no one's ever wrong, that's what appeals to me
>
> about not saying "I'm sorry," but there's also this sense of owning when I
>
> have done something that I regret and "I'm sorry" is a way to say that and
>
> convey to the other person that I regretted it. I haven't quite figured out
>
> how to do that.

In the NVC model, apologies are statements that depend on a worldview that includes "right" and "wrong" as guides for behavior. NVC replaces these terms in favor of using an in-the-moment assessment of how "feelings" and "needs" direct behavior. The finding that the NVC teaching about apologies stood out to these participants suggests they are exploring the transition from a right/wrong framework to one focused on feelings and needs.

The Centrality of Feelings and Needs. Wendy conveyed her insight about feelings and needs when reflecting on challenges in a past relationship:

I felt like we, my husband and I, failed at that whole skill [communicating

effectively] . . . what I'm saying is that it was like an "aha" moment when

you started to explain to us that this is about feelings and needs, but to be

able to identify really what you're feeling has been a process for me and

has been a struggle my whole life, and now that's breaking through.

Wendy's "breakthrough" parallels other findings in this project about the

importance and value of acknowledging feelings and needs. The training content related

to this issue helped her experience greater ease in identifying these elements in herself.

The Difference Between "Fixing" and "Empathizing". Shawn shared an insight about

the distinction between providing empathy to another and trying to fix their problem.

This topic was shared at the training using the jackal and giraffe puppets. Shawn said he

really took home the "fix-it" example with the jackal and the giraffe. That

was really an eye opener for me at the training because I had never, at

least I don't think I'd ever, heard that kind of description about the "fix-it"

[approach] being more of a jackal quality [that may lead to violence] than

the [approach taken by the] loving giraffe.

Later in the interview he mentioned another insight: a desire to be less attached to the

outcome of communication, and he connected it to the "fix-it" approach:

I feel less attached to the outcome of communication and just trying to

encourage the communication but I'm trying to be helpful but also being

careful of being hooked by what's going on. I think that really helps me

with the "fix-it" attitude, because if I become hooked because someone is

having a hard time and then I make it about me because they're having a

hard time, then I'm feeling that I need to fix it and so for myself. I feel that

that opens up a space to allow the "fix-it" attitude to just dissipate.

As mentioned in Chapter two, the inclination to provide advice, a form of

honesty, instead of empathy is directly addressed by NVC. This inclination is common in

our culture because people typically have a strong desire to help others, especially when

the other expresses a displeasurable emotion. Connor and Killian state: "Contributing to

others is one of the most basic and compelling of human needs: we feel happy when we

do so" (6). Thus, applying empathy before honesty requires that the communicator resist

the urge to help by sharing advice, in favor of giving their presence and offering a

reflection to contribute to the other's well-being. Shawn's comments suggest that he is

exploring this new approach to see how it could improve his interpersonal

communications.

The Importance of Starting with the Self. Theresa offered an insight about the

primacy of intrapersonal communication when communicating interpersonally. In her

response to a question in the final interview about what she remembered from the training

sessions, she said: "I remember there were really three parts to it, and I think the self-care

part was really sort of surprising to me that that was an important element." She expands

on this comment later in the interview sharing these words:

> Often when we think of communicating with others, the focus is generally
>
> on the other rather than on the self, and the whole idea that if we're not
>
> really clear about where we're coming from, then that makes that
>
> messaging [to the other person] almost impossible because it is clouded by
>
> . . . feelings and needs that we might not be aware of that we could be

projecting onto the other person. I thought that was [an] extremely valuable insight . . . It [the importance of using self-empathy first] . . . makes me think of that analogy of being on an airplane and taking oxygen first for oneself and then putting it on someone else who is traveling, like a child.

Theresa's insight echoes information in the literature review and points to the power of cultural conditioning to limit our willingness to expend energy connecting with ourselves. When we fail to attend to what we're experiencing before attending to the other person, we run the risk of confusing our projections with our observations about that person.

Uniqueness of the NVC Approach to Empathy. Theresa expressed another insight related to the practice of guessing about another's feelings and needs using a question. She reported that this insight arose when she edited an essay on effective communication practices which offered a different approach than NVC. She said the approach in the essay

was missing the feelings and needs components, it was mostly focused on empathetic listening and a little bit of reflecting back, but not in a specific way. Just making sure that you heard well but without the component of trying to be helpful to the other person by helping them identify the need [through a guess about their current feelings and needs], which I think is very specific to this technique [of NVC].

Theresa indicates two key elements of the NVC process that have been cited in previous findings: (1) The integration of feelings and needs into definitions and practices;

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and (2) The use of a specific type of guess as part of empathy. The presence of these key

components in participants' feedback suggests that participants developed a greater

ability to engage in mutually-satisfying interactions.

The Import of Vulnerability. Rachel reported that the training helped her appreciate the

significance of being vulnerable as a means of relating to others, and it improved her

ability to do so. When asked to expound on this comment she said,

> The training helped, practicing, looking at some sample dialogue and just
>
> knowing how important that [vulnerability] is in order to have an effective
>
> conversation where you're really connecting with someone. If I'm not
>
> going to be vulnerable or honest in that conversation, then we're not going
>
> to get very far.   I felt through the training it really helped me to
>
> understand this is a very important piece, so if I want to have that
>
> connection with this person, I really need to open myself up, to myself and
>
> to that person, so the importance level came up and helped me to get better
>
> at that.

Later in the interview she shared how she applied this insight during a

conversation with a friend when Rachel told her about a challenge she was experiencing.

When asked how the training might have influenced her behavior in this interaction, she

said:

> The biggest piece is the understanding that, "Gosh, I want to connect with
>
> this person." In order to do that, I'm willing to take that risk of sharing
>
> how I'm feeling. I'm willing to be vulnerable. I'm willing to share my
>
> feelings and have them say, "You know, I really don't want to talk about

that," and be okay with it. Before the training, I wouldn't have had the

ability to recognize why I would want to be as vulnerable. [Now I realize

that] I want to have the connection. I want to build a relationship with this

person, so I'm going to do that [be vulnerable]. Somehow, that

[awareness of a desire for a relationship] makes it feel easier to have

someone else say, "You know, I'm not really interested in doing that,"

because I know why I did it. [This awareness] lessens the hurt, I guess.

During the training, the giraffe puppet was used to emphasize the value of

vulnerability to improve interpersonal communication. The giraffe represents the NVC

for several reasons having to do with its unique physiology. The giraffe's long neck

highlights the importance of vulnerability as a means to create relationships. It suggests

that one strategy for people to develop relationships is to "stick their neck out" (i.e. take a

risk), by being vulnerable in their expression of feelings and needs. Rachel was moved

by this teaching to share her vulnerability with others. Adopting this new approach

helped her communicate more effectively.

Conclusion. These insights provide a glimpse into the variety of ways NVC training

improved participants' communication processes and, in particular, their ability to have

more mutually-satisfying dialogues.

CHARACTERIZATIONS OF NVC

Three participants offered remarks about the NVC model as a whole.   Richard stated that

"what's at the heart of NVC . . . is compassion and self-empathy, empathy for others, and

honesty. That's a golden ticket to a real functional society" and later that "it seems like

there's always room for this dialogue to come up, this compassionate dialogue." Wendy

summed up her sense of the model when she said: "It is compassion. It's about self-compassion." Theresa commented: "If you distilled compassionate communication [NVC] down to one thing, it would be awareness." It's apparent from these comments that these participants not only understood and practiced the skills of NVC model, they considered what the model as whole meant to them.

