THE LIVED EXPERIENCE OF REMORSE AMONG MALE, ADOLESCENT OFFENDERS: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL INQUIRY

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This study is dedicated to my parents, Jack and M.C.; my children, Hannah, Sam, and Hayley; and especially to my husband, Michael, as a thank you for your patience, support, and encouragement throughout this endeavor.
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Most of all, I express appreciation to the participants for their willingness to share their stories and experiences in the hope that others might benefit.
Remorse continues to play an important role in the legal system and in offender rehabilitation; yet, it remains an understudied concept. Research related to remorse at the phenomenological level is sparse and studies that focus on youthful offenders are nearly non-existent. The purpose of this study was to describe the essence of the lived experience of male, adolescent offenders, who have experienced the phenomenon of remorse in the context of their crimes. Colaizzi’s descriptive, phenomenological approach to inquiry and analysis guided this qualitative study. Narratives from in-depth, semi-structured interviews with 13 male, African American and European American, ages 16-18 year-old offenders placed in privately owned Residential Treatment Programs served as data. Eight clusters of themes and 18 themes emerged from the data and provided rich descriptions of the remorse experience among this population. Findings supported the positive and negative aspects of remorse noted in the literature. Implications for future nursing research, nursing practice, and policy were provided.
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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Chapter one presents the background for the study, statement of the problem and study purpose, the research question, philosophical orientation, a discussion on adolescence and relevant developmental theories, assumptions, definition of terms, and the significance of the study.

Remorse is a concept of growing interest in the literature, but its relevance has not yet been explored or embraced by nursing science. Remorse continues to play an important role in the legal system and in offender rehabilitation; yet, it remains an understudied concept. Although some empirical studies have examined the effects of remorse on social judgments, research on remorse among adolescent offenders is nearly non-existent.

Background

On a given day in the United States, approximately 93,000 youthful offenders were held in residential placement facilities (OJJDP, 2006) and more than 550,000 received probation (Puzzanchera & Sickmond, 2008). However, treatment nor punishment appears to be working as youth repeatedly cycle in and out of juvenile justice and mental health systems (Goren, 2001) and youth crime remains prevalent as evidenced by the estimated 2.18 million arrests of youth under the age of 18 in 2007 (Puzzanchera, 2009).

Clinical practice with adolescent offenders in a residential treatment center gave impetus for this investigation. The researcher observed that the exploration of remorse and the impact of crime among others was not a priority intervention during individual,
group, or family therapy. Mental health services appeared to be implemented out of the context of the youths’ criminal behavior. This observation was supported by Goren (2001) who noted that in the juvenile justice system, mental health interventions related more toward the youths’ psychiatric diagnosis rather than on the offence or repairing the damage incurred. How then, does one expect youth to become accountable for their actions if they are not expected to talk about remorse, their crimes, and the impact of this behavior on victims, self, families and communities? How is remorse relevant to youthful offenders and nursing?

The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-IV) includes a lack of remorse as a symptom of Conduct Disorder among youth, and of Antisocial Personality Disorder among persons 18 years-old and older (American Psychiatric Association, 1994). This lack of remorse combined with other symptoms of the disorders, seriously interferes with one’s ability to relate positively with others and function as a healthy, productive member of society.

A recent concept analysis also points to the relevance of remorse. Experiencing remorse can be painfully intense (Marriott, 2007; Weisman, 1999) and it can negatively affect one’s identity, self-perception, and inter-relatedness with others (Marriott, 2007; Shaw, 1989; Singer, 2004). These potential negative consequences of remorse suggest that youthful offenders who struggle with remorse need assistance, guidance, and support as they work toward integrating the negative and positive aspects of self. However, the literature also suggests that, although there are negative aspects associated with remorse, the experience can be quite positive and transformational. Remorse can be “a vehicle for healing” (Brothers, 1989, p. 47), “cathartic and renewing” (Moore, 1989, p. 83), and
“regenerative” (Shaw, p. 80). The possibility of assisting youth to turn a negative experience into something positive and productive, lends support for further investigation of the concept of remorse. This study aims to discover the lived experience of remorse among male, adolescent offenders.

**Statement of the Problem**

Researchers in multiple disciplines have empirically examined the interpersonal effects of remorse (Proeve, 2001; Gold & Weiner, 2000; Obuchi, Kameda, & Agarie, 1989), the effects on judgments by others (Darby & Schlenker, 1982; Gold & Weiner, 2000; Obuchi et. al, 1989; Obuchi & Sato, 1994; Scher & Darley, 1997), the effects of remorse on the assignment of punishment (Darby & Schlenker, 1982; Gold & Weiner, 2000; Obuchi et. al, 1989; Obuchi & Sato, 1994; Scher & Darley, 1997) and legal sentencing (Kleinke, Wallis, & Stalder ; 2001; Prove & Howells, 2006). However, very few studies have focused on the nature of remorse among adults (Davitz, 1969; Prove, 2001), and even less is known about remorse as experienced by adolescent offenders.

Only one qualitative study involving the experience of remorse among at risk youth ages 18-21, some of whom had experience in the juvenile justice system (Higgins, 2005), was found in the literature. No theoretical work, qualitative studies, nor quantitative studies on remorse were found in the nursing literature. This gap in knowledge poses a problem for Advanced Practice Psychiatric Nurses who work with adolescent offenders. It is difficult to work therapeutically with those who are experiencing remorse without an in-depth understanding of its meaning among this population; outcomes may be affected as a result. A qualitative approach to inquiry can
help nursing discover the unknown essence of remorse among adolescent offenders, and thus, aid in filling this knowledge gap.

**Statement of Purpose**

The purpose of this study is to describe the essence of the lived experience of male, adolescent offenders who have experienced the phenomenon of remorse in the context of their crimes.

**Research Question**

The research question is, “What is the lived experience of remorse among African American and European American male, adolescent offenders?”

**Philosophical Orientation to Research**

Research methodology is comprised of two basic approaches to inquiry: quantitative and qualitative methods (Polit & Beck, 2010). Quantitative methods, a representation of the positivist tradition, utilize the scientific method and deductive reasoning to create theory-driven hypotheses, which are then tested in real world situations through the use of formal instruments and statistical analysis. Since this method relies on objectivity and results in numerical data, it does not wholly capture the essence or reality of lived, human experiences.

Qualitative methods use an inductive approach to inquiry and are aligned with the naturalistic or constructivist paradigm (Polit & Beck, 2010). Qualitative methods accentuate the human experience as lived and data consists of subjective material often created through the use of dialogue in the context of participants who have experienced a particular phenomenon. Through careful analysis, qualitative researchers can discover
knowledge, meaning, insight, and understanding about human experiences that cannot be quantified.

Since little is known about the human experiences of remorse among adolescent offenders, a qualitative approach is the appropriate method of inquiry for this study. Phenomenology is the qualitative approach that reflects congruence with the study’s aim and research question. Phenomenology is a qualitative approach to inquiry that stems from philosophy and seeks to understand the meaning of human lived experiences regarding a particular phenomenon under study (Creswell, 1998; Munhall, 1994; van Manen, 1997). Through actual descriptions by those who experience the phenomenon firsthand, researchers gain insight and a deeper understanding of the essence or meaning of the phenomenon under study. Phenomenology allows the researcher to discover the human experience of remorse as perceived through the lenses of adolescent offenders.

**Adolescent Development**

Adolescence is a time of gradual transition from childhood to adulthood, which is often referred to as the teenage years. During this stage, evidence of physical and sexual maturity may be the most obvious changes noted in this population. However, cognitive, moral, and psychosocial developments also play a key role in the adolescents’ journey toward adulthood, and this development is influenced by the immediate and broader environments in which the adolescent lives.

**Cognitive Development**

According to Piaget’s Cognitive Development Theory, the final stage of *formal operations* occurs during adolescence. In this stage, adolescents develop the ability to think and reason in an abstract fashion, plan and think ahead, and problem-solve
(Craig & Baucum, 2002). They acquire the ability to create, test, and evaluate hypotheses not only in their current environments and circumstances, but also in hypothetical, non-factual situations as they ponder over “what if?” questions.

**Psychosocial Development**

Erikson (1964) identified the developmental stage of adolescence as Identity vs Role Confusion (identity confusion). In this stage, the ego strives to develop and maintain a positive sense of identity, a secure sense of self. Adolescents think about whom they are and who they want to become in the future in the context of how others judge them and expect them to be. It is a time for letting go of childhood while attempting to grasp expectations and meaningful directions toward adulthood. This sense of identity starts during infancy, but realization of one’s identity does not occur until adolescence, and it includes both positive and negative aspects of the self (Ewen, 1993).

Based on the nature of interactions among the youth’s intrapersonal, interpersonal, and external environments; the adolescent can either develop a secure sense of identity or experience an identity crisis. An identity crisis usually leads to role (identity) confusion (Erikson, 1963). Adolescents who endure an identity crisis experience an inner crumbling or disintegration, a loss of direction in life, and a loss of support that satisfactory social roles and occupations generally fulfill (Ewen, 1993). As a result, the adolescent may feel like a drifter, a loner, or an outcast. The quest for identity creates a sense of vulnerability among adolescents toward ideological groups that have the potential to meet their needs for social acceptance and role identification. However, the group’s influence can be either positive or negative. Ewen stated, “Even juvenile delinquents need a sense of identity; and they achieve it by conforming to group demands
as rigid as those of the majority, a developmental failure for which Erikson blames society” (1993, p. 252). If the adolescent does not attain a positive or negative sense of identity through this crisis, the youth may continue to function in the adolescent stage for quite an extensive period of time.

Mastery of a positive sense of identity or the ability to successfully resolve an identity crisis involves recognition and support of significant others and society, and in part, the establishment of an appropriate sexual role, and satisfaction with interpersonal relationships and one’s chosen occupation. The ego quality that emerges from the successful development of this stage is fidelity, “the ability to sustain loyalties freely pledged in spite of the inevitable contradictions of value systems” (Erikson, 1964, p. 125).

**Moral Development**

Moral development is also an important aspect of adolescence. Kohlberg (1981) elaborated on Piaget’s two-stage theory of moral development through the creation of a three-level, six-stage process. Similar to cognitive development, the transformation of morality begins with a concrete, externally driven approach in childhood to a more abstract, principle-laden form in adolescence and adulthood. According to Kohlberg, humans progress through each stage in a sequential manner, and completion of the process results in moral maturity. Level I consist of the Preconventional level, which is prevalent among 4 - 10 year-olds. At this level of moral development, fear of punishment (Stage 1) and personal gain (Stage 2) motivate behavior. In Level II, the Conventional level, the expectations of others and a strong desire for approval and acceptance (Stage 3) and a respect for authority (Stage 4) motivate behavior. Level II is prominent among 10 –
13 year-olds and well into adulthood. Level III is known as the Post-conventional level, which can be achieved from adolescence and beyond. In Level III, the respect for moral principles and universal laws and an internalized value system drive behavior (Stage 5) while individual principles and one’s conscience guide behavior in the highest level (Stage 6). However, very few people achieve this high level of moral development.

Many of the adolescent offenders in residential treatment, who will be invited to participate in this study, come from disadvantaged backgrounds. Although specific information regarding their cognitive, psychosocial, and moral development is unknown at the time of this writing, many existing factors may play a significant role in their current level of functioning. For example, the socio-economic status of most youth is low, and many families struggle financially to make ends meet. Many live in high crime, unsafe neighborhoods, and some youth affiliate with gangs. Many of the youth function below the expected level in academic performance, many have been suspended or expelled from school, and others have dropped out of school entirely. Many of the youth participate in high risk behaviors such as drug and alcohol use/abuse, reckless or impaired driving, and unprotected sexual activity. Most youth do not have children while others have fathered one to three children.

The youths’ family structure and functioning varies as well; few youth reside in a two parent home. Some youth report strong family support and bonds while others perceive family relationships as distant. Many youth live in a one parent or grandparent home and have multiple siblings, step-siblings, or half-siblings. Some have never met their fathers or have limited contact with them. Some youth have one or both parents who
have substance or alcohol abuse issues, mental illness, or a history of criminal activity and incarceration. Few youth have established strong ties to their schools or communities.

**Human Ecological Perspective**

The Human Ecological Perspective was shared initially by Bronfenbrenner (1977). He argued that the understanding of human development requires much more than the direct observation of one or two persons in the same setting. He believed that a greater understanding of human development required “examination of multi-person systems of interaction not limited to a single setting and must take into account aspects of the environment beyond the immediate situation containing the subject” (p. 514).

According to Bronfenbrenner, outcomes, both positive and negative, transpire in a framework that includes four locational or spatial contexts and one time-related context: microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem.

Bronfenbrenner (1977) describes a microsystem as the multifaceted relations between the developing individual and environment within an immediate setting such as home, school, and workplace. The person to person interactions occur in a specific setting, which includes place, time, physical features, activity, participant, and participant roles such as son, parent, and teacher. The mesosystem refers to the relationships among major settings (or two or more microsystems) that contain the developing individual at a specific point in one’s life. For example, the adolescent’s mesosystem might include family, school, and peer group. The exosystem expands on the mesosystem and includes other social structures that do not directly contain the developing individual, but influence the immediate setting of the developing individual such as the neighborhood, the work world, and government agencies. The macrosystem involves the encompassing
situational patterns of one’s culture or subculture and includes educational, social, economic, legal and political systems. The chronosystem refers to the influences on the individual’s development of changes over time (Bronfenbrenner, 1986). This systems approach to human development provides a context for understanding human development which emphasizes the progressive, mutual accommodation between the developing individual (adolescent in this case) and the changing immediate environments in which one lives. This process is influenced by relations between these settings and the larger social contexts in which the settings are entrenched.

Over time, the conceptualization of the ecological model has evolved, and some models reflect a public health perspective that focuses on risk reduction and disease, illness, and injury prevention. This model also moves beyond the individual level and discloses the interplay of risk and protective factors as more of an interactional, systems approach to understanding youth development and youth violence (Jessor, 1993). This model illustrates the complexity of relationships between the individual and family, community, and broader environment.

Experiences with family, community, and environment involve protective factors that facilitate resiliency or risk factors that contribute to youth violence, and, as exposure to risk factors increase, so does the likelihood that youth will participate in violence (Hawkins, Herrenkohl, Farrington, Brewer, Catalano, Harachi, & Cothern, 2002). If viewed from an ecological model, it appears that risk factors outweigh the protective factors among many of the adolescents described above. However, current research aims to develop interventions that promote protective factors and reduce risks among this population.
The ecological model provides a context to explore and understand many aspects of adolescent development including cognitive processes, personal identity, and moral behavior. Development does not occur in isolation. It is the adolescents’ experiences, relationships, and interactions with family, peers, schools, neighborhoods, communities, and environments that shape, mold, and influence their development either positively or negatively. As such, the ecological approach would also be an appropriate context to explore the experiences of remorse among adolescent offenders.

**Assumptions**

There are a number of assumptions associated with this study. First, it is assumed that all human beings possess the capacity to experience remorse. Second, it is assumed that the adolescent participants will share their experiences of remorse in an honest fashion. Third, remorse is a complex, multidimensional concept that includes cognitive, psychological, affective, and behavioral components. Fourth, an inter-relationship exists among cognitive, psychosocial, and moral development. The final assumption is that the adolescents’ interaction within and between his immediate settings as well as the larger social contexts affect adolescent development.

**Definition of Terms**

For clarification purposes, the following definitions of terms will be used in this study:

**Adolescent Offenders**: European American and African American male, adolescents between the ages of 16 and 18 who are placed in a residential treatment center by Juvenile Justice, classified as Adjudicated or Youthful Offenders.
**Phenomenology**: “A qualitative research tradition, with roots in philosophy, that focuses on the lived experience of humans” (Morse & Richards, 2002).