THE FINDINGS AS RELATED TO ARISTOTLE'S VIEWS ON VIRTUES AND FRIENDSHIP

Virtues. Here I analyze the research findings based on Aristotle's virtues and his conception of friendship. In Chapter two I argued that NVC can be seen as a virtue. Here I continue this argument by focusing on four elements of Aristotle's view on virtues: (1) they are a good; (2) they are acquired by action; (3) habit is essential to their development; and (4) they are difficult to develop.

NVC is a Good. Aristotle defines the good as something we seek for its own sake and that is an "activity of the soul exhibiting virtue" (12). The participants' common recognition that the skills of NVC are beneficial is reflected in their continued use of the skills and their intent to use them in the future. Wendy exemplifies this when she stated that the concepts of feelings and needs "are where [she] wants to focus her communication." Frank said he intends to use the skills because he doesn't "think one can communicate effectively if you don't use the skills." Richard expressed hope that the skills will benefit him when he said: "I love the idea of NVC being a tool to help me become a more functional peace activist." He later expanded his expectation when he declared that the skills of NVC are "a golden ticket to a real functioning society."

NVC is Acquired by Action. Participants' stated intentions to use NVC skills in the future corroborate Aristotle's position that virtues are developed through action.   Four

participants expressed intentions to join a group to practice their skills, including Theresa, who stated: "I would be open to . . . joining a group where we practice." The participants' consensus about this intention provides additional evidence on this point. When asked about her intentions to use the skills in future, Rachel stated unequivocally: "I plan to continue to practice them and to get better." Richard developed a greater understanding of himself as a result of action in the form of practicing self-empathy during the interview. After the action of checking-in with his feelings and needs, he stated: "It's a challenge in the sense that I desire this bright happiness all the time, and when it's not there the challenge is [to say to myself] 'Well that's okay. I'm more dynamic than just that one way.'"

Habit is Essential to its Development. The responses discussed above that indicated a desire to continue using the skills also support this point, in that habits are only developed through practice. Integrating needs and feelings into definitions of a mutually-satisfying dialogue and the NVC skills indicates that participants took the first step toward developing a habit. In order to create an effective habit, it helps to understand the concept underlying it. In this case, subjects' new awareness of the skills clarified the actions taken to develop new communication habits. With this base, participants were able to practice the skills in a variety of ways.

NVC Skills are Difficult to Develop. Participants' intentions to continue using the skills and to access resources to develop them, attest to the difficulty in becoming proficient at NVC. Several participants shared comments about their challenges with the skills. Frank stated that applying the concept of not providing apologies presented difficulties for him, stating about the process: "I haven't quite figured out how to do that." Early in

her final interview, Michele expressed the challenge of practicing the fourth step of the model, request, when she said, "another thing that stuck out in my mind . . . was the clear communication, clear and doable . . . That one, I'm trying to work on really hard, with the clear and doable and the requesting because that seems to be the hard part with my communication." At the end of her example of dialogue, Michele summarizes her efforts, stating: "It was tough, but I pulled it off after an hour. Yeah, I definitely need to do this better." She expressed satisfaction about her use of the skills along with a longing for greater efficiency. Richard's reflection quoted above about his use of self-empathy highlights the challenge of accepting that he isn't happy all the time.

Conclusion. The findings of this project add additional support to the argument that NVC meets Aristotle's criteria for virtue.

Friendship. In this section, I review the research findings through the lens of Aristotle's views on friendship by addressing the value of friendship, and self-love as a precondition for friendship.

The Value of Friendship. The participants chose to be involved with the project, in part because they saw the value of improving relationships. As stated in the introduction, one function of interpersonal communication skills is to develop and maintain satisfying relationships. The training focused on developing skills to facilitate the mutually-fulfilling dialogues that are a key part of friendships. The bulk of the examples offered in the findings reflect participants' use of the skills in relationship. Theresa stated that the experience of using empathy with her daughter was "very gratifying" and she was thereby encouraged to apply the skill more frequently "because it made her [Theresa's daughter] feel heard." Not only was Theresa satisfied with the result of using empathy

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with her daughter, she became hopeful of applying the skills to improve other

relationships.

Self-Love. Aristotle states that good friendships derive "from a man's relation to himself"

(168). As stated in Chapter two, the skill of self-empathy is most closely compared to

self-love. Self-empathy was the first skill mentioned by five participants when they were

asked what they remembered from the training. Jennifer provided a succinct definition of

this skill: "Self-empathy is identifying your feelings and needs in a non-judgmental

manner." Several participants made the connection between relating to others effectively

and having a good relationship with oneself. For example, Richard stated that "checking

in with myself first and then going forward is what I appreciated most of the training."

Theresa offered a comparable observation when she used an analogy to describe the

importance of self-empathy: "It [the importance of using self-empathy first] . . . makes

me think of that analogy of being on an airplane and taking oxygen first for oneself and

then putting it on someone else who is traveling, like a child." Wendy used Aristotle's

term when she shared: "Self-empathy is really self-love."

Conclusion. These findings provide evidence that Aristotle's views on friendship fit the

use of NVC. His emphasis on the relationship with oneself as a starting point for a

friendship with another has particular resonance with the NVC skill of self-empathy.

THE FINDINGS AND MCDONALDIZATION

In this section, I present findings pertinent to the elements of the Theory of

McDonaldization described in the Literature Review.

Subjective versus Formal Rationality. In Chapter two, I stated that NVC employs

subjective rationality, in which values guide decisions, rather than formal rationality,

which is based on following rules. Another terms used for needs, in some instances, is the term *values*. The term fits especially well for more abstract needs such as autonomy, respect, choice, and consideration. The findings provide several examples of the role needs play in determining behavior according to the NVC model. Jennifer states that "Mutually-fulfilling dialogue helps both participants meet their needs. There you go." This response indicates that meeting needs drives mutually-satisfying dialogues.

Efficiency. No participant reported that the model improved short-term efficiency in their communications. To the contrary, several participants shared observations about how long it took to use these skills effectively. Michele, in her example of dialogue, implied she would like to become more efficient with the skills. When reflecting on the skills she used in that interaction, she said: "It was tough, but I pulled it off after an hour. Yeah, I definitely need to do this better." Although the process may have taken longer than Michele had hoped, it resulted in a positive outcome for both parties.

John related his desire to develop the skills to support the "graceful aging" process which suggests his goal was long-term effectiveness rather than short-term efficiency. Richard and Rachel both employed the term "step back" when they talked about how they used self-empathy. Richard stated that self-empathy was a process of "stepping back . . . then move (*sic*) forward" while Rachel expressed that self-empathy allowed "a little bit of time to step back [and ask] 'What's going on?'" Both comments suggest they used the model to take time to check in with themselves before engaging with the other person. While these actions may have increased the length of the interaction, thereby decreasing its efficiency, they likely allowed the participants to get clear on their inner state which ultimately increased effectiveness.

In my experience, new learners of NVC often share concerns about the amount of time it takes to go through the steps of the process. It does take a considerable amount of practice to change old patterns of thought and speech, and to develop proficiency in the literacies of NVC. Ongoing practice of the model helps new learners develop greater efficiency in employing the skills without sacrificing effectiveness.

Calculability. Participants did not frame their responses in terms of quantities. NVC invites users to explore the qualities of their inner world by focusing on understanding how needs motivate their behavior. NVC encourages users to increase their awareness of the part needs play in their own and other lives. Participants integrated the concepts of feelings and needs into their definitions and practices of the skills, which suggests they focused on these qualitative elements rather than some quantifiable part of communication.

Predictability. The findings provide evidence that the NVC model does not promote regimented, uniform communication processes. Both Michele and Jennifer, in their experiences of dialogue, did not employ the skills in a linear fashion. In his description of his insight regarding "fix-it" behavior, Shawn stated that the model helped him "feel less attached to the outcome of communication." Predictability in communications suggests a higher value on knowing outcomes rather than adapting to spontaneous, unique expression. Shawn's statement indicates that he desires to let go of expectations in order to increase his communication effectiveness.

Scripted communications used in fast-food restaurants and telemarking calls are directed to a particular outcome. In the first case, the outcome is receiving an order for food or drink by the customer. In the second case, the outcome is obtaining a product

order from a telemarking call recipient. NVC operates in a distinctly different and more

abstract sphere of communication, the ever-changing inner world of feelings and needs.

Empathy, when applied both to the self and to others, invites a deeper assessment of

one's inner world yielding results that cannot be anticipated. Richard's experience with

self-empathy, in which he arrived at a deeper understanding about accepting that he has

"more feelings and emotions inside me than just bright happiness," is one example.

Control. The skills of NVC cannot be employed to control others without sacrificing the

integrity of the foundational intention of the process: mutuality in interpersonal

relationship. If users hold to this intention they will exercise the model to create

relationships that encourage freedom and growth. Wendy's statement that the model

"opened up a whole new world for me" suggests that NVC provides new opportunities

rather than limiting them as a more controlling process might. Participants used terms

such as *compassion* and *caring*, which are opposed to controlling, to characterize the

model. John employed the term *compassion* in his definition of empathy and Theresa

used *caring* in hers. Attempting to be present to others rather than to control them is

evident in Shawn's comments about the "fix-it" approach. He discovered through the

training that trying to solve another's problems may be less-satisfying than providing

empathy.

Conclusion. The McDonaldization of interpersonal communication threatens to take the

richness and spontaneity out of interactions and replace them with efficiency and

predictability. Nonviolent Communication offers a de-McDonaldizing tool that can resist

this process by supporting effectiveness over efficiency, by valuing the quality of

relationships over their number, by acknowledging the inherent unpredictability of communication, and by encouraging freedom and growth over control.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study show that training in empathic dialogue has a positive impact on participants' abilities to engage in mutually-satisfying dialogues. The training led to changes in their definitions of mutually-satisfying dialogue and the different skills of the NVC process. The participants developed clear definitions of how the skills work together in dialogue, and shared experiences in which they employed the skills. Participants shared insights they had gleaned from the training and its application in their lives that improved their interpersonal communication skills.

The findings support the claim that NVC is a virtue as defined by Aristotle. Participants indicated that the model was helpful in relationships, that it is acquired by action, that habit is a key part of its development and that the skills are difficult to develop. The findings also provide examples that fit Aristotle's conception of friendship, especially the importance of loving oneself as one loves a friend.

The findings provide evidence that NVC may be employed as a de-McDonaldizing communication model whose skills oppose the McDonaldizing trends of efficiency, calculability, predictability, and control.

In the next chapter, I reflect on the project as a whole, explore the implications of this work for developing sustainable communities, and offer recommendations for the communication processes of both individuals and communities.
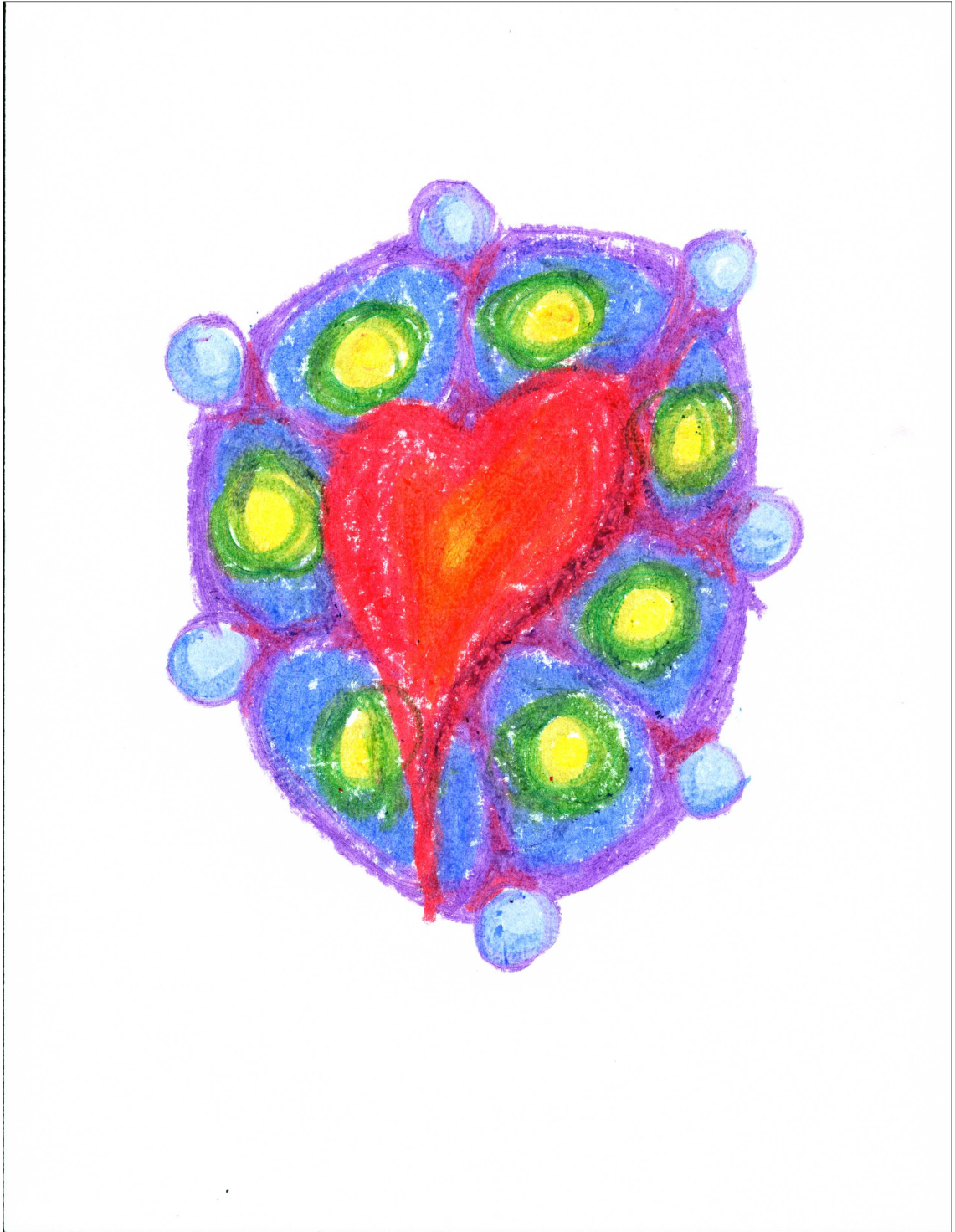
Fig. 4: *A Group with Heart*: Shawn's Visual Representation of a Mutually-Satisfying Dialogue

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

What's at the heart of NVC . . . is compassion and self-empathy, empathy for others, and honesty. That's a golden ticket to a real functional society.
- Richard, Research Participant

The goal of this project was to explore the impacts of communication skills training on the ability of participants to create mutually-satisfying dialogue. I interviewed nine participants before and after they received training, to gather information about the effect of the training on their communication skills. In the previous chapter, I presented the findings of these interviews and analyzed them through two theoretical frameworks.

In this final chapter, I discuss my conclusions and some of the broader implications of this study, specifically implications for creating sustainable communities, and I provide final comments about the study.