**Significance of the Study**

Since youthful offenders are expected to express genuine remorse and remorse is something that should be explored and instilled during treatment (Marriott, 2007), this concept has particular value to Advanced Practice Psychiatric Nurses who work as members of the treatment team and/or as nurse researchers in juvenile justice. By gaining an in-depth understanding of the meaning of the remorse experience, nurse clinicians could enhance recognition of remorse and thereby increase competence. This study can contribute to the body of knowledge on remorse and possibly lead to the development of nursing interventions that focus on how to work therapeutically with adolescent offenders who experience remorse. A qualitative, phenomenological approach to inquiry could capture the true essence of remorse that quantitative approaches have not been able to measure. Further exploration of remorse at the phenomenological level could also provide new insights regarding developmental and cultural aspects of remorse.
CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW

Chapter two presents the literature review and the concept analysis of remorse. It includes definitions, competing concepts, attributes, antecedents, and consequences, instruments of measurement, and implications for nursing.

Definition and Purpose of Concept Analysis

Morse (2000, p. 334) defines a behavioral concept as “conceptual representations of phenomena,” “they are names given to clusters of behaviors that together form some function or purpose.” Concepts possess context-bound attributes or characteristics that differentiate a select concept from others. Boundaries inherent in concepts illustrate what is or is not an occurrence of a particular concept. Morse’s method of Pragmatic Utility is accomplished through critical appraisal of the literature, which contributes to a research agenda “through the exploration and development of the concepts themselves and the role they play in inquiry” (p. 334). As a result, it enables the researcher to discern the usefulness of the concept to science that leads to more appropriate directions of inquiry or concept development.

Conceptual Review of the Literature

Morse’s (2000) pragmatic utility method guided this concept analysis. This method involves the review and critical appraisal of a large body of literature from multiple disciplines as a means of exploring conceptual adequacy and appropriateness for research and clinical application. The process facilitates concept clarification and level of maturity, comparison of the use of the concept among disciplines, competing concepts, and the identification of gaps and conceptual inconsistencies (p. 343). The aim of this
concept analysis was two-fold: 1) to share a current understanding of the conceptualization of remorse among disciplines, and 2) to provide support as to the potential usefulness of the concept to the nursing discipline.

A systematic review of the literature was conducted via PsycINFO, PsycARTICLES, Pubmed, HaPI, and CINAHL using the following key words individually and/or in combination: remorse, guilt, regret, shame, and apology. The sample included a total of 87 relevant theoretical papers, qualitative and quantitative research, and books that focused on remorse or its differentiation among related concepts. A secondary search was conducted through the review of references from relevant sources. Data sources were limited to the period of 1978-2008, with the exception of several classic works (Davitz, 1969; Freud, 1961; Goffman, 1971; McCord & McCord, 1964; Rumsey, 1976). Data represented multiple disciplines including psychology, psychiatry, criminology, social work, sociology, nursing, and psychology-law. Interestingly, the nursing literature contained no theoretical or empirical works on remorse.

**Competing Concepts**

Morse (2000, p.347) described the importance of exploring the conceptual adequacy of competing concepts, which “account for the same phenomenon,” but are known by different names. The abstract character of concepts leads to difficulty in measurement and one or more concepts may represent the same phenomenon. “This is an awkward situation because these concepts then compete with varying degrees of acceptance, according to the discipline of origin, amount of conviction of adequacy of explanation, faddishness, and even practical concerns, such as ease of operationalism and
measurement (Morse, 2000, p. 347). Therefore, the task of comparing and contrasting competing concepts is important.

Regret and guilt were used in the descriptions of remorse by several authors, and there was consensus that remorse, guilt, regret, and shame shared similar characteristics. However, authors disagreed on how the concepts differed. All four of these emotions are included as symptoms of depression and anxiety, each can be felt by the transgressor after the commission of a harmful act, and all are considered “moral emotions,” meaning, emotions that occur in daily life experiences in which actions or inactions are influenced by one’s perception of right and wrong (Kroll & Egan, 2004).

Shame and guilt are regarded as self-conscious emotions; shame involves a negative evaluation of the self, while guilt involves self-blame and a self-appraisal of responsibility for violating an internalized ideal or standard (Hauck, 1989; Proeve, 2006; Schneiderman, 1989; Smith, Webster, Parrott & Eyre, 2002). According to Tangney & Dearing (2002), the experience of guilt relates to empathy and increased self-reported moral behavior, whereas the experience of shame relates to increased hostility and projection of blame onto others.

Remorse is considered an “other-related emotion” as opposed to a self-related emotion; its cognitive focus lies with the action toward the harmed other rather than on the self (Taylor, 1996; Tudor, 2001; Van Stokkom, 2002). Although Tudor (2001) acknowledged that the focus of remorse is on the harmed other, he added that the remorseful person suffers from corrupted self-development due to self-alienation and the dreadfulness associated with one’s actions. Both guilt and remorse possess a need for reparation; however, one who feels remorse perceives the reparation as an end, whereas
one who feels guilty views reparation as part of self-rehabilitation (Taylor, 1996). In contrast, shame is linked to public exposure and is associated with avoidance as evidenced by the desire to runaway or hide from those who sit in judgment (Smith, et al., 2002; Proeve, 2001). Therefore, guilt and remorse appear as more pro-social (reparation) in nature while shame appears as self-protective (avoidant) based on distinct action tendencies (Prove & Howell, 2006).

Regret differs from remorse and guilt in several respects. Regret appears to exist on a continuum in which the highest level of regret most closely resembles remorse (Kroll & Egan, 2002). The focus of remorse lies with one’s own action, an action that one evaluates as wrongful or harmful. With regret, the action or inaction is not necessarily deemed wrongful or harmful, but may be construed as a mistake, a loss, or a missed opportunity. According to Taylor (1996), regret implies an acceptance of what has been done, whereas remorse involves a desire to undo the wrongful act. However, Zelenberg, van Dijk, Manstead, & van der Pligt (1998) found the desire to undo an event was also characteristic of regret. Regret also differs from remorse in that regret can occur due to either an action or inaction, whereas remorse cannot occur in the absence of a harmful action. According to Landman (1993), in comparison to guilt, regret is a broader concept. He stated, “In general, it seems impossible to imagine experiencing guilt without regret, but quite possible to imagine experiencing regret without guilt (p. 56).

Attributes

Although the literature contained few actual definitions of remorse, there was consistency among disciplines that remorse occurs after committing a harmful or wrongful act. Freud (1961) defined remorse as:
a general term for the ego’s reaction in a case of sense of guilt. It contains, in little altered form, the sensory material of the anxiety which is operating behind the sense of guilt; it is itself a punishment and can include the need for punishment (p. 84).

Freud added that “…the term ‘remorse’ should be reserved for the reaction after an act of aggression has actually been carried out” (1961, p. 84). McCord and McCord (1964) supported Freud’s view by defining remorse as one’s ability to experience regret or distress induced by a sense of guilt, and added that the capacity to feel remorse is contingent upon one’s ability to experience guilt. Although most people develop a capacity to feel remorse, remorse is absent or decreased in those with psychopathy (psychopath, sociopath, antisocial personality) (Freud, 1961; Hart, Hare, & Harper, 1992).

“Remorse can be described as a feeling of compunction or deep regret” (Van Stokkom, 2002, p. 350), a critical element of an apology (Goffman, 1971; Mulford, 2004; Scher & Darley, 1997; Schlenker & Darby, 1981; Tavuchis, 1991;), and as a valuable experience of consciousness that needs to be explored in psychotherapy (Gorelick, 1989; Moore, 1989; Schneiderman, 1989; Shabad, 1989; Singer, 2004; Switzer, 1989). Gold and Weiner’s (2000) findings suggested that confessions must include remorse to evoke forgiveness; however, a study by Schlenker and Darby (1981) found that remorse was not a required or a necessary component of apology when the incident was minor and consequences were low.

Remorse consists of cognitive, psychological, affective, and behavioral components expressed explicitly or implicitly, verbally and/or nonverbally, or in writing.
The cognitive component, meaning thoughts or perceptions, involves an acknowledgment of the committed act as wrongful (Tavuchis, 1991; Taylor, 1996), morally wrongful (Hauck, 1989; Kroll & Egan, 2004; Taylor, 1996) or a violation of a social norm (Goffman, 1971; Lazare, 2004; Weisman, 2004). An acceptance of responsibility is also implicitly conveyed through remorse (Hoyt, 1983; Taylor, 1996; Weisman, 2004) as well as an awareness of how the act has affected those harmed. Persons experiencing remorse also wish the action had never occurred, and they attempt to “mentally undo” and ruminate about the event. They also think about potential consequences including how the harmed individual will view them and respond to them because of the transgression.

The psychological component refers to the psyche, the workings of the mind. Descriptive accounts of the psychological component include terms such as “painful anguish,” “mental anguish,” “psychological suffering,” “self-punishment,” “re-biting,” “symbolic reparation,” and “dread.” These terms clearly illustrate the intensity and persistence associated with remorse. Weisman (2004, p.125) reported the most distinctive feature of the attribution of remorse may be its internal origin, “…feelings of remorse are expected to originate from inner experience, beyond the realm of appearance” and there must be congruence between what is shown and what is felt.

The affective component refers to the range and intensity of feeling, feeling tones, and emotions. This component was described particularly well by Weisman (2004, p.125) through a discussion on the differences between an apology and remorse. The pain and anguish experienced as a result of violating a social norm is reflected through an apology; however, expressed remorse communicates this pain and anguish through a visual display
of suffering. With an apology, people are more likely to attend to the spoken words; with remorseful expressions, the focus lies with the manner in which the words are spoken and the accompanying feelings. Weisman added that expressions of remorse are frequently described as “signs,” “symptoms,” “manifestations,” or “demonstrations” among law and psychiatric communities, which suggests “that remorse is communicated through gestures, displays of affect, and other paralinguistic devices. Weisman also noted the following:

Feelings of remorse are supposed to be painful, unwanted, and involuntary. In popular and legal discourse, one is “afflicted,” “burdened,” or “cursed” with feelings of remorse. That demonstrations of remorse are often described as “breaking down” or “losing control” or as symptoms of emotional collapse fits well with its perceived involuntary character (p. 125).

The behavioral component, meaning observable actions, was illustrated in the literature as an open declaration of remorse and responsibility, demonstration of concern for the victim, an apology, a timely guilty plea, reparation, restitution, the absence of reoffending or repeating the behavior, and a willingness to make amends or undergo rehabilitation (Proeve, 2001; Weisman, 2004, 1999; Wood & MacMartin, 2007). There appeared to be some confusion as to whether or not behavioral components should be considered attributes, consequences, or both. Proeve (2001) clarified this overlap to a degree by designating behaviors as action tendencies; meaning, the offenders may not have actively engaged in these behaviors, but the urge or desire to engage in these behaviors was perceived as an attribute of remorse.
Surprisingly, the literature contained little information regarding the nonverbal expression of remorse. Lazare (2004) reported that downcast eyes were associated with feelings of remorse and continual eye contact reflected an absence of remorse. However, the opposite held true in a recent study that examined the effects of remorse on attributions of responsibility (Jehle, 2007). Jehle suggested participants might have perceived the remorse display as deception where downcast eyes signaled dishonesty and continuous eye contact implied truth telling. Occasional references were made to a trembling voice (Jehle, 2007; Pfeifer, 1996) and a saddened facial expression (Darby & Schlenker, 1982). Sundby (1998) explored how jurors distinguished credible from non-credible expressions of remorse in capital cases. He found that credible expressions were based on whether or not the person “seemed uncomfortable or ill at ease” when sharing feelings of remorse (p. 1564-1565).

In the legal setting, Wood and MacMartin (2007) utilized discursive psychology to analyze judicial sentencing decisions as a means of identifying how judges construct remorse. The authors reviewed each sentence and the judge’s accompanying rationale in 48 of 74 cases of child sexual assault. Judges, with the exception of one, did not provide a definition of remorse. Findings were consistent with Weisman’s (1999) investigation of remorse in cases of wrongful convictions; a guilty plea indicated remorse and a not guilty plea reflected an absence of remorse. Judges used additional resources to assess remorse (text citations, appearance-reality contrasts, written reports, professional evaluations, etc.). However, much variability existed in the selection of resources and the manner in which they were used (Wood & MacMartin, 2007).
Antecedents

The primary antecedent to remorse is the commission of a wrongful or harmful act that results in harm to an individual, a group, or society in general. In the absence of a wrongful or harmful act, one cannot feel remorse (Freud, 1961; Juni, 1991; Proeve, 2001). Some experts perceived guilt as a precursor to remorse (Freud, 1961; McCord & McCord, 1964; Tangney, 1995) but others did not specifically address guilt as an antecedent. Vignettes depicted in several studies (Darby & Schlenker, 1982, 1989; Kleinke, Wallis, and Stalder, 2001; Schlenker & Darby, 1981) imply that the act can be either intentional or unintentional.

Consequences

One of the key findings of the concept analysis was that remorse can lead to either positive or negative consequences. However, consequences appeared to be contingent upon if and how one communicates remorse, and how others perceive and interpret its expression. A series of evaluations by the observer or victim may or may not take place regarding the transgressor’s expression of remorse. The evaluations include determining if remorse is present or absent, if remorse is genuine or feigned, and if the source of remorse relates directly to the harmful act versus a manipulative strategy used as a means of avoiding punishment (Weisman, 2004; Wood & MacMartin, 2007). The potential consequences will be categorized as those noted in the theoretical and empirical literature.

Consequences Based on the Theoretical Literature

Negative. The most extreme consequences of remorse were identified in the psychotherapy literature as anxiety, severe depression (Kroll & Egan, 2004;
Marriott, 2007; Singer, 2004), suicidal ideation, and suicide (Singer, 2004) in which ineffective coping or resolution of the devastating effects of remorse, likely, contributed to this tragic outcome. Experiencing remorse can be painfully intense (Marriott, 2007; Weisman, 1999) and it can also negatively affect one’s identity, self-perception, and inter-relatedness with others (Marriott, 2007; Shaw, 1989; Singer, 2004).

**Positive.** Although some clinicians in the psychotherapy literature focused on the nonproductive or psychopathological aspects of remorse (Dublin, 1989; Greenberg & Fitzpatrick, 1989; Hauck, 1989; Juni, 1991; Willis, 1989,) others emphasized the positive aspects or outcomes that can result from the experience of remorse. For example, “Remorse can bring people into psychotherapy when they want to change something that hurts” (Shaw, 1989, p. 80), “remorse, transformed, might become a vehicle for healing/wholing rather than a masochistic preoccupation” (Brothers, 1989, p. 47), “remorse aids patients in developing authentic concern and compassion” (Stern, 1989), and “Remorse may hold us in the muck of past mistakes, but ultimately it is cathartic and renewing” (Moore, 1989, p. 83). The experience of remorse may also free someone to live truthfully and honestly with a sense of compassion (Schneiderman, 1989). Remorse was also described as having the potential to open the door to forgiveness, aid in conflict resolution, repair relationships, restore one’s place in the moral community (Goffman, 1971; Higgins, 2005; Petrucci, 2002; Singer, 2004; Tavuchis, 1991), and as a motivating factor or deterrent against future transgressions (Higgins, 2005; Shaw, 1989; Petrucci, 2002).

Shaw (1989) shared her insights on remorse through a case study presentation of a man who chose to give up a life of crime in midlife. She stated this man’s ability to feel
remorse helped him to refrain from criminal behavior and pursue relatedness with others who could see the goodness within him. She hypothesized that “remorse contributes to a redirection of energy” (p. 80), is a “quality which can effectively motivate a person to change” (p.80), and “by allowing for change, remorse is regenerative. It provides an opportunity for one to experience consciously the constructive, growthful aspects of self” (p. 81).

Marriott (2007) presented a case study of his year-long psychodynamic work with a 14 year-old male who was convicted of murder. Marriott attempted to illustrate the relevance of the concept of remorse by providing the following quote from this youth as stated in their first session, “Will it be a chance to do – what they call sorry work – for my offence? I think about it all the time. No one has talked to me about how I feel since I got sentenced” (p. 256). Marriott acknowledged remorse as something that should be explored and instilled during treatment; yet, the mechanism for accomplishing this task remains unclear. The objective of therapy focused on modifying remorse into a tolerable form and transforming it into something reparative. He believed resilience factors allowed the youth to experience remorse and prevented him from existing in total denial and avoidance. He described the adolescent’s struggle with revealing vulnerability and integrating the good and bad aspects of himself. Since psychotherapy increases internal attributions, remorse increases as well. Therefore, the remorse experience initially led the youth to feel more negatively about himself instead of better. Over time, however, the youth was able to tolerate the experience of remorse for longer periods, engage in therapy, and eventually share hopes for his future beyond incarceration. Marriott acknowledged the uncertainty of whether or not remorse led to a reduction in
re-offending (recidivism), but added, if it resulted in a lifestyle change, the risk of reoffending would be reduced.