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

This study finds that Empathic Dialogue communication training had a positive effect on the ability of participants to develop mutually-satisfying dialogues. In this section I offer a number of conclusions that I have drawn from this study and explore their broader implications. The conclusions are divided into four sections each asking a question: (1) What would be the implications of seeing Nonviolent Communication as a Virtue?; (2) What practices help resist the McDonaldization of interpersonal communication?; (3) How can NVC be applied to conflict?; and (4) What techniques help individuals improve their communication skills?

What would be the implications of seeing Nonviolent Communication as a Virtue?

It seems that our culture has moved far away from a reverence of and yearning for virtue and, consequently, lessened its distaste and avoidance of vice. For Aristotle, life was a

quest to become "good" by behaving virtuously. Aristotle advocates for the virtues as a guide to behavior, and sees it as determinative for the friendships one might cultivate and the place one holds in the community. Aristotle's words about virtue and the path to develop them seem daunting given our culture's short-term focus and the endless means of distraction constantly, and very professionally, marketed to us.

Communication skills development is one of the many casualties of this shift toward a culture of distraction and busy-ness. Time has become a scarce commodity both for those who work sixty or more hours a week to make ends meet, and others whose free time is filled with trips transporting their children to and from activities, purchasing and consuming goods, and accessing sources of entertainment. The prevalence of entertainment options available to us on demand via TV, smartphone, and the Internet would seem to impede the development of people's communication skills by focusing their attention on screens instead of on relationships and the skills needed to foster them.

Due to the nature of these technologies, much of this entertainment isolates people from their friends and communities, further complicating the development of communication skills. Bringing human needs into the equation, Marshall Rosenberg states that "we [the culture] teach people to misrepresent their needs. Rather than educating people to be conscious of their needs, we teach them to become addicted to ineffective strategies for meeting them. Consumerism makes people think that their needs will be met by owning a certain item" (Connor and Killian 355).

Moreover, as I stated in the introduction, communication skills are vital for developing relationships. By failing to value communication competence we are also

devaluing relationships. In this context, seeing Nonviolent Communication as a virtue seems far-fetched.

Yet, if we imagine NVC as a virtue or merely that interpersonal communication was a greater priority in our culture, we see a very different world. Let's imagine how Education might be different in this new world. In this world, communication training is no longer relegated to communication skills workshops and the college classroom. Pedagogy throughout the lifespan addresses how we talk to ourselves and how we communicate with others. Students explore the communication practices of their own families and communities along with learning about how fellow students, and other people around the globe, communicate. Classrooms are communication laboratories where students and teachers experiment with different models and approaches and have freedom to create their own. Regarding the development of empathy for others, children learn about its origins, history, and means to practice it in their lives. Parents first spend time and attention on improving their own communication skills, then act as guides to support their children as they explore how they relate to themselves and others.

From the vantage point of our present reality, this vision may seem distant and unclear. However, there are organizations currently working in communities to realize at least parts of this vision. For example, Roots of Empathy, a non-profit organization based in Canada, offers "a classroom program that has shown significant effect in . . . raising social/emotional competence and increasing empathy" in six countries[3] (Roots of

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[3]   At the 2012 Compassion Conference at Northern Arizona University, Mary Gordon, the Founder/President of Roots of Empathy, gave the keynote address. Her address prompted members of the NAU Compassion Project, organizers of the conference, to contact Roots of Empathy about bringing the program to Flagstaff. For more information, go to http://nau.edu/SBS/Events/Compassion-Project/

Empathy).   Practitioners of NVC around the globe have envisioned and created methods to change the way children are taught. These approaches both prioritize communication and, in bringing the intention for mutual-satisfaction and needs-awareness into the classroom, alter the learning process.

In his book describing the application of NVC principles in education, Marshall Rosenberg shares his experience as a student in a class led by Carl Rogers that showed him the importance of student self-direction in the classroom. He states that, "Rogers began the class in a way that was unfamiliar to me. Instead of coming in and directing the learning process, he simply sat and waited for us to express what we wanted from the course" (*Life-Enriching Education* 81). When students complained about this approach and suggested Rogers take a more directive role, Rogers stated that, "'I am reluctant to decide by myself what is important for you to learn because I believe that the most important aspect in learning is to choose what is worth learning. If I alone make that choice, every day I would be reserving the most important part of learning for myself'" (Rosenberg, *Life-Enriching Education* 81).   Rosenberg brings this value into the educational setting using the analogy of teacher as travel agent who "might offer some suggestions, might strongly encourage, but would never tell the students were to go" (*Life-Enriching Education* 100). In this role, the teacher works in partnership with the student to develop learning objectives and to access the materials necessary to meet these objectives. Next, the teacher and student would "together identify and define the contributing concepts, the instructional activities, the target date, and the vocabulary the learner needs in order to reach the objectives" (Rosenberg, *Life-Enriching Education* 101).   In this context, evaluation would come not through grades, but via reports

presenting "exactly what students were able to do at the end of the learning period that they were not able to do at the beginning" (Rosenberg, *Life-Enriching Education* 86).

Another approach to education based on NVC features classroom practices that develop skills in "'relational intelligence': guessing feelings of others from verbal and non-verbal cues; identifying values—one's own and those of others; translating judgments into statements of feelings and needs or strategies for meeting needs; and taking responsibility for one's own thoughts, feelings and actions." (Hart and Hodson, *Compassionate Classroom* 20). These skills closely parallel the Literacies of Compassions I taught research participants and support students' capacities to communicate nonviolently.

Rule-making and dealing with conflict in the classroom would also change under an NVC-based approach. In keeping with the intent to develop mutually-satisfying outcomes, the rules that are put in place to maintain order in the school would be determined cooperatively through dialogue by the staff and students (Rosenberg, *Life-Enriching Education* 110). To effectively deal with conflict in the classroom, an NVC approach would create a "community where all students and teachers are assured that their needs matter and can be met" (Hart and Hodson, *No-Fault Classroom* 15). Hart and Hodson, as part of their NVC-based curriculum for seven to twelve year-old students, offer two modules on "The Power to Co-operate to Solve Problems & Conflicts" (*No-Fault Classroom* 161-178). These modules indicate what instruction in conflict resolution between individuals and between groups might look like in a NVC classroom. They utilize the steps and skills of the model to teach students tools that "will be helpful

to [them] in many ways . . . for the rest of [their] lives" (Hart and Hodson, *No-Fault Classroom* 164).

Certain forms of spiritual practice nudge society toward this new vision by encouraging practitioners to focus their energy on improving communication skills. Buddhism, which has common threads with NVC[4], offers a case in point. Thich Nhất Hahn, in his book *Good Citizens: Creating Enlightened Society*, lists communication as one of "The Five Mindfulness Trainings . . . [that] represent the Buddhist vision for a global spirituality and a global ethic" (*Good Citizens* 103). The fourth Mindfulness Training is "Loving Speech and Deep Listening" which encourages the practitioner to "speak and listen in a way that can help . . . [him or herself] and the other person to transform suffering and see the way out of difficult situations" (Nhất Hahn, *Good Citizens* 107). Another Buddhist teaching, the Noble Eightfold Path, lists "Right Speech" as the third step under the division of "ethical conduct" ("Noble Eightfold Path"). This step is described as "the way in which a Buddhist practitioner would best make use of their words" ("Noble Eightfold Path"). While not presented as "virtues," these precepts provide clear encouragement for Buddhist practitioners to improve their communication skills.

Defining NVC as a virtue would result in a world where institutions would reflect the high value of communication skills. The society would focus on exploring the most effective ways to talk to ourselves and others and how to resolve conflicts that arise when

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[4]   At one NVC workshop I attended, the trainer, a Buddhist practitioner, said she was initially attracted to NVC because of her desire for concrete tools to practice "Right Speech". Other trainers I've worked with have commented on the similarities between NVC and Buddhism. For more information on the links between NVC and the ZEN form of Buddhism, visit http://zenvc.org/

people's needs aren't met. The educational system would drive these changes by teaching children from an early age, the foundations, steps, and skills of NVC.

What Practices Resist the McDonaldization of Interpersonal Communication?

Becoming aware of the presence and effects of McDonaldization in our lives is an important first step toward resisting it. An experience I had today showed me how I have succumbed to aspects of McDonaldization. While writing this chapter, I searched my bookshelf for a book which I wanted to quote. After looking for five minutes without success, I thought to myself, "I wish I had a 'search feature' that would help me find my lost book!" With the McDonaldization of society on my mind, this thought gave me pause because it was an example of transplanting a strategy from its home within a discrete, technological system into the wide-open, non-technological arena called life. Apparently my desire for efficiency, and my frustration at the inefficiency of my search, triggered a memory of the most efficient process I know to find something: The search feature that I have used frequently in the course of writing this thesis. Unfortunately, the rationalized way a computer finds a word in a document with thousands of words does not transfer to the world outside the computer. I must assume that strategies I employ while browsing the Internet, chatting, e-mailing, or texting to create efficiency and predictability seep into my mind and influence how I communicate.

Once we are aware of McDonaldization in our lives, we are better able to address it. One way to address the risk is to take inventory of the modes of communication we employ and consider how they fare when held up to the criteria of McDonaldization. This analysis might stimulate us to change when and for how long we use certain modes of communication, and inspire more exploration into our communication processes.

Processes like NVC which focus attention on how we communicate and provide guidance can help us de-McDonaldize our communications. One broad strategy to de-McDonaldize interpersonal communication is to get more practice talking to people in contexts where communication strategies for efficiency, calculability, predictability, and control are not exercised. Another strategy is to apply Aristotle's approach by first viewing the dimensions of de-McDonaldization as virtues and then experimenting to find one's individual mean in their expression.

Resistance can also occur through our interactions with employees in McDonaldized institutions. Treating these workers as human beings by consciously breaking out of the prescribed scripts that dictate the course of interactions is one way to counter the de-humanizing trend of McDonaldization.

More generally, consciously slowing down the pace of one's life may serve to oppose these forces. The aforementioned "Slow Food" movement exemplifies this approach, as does mindfulness as practiced by Buddhist practitioners, which invites a high level of intentionality and emotional presence into daily actions and interactions. **How can NVC be Applied to Conflict**? I'm writing this section just days after a St. Louis County Grand Jury did not indict the police officer who killed a young black man in Ferguson, Missouri. This ruling stimulated civil unrest in Ferguson and across the country. Responding to a question about the events in Ferguson, Ricky Jackson, a man recently released from jail after being imprisoned for thirty-nine years for a crime he did not commit, said:

> It is a terrible tragedy. But, unfortunately, it's something that seems to be
> re-occurring in America all too often. I just think that everyone has lost the

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ability — or just doesn't want to talk to each other. I think it all begins

with dialogue. Sometimes you have to listen to the other side to get an

understanding of the entire situation. I just think it needs to be more

dialogue. (Democracy Now)

Jackson's comment is a more nuanced expression of the message given by Rodney King

more than twenty years ago during the LA Riots: "Can we all get along?" ("Rodney

King"). Both comments reflect the desire held by many Americans for different

approaches to address issues like the treatment of African-Americans by the justice

system, which stimulate anger and lead to violence in communities across the country.

Given the prevalence of violent actions taken on the individual and collective levels, what

are the prospects for conflict-resolution approaches that value dialogue?

While the reach of NVC is limited, the process offers guidance for those

interested in new ways to dialogue about differences and, through the dialogue, create

mutually-satisfying agreements. Used in this fashion, the NVC model goes to the heart

of conflict by focusing on the unmet needs of the parties involved. Once these needs are

identified, the model encourages the use of empathy to develop mutual understanding,

and, when each party feels that the other understands their perspective, the model

promotes solution-creation by exploring strategies that can meet all the unmet needs. In

practice, an NVC-trained mediator meeting with the parties in conflict would first clarify

each person's unmet needs by translating statements that may be judgmental or

inflammatory. This brings the parties out of the "right/wrong" paradigm into the

"feelings and needs" perspective. Then the mediator would encourage each party to

empathize with the other's unmet needs to develop mutual understanding. These two

stages might take a significant amount of time depending on the intensity of the feelings

stimulated by the unmet needs. Next the mediator would facilitate a brainstorm session to

find solutions that work for everyone. Once both parties determine one or more

solutions, the mediator would ensure that an agreement is written that defines the

decision and the process for implementation.

On a spiritual or conceptual level, NVC's focus on universal needs provides a

conflict-resolution process that operationalizes the "oneness" or unity of all people. As

stated, in the NVC model, needs motivate all actions and all needs are held in common by

every person. One need that connects us directly to other people is a need for *other*

people's well-being. Like all needs, this need does not create a responsibility for anyone

to meet the need or suggest any particular strategy to meet it. It does create a bond

between people in bringing all people (via valuing their well-being) under each person's

need umbrella. The end result of this bond is that meeting *other's* needs becomes

inseparable from meeting our own. Marshall Rosenberg emphasizes the importance of

this condition to the sustainability of humanity when he states: "Our survival as a species

depends on our ability to recognize that our well-being and the well-being of others are in

fact, one and the same" (Connor and Killian, 351). Practically speaking, understanding

the interconnectedness of humanity means that only when all people's needs are met, can

my own needs be met. Awareness of this connection between people changes conflict-

resolution from an adversarial process where one party tries to get their needs met

without concern for another's needs to a cooperative effort to attain a mutually-satisfying

outcome in which all needs are met.

NVC provides a learnable template that can improve both how we perceive conflict and how we go about resolving it. Our society would be well-served by bringing the model into conflict resolutions between individuals and between groups.

What Concepts and Practices Help Individuals Develop Communication Skills?

This study found a number of ways participants benefitted from NVC training, including supporting their ability to develop mutually-satisfying dialogues. In this section, I detail five broad conclusions that offer guidance for individuals interested in developing their communication skills: (1) Awareness of the Influence of Communication on Well-being; (2) Awareness of Communication Deficiencies; (3) The Importance of Intrapersonal Communication; (4) The Importance of Developing Habits; (5) The Importance of Developing Skills of Judgment in Communication; and (6) The Importance of Avoiding Attachment to any One Approach to Communication.

Awareness of the Influence of Communication on Well-Being.   The first step in developing interpersonal communication skills is acknowledging their importance in our lives. This study shows that the way we communicate has a direct and significant impact on our well-being. When we are able to engage in mutually-satisfying dialogues with others we are able to move through the world more easily.

Communication skills are relationship skills, and as we improve them we have the potential to increase the quality of our relationships. The skills that participants learned in this study provide strategies to help manage conflict. The wide range of positive impacts the training had on participants, beyond those that answer the research question, included insights into how they viewed themselves, feeling greater self-worth, expanding their

repertoire of communication skills, increasing honesty in relationships, and expressing

greater vulnerability in relationships.