Singer (2004) described his experiences in psychotherapy with Vietnam veterans who committed atrocities during the Viet Nam War. The key dynamic in treatment of this population was the inability to express remorse. Singer suggested that working through the veterans’ shame, guilt, and self-hatred was “fundamental to the expression of remorse” (p.377). He perceived the veterans’ feelings of remorse as hidden by shame and disguised by self-hatred, and that expressed self-hatred may function as an expression of guilt and remorse in a more primitive form. Like Marriott (2007), Singer emphasized the importance of addressing self-integration issues; the assimilation of the good and bad aspects of self as a means of working through remorse. The positive outcomes consisted of the veterans’ ability “to feel deserving of some of life’s satisfactions” (p. 384), self-forgiveness and acceptance, and engagement in atonement-like activities within the community.

Although anecdotal, findings from the psychotherapy literature and case studies suggest that experiencing remorse, as difficult as it is at times, can lead to positive changes among offenders. Working through remorse also appears to be an on-going, yet intermittent process that requires considerable guidance and support from the clinician as it appears to be easier and safer to deny remorse rather than confront it. Although these anecdotal findings of remorse experiences instill hope and optimism that lives can, indeed, be turned around, these potential, transformational benefits need to be validated through further research.
Consequences Based on the Empirical Literature

Nature of remorse. Two researchers investigated the nature of remorse empirically at the phenomenological level. Via a series of studies, Davitz (1969) created a dictionary of emotions based on personal experiences obtained through interviews and written reports, which resulted in a checklist of 556 statements. Fifty college graduates used the checklist to depict 50 different emotional experiences determined by the frequency of checked items. Thirty-five of the 556 statements were identified under remorse with a between-subject rating range of 34% to 82%. Many of the statements were consistent with the multi-dimensional composition of remorse as noted in the literature such as “I keep thinking about what happened over and over again,” “I keep blaming myself for the situation,” “I wish I could go back in time,” “I feel empty, drained, hollow,” and “There is an inner ache you can’t locate.”

Since describing 50 different emotional experiences may have been a daunting or confusing task for participants in Davitz’ (1969) study, Proeve (2001) chose to improve on Davitz’ work by limiting the number of emotions to four (remorse, regret, shame, and guilt) and using a likert scale instead of frequencies. Undergraduate psychology students gave written descriptions and ratings of emotional experiences. A prototype of each emotion was created based on content analysis, and principal component analysis reduced item ratings to 15 components for comparison. Although some delineation among concepts occurred based on these studies, the results also supported overlap among concepts, the significance of regret in relation to remorse, and the need for further investigation to differentiate among these four concepts (Proeve, 2001).
Although Davitz’ (1969) and Proeve’s (2001) work provide valuable insights on the nature of remorse, there are limitations associated with their studies. While Davitz used interviews and written reports of personal experiences, he focused on a wide array of emotions which may have been somewhat overwhelming and confusing to the participants. Proeve chose to use written descriptions and ratings in place of in-depth interviews, which prevented the opportunity for clarification, elaboration, and to truly gain an understanding of the essence of the experience. Both researchers used college students as participants so generalizability is limited. The experiences of remorse among college students may be very different than remorseful experiences among youthful offenders given the difference in context between the two populations.

**Effects of remorse on judgment.** Much of the research on remorse was intertwined with works on apology since remorse is considered a critical element of apology (Goffman, 1971; Mulford, 2004; Scher & Darley, 1997; Schlenker & Darby, 1981; Tavuchis, 1991). A number of experimental studies focused on the effects of remorse on judgments, often through the manipulation of levels of remorse. For example, Darby and Schlenker (1982) examined the effects of apologies on children’s reactions to transgressions in two separate studies. The samples included 110 and 101 randomly selected K through 7th graders. In the first experiment, children listened to vignettes about a character that bumped into another child, which caused the child to drop a stack of dishes. In the second experiment, children listened to vignettes about a child who was playing on a seesaw with a friend in which the child either jumped off or fell off his end of the seesaw causing the friend to fall to the ground. The authors manipulated the reason for bumping the child and for causing the friend to fall, level of responsibility of the
transgressor, damage ensued by the accident, and the amount of expressed remorse by the transgressor. Participants responded individually to questions using a 10 point likert scale (0 = no or none at all; 9 = yes, extremely so, or a great deal). Analysis of variance (ANOVA) results showed that apologies that are more elaborate resulted in less blame and punishment, an increase in forgiveness, more favorable impressions of the actor, and stronger beliefs that the transgressor was truly sorry for his behavior.

In a follow-up study Darby and Schlenker (1989) examined children’s reactions to transgressions including the effects of the actor’s apology, reputation, and level of remorse. Eighty-one 2nd and 5th graders were randomly selected for participation. Researchers read vignettes in which a boy accidentally damaged a classmates bicycle, and reputation (good or bad), the presence or absence of remorse, and the presence or absence of an apology was manipulated. Individual participants responded to questions using the same 10-point likert scale used in the previous study (0-9). Findings from ANOVA indicated that the presence of an apology, a good reputation, and expressed remorse resulted in less punishment. Participants also perceived the actors’ intentions and motives more favorably with expressions of remorse.

O’Malley and Greenberg (1983) proposed that transgressors who suffered psychologically through remorse or guilt after harming another would be perceived as attempting to right the injustice incurred by the victim. Therefore, they would be expected to make fewer amends and receive lesser fines compared to those who did not express guilt or remorse. Using a convenience sample of 328 male and female undergraduate students, the authors presented scenarios involving an accident in which level of responsibility (did or did not admit to responsibility) and levels of remorse (no,
moderate, or extreme remorse) were manipulated. Findings from ANOVA revealed that actors who admitted responsibility were viewed as suffering more from guilt and remorse, actors who apologized received lower fines as punishment, and females were more lenient than males with punishment toward remorseful actors. In contrast, participants assigned harsher punishments to extremely remorseful actors compared to unremorseful and moderately remorseful actors in situations of negligence versus bad luck. The authors suggested that extremely remorseful but negligent transgressors might have been perceived as manipulative. They also concluded that psychological suffering by the transgressor could serve as a ‘down payment’ toward restoring justice for the victim (p. 174).

Gold and Weiner (2000) recruited psychology students to explore the mechanisms and processes underlying the positive, more obscure benefits of confession. They found that confessions must include a demonstration of remorse in order to be effective. This finding indicates that demonstrations of remorse are necessary in order to convey the message that one truly feels badly about the act and implies that the action will not be repeated in the future. The researchers also discovered that perceived remorse affects future expectations by way of causal stability and perceptions of the transgressor’s moral character. They concluded that people look for reassurance that the harmful or immoral behavior will not be repeated, and if they believe that immoral behaviors are an enduring part of one’s character; they are less likely to accept the confession or forgive. Victims are more likely to forgive if remorse is expressed compared to when it is not expressed.

Effects of remorse and hypothetical legal contexts. A number of experimental studies have also been conducted on the effects of remorse on judgments regarding
hypothetical legal punishment in which levels of remorse were varied. For example, Rumsey (1976) hypothesized that defendant remorse and a defendant’s disadvantaged background would result in a reduced sentence according to Equity Theory. A convenience sample comprised of 48 male and 48 female Introductory Psychology students were randomly assigned to one of four conditions (I- ‘extremely remorseful,’ II- ‘gave no indication of remorse,’ III- ‘raised in a slum by an alcoholic father and a mother suffering from cancer,’ and IV- ‘raised in a comfortable upper-middle class neighborhood’). Each participant received a booklet that contained a trial transcript summary and a questionnaire. The transcript included an alleged incident of negligent homicide in which a pedestrian was struck and killed by an intoxicated driver after a police officer instructed the driver to abandon his car and take a cab. Individually, participants recommended a prison sentence between one and 25 years and rated the defendant on three bipolar attributes: ‘good background-deprived background,’ ‘remorseful-not remorseful,’ and ‘fortunate-unfortunate.’ Each group also deliberated for 15 minutes and reached a unanimous decision on sentencing.

ANOVA results showed that participants gave significantly lower sentences when remorse was expressed compared to when it was not expressed, and sentences were significantly lower after a group discussion. Although manipulation checks were successful, participants were not influenced by an actor from a disadvantaged background in the assignment of punishment. Participants gave harsher sentences to the deprived defendant compared to the fortunate defendant although results did not reach a significant level. Males, however, assigned significantly longer sentences to the deprived defendant compared to females. The authors concluded that the background manipulation failed to
establish any salient inequity among the participants.

Kleinke, Wallis, and Stalder (2001) investigated the effects of expressed intent and remorse on judgments of the perpetrator’s character, responsibility for the crime, and assigned prison sentence in two separate studies. The sample in Experiment 1 consisted of a convenience sample of 98 male and female college students enrolled in psychology and sociology courses. Participants were randomly assigned to groups and each group was randomly assigned to watch one of four, five minute videotaped interviews with a convicted rapist. During the interview the rapist either admitted intent by saying he planned to rape the woman or denied intent by saying he just lost control and did not mean to do it. The rapist also either denied remorse or expressed remorse. Participants chose 30 adjectives that best described the rapist using the Personal Attribute Inventory (PAI). They also rated rapist and victim responsibility, the seriousness of the crime, and rehabilitation potential of the rapist using a 10-point likert scale. Lastly, they recommended a prison sentence.

The ratings on manipulations checks via ANOVA were successful. In addition, a significant Intent x Remorse interaction revealed that when the rapist expressed remorse and denied intent, he was perceived as particularly remorseful. When the rapist denied remorse and expressed intent, he was viewed as particularly unremorseful. MANOVA results indicated significant main effects for both intent and remorse. With expressed intent, higher ratings were assigned to seriousness of the crime, rapist responsibility, less rehabilitation potential, and longer prison sentences. Participants viewed the rapist significantly less negatively and as having a significantly higher rehabilitation potential with remorseful expressions compared to denial of remorse. Lesser prison sentences were
assigned when the rapist expressed remorse compared to when he denied remorse, but differences did not reach the significant level. Results indicated no gender effects.

In a second study Kleinke, Wallis, and Stalder (2001) used a control group and examined a wider range of attribution evaluations including cause, responsibility, blame and punishment. Participants rated the rapist on more specific characteristics compared to the PAI. The convenience sample consisted of 184 male and female psychology and sociology students who were randomly assigned to read one of nine case examples, which resembled the rape incident in the first study. The researchers systematically manipulated intent and remorse. Ratings were obtained on 10-point bipolar scales (did-did not cause the rape; the man is-is not responsible for the rape; the woman is-is not responsible for the rape; the man deserved- did not deserve blame for the rape; the man should-should not be punished severely for the rape; the man did-did not intend to rape the woman; and the man feels- feels no remorse). Participants also rated the rapist on 14, 10-point bipolar attributes such as sincere-insincere, trustworthy-untrustworthy, and truthful-not truthful. Manipulation checks via ANOVA were successful. Significant main effects were obtained for both intent and remorse. Factor analysis of the attribute ratings via principal component solution and varimax rotation revealed one factor with an Eigenvalue of 6.73. The attributes were averaged into a single score, and higher ratings reflected more favorable ratings.

Results of the MANOVA on evaluations of attributes indicated a significant main effect for both intent and remorse. Participant ratings were less favorable when the rapist expressed intent, and they assigned significantly lower sentences when intent was denied. The rapist was rated more favorably with expressed remorse compared to denial of
remorse. Participants gave a more lenient sentence when remorse was expressed compared to the denial of remorse or the control group; however, differences in sentencing were not statistically significant. Results also revealed a significant main effect for gender in that females rated the rapist more severely on cause, responsibility, blame, punishment, and attributes compared to males, but the assigned prison sentences did not differ between males and females.

*Effects of remorse on victims.* Consequences of expressed remorse were not limited to the transgressor or offender. Empirical findings suggest that offering an apology (of which remorse is a critical element) leads to a reduction in victim anger and aggression toward the offender (Gold & Weiner, 2000; Obuchi, Kameda, & Agarie, 1989) and improves overall victim impressions of the offender (Darby & Schlenker, 1982; Gold & Weiner, 2000; Obuchi et. al, 1989; Obuchi & Sato, 1994; Scher & Darley, 1997). Victims who receive an apology (Darby & Schlenker, 1982; Gold & Weiner, 2000; Obuchi et. al, 1989; Obuchi & Sato, 1994; Scher & Darley, 1997) are also less likely to award harsher punishments and are more likely to forgive (Obuchi & Sato, 2001; Gold & Weimer, 2000). Perhaps, the positive aspect of decreased negative feelings among victims as a result of the offender’s remorseful expressions may contribute toward victim healing. An obvious benefit for youthful offenders is the likelihood of receiving less punishment. According to Abel (1998) victims also felt empowered by being in control of whether or not to forgive the offender, and remorse conveyed through an apology evoked feelings of empathy on behalf of the victim toward the offender.

Appendix A contains a preliminary model of attributes, antecedent, and consequences of remorse.
Remorse among adolescent offenders. Two studies (dissertations) involving remorse and adolescent offenders were noted in the literature. Mulford’s (2004) experimental study investigated the development of empathy, remorse, and moral disengagement and the effectiveness of victim empathy training (VET) program with a convenience sample of 60 male (78%) and female (22%) community-based, youthful offenders. Mulford utilized three different measurements of remorse, which included an adapted 5-item Guilt and Restitution Scale (Bandura, Barbaranelli, Capara, & Pastorelli, 1996), a single item which asked participants how badly they felt about the committed crime (rated on a 4-point likert scale), and a Judge’s rating for each youth on the perceived degree of remorse observed during adjudication (rated on a 4-point likert scale). Baseline and follow up interviews were scheduled with each youth; however, not all participants completed follow up interviews or received judicial ratings of remorse.

The researcher collected recidivism data upon completion of the study. Results showed, 1) a capacity for remorse was predictive of recidivism while psychosocial maturity and empathy were not; 2) a positive linear relationship existed between altruistic behavior and remorse; 3) judicial evaluations of remorse were not significantly related to recidivism; and 4) the VET program had no significant effect on recidivism although it may have aided in delaying recidivism.

Higgins (2005) utilized a non-experimental, qualitative approach to explore the experience of remorse among at-risk adolescents between the ages of 18 and 21, some of whom had experience within the juvenile justice system as youth. The TOSCA-A, a measurement of guilt proneness, was administered to 45 male and female adolescent participants to determine high guilt-proneness and low guilt proneness groups. Remorse
was explored qualitatively with participants from two high guilt-proneness groups and two low guilt-proneness groups with three participants in each focus group. Four individual case studies were also presented, 1 participant from each group. Higgins found that participants in the high guilt-proneness group stayed focused on the topic and discussed their experiences of remorse while participants in the low guilt-proneness groups had difficulty remaining on topic. Low guilt-proneness participants used humor or distraction to avoid the topic or simply stated that it was too painful to talk about their experiences of remorse.

The qualitative portion of Higgins (2005) study on the experience of remorse found that some participants perceived the experience as transformational in nature. They acknowledged that the experience was painful, but that it also served as a catalyst for making positive changes in their lives, which for some meant not repeating the same transgressions in the future. Some felt the experience helped them to become accountable, make amends, and forgive themselves, while others thought the unpleasantness associated with remorse was the motivating factor that kept them from making the same mistakes as they did not want to re-experience the negative thoughts and feelings induced by the remorse. These experiences of remorse suggest that some youth learned from the experience and it helped them to make better choices in the future. Results also suggest that remorse instilled hope in this particular population. Higgins (2005) also emphasized the importance of remorse in restorative justice programs as an opportunity to gain insight on how the youths’ behavior affects the youth and others, helps to repair relationships, and potentially leads to forgiveness.
Higgin’s (2005) study was the only qualitative study found in the literature that focused on remorse in which, at least a portion of the sample included adolescent youthful offenders (18-21 year olds). However, rigor may have been limited. For example, no reference was made to the selected research tradition, selected questions, length of interviews, management of data, data analysis, and no direct quotes or passages from participants were included. As a result, reliability and validity of the study could be in question.