Awareness of Communication Deficiencies. The first of the Twelve Steps of Alcoholics

Anonymous is "to admit you have a problem" (Recovery). Unless we acknowledge the

shortfalls of any skill or behavior, we will not be motivated to improve that skill or

behavior. In NVC parlance, it is the unmet need that drives us to act. All participants in

this study stated that they experienced challenges in interpersonal communication.

Michele identified her main challenge as being perceived as aggressive in the workplace

while Jennifer cited difficulties communicating with her daughters.

Participants' decisions to be in the study indicate that they wanted new methods

to address these challenges. From this foundation of interest, they were willing to

explore the NVC model, even though its tenets and practices were quite different from

the approach they had been using. They decided to embrace the study of NVC with open

minds and open hearts. Every time I was with the participants, whether in the interviews

or the training sessions, I noticed their desire for improvement and willingness to

experiment with NVC. This clarity of intention is an essential first step in developing

new communication skills. As with AA, people will only seek out tools to change when

they acknowledge their need for improvement. One result of the training was to narrow

the participants' broad intentions to improve their skills into an intention to practice and

develop skills offered in the NVC framework.

While a large proportion of Americans could agree that alcoholism is a

destructive illness that should be avoided, there is much less consensus about the negative

impacts of communication practices that are McDonaldized. Thus an alcoholic likely

sees alcoholism as a problem though he or she may deny that it is *his* or *her* problem; a

person whose communication exhibits the dimensions of McDonaldization is much less

likely to see their communication as problematic and needing improvement. In other

words, if it is common practice to value, or at least not proscribe, communication that is

highly efficiency, predictable, calculable, and controlling, it would be unlikely that

communicators would perceive their practice of these dimensions as anything other than

satisfactory. This suggests that the normalized approach to the communication process,

to which NVC offers an alternative, may itself be problematic, which in turn indicates

deeper, systemic, and more entrenched problems with communication that decrease an

individual's likelihood of seeking out different ways to communicate.

The Importance of Intra*personal Communication.* My findings show that participants

saw great value in developing their intrapersonal communication skills along with skills

supporting interpersonal engagement. This point was made most clearly by Richard, who

coined the phrase "Stepping Back to Move Forward," which provides the title for this

thesis. The participants were in consensus that the *intra*personal process called centering,

checking-in or empathizing with oneself facilitates the *inter*personal communication

process. These findings point to a clear distinction between selfishness and self-

awareness or self-care. Participants reported behavior such as practicing self-empathy

before or during an interaction that could be labeled by others as "selfish." In contrast,

NVC views this as extending care and awareness to oneself to meet a need for self-care.

Looking closely at the word "self-centered" can shed light on the contrast

between the typical way of perceiving the self in communication and the alternative NVC

provides. The denotation of "self-centered" is: "too interested in yourself and not caring

about the needs or feelings of other people" ("Self-Centered"). Self-centeredness viewed through an NVC lens yields a very different definition. Placing the word "self" with one dictionary definition of "centered," "emotionally healthy and calm" ("Centered"), yields a definition in keeping with the NVC model. In the model, the self is placed at the center of communications because it is difficult to be in relationship with others if one is not aware and accepting of one's own inner state (i.e. centered). This new definition of "self-centeredness" offers both a means to be in relationship with others and an end in relating to oneself. This analysis provides new ways to look at the self in relationship by realizing that effective interpersonal communications start with intrapersonal communications.

Acknowledging the primacy of one's self in communication has implications for the way communication skills are taught and practiced. This finding suggests that *all* communication instruction should emphasize the importance of the processes operating within an individual. This might include providing a clear process to access one's inner world and a range of opportunities for learners to practice becoming aware of, naming, and accepting their inner state. A training program that fails to address this issue is likely to fall short in preparing people to communicate effectively.

In the practice of communication, becoming more awareness of one's inner world can provide benefits. This awareness helps us know when our inner state might make it difficult to engage effectively with others. A simple practice to increase one's inner awareness utilizes the acronym "HALTS." The letters in the acronym help an individual explore five possible inner conditions that may hinder one's ability to connect with others (rather than representing sequential steps like the examples shared in Chapter two).

These conditions are being *H*ungry, *A*ngry, *L*onely, *T*ired, or *S*ick, respectively. Identifying any of these conditions during a check-in warns the person to address the condition before communicating with another person.

The Importance of Habit in Developing Skills. The findings, in agreement with Aristotle, point to the importance of developing habits through action in improving communication skills. The act of practicing NVC is one sure way to improve skills. Malcolm Gladwell, in his book *Outliers*, quantifies how much practice is needed to develop mastery using this quote from a neurologist: "Ten thousand hours of practice is required to achieve the level of mastery associated with being a world-class expert -- in anything" (40). If we add up all the time we spend communicating, we would probably find that we reached the magical "ten thousand hours" relatively early in life. However, *effectively* practicing communication, like practicing the piano or basketball, requires instruction in the most effective methods so that the habits we form are good ones. Without gaining knowledge that perfects our practice, our time spent communicating will not lead to mastery. Given the power of habit, the time we spend practicing bad communication habits will make it even more difficult to develop better new ones.

Aristotle also suggests that habits should be developed "from our very youth; it makes a very great difference, or rather *all* the difference" (Aristotle 24). Implementing this suggestion regarding communication habits would require schools and parents to be intentional about influencing children's communications. One way children learn communication skills is by observing the communications of parents and teachers. In the absence of clear training for children, the habits parents and teachers practice, whether good or bad, will likely become the habits of the children. Thus parents and teachers

(and the children they instruct) would be well-served by developing clear communication practices to guide students rather than relying on habits developed unintentionally.

Practicing good communication habits has the additional benefit of influencing how others act. In another book, Malcolm Gladwell cities research that finds that "emotion is contagious" (*The Tipping Point* 85). Thus, if our communication habits improve our mood, they have the potential of improving other people's moods merely by exposure. NVC skills also offer the benefit of providing tools that facilitate needs being met. These met needs then stimulate positive emotions, which in turn can rub off on others.

The Importance of Developing Judgment in Communication. The acts that bring virtue, in Aristotle's view, are difficult to describe because they depend on the judgment of the individual who "must in each case consider what is appropriate to the occasion" (Aristotle 25). This statement is echoed more than two thousand years later by Salmon and Young when they write that good communication "means making good judgements" (221). There is a contrast between approaches to communication skills that encourage linear use of a particular model and those, like NVC, that encourage the speaker to apply skills based on their own assessment of the situation. The linear approaches offer little guidance in dealing with the uncertainties of communication while, in my experience, the alternative models are much more helpful.

Approaches to communication skills which are based on acronymic tools and mnemonic devices offer less potential to develop judgment than those which teach a comprehensive system of communication. A comprehensive system enables the learner to address all forms of communication rather than being limited to addressing specific

communication in certain contexts. However, the more comprehensive systems, like

NVC, are much more difficult to learn than a simple acronym.

The Importance of Avoiding Attachment to any one Approach to Communication. Given

that this project focused exclusively on the NVC model, I would like to provide a

cautionary note about the risks of becoming too attached to any approach to

communication. NVC is the best tool I've found to honor my own needs and those of

others in communication. And, in order to maintain flexibility and openness in my

interactions, I have endeavored to view it as one of many tools that I and others can

employ to communicate effectively. Marshall Rosenberg points to the problems of

seeing NVC as *the goal* rather than *a tool for* communication when responding to a

question about how language can get in the way of the NVC process:

> I've altered a Buddhist parable that relates to this question. Imagine a
>
> beautiful, whole, and sacred place. And imagine that you could really
>
> know God when you are in that place. But let's say that there is a river
>
> between you and that place and you'd like to get to that place but you've
>
> got to get over this river to do it. So you get a raft, and this raft is a real
>
> handy tool to get you over the river. Once you're across the river you can
>
> walk the rest of the several miles to this beautiful place. But the Buddhist
>
> parable ends by saying that, "One is a fool who continues on to the sacred
>
> place carrying the raft on their back."
>
> Nonviolent Communication is a tool to get me over my cultural training
>
> so I can get to the place. It's not the place. If we get addicted to the raft,
>
> attached to the raft, it makes it harder to get to the place. People just

learning the process of Nonviolent Communication can forget all about the

place. If they get too locked into the raft, the process becomes mechanical.