The positive effects of remorse might be better understood by a process known as remedial exchanges (Goffman, 1971; Tavuchis, 1991). When harm becomes a reflection of the offender’s identity, apologies (of which remorse is a critical element) become necessary. The expression of an apology and remorse can re-establish relations between the offender and the offended through this remedial exchange. According to Goffman, “An apology is a gesture through which an individual splits himself into two parts, the part that is guilty of an offence and the part that dissociates itself from the delict and affirms a belief in the offended rule (p. 113).” Accordingly, a part of the self could be perceived as ‘blameworthy’ while the other part of the self could be viewed as ‘sympathizing.’ It is the sympathizing self that is worthy of forgiveness (Goffman, 1971).

Tavuchis (1991) suggests the mutual rejection of the offending behavior through an apology and remorse aids in reestablishing the offender’s membership back into the common moral community (Weisman, 2004). Based on this theory, youthful offenders might receive positive effects through expressed remorse or apology to victims. This gesture acknowledges awareness of the wrongdoing and a promise of forbearance that
could facilitate forgiveness and acceptance by the victim and community. It might also restore the youth’s identity by conveying, despite the transgression, he is worthy of forgiveness.

**Measurement of Remorse**

Several psychometric instruments have been developed to aid in the assessment of remorse although, with the exception of one, remorse was not the primary focus of measurement. Forth, Kosson, and Hare (2003) adapted the adult version of the Hare Psychopathy Checklist-Revised (PCL-R, Hart, Hare, & Harper, 2003)) to create the Hare Psychopathy Checklist-Youth Version (PCL-YV) for use with adolescents between the ages of 12-18 years old. During semi-structured interviews, clinicians rely on professional expertise to rate lack of remorse and 19 other psychopathy traits/items via an ordinal scale (no, maybe, yes, or omit). The HPC-YV demonstrated acceptable reliability and validity as evidenced by mean interrater reliability estimates above .70, and internal consistency estimates (Chronbach’s alpha) range of .85 to .94 (Fleenor, 2004); however, the instrument was designed to measure psychopathy as opposed to remorse.

Powell, Rosen and Huffing (1997) developed the Avoidance of Responsibility Scale (ARS) for use with adolescents, although the sample consisted of 361 introductory psychology students. This 28 item, self-report, true or false questionnaire focused on avoidance of responsibility strategies. The items clustered on nine factors: Affect Rationalization (three items), Blaming (four items), No Remorse (three items), Victim Role-Past (three items), No Personal Responsibility (three items), Playing Dumb (three items), Misunderstanding (four items), Victim Role-Others (three items), and Immoral Attitude (two items). The No Remorse sub-scale was operationally defined as “Having no
regrets or guilt about inappropriate behaviors” (Powell, Rosen, & Huff, 1997, p. 552) and it included the following items: “If I could turn back time after getting in trouble I would do everything exactly the same; I feel bad about my actions when I get in trouble; and I feel bad about my wrong behaviors” (p. 553). Interestingly, this definition of remorse contains two out of three competing concepts, and it refers to inappropriate behavior as opposed to wrongful, harmful behavior, the sole antecedent to remorse. At first glance, one could easily perceive the latent variable as either guilt or regret, but the items lacked the intensity and persistence associated with remorse. The authors reported Cronbach’s alpha coefficient for the total score as .78, and a range of .37 to .78 for each factor (No Remorse = .69). However, this instrument is intended to measure Avoidance of Responsibility and not remorse.

The Guilt and Restitution subscale was utilized in a study on moral disengagement among children (Bandura, Barbaranelli, Capara, & Pastorelli, 1996). This 15-item, self-report subscale measured the anticipatory degree of guilt, remorse, and self-criticism as well as the anticipated desire for atonement if the wrongful act was committed. The items loaded on a single factor, which again, provided support for the complexity involved in differentiating guilt from remorse. Cronbach’s alpha coefficient was reported as .79. Again, this instrument does not focus on remorse.

The Rapid Alcohol Problems Screen (RAPS) was developed by Cherpitel in 1995 and revised by Cherpitel (2000) through the deletion of one item to create the four item Rapid Alcohol Screen Problems (RAPS4). The instruments are used as brief screening tools designed to measure alcohol dependence, and they rely on a single, yes or no response item to measure remorse: The four items represent Remorse, Amnesia, Perform,
and Starter features of alcohol dependence; the deleted item focused on loss of
friendships due to alcohol use. Like the PCL-YV scale (Powell, Rosen, & Huff, 1997),
the RAPS and the RAPS4 both utilized one item to measure remorse: During the last year
have you had a feeling of guilt or remorse after drinking? Similar to previously described
scales, the phrasing of the remorse item assumes a synonymous relationship between
guilt and remorse indicating overlap between these two concepts. Since both scales are
intended to measure problem drinking, neither scale is sufficient to measure remorse.

Brooks and Reddon (2003) created the most recently developed instrument, the
Remorse Construct Rating Form (RCRF), through a series of studies. Perceptions of the
nature of remorse were obtained through interviews with 13 probation officers, which
resulted in the identification of 668 features of remorse. The researchers reduced the key
features to a 50-item scale, administered the scale to 79 probation officers, and further
reduced the scale to 42-items. Many of the 42 items demonstrated congruence with
descriptions of remorse noted in the literature. The authors administered the refined scale
to 363 college students along with the Jackson Personality Inventory-Revised (JPI-R). A
two-dimensional nature of remorse was illustrated by the loading of items on two factors:
internal (Factor 1) and external (Factor II). The authors viewed the internal aspects of
remorse as the more genuine expression of remorse since items focused on concern for
the victim, acceptance of punishment, and a negative self-evaluation. In contrast, the
external aspects of remorse included items that emphasized a fundamental fear of
punishment in which the offender appeared more distressed by the consequences that
might ensue rather than one’s own actions. Although the authors suggested that a low
score on Factor I and a high score on Factor II could possibly identify feigned remorse,
the RCRF’s discriminative potential has not been tested with juvenile or adult offenders, or any other population to date. Reliability measurements were not included.

Most of the instruments described above contain a minimal number of questions regarding remorse and are intended to measure other psychological problems such as psychopathology, avoidance of responsibility, and problem drinking; therefore, they do not measure remorse in a meaningful way. The RCRF (Brooks & Reddon, 2003) contributes valuable information on the nature of remorse, but restricting the sample to probation officers may be a limitation of the study. The probation officers certainly have knowledge and experience working with the offender population, but their perceptions may differ from those who have actually committed crimes and experienced remorse in that context.

**Implications for Nursing**

Remorse is a multidimensional, complex concept that shares similar characteristics with regret, guilt, and shame. It appears most similar to regret and most distinguishable from shame (Proeve, 2001). Remorse is difficult to define and accurately assess. Nonetheless, remorse is often considered a factor in sentencing in the legal realm despite the absence of a standard, agreed upon definition or specific guidelines for assessing its presence or authenticity. Remorse can be painfully unpleasant and undesirable, suggesting that most people would choose to avoid the experience. Yet, it also appears to possess the capacity to motivate change and promote personal growth. Results suggest that remorse’s level of conceptual maturity remains in the partially developed stage due to the presence of several competing concepts, the blurring of
boundaries, and the limited definitions (Morse, Hupcey, Mitcham, & Lenz, 1996). Therefore, quantitative methods of inquiry may have been premature.

Although the literature reflects a growing body of quantitative research on the nature and effects of remorse, very few studies explored remorse at the phenomenological level, and the data base related to remorse among youthful offenders is nearly non-existent. Therefore, a qualitative method of inquiry is appropriate.

Since youthful offenders are expected to express genuine remorse and remorse is something that should be explored and instilled during treatment (Marriott, 2007), this concept has particular value to Advanced Practice Psychiatric Nurses (APRNs) who work as members of the treatment team and/or as nurse researchers in Juvenile Justice. A more in-depth understanding of the remorse experience would facilitate the development of therapeutic nursing interventions. A qualitative, phenomenological approach to inquiry could capture the true essence of remorse that quantitative approaches have not been able to measure.

**Summary**

Chapter Three presented the literature review and concept analysis of remorse, which was guided by Morse’s Pragmatic Utility method of analysis. A systematic literature review was conducted among multiple disciplines. Critical appraisal of these data revealed that remorse is a multidimensional, complex concept comprised of cognitive, affective, psychological, and behavioral attributes. The commission of a harmful, wrongful act was identified as the antecedent to remorse. Findings suggested that there are both positive and negative consequences of remorse. Finally, implications for nursing were shared. The review of the literature presented in this chapter illustrates
the role remorse plays on the judgment of others on multiple variables. However, what it
does not convey is how adolescent offenders experience remorse.
CHAPTER 3
METHODOLOGY

Chapter three presents the research methodology selected for this study which seeks to understand the meaning of the lived experience of remorse among male, adolescent offenders. This chapter includes a discussion of methodology selection, phenomenology, a historical overview of phenomenology, the design, and supportive rationale for its selection as an appropriate method to guide this inquiry. The setting, sample selection, protection of human rights, research procedure, data collection, data management, and data analysis are also included.

Methodology Selection

Since little is known about the experience of remorse among youthful offenders, a qualitative approach to inquiry is the preferred method of gaining an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon from those who experience it firsthand. Qualitative method, a naturalistic tradition, emphasizes understanding of the human experience as it is lived, which cannot be captured via quantitative inquiry since psychological phenomena cannot easily be measured with the accuracy and precision inherent in this method (Polit & Beck, 2010). One of the criticisms of the qualitative method involves a reliance on subjectivity since data is based on the personal experiences of participants. However, since little is known about the experiences of remorse, it makes sense to seek knowledge directly from those who have experienced the phenomenon first hand. Methodological congruence is of the utmost importance to validity and credibility, and errors in the selection of the most appropriate method are at risk of yielding less than meaningful results (Morse & Richards, 2002).
Phenomenology

The selection of an appropriate methodology is driven by the research question, and there must be congruence among the research question, design, and analysis of data (Morse & Richards, 2002). Phenomenology is a qualitative approach to inquiry that stems from philosophy and seeks to understand the meaning of human lived experiences regarding a particular phenomenon (Creswell, 1998; van Manen, 1997). Through actual descriptions by those who experience the phenomenon firsthand, researchers gain insight and a deeper understanding of the essence or meaning of the phenomenon under study.

There are two primary assumptions associated with phenomenology. The first assumption is that one’s perception provides evidence of the world as it is lived, not what is it thought to be. Therefore, the human experience as lived is foundational to phenomenology. The second assumption acknowledges human existence as meaningful and an ongoing sense of consciousness. This existence is known as being in the world; meaning, human beings exist within their own worlds, and it is only within that world that individuals are understood (Morse & Richards, 2002).

A descriptive phenomenological approach to inquiry often begins with bracketing. Bracketing involves the reflection and documentation of assumptions, previous knowledge of the phenomenon, and expectations by the researcher in order to begin the study with an objective as possible open mind, in an attempt to avoid undue influence on the data (Creswell, 1998; Morse & Richards, 2002; van Manen, 1997). Data is generated through in-depth interviews with a select population, which are transcribed verbatim, and carefully analyzed. Each transcription (or protocol) is reviewed to gain a general sense of the shared experience and to ensure accuracy. During analysis the researcher extracts
significant statements, categorizes them into meanings, and then formulates cluster themes, which are then used to develop an exhaustive description of the lived experience.

**Phenomenology: Historical Overview**

Phenomenology as a philosophy and method of inquiry began based on the philosophical views of Descartes, Kant, and Hegel (Hesook & Kollack, 1999). Although many philosophers contributed to the phenomenology evolution, historical overviews emphasize the work of Husserl, Heidegger, and Merleau-Ponty.

Husserl (1859-1938) receives credit for initiating the phenomenological movement in the late nineteenth century. The major principles of Husserlian phenomenology are based on his words, “To the things themselves.” This notion refers to phenomena or things as acts of consciousness (Hesook & Kollack, 1999). Husserl, originally a mathematician, rejected the positivist paradigm and believed that truth could also be discovered through the subjective human experience.

Husserl’s three major themes include the theory of intentionality, essences (*eidos*), and phenomenological reduction (Hesook & Kollack, 1999). His theory of intentionality, expanding on Brentano’s earlier work (Cohen, 1987), focuses on how things are constituted in what he refers to as the “life-world” (*lebenswelt*). The “life-world” in this sense means human day to day experiences that are too often taken for granted, yet they exist through human subjectivity and consciousness. Human experiences are intentional and if brought to consciousness, the meaning or “essence” of the experience can be discovered.

Phenomenological reduction, an act of consciousness, is also known in modern terms as bracketing. Bracketing involves the reflection and documentation of
assumptions, previous knowledge of a phenomenon, and expectations by the researcher in order to approach the shared experience with a clear and open mind (Creswell, 1998; Morse & Richards, 2002; van Manen, 1997). Eidetic reduction refers to the ability to capture and understand the true essences of phenomena through the use of intuition. Husserl also emphasized the concept of *epoche*, which relates to phenomenological and eidetic reduction, and means the suspension of all judgment. The use of *epoche* facilitates descriptive neutrality and the adoption of a phenomenological attitude toward inquiry (Hesook & Kollack, 1999). Husserlian phenomenology is often referred to as transcendental phenomenology.

Heidegger’s (1889-1976) variation of phenomenology, known as existential phenomenology, focuses on the meaning of *Being* and is reflected by the concept of *Dasein* (being there or being-in-the-world) (1962/1927). Unlike Husserl, Heidegger’s primary concern lies with the meaning of existence as opposed to the meaning of experience (Hesook & Kollack, 1999). Heidegger did not support Husserl’s transcendental consciousness or phenomenological reduction. He believed that reduction was a nearly impossible task, and attempts to set aside all previous knowledge and experience of a phenomenon only served as a barrier to further understanding. Heidegger utilized interpretation as a method of understanding the meaning of *Being*, the being of entities. According to Munhall (1994) *Dasein* “is ontologically related to the entities by an attitude of care” (p. 44) and “Research thus becomes a caring act, or an act of caring to know what it is like ‘to be’ in the world” (p. 44). Heidegger also introduced the concept of temporality, which refers to time: present, past, and future.
Merleau-Ponty (1906-1961), a French Phenomenologist, also rejected Husserl’s principles of transcendental consciousness and phenomenological reduction, but acknowledged that humans are always conscious of something (1964/1948). Merleau-Ponty focused on perception as a means of acquiring knowledge and the lived experience. He alleged that humans experience their worlds through embodiment. Through consciousness, humans see, hear, feel, touch, think, sense and judge through their own bodies, and it is these bodily experiences within a situated context that allow access to our worlds (Munhall, 1994; Hesook & Kollack, 1999).

Nursing research has been strongly influenced by the work of Husserl, Heidegger, and Merleau-Ponty as well as other phenomenologists. Patterson and Zderad (1976) introduced the idea of phenomenology to nursing in Humanistic Nursing, and, Parse (1981) proposed the Man-Living-Health theory, which was eventually changed to the Human Becoming Theory in 1992. Since this introduction of phenomenology to nursing, nurses have utilized a variety of distinct phenomenological approaches to discover what it means to be human. Many of the nursing concepts such as humanism, open system approach, and the holistic view of individuals as unique and self-determined beings support the congruence of phenomenology and the world-view of nursing science (Munhall, 1994).

**Research Design**

According to Munhall, (1994) “the structural concept of phenomenology is the study of lived experience,” (p. xv) and the study “of human beings experiencing something or being something” (p. xv). Since the research question for this particular study is, “What is the lived experience of remorse among African American and
European American male, adolescent offenders,” a qualitative, descriptive phenomenological approach to inquiry was the most appropriate fit to answer this research question.

**Protection of Human Rights**

Approval for this study was obtained from the Institutional Review Boards (IRB) at the University of Hawaii at Manoa and a rural Southwestern University, which was affiliated with the daily operation of five Residential Treatment Programs (RTPs) in which the adolescents resided. The University operates the RTPs via a contractual agreement with the State Office of Juvenile Affairs (OJA). Written permission from the Administrative Official who is in charge of the Residential Treatment Programs (RTP) was also obtained to access the facility. There were no conflicts of interest present. The Office of Juvenile Affairs must obtain legal custody of each adolescent before the youth can be admitted to any of the residential programs; however, legal custody of the adolescent is shared between OJA and the parent or legal guardian. Informed consent was obtained from the parent or legal guardian as recommended by the IRBs. The consent and assent forms are located in Appendices B and C respectively.

Informed assent was obtained directly from youth since all participants were either 16 or 17-years-old. Each youth signed the assent form prior to participation (data collection) in the study. The following information was shared verbally and in writing with each participant and parent or legal guardian, and it was also included in the letter of request for access to the facility: 1) the purpose of the study; 2) participation is strictly voluntary; 3) participation would have no bearing on the adolescents’ current legal status; 4) participants may withdraw from participation in the study at any time without penalty;
5) two recorded interviews will be transcribed by hired transcriptionists and confidentiality will be maintained; 6) audio-tapes and transcripts will be stored using a double-lock system in accordance with university policy; 7) a statement of possible benefits and risks related to participation; and 8) the availability of counselor assistance if requested. Permission to access the participants’ records was also included in the consent and assent forms to obtain demographic data. The demographic form is located in Appendix D.

Names were not used during the interviews in most instances. If a name was disclosed inadvertently during the interview, it was deleted during transcription. Each transcription contained a number assigned by the researcher for coding purposes to protect the participant’s identity. After the recorded interviews were transcribed, the transcriptionists no longer had access to the recordings, transcriptions, or computer files as they were returned to the researcher. Two, hired transcriptionists were required to complete a web-based certification in The Protection of Human Research Participants before transcribing any of the recorded interviews to ensure an understanding of the sensitive nature of research and the importance of confidentiality. A printed copy of the certificate was obtained for verification. The coded list of participants, audio-recordings, computer files, and transcripts were stored in a locked cabinet within a locked office, and only the researcher had access to the information. The audio recordings were destroyed after the researcher listened to them multiple times to get a feeling and sense from them and after proof-reading each transcription for accuracy. Confidential data remained doubled locked in storage and will remain secured until they can be destroyed according to the rural University’s IRB protocol.
There were several potential benefits for participants in this study and these benefits were included in the consent and assent forms. They were also shared verbally with the parent or guardian and participants. It is well documented that talking is therapeutic, and providing the opportunity to express or vent one’s thoughts, feelings, concerns, fears, etc., is a common nursing intervention; participation in the interviews could provide this opportunity (Munhall, 1994). Munhall also noted that receiving attention and being central to and worthy of study are generally perceived as positive experiences. As such, a validating effect may occur.

Participation in this study involved a low risk of harm to participants. However, in the event that participants felt any distress or needed to talk about thoughts, feelings, or concerns at any point during the study, they were provided access to one of two Licensed Professional Counselors employed fulltime at each facility. Participants had the right to withdraw from the study at any point, and access the services of these counselors throughout their seven month stay in the RTP. None of the participants experienced harm during the study and did not need to seek the services of Counselors.

All of the youthful offenders at the utilized RTPs were rewarded with a pizza party (pizza and soda) upon completion of data collection. Those who were actual participants received an individual pizza with their choice of toppings. A variety of pizzas and toppings were provided to those who did not participate in the study in an effort to help them feel somewhat included in the process.

**Setting**

Three Residential Treatment Programs (RTPs) located in a rural Southwestern state served as the setting for this study. These RTPs were three of five RTPs operated by
a rural University in conjunction with the State Department of the Office of Juvenile Affairs. Recruitment began in one RTP and expanded to two other RTPs. The adolescents who resided in these facilities were referred to as “residents.” The first RTP was located approximately 12 miles from the closest rural community of 12,000 residents, and 85 miles from the nearest metropolitan area of 552,000 residents. The facility contained 12,000 square feet of living space and was surrounded by 60 acres of rather isolated, yet scenic, countryside.

All three of the university-run RTPs were categorized as Level E Residential Treatment Programs, each with a bed capacity of approximately 16, and a total combined capacity of 48 residents. The designated Level E status means that it is a less restrictive environment compared to other facilities. The first RTP contained a large dining area, a small kitchen, and two large dormitory-type bedrooms; each bedroom accommodated eight residents. It also contained two large bathrooms with multiple showers, sinks and toilets; a laundry room; a large classroom; a spacious career center (vocational/technology center); multiple staff offices; and a large conference room. There was a covered, cement patio and basketball court, built by the residents and staff that overlooked 60 acres of rolling hills and farms. The second RTP was also located in a rural area with similar amenities although it had a separate trailer as a classroom. The third RTP was located in a southwest city of approximately 92,000 residents. This RTP consisted of a converted two story house and one additional separate living quarter located near the downtown area. A building one block away was used for administrative, therapy, and school purposes. The second and third RTPs mainly differed from the first in
that youth ages ranged from 15 to 18 years-old and they did not have a vocational or technology center.

The RTPs provided a number of services and opportunities to the residents within a very structured program. Most of the residents had not obtained a high school diploma so they were required to attend school for 5 hours per day to work on preparation for the GED. A certified public school teacher worked full-time and developed individual educational plans based on the residents’ current academic level. Many of the residents obtained a GED prior to discharge. Some of the residents also had the opportunity to learn a trade. The first RTP employed a full-time vocational instructor who trained the youth in skilled labor jobs including various types of construction and masonry. Due to the presence of this career program, residents had to be at least 16 years-old for admission to this particular RTP.

Physical activities comprised a large portion of the program. Since the university had a variety of resources, residents participated in an array of physical activities including a ropes course, rappelling, canoeing, swimming, and scuba diving classes as well as standard sports activities such as football, soccer, and baseball. Many of the activities took place at the RTP while others occurred in the community setting. Staff supervised all activities.

The facilities also provided mental health services. Residents attended one, one-hour individual psychotherapy session and three, one-hour group therapy sessions each week with a Master’s prepared Licensed Professional Counselor. Family therapy sessions were encouraged on a monthly basis; however, consistency of sessions varied due to transportation constraints, financial issues, or other unknown reasons. The majority of the
youths’ homes were great distances away from the facility, which limited family participation in treatment and visitation. However, the residents communicated with family via telephone and letters. Each youth participated weekly in an Interdisciplinary Treatment Team meeting to discuss progress and evaluate goal achievement. The staff was very positive and supportive of the youth.

The youth represented a diverse population although the ethnic make-up changed regularly due to sporadic discharges and admissions. The ethnicity of residents at the time of the proposal included European Americans (35%), African Americans (35%), Hispanics (15%), Native Americans (5%), and unspecified mixed ethnicity (10%).

Admission to the RTP usually occurred after an extensive stay in a more restrictive environment (medium or maximum security facility), but a small percentage were admitted directly from the community if they continued to reoffend under community supervision provided by the Office of Juvenile Affairs. The majority of youth had been arrested for multiple crimes, belonged to the lower socio-economic level, and met the criteria for at least one mental health diagnosis based on the DSM-IV R (1994). Some of the more common mental health disorders included Conduct Disorder, Oppositional Defiant Disorder, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, Major Depression, and Generalized Anxiety Disorder. Adolescents diagnosed with a psychotic disorder were not admitted to the RTPs. Up to approximately one-third of the youth took prescribed psychotropic medication. However, since it was unlikely that medicine would interfere with the youths’ ability to respond to remorse questions as the youth functioned appropriately in school, therapy, and all activities. Therefore, youth who took prescribed medications, were not excluded from the study.
Sample

The sample consisted of 13 male, adolescent offenders. Fifty-four percent of the sample was African American and 46% was European American. Participants were either 16 (54%) or 17 years of age (46%). Forty-four percent functioned below the expected grade level. The majority of the sample did not have any previous work experience prior to placement (62%). Those who were previously employed worked in lawn care (15%) or fast food services (23%).

The average age of the first arrest was 12 years-old, and the average number of arrests was six. The vast majority of offences were misdemeanors. The most frequent types of offences included Assault and Battery (38%), Destruction of Property (31%), Public Intoxication (31%), Possession of a Controlled Dangerous Substance (CDS) with Intent to Distribute (23%), Petit Larceny (23%), Possession of Marijuana (23%), Larceny from a Person (23%), Unauthorized use of a Motor Vehicle (23%), and Escape from an Officer (23%). A few had more serious charges of Shooting with Intent to Injure (7%), Pointing a Firearm at Another (15%), and Arson I (7%). Ninety-two percent committed offences with others as opposed to committing them alone.

All of the participants had at least one psychiatric diagnosis. Seventy-seven percent had three to six psychiatric diagnoses on Axis I. The most common diagnosis was Conduct Disorder, Adolescent Onset (77%) followed by Oppositional Defiant Disorder (46%), Cannabis Abuse (46%), Major Depression (23%), Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (23%), and Alcohol Abuse (23%). A total of 17 psychiatric diagnoses were distributed amongst the 13 participants. Two participants took prescribed antidepressants (15%), which did not interfere with their ability to function within the RTP. No other
current medications were documented except for asthma related medications. The majority of the sample did not have a documented history of trauma (85%), which included any type of severe physiological injury or physical, psychological, or sexual abuse. Seven percent of the sample had a history of a head injury, sexual abuse, or unsubstantiated neglect. Fifteen percent of the sample was diagnosed with Asthma. A history of alcohol and substance abuse was prevalent in 92% of the sample. Partial demographic data is provided in Table 2.

Table 2

Demographic Data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Demographic Data</th>
<th>Percentage of Sample</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16 years-old</td>
<td>54%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17 years-old</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td>54%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>European American</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Most Frequent Type of Offence:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assault and Battery</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Destruction of Property</td>
<td>31%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Public Intoxication</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Possession of a CDS with Intent to Distribute</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Petit Larceny</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Possession of Marijuana</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Larceny from a Person</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unauthorized use of a Motor Vehicle</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Escape From an Officer</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Most Common Psychiatric Diagnoses:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conduct Disorder, Adolescent Onset</td>
<td>77%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oppositional Defiant Disorder</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cannabis Abuse</td>
<td>46%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Major Depression</td>
<td>23%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alcohol Abuse</td>
<td>23%</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Family structure varied. Fifty-four percent of the sample resided in a single parent home. Of the 54% of single parent homes, 46% had a female head of household, and (7%) had a male head of household. Twenty-three percent of the sample lived in a blended family structure, 15% was comprised of a nuclear family, and 7% lived either with a guardian or in a community home prior to placement. Seventy-seven percent of the mothers were employed while 62% of fathers were unemployed. Fifteen percent of fathers were currently incarcerated. Fifty-four percent of the sample had no parent or guardian history of alcohol or substance abuse, mental illness, or arrests. Of the remaining portion of the sample, 50% had at least 1 parent with a history of alcohol or substance abuse, 33% had a parent with a mental illness, and 67% had a parent with a history of arrests.

Sample Selection

The method of sampling was purposive and criterion based. Inclusion criteria consisted of male, African American and/or European American, 16-18 years-old, adjudicated or youthful offenders who stated that they had experienced remorse in the context of their crimes, and were currently undergoing rehabilitative treatment at one of the University affiliated Level E Residential Treatment Centers. The youth had to be able to speak the English language, be willing to talk about their experiences of remorse in the context of their crimes, and agree to participate in two, audio-taped interviews. Ethnicity was limited to these two particular groups as they consistently comprise the majority of youth at the primary facility. Since older adolescents were more likely to possess the cognitive ability to articulate their experiences, youthful offenders under the age of 16 were excluded. Since qualitative research does not possess a standard, agreed upon rule
for sample size, the number of participants was based on informational needs and the principle of data saturation as a guide to sampling (Morse, 2000b; Morse & Richards, 2002; Munhall, 1984). The principle of data saturation is used frequently in nursing research and it refers to reaching a point where no new information is obtained from the interviews, thus, redundancy occurs (Polit & Beck, 2010).

**Data Collection**

**Participant Recruitment**

The researcher met with RTP staff to inform them of the study, its purpose and procedure, and the inclusion/exclusion criteria. A separate meeting was held with two of the three Directors to discuss the study; communication with the third Director was through email. The researcher also met with Counselors and one Case Manager for participant recruitment. The counselors worked very closely with the youth in individual, family, and group psychotherapy, and they knew the youth very well through these therapeutic interactions. The Director and counselors also engaged in weekly interdisciplinary team meetings and acted as liaisons between the youths’ case workers and the courts. Therefore, these staff members were very helpful as key informants for participant recruitment. Based on the Counselors’ perceptions of remorse, familiarity with the youth, and a summarized description of remorse based on the literature review and concept analysis, recommendations were sought from the Counselors as to which youth met the criteria for the study and would be appropriate to screen for participation.

After receiving the staffs’ recommendations, the Counselor introduced the researcher to the youth individually. A brief, individual interview (20-30 minutes) was held with each youth to ask if the youth had experienced remorse (yes or no) regarding
his crime(s) and to establish rapport. If the youth responded that he had not experienced remorse, then he did not meet the inclusionary criteria and was not included in the study. If the youth reported that he had experienced remorse, then a description of the purpose of the study, method of data collection, audio-recording format, explanation of its voluntary nature, and inquiry as to the youth’s interest in participation, etc., followed.

The researcher screened a total of 18 adolescents and 13 participated in the study. Of the 5 screened adolescents who did not participate, one stated he did not feel remorse for his crimes, and therefore, did not meet the eligibility criteria. Another did not meet the criteria since he stated although he felt remorse for his crimes, he did not feel comfortable discussing criminal activity with the researcher. The parents of the remaining three participants agreed to give written consent; however, one parent changed her mind and the other two parents did not return the signed consents after multiple follow up communications with them.

If the youth was willing to participate, informed consent was obtained from the parent or legal guardian first. The researcher contacted the parent by phone to explain the study, purpose, procedure, etc. and to ask if they would be will to give written permission to allow the adolescent to participate. The researcher mailed two consent forms to the parents, one to sign and return, and one to keep as a personal copy. An addressed, stamped envelope was included so parents did not have to incur any expense. The majority of signed consent forms were received within two weeks. Two of the written consents were obtained from a parent on site.

The researcher obtained assent prior to the first interview after written consent was obtained from a parent or legal guardian. Demographic data was obtained from the
record after completion of the second interview. The length of each in-depth interview session was expected to range from approximately 1-1½ hours or according to the tolerance level of each participant. If the youth wanted to continue with the dialogue beyond that time-frame, he will be allowed to continue. A second 1-1½ hour, in-depth interview session was scheduled at the end of the first interview and took place within two weeks of the first interview. Therefore, the expected total contact time with each participant was estimated at four hours, divided into 4 separate meetings (20-30 minute recruitment interview; 1-1½ hour in-depth interview session #1; 1-1½ hour in-depth interview session #2; and a 20-30 minute interview to obtain feedback on study findings.

The actual length of interviews varied from the proposed time frames. The length of the first interview ranged from 30 to 69 minutes with an average of 47 minutes. The length of the second interview ranged from 23 to 107 minutes and averaged 38 minutes. Interviews were conducted for approximately 3 months until saturation occurred. The researcher met individually with participants for 15-20 minutes to validate findings upon completion of data analysis. Unfortunately, only five participants remained in placement at that time to validate findings. The researcher shared a summary of the study findings and requested feedback as to if the findings reflected their experiences of remorse.

**Data Collection Procedure**

In-depth interviews were held at the RTPs in a conference room or a private office and each interview was audio-recorded. Two audio recorders were activated concurrently during each interview to ensure recording of data should one of the recorders malfunction. The rooms contained a window that allowed the staff to view the researcher and participant for safety reasons, yet allowed for privacy at the same time. Data
collection consisted of semi-structured questions. The data generating questions were based on the Human Ecological Perspective (Bronfenbrenner, 1977) and included:

1. How would you define remorse?
2. What is it like to experience remorse related to one or more of your crimes?
3. What kinds of thoughts go through your mind when you experience remorse?
4. What kinds of feelings occur when you experience remorse?
5. What do you do when you are experiencing remorse?
6. How does your experience of remorse affect your relationship with family?
7. How does your experience of remorse affect your relationship with friends?
8. If there is a special person in your life, such as a girlfriend, how does your experience of remorse affect your relationship with her or him?
9. How does your experience of remorse affect your relationship with people at school (students, teachers, school officials)?
10. How does your experience of remorse affect your relationship with people in the town where you live?
11. How does your experience of remorse relate to the victim(s) of the crime?
12. How does remorse affect the decisions you make?