("Spiritual Basis of Nonviolence Communication")

IMPLICATIONS FOR CREATING SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES

I began this thesis by stating the importance of communication for individuals and for

communities. Here I expand on that theme and offer some recommendations for using

communication processes to create and maintain sustainable communities.

Functional Communities Require Effective Communication. Authors from a range of

backgrounds and fields of interest agree about the value of communication for

communities. Thich Nhất Hanh, the Buddhist teacher, reveals an etymological

connection between communication and community stating that, "Both *communication*

and *community* have the same Latin root, *communicare*, meaning to impart, share, or

make common" (*Art of Communicating* 129).

Starhawk, a writer and activist, includes communication in her examination of

"the factors that enable collaborative groups to thrive" (7). She draws similar parallels to

Nhất Hanh about the importance of communication, stating that "communication is the

heart of any organization" (79). She dedicates an entire chapter to specific practices to

improve communication in groups.

In his chapter titled "The Small Group is the Unit of Transformation," Peter

Block, best known for his work in the organizational development and civic engagement

fields, states that "the small group gains power with certain kinds of conversations . . .

We structure these conversations so that diversity of thinking and dissent are given space,

commitments are made without barter, and the gifts of each person and our community

are acknowledged and valued" (93). In a later chapter, he states that in order to ensure

that a sense of belonging develops, groups and communities should engage in specific

conversations which address these topics: "possibility, ownership, dissent, commitment,

and gifts" (Block 123). Regarding the conversation addressing dissent, he mentions that

the practice in groups of "creating space for dissent is the way diversity gets valued in the

world . . . Inviting dissent in to the conversation is how we show respect for a wide range

of belief" (130). Conversations in which participants value one another and honor

dissenting views require group members to have facility at communicating clearly and

empathizing with one another. Block also cites the importance of group practices that

support honesty; that "allow people the space to say no" (132).

John Paul Lederach, in his book about means to create social change, offers the

comment that relationships, developed through communication, are the "center that holds

things together" (75). He speaks of the importance of crafting relational webs by having

the "right people in place and connected in the right way . . . [as a means to generate]

both processes and solutions . . . [which he calls] the art of *know-who*" (Lederach 77).

Lederach concludes with a list of pathways that enable social change. Two of these

resonate with NVC, including moving "from isolation and attitudes of 'dominate or be

dominated' toward a capacity to . . . act on the basis that we live in and form part of a

web of interdependent relationships" which maintains the integrity of NVC to create

mutually-satisfying dialogues (173). The second pathway, which parallels the giraffe's

urging that we "stick out our necks" in communication, is practicing "vulnerability

[where we] must risk the step into unknown and unpredictable land and seek constructive

engagement with those people and things we least understand and most fear" (173).

Recommendations for Communities. Here I provide a number of recommendations that support communication in communities. In this context, "communities" refers to groups in which the members are in physical contact and able to meet as a group, members have a shared purpose, members work together to achieve their purpose, and power is shared between all members rather than being held by a few. Examples might include neighborhood watch groups, graduate school cohorts, and social activist groups. Rather than focusing on the particular practices which can be discerned from the previous section, I offer a process to help a community be intentional, thoughtful, and creative about the communication processes members employ.

Make Communication a Priority. As with individuals, a community will not address their communication processes unless the members see the value in doing so. I have made the point that functional, compassionate communication skills are skills that help relationships start and thrive. In communities, especially those that intend to work collectively to meet shared goals, strong relationships are essential. Though the value of communication may be implicit in some communities, making this value explicit opens up opportunities for improvement. By acknowledging communication as a priority, the community invites collective attention to be focused on their communication norms.

Similarly to the caveat I described earlier regarding the difficulty individuals have in identifying a need for improvement in their communications, cultural norms around communication in groups may prevent members from recognizing a need for intentionality around communication. Hopefully, if a group has not addressed communication before conflict occurs, the conflict will motivate members to take time to reflect on their communication processes and consider changes.

Create Time to Talk about Talking. Communication processes will not improve unless the community commits time to reflect on their habitual communication styles. This time can be spent assessing the quality of the community's communication processes, exploring alternative means of communication, and making collective agreements about changes to those processes. A document that lists and describes these agreements provides a good baseline for future revisions and for distribution to new members. These conversations can also address issues of power and privilege that exist in the community. Communities would also benefit from addressing decision-making and conflict resolution in their communication agreements. A formal decision-making agreement includes guidelines about who makes decision and how they are made. Clarifying this process avoids the confusion that results from a more casual means of making decisions. Conflict is an unavoidable part of most every relationship. It is very likely to occur in communities and when it does, it can undermine communities if not effectively addressed. In addition, any community likely encompasses a range of perceptions about the value of conflict and effective means of addressing it. Developing clear practices relating to conflict in advance of conflict creates more ease when it arises, than does trying to develop practices in the midst of conflict.

Experiment and Reflect. Once the community communications guidelines are in place, they can be tested and reevaluated. The document the community produces that lists decisions should be a dynamic one that the community can revise when needed. Periodically reassessing the community's communication processes provides important information that may result in changes to the document.

When I began the thesis process, I had a rich understanding of Nonviolent Communication as a personal practice and as an education tool. Although I have past experience supporting NVC learners over a period of several months I was not prepared for the superlative degree of positive change participants in this study reported after only six hours of training. Though the training I provided was markedly shorter than most introductions to NVC and did not include any follow-up sessions, the participants achieved a clear understanding of the model and experienced success applying it. I was most heartened by the participants' consensus about intentions to continue practicing the model and finding ways to advance their learning.

I thoroughly enjoyed spending time with the participants and getting to know them through the stories they shared about the effects of the training on their lives. Offering these skills to others is very rewarding and I intend to continue developing my capacity to present them in an understandable and engaging manner.

Because I am more inclined to practice than theory, the theoretical elements of this project gave me a much greater appreciation of the power of theory to describe how the world works and to present alternatives. This project also exposed me to the interrelationship of theory and practice whereby theory informs practice and practice influences theory.

I am hopeful that my recommendations will help individual members and the communities to which they belong explore new communication strategies to create more ease and flow in their work. When individual members improve their communication skills, the quality of communication in the community improves. When entire

communities prioritize, reflect on, and craft agreements about their communication

practices, they nurture relationships between members and increase members' capacities

to relate well with those outside their bounds. Given the challenges currently facing our

world and new ones that will arise, I believe sustainable relational webs are a foundation

of sustainable communities. By taking a step back to bolster their communication

processes, communities can then move forward to effectively address the unmet needs

present in our world.

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APPENDIX A: INITIAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

<u>Background of Participant</u>

1. What is your educational background?

2. What is your current occupation?

3. Have you received specific training on Communication Skills?

    a. Would you describe it?

    b. What skills did you learn?