Succeeding questions were determined based on initial responses, and expansion questions such as, “Tell me more about that,” or “Could you give an example?” were asked to encourage elaboration and clarify responses. Brief procedural information was read to each participant prior to the start of the first interview (See Appendix D). Data obtained from the participant’s record was used to describe the sample in aggregate form (See Appendix E). Bracketing was used by the researcher as much as possible during data
collection as an effort to prevent researcher bias. Field notes were taken by the researcher after each interview. Field notes include documentation of observed non-verbal behavior such as tone of voice, pauses, changes in affect as well as the researcher’s thoughts and reflections. An audit trail was used as a means of improving validity and reliability (Richards, 2005).

**Data Management**

Two, hired transcriptionists transcribed the audio-taped interviews. Communication between the transcriptionists and researcher occurred in person, by telephone, or through email. Upon completion of each interview, the audio recordings were given to the transcriptionist to transcribe verbatim on computer, and save on a removable disk. The transcriptionists were instructed to type the interviews in the participant’s original phonetic. This decision was made so the reader could experience the interaction in the most real sense. To provide confidentiality, participant names were not included on the transcripts. Transcripts were coded by number to protect the identity of the participants, and only the researcher had access to the coding system.

Upon completion of the transcription in electronic form, the researcher met with the transcriptionists to copy the electronic file to the researcher’s removable disk and back-up disk. The original file was deleted from the transcriptionist’s removable disk. The researcher read each transcript and then reviewed it directly from the removable disk for accuracy while playing the recording. Any inaccuracies were corrected at that time. The document file was copied to the researcher’s removable disk, two back-up files were created, and two hard copies of the transcript were printed after proofed. Observations and researcher reflections were after the interviews as field notes in a notebook. Entries
included the date, the coded number assigned to the participant, and documentation of observations related to verbal and nonverbal communication. This process was repeated after the completion of each interview and until data saturation was achieved.

Data Analysis

Colaizzi’s (1978) phenomenological approach has been utilized in nursing research and was selected as the approach to guide this study. This approach has been generally referred to as descriptive phenomenology; however, Mulhall (1994) suggests that “all experiences are interpreted even if it is called descriptive” (p. 206). She supported this view by adding that humans continuously interpret reality due to one’s active unconscious. Therefore, interpretation is an on-going process.

Colaizzi’s approach consists of seven steps for descriptive purposes, yet it is non-linear in nature. Data analysis was on-going throughout the research process over a 3 month time frame. The analysis was conducted by hand by the researcher without the use of a software program. A description of the analysis based on Colaizzi’s method follows:

1. Read protocol (participant’s descriptions contained in the transcript) to acquire a feeling or general sense for them.

   The researcher listened to each audio recording 3 times and read each protocol (transcript) in order a total of four times to obtain a feeling or sense for them. Recordings were of good quality and easily heard for the most part. At times portions of the recordings had to be replayed to ensure understanding of its contents due to the unique language spoken by participants.

2. After obtaining a feeling or general sense for the protocols, review each protocol again and extract significant statements.
After obtaining a general sense for the protocols the researcher re-read each protocol and began the task of extracting significant statements. The protocols from the first and second interview for each participant were examined in sequential order. Significant statements consisted of a phrase, sentence, or multiple sentences that directly related to remorse. These statements were highlighted with a marker to distinguish them from the remaining text. Repetitious statements were eliminated. This procedure continued until all significant statements were extracted. The extracted statements were typed into a table, assigned a number, and coded to reflect which participant made the statement as part of the audit trail. The significant statements were reviewed again, and remaining redundant statements were removed from the table.

3. Formulate meanings of each significant statement.

The researcher then engaged in what Colaizzi referred to as “creative insight” (1978, p. 59). This component of the analysis consisted of going beyond what the participant said to arrive at what the participant meant in the statements. Contextual and horizontal meanings accompany the protocols, but are not obvious. Therefore, the research must seek out and discover hidden meanings within the statement. The formulated meanings were added to the table adjacent to its related significant statement. Caution was taken to ensure formulated meanings remained connected to the original protocols.

4. Organize or compile the formulated meanings into theme clusters. Compare clusters to the original protocols as a means of validation. Observe for any incongruence between or among clusters and pay attention to data that do not appear to fit.
The formulated meanings were cut from a hard copy of the table in order to compile them into theme clusters. Like or related formulated meanings were clustered and the researcher was attentive to emerging themes. The use of cuttings of this size was not conducive to the analysis. The small print was difficult to see and it impeded the analysis. As an alternative, the formulated themes were handwritten on 2 x 3 inch cards and then compiled into theme clusters. The clusters of themes were compared to the original protocols and validated. Validation was determined by analyzing the clusters of themes to see if anything existed in the original protocols that were not represented in the cluster of themes, and if the clusters suggested anything that was not implied in the original protocols. Colaizzi noted that discrepancies might be observed among or between clusters and some clusters may contradict others. This was not observed during the analysis. Some overlap existed among theme clusters, which was not uncommon given the nature of human phenomena (Colaizzi, 1978). The clusters of themes were added to the working table for continued organization of findings and to reflect the steps or procedures involved in the analysis.

5. Synthesize results into a thorough description of the phenomenon of remorse

At this point in the analysis, the researcher synthesized the findings into a thorough description of remorse as experienced in the context of adolescent offenders. The synthesis of findings was challenging as the data represented eight theme clusters and 18 themes.

6. Develop an exhaustive description of the phenomenon (remorse) as statements of identification.
An exhaustive description of remorse in the context of the experiences of adolescent offenders was developed. This description should illustrate a clear, unambiguous description of the fundamental structure of the remorse experience.

7. Return to the participants to share findings as a means of validation.

The exhaustive description of remorse was presented to participants as the final step of validation. However, due to the time intensity of the analysis, validation of findings was limited to the five participants who still remained in treatment. A 15 to 20 minute meeting was held with each participant individually to validate findings. The participant read the exhaustive description and then provided feedback. The participants were asked to respond to two questions as suggested by Colaizzi (1978, p. 62). They were asked ‘how do my descriptive results compare with your experiences?’ and what aspects of your experiences have I omitted? Feedback from participants was positive. One participant stated, “it’s me…it’s all me” and another stated, “This is exactly what I was trying to tell you in the interviews. You just said it better.” All participants believed that the results indicated a true, accurate, and thorough description of their experiences. None of them could think of anything that was omitted in the description.

Peer-debriefing, (Holloway & Wheeler, 2002) was used to safeguard against researcher bias, and thus, enhance validity. Peer-debriefing is designed to identify bias or inappropriate subjectivity, offer alternative explanations of interpretation, and to ensure that data substantiates the interpretations. If alternative conclusions are reached during the review, the researcher will return to the data for further examination and reflection.

Peer debriefing involved asking a member of the dissertation committee experienced in qualitative methods to review the identified clusters of themes and themes
that emerged through data analysis. Dr. Dana Davidson agreed to assist with validation of study findings. Dr. Davidson is an expert as evidenced by 40 years of experience in qualitative study. The researcher provided her with electronic files that included the 26 combined protocols (interviews); a text file of the cluster of themes and themes; a text file that included clusters of themes, themes, and their related formulated meanings; and the comprehensive table as part of the audit trail.

Dr. Davidson’s role far exceeded peer-debriefing. A separate, blind analysis was conducted and a discussion of the analysis and findings was held via telephone. Theme clusters and themes were supported in the analysis and codings were evaluated as strong and reliable. There was a slight difference in the arrangement of theme clusters and the labels of two theme clusters; however, all theme clusters and themes were reflected in the data. Differences in findings were discussed. As a result some changes were made after returning to the data for re-examination. For example, the theme cluster, Coping Strategies, originally contained two themes, positive and negative strategies, and the theme of Friends was added as a separate theme in the Repairing Relationships theme cluster after the discussion and re-examination of the data. Overall, study findings were supported and comparable. The analysis and findings were also reviewed by the Committee Chair, Dr. Kataoka-Yahiro who concurred with Dr. Davidson and the researcher.

**Ensuring Rigor**

An on-going debate continues among nurse researchers regarding rigor in qualitative inquiry. Researchers agree that rigor is a necessary component that enhances consistency and quality of qualitative study, and provides a framework that ensures
credibility and integrity throughout the research process (McBrien, 2008). However, there is much disagreement as to the appropriateness of the use of rigor and validity as standards for evaluating the quality of nursing research. For example, Lincoln and Guba (1985) rejected the use of rigor and validity because the terms reflect the positivist paradigm, which they viewed as inappropriate for naturalistic inquiry. They offered an alternative approach to evaluation through standards that address trustworthiness, which mirrors the criteria of reliability and validity. Other nurse researchers support rigor and validity as appropriate terms for qualitative research (Morse & Richards, 2002; Munhall, 1994; Whittemore, Chase, & Mandel, 2001). Due to this controversial debate, there is no standard, agreed upon quality criteria or terminology for evaluating qualitative research in nursing, and dozens, perhaps hundreds, of terms have been recommended (Polit & Beck, 2010). Since one method of evaluation is not preferred over another, Burns (1989) criteria for evaluating qualitative research was selected as the criteria for use in this study. Burn’s choice of terminology is often used in qualitative nursing research texts and reference books.

Burn’s (1989) evaluation criteria include a) descriptive vividness; b) methodological congruence; c) analytic preciseness; d) theoretical connectedness; and e) heuristic relevance. Each standard will be addressed individually as it relates to this study.

**Descriptive Vividness**

The descriptive vividness criterion was met by providing a thorough, detailed description of the participants, the setting, and the research decisions throughout the course of the study. An effort was made to provide rich descriptions that raised
consciousness and, hopefully, moved the reader to an understanding of remorse that had
not yet been considered. The use of phonetics in the significant statements provided depth
to participants’ responses. A high level of self-awareness and documentation of
nonverbal communication was maintained throughout the study.

**Methodological Congruence**

According to Burns (1989) methodological congruence entails four elements:

- Rigor in documentation; procedural rigor; ethical rigor; and auditability. Rigor in
documentation involves the written communication of each element of the study such as
the phenomenon under study, purpose, aim, and research question, significance of the
study, sampling, setting, ethical considerations, and procedures. These elements have
been documented in Chapters one and three.

- Procedural rigor ensures that the researcher has clearly identified the steps taken
during the data collection process and that data were accurately recorded, documented,
and shared. Procedural rigor began by selecting a method that was congruent with the
research question (phenomenology). Bracketing was used to avoid undue bias, promote
an inductive approach, and enhance reliability. This procedure allowed openness to the
participants’ descriptions without the influence of the researcher’s assumptions or prior
understanding of the concept of remorse. Prior to data collection, the researcher
documented personal assumptions, ideas, theories, and previously gained knowledge
regarding remorse in a journal and set it aside. The researcher returned to this writing
later in the study as knowledge must be documented in light of what is already known.
The participants had sufficient time to share in-depth descriptions and meanings of their
experiences. Two, in-depth interviews were conducted to establish rapport and obtain
thick, rich descriptions of the remorse experience. The use of two interviews proved beneficial as participants seemed more comfortable in the second interview and they tended to elaborate on responses from the first interview. All data were analyzed. The members of the dissertation committee also contributed to procedural rigor by pointing out any visible threats and recommending an alternate approach.

Ethical rigor was maintained by obtaining IRB approval from the University of Hawaii and the rural University. There were no conflicts of interest present throughout the study. Written informed consent was obtained from the youths’ parent or legal guardian, and assent was obtained from each youth since all participants were under the age of eighteen. Participants were informed of the purpose of the study, method of data collection, confidentiality, the voluntary nature of the study, the right to withdraw from the study, potential benefits and risks, and the availability of counseling services if requested. Since all data were analyzed, participants were cautioned about sharing secrets at the beginning of each interview (Munhall, 1994) and, should they arise during the interview, but this was not an issue during data collection. Participants were asked to keep the contents of the interviews confidential between them and the researcher, although adherence to this request could not be verified.

Auditability was achieved through documentation of the project history in the form of dated field notes. The researcher shared the development of cluster themes and explained the “how” and “why” behind their development to avoid threats to auditability with the Committee Chair and Expert Reviewer. Rationale for decisions made during the analysis was also documented and shared during discussions. Reflexivity is an important feature of auditability. Documentation of the investigator’s self-awareness, self-critique,
and self-appraisal continued throughout the research process. The act of self-monitoring acknowledges that the researcher’s decisions and actions may impact the meaning and context of the findings (Porter, 1993). Achieving auditability should lead the reader toward comparable conclusions.

**Analytical Preciseness**

Analytical preciseness was met by working inductively. This criterion emphasizes the need to document transformations that occurred during the analysis. To meet this element, the researcher asked analytical questions of the data, and thick, rich descriptions in the participant’s own language were documented to illustrate and support the emergence of theme clusters and themes. The clusters of themes were compared to the original data (protocols) for validation and inconsistencies were not identified. All data were analyzed and documented. Analysis involved a search for conflicting theme clusters and none were observed. In addition, peer-debriefing, (Holloway & Wheeler, 2002) was used to safeguard against researcher bias, and thus, enhance validity.

**Theoretical Connectedness**

The theoretical schema and its clear expression, logical soundness, reflective quality of the data, and compatibility with nursing knowledge form the basis of theoretical connectedness (Burns, 1989). This standard was met through the development of cluster themes that were clear, understandable, logical and reflective of the data. The participants’ language was used to guide the development of themes. Although nursing has not yet explored the concept of remorse, the researcher analyzed, compared, and contrasted the relationship of study findings to theories of adolescent development including cognitive, psychosocial, and moral development as well as development based
on the human ecological model. Findings were also compared and contrasted to the existing literature and concept analysis.

**Heuristic Relevance**

The final criterion developed by Burns (1989) is heuristic relevance, which includes three elements: intuitive recognition; the relationship to an existing body of knowledge; and applicability. There is some overlap between heuristic relevance and theoretical connectedness. Intuitive recognition was addressed by documenting the relevance of the lived experience of remorse among adolescent offenders to nursing practice. As in theoretical connectedness, the results were compared and linked to existing adolescent developmental theories commonly used in nursing and the concept analysis. Applicability was met by documenting how the findings related to nursing future nursing research, nursing practice, and policy change.

**Summary**

Phenomenology as the appropriate method of inquiry and its historical overview were provided, as was a vivid description of the setting and the comprehensive services provided to adolescent offenders who resided in the RTPs. A descriptive phenomenological approach to inquiry guided this qualitative study that aimed to understand the experiences of remorse among youthful offenders. In-depth, semi-structured interviews with African American and European American, 16-18 year-old, male offenders served as data. Field notes and an audit trail were included in the analysis. Consent and assent was obtained prior to participation and after IRB approval. Data analysis was on-going and guided by Colaizzi’s technique. The results of this inquiry should produce a greater understanding of the experience of remorse through thick, rich
descriptions as perceived through the lenses of youthful offenders. A description of strategies to ensure rigor was provided, which illustrated that steps to avoid threats to reliability and validity were included in the study design.
CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

Chapter four includes the results of data analysis. The results consist of Theme Clusters and Themes derived from aggregate formulated meanings during data analysis of the 26 protocols (interviews), two from each of the 13 participants. Eight theme clusters and 18 themes emerged. Theme clusters and themes are individually described in the following paragraphs; however, it should be noted that they did not occur as distinct experiences. Significant participant statements are included to clarify and support the meaning of themes. Table 1 and Appendix F contain theme clusters and themes.

Table 1
Clusters of Themes and Themes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme Clusters:</th>
<th>Themes:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Definition of Remorse</td>
<td>Characterizations of Remorse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Battling the Power of Remorse</td>
<td>Pervasive Thoughts</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Affective/Emotional Aspects</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Haunting Effects</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Repressing Remorse</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fighting Remorse Alone</td>
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<tr>
<td>Coping Strategies</td>
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<tr>
<td>Becoming Accountable</td>
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<tr>
<td>Searching For Identity</td>
<td>Will I be Judged?</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Evaluating the Self</td>
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<tr>
<td>Repairing Relationships</td>
<td>Family</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Victim(s)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Friends</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seeking Forgiveness</td>
<td>From Family/Others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Victim(s)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Oneself</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transforming Remorse</td>
<td>The Need to Apologize</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Alternate Means of Making Amends</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Hope for the Future</td>
</tr>
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</table>
Theme Cluster: Definition of Remorse

Each participant was asked to define remorse during the first interview; therefore, definition of remorse was selected as a theme. This theme cluster consists of participants’ definitions remorse and its associated theme, Characterizations of Remorse, which include descriptions of its occurrence, frequency, and experience as a process. Characterizations of Remorse was selected as a theme since these aspects provided additional information about the nature of remorse and promoted further understanding and enlightenment of remorse as experienced by adolescent offenders.

Remorse appears to be an on-going, complex, intermittently persistent process that occurs after committing a crime or doing something wrong that results in harm to one or more persons. Many participants found it difficult to define or explain, but most definitions included feelings of intense guilt and a strong desire to take back the incident, if it were possible. For example, one participant defined remorse as, “I look at remorse as like feelin’, feelin’ guilty. You know, it’s like feelin’ sad at somethin’ that you done and you know that you shouldn’t have did, and wish you could go back and change it.” Another participant described remorse in terms of its effects, Um, it’s, it’s something that makes you depressed when you think about it, so depressed that you don’t want to think about it, it kinda gets to you, and you feel worse.” Some participants described remorse as, “…feeling sorry for something that you did, regretful” or “feeling bad for somethin’ that you’ve done in the past…” while another emphasized forgiveness, “It means like to forgive somebody, or like I forgive them, or like they forgive me. It’s like I’m sorry for what I’ve done to them --that I didn’t mean to hurt ‘em.”
Most participants thought remorse occurred after doing something negative or harmful, but two participants stated that one can also experience remorse after committing a non-malicious act. For example,

…if somebody shot somebody for either good or bad, um, say even if it was like a cop, you know, or something and shot somebody…it, it would feel like it’d, it’d be on their mind for a long while, and they would feel bad about it and wish they hadn’t done it.

**Characterizations of Remorse**

Not all participants experienced remorse for all crimes, and remorse was not necessarily related to the severity of the crime as noted by one of the participants,

“Sometimes I feel sorry about some things, sometimes I won’t… hmm, I mean sometimes the worst things I do, I don’t have remorse for. Um…sometimes the less worse things, I do.”

Remorse appeared to be involuntary, intermittent, and often unpredictable. Participants described it as though its abrupt occurrence frequently caught them off guard and overpowered them.

It comes. It comes and then like, it comes, and I think about it. I get mad. Like, I get in the mood where I don’t want to talk to nobody, and I just want to be by myself–antisocial. And it just pushed me in…

Another stated, “Remorse is the type of thing that like, it just hits me. Like it’s sometimes, it could be just like random through the week. Sometimes it just don’t hit me.” Although remorse appeared to possess an unpredictable quality, many participants
reported it often disturbed them at night while trying to sleep. Others reported remorse occurred upon awakening, which often signaled a rough day ahead.

The frequency of remorse varied among participants, but most experienced it fairly often. A few experienced remorse randomly throughout the week. Some experienced it several times each day, some at least every day or night, and one participant reported, “It’s always there.”

Remorse appeared to have two phases. In the first phase, remorse was painfully intense and difficult to tolerate. As a result, they became masters of denial. Participants spent much time and energy fighting remorse and trying to push it away or bury it. Over time, most participants realized they could not fight remorse and win, nor could they undo their past actions. Thus, eventually, they surrendered to remorse. Although pain and suffering persisted well into the second phase, remorse became less intense and distressing, and it was a little easier to tolerate and manage. Once participants surrendered to remorse, they were more open to the experience. They acknowledged remorse, tried to understand it, and made an effort to learn from it.

**Theme Cluster: Battling the Power of Remorse**

Remorse involves pervasive thoughts about the crime and its effects on the self and others. These unwanted thoughts elicit a variety of affective responses such as feeling sorry, sadness, depression, and feeling anger toward themselves. Participants are troubled and haunted by remorse since the distressing thoughts, feelings, and memories recur at intervals, and are difficult to combat or push out of awareness. Although they can occasionally escape remorse, it is a temporary reprieve; the remorse always comes back. Most participants choose to endure this internal battle alone. Five themes emerged under
this cluster: Pervasive Thoughts, Affective/Emotional Aspects, Haunting Effects, Repressing Remorse, and Fighting Remorse Alone.

**Theme: Pervasive Thoughts**

Remorse involves unwanted, intrusive, repetitive thoughts about the crime and its effects on others and the self. These thoughts or questions often occur at random, but something one sees, hears, reads, etc., in the environment may trigger them as well. The question participants asked themselves most often was, “Why?” Why did they engage in the criminal behavior knowing it was wrong?

Um, the main one that I can think about is I’m always asking “why?” Like why I’d do something, or why I’d treat somebody like this or why I’d rob somebody. Its always “why?” that comes to my head right away. Um, because I didn’t, I mean, they’re for unnecessary reasons.

Participants struggled to figure out the reasons behind offending and they wondered what drove them to do such callous, senseless, or unnecessary acts since they did not think were not raised to act in such a manner. One participant stated, “I look back on it and be like you know, I’m better than that. I shouldn’t of did that. I could have went about it a different way.” Participants wished they had stopped to think before committing the crime so better decisions could have been made, thus, sparing the pain and heartache for everyone. They think about what their lives, and the lives of those affected by their actions might be like now, had they made better decisions.

Participants often wished they could take the crimes back, or somehow, undo what had been done. One participant related the strength of his desire to change the past: “…it’s like if I had…if, if it was one of those wishes, you know. It’s one of those deals if
you had one wish, I woulda took that [crime] back.” All of the participants knew it was impossible to change the past. Nonetheless, they could not stop themselves from trying to wish away the crimes and its effects. Most participants’ thoughts also focused on “if only” and what they “should have done” to avoid the criminal behavior.

When I first got locked up I was like, if only I woulda jump all the way over the fence without touchin’ it, I woulda never been caught, or if only I woulda told the smoker I wasn’t gonna sell her nothin’ for seven dollars, I woulda never been, uh, never woulda got caught. If only I woulda stuck with cuttin’ my grandpa grass like he told me to, I woulda never been in a predicament. You know? If only I listened to my mom when I was younger, my mom and my stepdad, you know? I probably woulda had a good outcome.

Many participants expressed disbelief about their actions as most did not think of themselves as bad people; they wondered how a good person could behave so badly. They thought about how others, mainly family members and victims, were hurt by their actions, and how sorry they continued to be for causing them pain, stress, shame or embarrassment. They wondered if it was possible to gain trust, respect, and forgiveness.

Many of the participants’ thoughts focused on the victim(s). They imagined what it must be like for the victim(s). Some wanted to know exactly how the victim suffered as a result of the crime:

I have thoughts about, uh, what I did to ‘em. How it affected them, like now. Like if it was causing them a lot of pain, trouble, things like that, or maybe things that I did didn’t affect them at all. But you never know, like when you treat someone a certain way, you don’t know how bad it could like affect that person.
All participants spoke of putting themselves in the victim’s shoes by asking themselves how it would feel to be treated in the same manner. Some often asked themselves if the victim deserved it, and they reminded themselves that they had no right to commit the crime, hurt others, or put others at risk. One participant, who robbed and assaulted a classmate, stated, “I wouldn’t want that to happen to me or have to go through that… I guess that’s the main thing that was going through my mind that he didn’t deserve what he got.” Another participant, who burglarized a family home, saw the impact of his behavior in a broader context.

And I just never really realized how hard people have to work for their money, and I just go and take it away like that and steal and break people’s… just destroy people’s things. And then really look at it like, you know, there is a family there. They have kids they have to, take care of. They have bills. They have car payments. They have everything they have to take care of. And I just don’t understand, well, back then, I didn’t understand it.

Many participants wondered about the victim’s thoughts and feelings toward them. Most of the participants thought about or wished they could apologize to the victim and be forgiven. Some rehearsed what they might say and imagined how the victim might respond. Some participants wished the victim would hurt them back to somehow, even things up, relieve the guilt, or cancel out the harm.

I really don’t… sometimes I hope and pray that they actually come and steal something from me, but most of the time I’d be at home, and nobody knows about anything. I’d feel better if they steal my stuff.

Participants experienced these pervasive thoughts most often while in placement.
(RTP and detention), and the time spent in detention was particularly disturbing. Some detention centers were more restrictive than others, but none of them provided structured activities or counseling. A few did provide self-directed education. So, other than watching television and interacting with other youth, there was little to do in detention.

It’s [detention] like a punishment. I don’t know. That makes you think about what you did, especially if you sit in there long enough ‘cuz you ain’t got nothing else to do but sit back and think, so probably that. And then you think about what you did, and if you didn’t never do it, you wouldn’t be in here. And then you get to, I don’t know, start feeling bad about it I guess… Feels like a long time…The two months in the detention about killed me.

Many participants questioned if and when they would ever be able to get passed the remorse. One participant questioned his own sanity due its persistence. For most participants, remorse was difficult to tolerate and its lingering presence disrupted their lives.

And when I think of remorse, I start to dwell, dwelling on the past, and it kinda, it hurts me a lot, and I feel sad over it. And I mean sometimes when I dwell, it, it, it affects my…the way my life’s goin’.

Some participants also thought about how devastating the consequences of their actions were not only to others, but to themselves. Some had frightening thoughts about retaliation due to their involvement with drug dealing, gangs, or more seasoned criminals. These thoughts were particularly intense, and, were therefore, categorized under haunting effects.
**Theme: Affective/Emotional Aspects**

Most participants referred to remorse as a feeling, an intense affective or emotional response to thoughts about the crime and its effects. The repetitive and intrusive thoughts triggered a host of negative, painful, distressing, and unwanted feelings, and remorse itself triggered other emotional responses such as fear, helplessness, and powerlessness. Guilt was generally felt first and most often; anger at oneself for committing the crime and hurting others was prevalent among all participants. Participants also felt bad, deep regret, sadness, sorrow, sorry, stress, depression, down, shame, embarrassment, and fear. A few felt foolish or humiliated while others felt “dumb” or “stupid.” Remorse elicited feelings of helplessness and powerless due to a perceived lack of personal control over the onset of remorse: “And you know, my mind just wanders like I’ll just start thinkin’ about it and then I’ll try to stop thinkin’ about it and the more I try to stop thinkin’ about, the more I think about it.” Not all participants experienced every emotion, but many felt a combination of emotions. Only one participant described feeling remorse at a physical level. This participant felt physical discomfort during a home invasion and other crimes, but it was not enough to deter the criminal behavior.

But, um, a way that I start feeling really guilty about things is I get knots in my stomach. Like uh, if it’s something that I know 100% that I shouldn’t be doin’, I just get a real tight knot in my stomach that basically is telling me just to leave, quit doing whatever I’m doin. Just forget all about it. But I have that knot in my stomach, but at the same time, I’m fighting it.
Participants were not asked directly if the affective responses can be seen by others or if genuine remorse can be distinguished from feigned remorse, but a few participants volunteered their perceptions and experiences about these aspects of remorse. For example, one participant stated, “I can tell when someone is remorseful and when they’re not. Just watch them.” When asked how he could tell if someone was remorseful, he stated,

‘Cuz they show a drive. Like, they show motivation to do what they got to do to get out, so they can go back to see their family. So, they don’t talk about how when they get out they’re gonna go sell drugs, they’re gonna go get drunk, they’re gonna go to a party or anything like that…Talkin’ about how they’re wanting to go to work. They’re not talkin’ about how they want to get out so they can go do the same things that that they did to get in here. And even then, you might not, they still might not be remorseful. They might get out and still do the same things they were doing.

Another participant was quite certain remorse could be observed:

I’ve had friends and stuff that’s done something wrong and you can tell they had remorse for it, you know, just by the look on their face, you know, and just by how they talked and by like by their actions that they, you know, did what they could to make up for it.

In contrast, a third participant did not believe remorse was at all obvious to the observer:

Will be like, you can’t always see it in people… They will try; a lot of people in this world will block out there feelings ‘cuz like… Especially, criminals ‘cuz they don’t want to be considered soft. Some people don’t really show their
remorse, can’t really… It’s invisible, you know like, a invisible feeling… You can see when someone is happy, sad, or angry. You can’t see when somebody is really remorseful.

The intense emotions associated with remorse were uncomfortable, distressing, burdensome, and taxing. It felt most intense when one was alone. The intensity of emotions associated with remorse seemed to increase and participants felt worse when the crime involved a victim they knew and liked, a vulnerable person such as an elderly person or child, or the victim reminded them of a special loved one.

As participants experienced remorse over time, they started to feel empathy toward the victim. One participant stated, “I’m trying to find the word, um, basically, I start caring more for all the victims I’ve done wrong.” For most participants, seeing or listening to the pain they caused others prompted and intensified remorse, especially if the others were close family members.

And pain ‘cuz you’ve gotta hear everyone else’s pain that you hurt. Whenever you talk to ‘em and they start cryin’ on the phone to you, you feel their pain. Even if you don’t feel any pain from what you did. You feel pain from what you did to them. And pain, when they come up here to visit you and when they’re leavin’, they start cryin’ and givin’ you a hug and tellin’ you how much they love you, and they can’t wait for you to come home.

The experience of remorse triggered fear among many participants. Some feared reoffending, some feared retaliation upon discharge, and some feared they may take the anger they feel toward themselves out on innocent others. Although many participants
believed they learned a great deal from their experiences of remorse, some still felt an intense fear of failure.

Um, fear. Fear that you’re gonna mess up when you get out and do the same thing that you already did, the reason that you got locked up. Fear that you’re gonna hurt your family all over again. Fear that all your work in here was for nothin’. That you just did it, and you’re just gonna get out and just do the same things.

Remorse was extremely painful and intense. Participants found it difficult to articulate the true level of distress that accompanied remorse. One participant described remorse as the worse possible form of punishment.

My selling drugs didn’t just affect me, it affected way more than me. Being locked up was the minimum of it. My probation was the minimum of it. Everything that they, all the consequences that they gave me, that the court gave me, was the minimum of the pain. That wasn’t anything compared to having to hear my grandma cry every time she talks to me or hearin’ my guardian, hearin’ the pain in her voice when she comes up here to visit me or when she comes up here for pass and tells me how much she misses me and wishes I was home. Nothing that they can do compares to that. No matter what they did to, no matter where they put me, no matter where they lock me up at -- none of that compares to that [pain of remorse].

**Theme: Haunting Effects**

The Haunting Effects of remorse consisted of negative, disturbing, unforgettable memories associated with the crime, family responses to the crime, and negative events
that might happen to them in the future that were triggered by remorse. The Haunting Effects elicited intense, affective responses. Most participants found remorse and its recurrence difficult to tolerate, and some participants perceived it as almost unbearable at times. Once remorse occurred, it took considerable effort and energy to free oneself from its grasp. At times, they temporarily subdued or denied it, but it inevitably returned to haunt them. In a sense, participants were held hostage by remorse; it was like being imprisoned within a prison.

A number of participants were haunted by memories of the crime, scenes from the crime, images of the victim(s), or family’s distraught reactions upon discovery of the youths’ involvement in criminal behavior. They remembered vivid details of the crime or arrest as though it was yesterday. A few relived the event and resultant remorse through dreams. Others replayed the voices and words of advice from others who tried to warn them of the devastating consequences of criminal activity, and they wished they had listened before it was too late. Seeing or remembering items from the crime also triggered memories of the crime and remorse. Remorse intruded upon them in this manner repeatedly while in placement. The participants’ non-verbal language supported the level of distress they experienced with these images. Some shook their heads, closed their eyes, or covered their eyes with their hands as if, somehow, they could jolt the images from their minds. One participant was haunted by recurring images of victims in his mind in the form of family photographs he saw during home invasions. He described his experiences as similar to flashbacks:

Like uh, for example, if I was to rob somebody’s house, as I’m in the house going through it, I see pictures of families and kids and stuff. And I kinda, at the
time I really try not to care cuz I’m just going through the house, but when I’m done, and I’m back at my house and everything’s all right, and I didn’t get caught or nothin’, I start thinking about, I start thinking back on the pictures I seen. And what the family’s gonna think when they come home.