<u>General Interpersonal Communication Skills Understanding and Perceived Competence</u>

4. How would you describe a mutually-fulfilling dialogue or conversation?

5. What are the key communication skills necessary to enable a mutually-fulfilling
   dialogue or conversation?

6. How effective are you with each of these skills?

<u>Sharing Experiences of Effectiveness in Interpersonal Communication</u>

7. Do you remember a specific experience when you had a mutually-fulfilling dialogue
   or conversation?

8. Would you describe the experience?

    a. How did you feel before the experience? How about after?

    b. What made the communication effective?

    c. What did you learn that you could apply to future relationships?

    d. Could you create a visual representation of a mutually-fulfilling dialogue or
       conversation?

<u>Sharing Experiences of Challenges in Interpersonal Communication</u>

9. What challenges have you faced in interpersonal communication?

10. Do you remember a specific experience when you faced a challenge in interpersonal communication?

11. Would you describe it?

    a. How did you feel before the experience? How about after?

    b. What made the communication challenging?

    c. How did you address the challenge?

    d. What did you learn that you could apply to future dialogues or conversation?

Nonviolent Communication and Empathic Dialogue Skills: Skill Awareness, Experience, and Perceived Competence

12. Are you familiar with Compassionate Communication or Nonviolent Communication (NVC)? If so, what is your understanding of it?

    a. Have you received training in the process?

13. Foundational Concepts of NVC: What is your familiarity with the following concepts as they relate to interpersonal communication?

    a. Intention/purpose of communication

    b. Human needs

    c. Connection between feelings and needs.

14. Regarding the first skill of NVC, self-empathy:

    a. Are you familiar with the communication skill? If familiar, how would you describe it?

    b. How effective are you with this skill?

    c. Do you remember an experience when you used this skill effectively?

        i. Would you describe it?

ii. How did you feel before the interaction? How about after?

d. What challenges have you experienced with this skill?

e. Do you remember a challenging experience using this skill?

   i. Would you describe it?

   ii. How did you feel before the interaction? How about after?

15. Regarding the second skill of NVC, empathy for others:

a. Are you familiar with the communication skill? If familiar, how would you describe it?

b. How effective are you with this skill?

c. Do you remember an experience when you used this skill effectively?

   i. Would you describe it?

   ii. How did you feel before the interaction? How about after?

d. What challenges have you experienced with this skill?

e. Do you remember a challenging experience using this skill?

   i. Would you describe it?

   ii. How did you feel before the interaction? How about after?

16. Regarding the third skill of NVC, honesty:

a. Are you familiar with the communication skill? If familiar, how would you describe it?

b. How effective are you with this skill?

c. Do you remember an experience when you used this skill effectively?

   i. Would you describe it?

   ii. How did you feel before the interaction? How about after?

d. What challenges have you experienced with this skill?

    e. Do you remember a challenging experience using this skill?

        i. Would you describe it?

        ii. How did you feel before the interaction? How about after?

17. (If they report familiarity with the skills) Using the three Skills together:

    a. How would you describe how these three skills (Self-empathy, Empathy for others, and Honesty) work together in Dialogue?

    b. Have you employed these skills together in your interpersonal communication? If so, what was their impact?

    c. Do you remember an experience when you employed these skills together?

        i. Would you describe it?

        ii. How did you feel before the interaction? How about after?

<u>Additional Comments</u>

18. Do you have any other information about your interpersonal communication skills that you'd like to share?

APPENDIX B: FINAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

<u>Demographics</u>

1. What is your age and racial or ethnic background?

<u>Accessing Learning or Practice Resources Since the Training</u>

2. Have you reviewed the materials distributed at the training since the training? If so, how frequently?

3. Have you accessed additional NVC-learning or practice resources since the training? If so, what resources have you accessed?

<u>Memories of and Impact of the Training</u>

4. What do you remember about what you learned during the training?

   a. How have you applied the training to your life?

5. Has the training impacted your ability to develop mutually-fulfilling dialogues or conversations?

   a. Have you noticed any other changes in your communications as a result of the training?

<u>General Interpersonal Communication Skills Understanding and Perceived Competence</u>
<u>(repeated from initial interview)</u>

6. How would you describe a mutually-fulfilling dialogue or conversation?

7. What are the key communication skills necessary to enable a mutually-fulfilling dialogue or conversation?

8. How effective are you with each of these skills?

<u>Nonviolent Communication and Empathic Dialogue Skills: Skill Awareness, Experience,</u>
<u>and Perceived Competence:</u>

9. Are you familiar with Compassionate Communication or Nonviolent Communication (NVC)? If yes, what is your understanding of it?

   a. Have you received training in the process?

10. Foundational Concepts of NVC: What is your familiarity with the following concepts as they relate to interpersonal communication?

    a. Intention/purpose of communication

    b. Human needs

    c. Connection between feelings and needs.

11. For the first skill of NVC, self-empathy:

    a. Are you familiar with the communication skill? If familiar, how would you describe it?

    b. How effective are you with this skill?

    c. Do you remember an experience when you used this skill effectively?

       i. Would you describe it?

       ii. How did you feel before the interaction? How about after?

    d. What challenges have you experienced with this skill?

    e. Do you remember a challenging experience using this skill?

       i. Would you describe it?

       ii. How did you feel before the interaction? How about after?

12. For the second skill of NVC, empathy for others:

    a. Are you familiar with the communication skill? If familiar, how would you describe it?

    b. How effective are you with this skill?

    c. Do you remember an experience when you used this skill effectively?

        i. Would you describe it?

        ii. How did you feel before the interaction? How about after?

    d. What challenges have you experienced with this skill?

    e. Do you remember a challenging experience using this skill?

        i. Would you describe it?

        ii. How did you feel before the interaction? How about after?

13. For the third skill of NVC, honesty:

    a. Are you familiar with the communication skill? If familiar, how would you describe it?

    b. How effective are you with this skill?

    c. Do you remember an experience when you used this skill effectively?

        i. Would you describe it?

        ii. How did you feel before the interaction? How about after?

    d. What challenges have you experienced with this skill?

    e. Do you remember a challenging experience using this skill?

        i. Would you describe it?

        ii. How did you feel before the interaction? How about after?

14. (If they report familiarity with the skills) Using the three Skills together:

    a. How would you describe how these three skills (Self-empathy, Empathy for others, and Honesty) work together in Dialogue?

    b. Have you employed these skills together in your interpersonal communication? If so, what was their impact?

      c. Do you remember an experience when you employed these skills together?

           i. Would you describe it?

          ii. How did you feel before the interaction? How about after?

<u>Intentions for the Future</u>

15. Do you anticipate continuing to use/develop these skills? If so, how do you anticipate doing so?

16. Do you anticipate accessing additional NVC-learning or practice resources? If so, what resources do you anticipate accessing?

<u>Additional Comments</u>

17. Do you have any other information about your interpersonal communication skills or the training that you'd like to share?

APPENDIX C: TRAINING AGENDA: DAY 1

Gathering Time

Welcome

Self-Connection and Check-in

Training Overview and Agenda Review

Learning Segment 1: Foundational Concepts of Empathic Dialogue

Learning Segment 2: The Four Literacies → The Four Steps

Break

Bringing the Steps Together: Classical v. Street Giraffe

Learning Segment 3: Dialogue and the First Skill – Self-empathy

Integration

Homework Request

Self-Connection and Check-out

Complete Exit Slip

APPENDIX D: TRAINING AGENDA: DAY 2

Gathering Time

Welcome

Self-Connection and Check-in

Review of August 2
- Pairs
- Large Group

Learning Segment 1: The Second and Third Skills: Empathy for Others & Honesty

Break

Learning Segment 2: Visualizing Dialogue with the Dance Floor

Integration

Next Steps

Self-Connection and Check-out

Complete Evaluation