Another participant spoke of his arrest by police officers in multiple vehicles for dealing drugs in which multiple family members showed up at the scene to witness his arrest.

I thought my life was over right there before my eyes…Then I sat there and then my momma pulled up, and I was just watchin’ my brothers over there and then my momma over here and my little brother and sister in the back seat, and my grandma with my momma. And it just you know --I always replay…I always replay that whole awful seen in my head…I could just see it in her [momma’s] eyes you know, that she wanted to break down and start cryin’ but she stayed strong.

Remorse elicited fear among many participants. Some feared the intensity of remorse would consume, devour, or destroy them, or prompt them to lose total control. A few feared or thought about suicide. One participant attempted suicide prior to placement because he felt he let the effects of remorse get to him. Another spoke of his fear of what might happen if he allowed remorse to control him.

Because like feeling guilty to me, it’s like feeling guilty, it’s like you constantly think somethin’, and you know you can’t go back and change it. And you constantly feel sad for doing something and doing it, and then you just can’t change it. And it just starts getting to you sometimes. (Pause). Like because when
I was younger, I knew this person who was feeling guilty for something he did, and he just kept stressing over it and stressing over it. He ended up killing himself for being guilty over something… That’s why I can’t let it get to me…It could bring on the negative, like it did for him.

Another participant shared his haunting experiences of remorse while in detention:

It’s like I can get to thinking about it [remorse] so hard that I just was prayin’ that God would make it stop, and hopefully that, I don’t know, sometimes I would just hope that He would just take me away from the world, and… just so I can move on from it.

One participant feared that the depression associated with remorse would lead to a relapse into the use of drugs and alcohol since that was how he coped with remorse in the past. Despite remorse, a few still recalled the personal benefits of crime (money, power, respect). They feared that thinking about past criminal behavior in any way may entice or tempt them to reoffend and, they would, once again, fail.

Some participants realized the consequences of their criminal behavior were not limited to court ordered placement and the experiences of remorse. Some feared retaliation from others whose paths they had crossed due to their involvement with drugs, gangs, and other criminal activity. They were haunted by scenarios or dreams of how they would be harmed after released. One participant, who was involved in a shooting, stated, “And now, I have crazy dreams. Like when I get out, I have to constantly watch my back.”

For the participants, remorse was a form of self-punishment, a type of suffering
that seemed to go on forever. They wanted the anguish to end; they wanted some form of closure. They hoped remorse would fade or disappear in time, but many believed remorse would be a part of them indefinitely.

**Theme: Repressing Remorse**

Remorse generated significant distress among the participants. In response to this distress, they attempted to survive remorse by denying it or repressing it. It was a means of controlling and avoiding the remorse experiences. These attempts helped them temporarily avoid pain and suffering, or to avoid other, more serious, negative consequences they feared might happen if they allowed remorse to get to them (i.e., suicide). One participant described his need to escape remorse: “Like if you keep thinkin’ about it, it could just keep making it worse, and then one day you just be so depressed that you don’t wanna be here no more.” Participants did not like feeling remorse. They did not want the experience, and they did not know how to deal with it. Participants spent a considerable amount of time and energy fighting remorse. They used a variety of strategies to distract themselves from remorse, push it away, or make it stop. However, their efforts were often in vain as noted by one participant.

Like, it gets so bad for me because like um, I don’t want to think about anymore of it. Like, I don’t want to think about what I’ve done --nothin’ like that. And then you just can’t forget about it, so it just keeps coming back and then you, I don’t know, you just keep thinking about how you wish it could go away, but you can’t just make it go away…
Despite the intense pain associated with remorse, the majority of participants chose to endure remorse alone. Most participants had difficulty expressing remorse verbally and/or emotionally prior to and while in placement. Most did not trust others enough to share their experiences, and they did not want others to perceive them as weak or “soft.” Many were taught to maintain a tough exterior by keeping their thoughts and emotions to themselves. Very few participants talked about their experiences of remorse with counselors or with one or two other residents. However, during validation of the findings, one participant stated the young men had two groups on remorse since the interviews were completed. He shared his perceptions of group participation.

“A couple of the residents talked about remorse, not many. People listened to ‘em though. Some of ‘em probably don’t want to look soft. Some of ‘em might be afraid of talking ‘cuz they might get in more trouble, you know. Saying they have remorse for somethin’ they did nobody knows about…might get new charges.”

Some participants feared they would be judged or ridiculed by other residents. Many participants believed they brought the remorse upon themselves by committing the crime; therefore, they deserve it and should endure it and deal with it on their own as well.

Most participants volunteered information as to whether or not they expressed emotions related to remorse through crying. None of the participants admitted to crying while in the current placement, but many cried often when alone in their rooms in detention or jail as noted by one participant: “I cried every day that I was sitting in there.”
Some participants thought they might feel better if they could cry, but privacy to do so was an issue:

Sometimes, sometimes I do, I do wanna cry, but I just try to hold it back because of where I’m at. If I was, when I’m at home, I’m just free to let it go. I’ll cry for 30 minutes to an hour, most the time when no one’s around. But here, you know, here I gotta hide, hold it in.

A few participants cried occasionally, but they did not see much point in crying.
I just like never cry. I just like, ‘cuz why cry when you can’t change it? What’s crying gonna do? I mean, I feel like crying sometimes, but I only cry when like, I’ve either hurt my mom or my grandpa mainly. But I mean, it’s not gonna solve anything. Get some emotions out, but that about all.

**Theme Cluster: Coping Strategies**

Coping with remorse was a huge challenge for most participants. Some of them did not experience remorse until they were placed in detention, and its effects overwhelmed them. Initially, they used denial as a means of coping. Most fought to keep it at bay so they would not have to endure the pain and suffering. The primary goal focused on surviving remorse through denial or repression. The coping skills for those who occasionally experienced remorse prior to placement were fairly destructive. Some attempted to deaden the pain of remorse with alcohol and drugs, “…sometimes really I just drank it or smoked it away, ha. Uh, at least try to… But that doesn’t really work oh so well.” Some participants tried to lessen or prevent remorse by adapting their usual mode of operation regarding criminal activity. For example, they refused to sell drugs to
pregnant women or in the presence of children. One participant spoke of increased remorse knowing children were involved in his drug transactions:

I’d ask them where their kids were at or something, and they would tell me that they are probably at home or somewhere. Well, then I’d find out when they’d pull off, I’d see like their daughters in the back seat of their car for like an hour, hour and a half and they’re just infants and that’s just uh, that tears me up when I think about that. I mean when I was selling drugs… my major rule was don’t bring your kids to my house if you come over for drugs.

Prior to placement, some participants could talk themselves into ignoring remorse and guilt temporarily, so personal wants such as greed could be met.

I mean, even though I felt sad for some things, I wasn’t gonna let it bug me real bad. It was, yeah, it bugged me on the inside, and I could mope around about it when I’m by myself, but when I was out, out in the streets gettin’ that money, it was a whole different story. It was like well, I don’t care for it right now, but I’ll care later.

Most of the participants wanted to be alone when experiencing remorse, especially if they felt anger toward themselves for committing the crime and hurting others in the process. Some participants deliberately avoided others so they could keep their anger in check while others looked for a fight to release the pent up anger. In placement, participants had a difficult time managing their anger. They did not want to get in further trouble by lashing out at others or becoming aggressive. They struggled to control their anger by sitting as far away as possible from other residents knowing
individual private time was not an option. They attempted to calm themselves and use
distraction to escape remorse.

Participants used a variety of distraction strategies such as music, exercise,
humor, reading, writing in a journal, writing music, writing letters, talking about other
topics, phoning family, and praying to try to control or manage remorse. They used any
available form of activity to help distract them from remorse, but rarely talked about it.
Sometimes distraction was effective in taking remorse off their minds, but often it was
not.

Coping strategies became more positive for participants after surrendering to
remorse, although there were still times when remorse felt too intense for them to
manage. Eventually, most participants learned how to tolerate remorse more effectively.
They found the strength to begin to work through it instead of fighting or resisting it all
of the time. They learned to channel their emotions in a positive rather than destructive
manner. Participants started to use problem solving techniques to avoid making future
mistakes as noted by one participant who had, “Thoughts about the future of how I can
do it next time if I’m ever confronted with the same situation.”

For some participants, writing thoughts and feelings helped to ease remorse.
Some wrote letters of apology to various people; some kept the letters while others chose
to mail them. Writing about remorse was used much more often than talking. However,
those that did feel comfortable talking about remorse thought it was beneficial, and it
helped to enlighten their understanding of remorse and its effects. Occasionally a
participant formed a relationship and gained support from one or two residents who also
knew what it was like to experience remorse.
I’ll just sit there, but like lucky for me, I got like two people in here that I really you know, close with, so whenever they see me sittin’ at the table quiet they just come over there and start talkin’ to me. Sometimes I get mad when they come over there you know, because I’m already mad at the thoughts that I’m havin’ and I probably kinda take it out on them a little bit, but they understand because we all have them type of feelings in here sometimes, some of us.

**Theme Cluster: Becoming Accountable**

Remorse helped participants in the on-going process of becoming accountable for their actions. Most blamed others less often and assumed responsibility more often in comparison to their descriptions of what they believed prior to placement. They did not want family to feel guilty or others to blame family for their own mistakes. Some participants were more accountable than others. However, none of the participants were totally accountable for all of their actions. Most of their statements reflected accountability such as, “I’m mad at myself. There ain’t nobody else that made me do what I did. It’s my fault…can’t be angry with nobody else.” Yet, occasionally, they minimized or attempted to justify select behaviors as evidenced by, “I was too young to get a good job that I could make the same amount of money as sellin’ drugs…” or “it’s like robbing or something like that, she understands that it’s drugs that took over me…”

Being in detention and in placement gave participants the opportunity to think about their behavior and experience remorse. One participant, among others, spoke of how he did not experience remorse until placed in detention, “Takes jail time to see, I guess…locked up to make you realize it.” However, change did not automatically occur just because of placement in a facility. One had to be willing to work through the
experience of remorse and learn from it, “Like, I mean, I do believe being locked up has been a big part of it, but at the same time, this has all been my, it’s been upon me to think about all this stuff.”

In time, participants recognized the level of harm they instilled on others in most instances, and they acknowledged their behavior as self-centered or selfish. Most of the time, they assumed responsibility for the choices they made, and for hurting others in the process. One participant stated, “… but I chose to go to the life of the streets, and I’ve finally figured out it didn’t hurt me real bad; it hurt my family, my friends, and it’s just…messin’ with everyone.” All participants acknowledged repeated failures and they no longer wanted to stay on this path toward self-destruction. They wanted to change their ways before it was too late. They assumed responsibility for the loss of trust, and they knew trust had to be earned through positive behavior. For many, words were not enough to show they had changed; words had to be supported by actions. If they had the chance to do it all over again, they believed they would not make the same mistakes.

All participants believed they deserved to be punished for their criminal activity. Some thought they should not only be punished by the State, but by victims and families as well. One participant felt very remorseful for falsely accusing his friends for taking part in the crime, which led to the consequences of criminal charges and probation for something they did not do. Although his friends forgave him, he still thought he deserved further punishment from them. He stated, “It’s just that, I don’t know, like, it feels like they should have done somethin’ back, just, I don’t know. I know it wasn’t right, but they should have done somethin’ back to get me back.”
Theme Cluster: Searching for an Identity

This cluster consists of a description of how remorse played a role in rediscovering and redefining the self. As participants experienced remorse, they were compelled to take a closer look at themselves. Somewhere along the line they lost sight of who they really were. As the reality of the crimes and their impact on others set in, most were taken aback by their behaviors. As they searched for an identity, they struggled with how the perceptions of others influenced their perceptions of themselves. Two themes emerged from this theme cluster: Will I Be Judged? and Evaluating the Self.

Theme: Will I Be Judged?

Many of the participants spent a considerable amount of time thinking about what others might think of them since the arrest and placement in residential treatment. One participant stated,

Like um, even though I’m not really stressing about it right now, in the back of my mind I’m still thinking about like, how are they thinking of me right now like, you know. Is he a bad person? They don’t want me… around their kids or something like that. Or they don’t know if they can trust me from like stealin’ from them.

All participants valued the opinions of family and friends over others’ opinions at school or in the community. They believed those who truly knew and loved them, did not judge them. Most of the participants either assumed or knew from experience that there were people who judged them, but their reactions to being judged varied. Some participants stated they did not care what others thought of them or if others judged them. They felt they did not have to prove anything to them, and they would simply avoid them.
One participant hoped to move out of his hometown as soon as possible so he would not have to deal with being judged, “Like, I don’t, I don’t mess with them people. I don’t like ‘em’. I don’t like ‘em lookin’ at me like a criminal.” Although several participants alleged that they were not affected by others’ thoughts of them, they sounded angry or bitter during this portion of the interview.

And it don’t matter like, I feel like I’m gonna live my life and do what’s right, and I ain’t gonna go let nobody stop me from doin’ what’s right. And I don’t, like, it shouldn’t matter what somebody else think about me. It’s just an opinion.

Some participants felt differently about being judged and they wanted to deal with it on a more mature level if possible. These participants did care about how others perceived them. They also realized that others’ negative perceptions of them were a reflection on their families as well. Due to their repeated involvement with the law, some participants understood why others might judge them. Some participants wanted to talk to those who judged them so they could explain how they had changed. It was important to prove to them, through positive behaviors, that they learned from their mistakes. One participant looked forward to showing others that he would not repeat the same mistakes, especially to those who doubted his ability to change.

Just like…they’re sayin’ he’s a bad kid; he can’t change his…what he’s done and stuff like that – like how I get in trouble, and I stole things. They say I’m just gonna…even if I did get out that I’m just gonna do the same stuff again. I mean me…that just makes it where I wanna prove to them that I’m not so…bad.
Theme: Evaluating the Self

Experiencing remorse prompted participants to reevaluate the self. As they thought about the crimes they committed and how they hurt others as a result, they were somewhat shocked by their own behaviors. They tried to figure out how a good person could do such bad things. Some participants recognized the different dimensions of the self, and they realized they had a choice in what kind of person they wanted to become. Some referred to themselves as “the real me,” “the bad part of me,” or the “old me.” A few participants spoke of themselves in the third person.

I see now…I mean back then I saw just the majority was a bad person. It was going through life just being a trouble maker, doing whatever he had to do, to do what he wanted to do. But now I don’t look at it that way. I look at it as the old, the old me is gone. I mean being a bad…I, I still have that, that anger stored up, but now I’m puttin’ it in, I’m gonna use it for good instead of evil…

Many participants thought about the differences in their behavior around family compared to when they were around peers. They wondered how they allowed themselves to become so negative or destructive. Some felt compelled to engage in criminal activity in order to be accepted by peers or for personal gain. They thought they had to portray the tough image that came with the territory.

I let my momma down. Um, ‘cuz she didn’t raise me that way to be shootin’ at anybody. But like when I’m around my mother, I show all respect. Around my grandmother…everybody. But when I leave the house, it’s like, it’s like I have a different mentality. Like, I don’t know, like when I was growing up, I always
hang around the older, the older dudes that was in the neighborhood. They were nothing, no good.

Some participants mistakenly thought the benefits of criminal activity, described as money, power, and respect, made them feel better about themselves. However, over time, they recognized it as a false sense of self-importance, and they not only lost self-respect, but the respect of those who were most important to them. Some grew tired of feeling like a failure or loser.

I’m just acting different. I don’t know. I guess I just got sick of it, sick of my mistakes. I told myself that’s gonna be the last time I was gonna be in the back of a police car, so that’s what I think is gonna happen. Not no more.

As participants searched for an identity, they thought about positive influences in their lives, in and out of placement. They saw select family, teachers, neighbors, or staff members as role models who could help them become better persons.

Yeah, you know, most of the time I look up to grown folks by helping me. So, most of the time as I’m lookin’ at staff and payin’ attention to staff, I’ll look at they ways and how they treat theyself and they kids and that’s basically how I actual think of being me. Like ‘cuz I know that if my little brother look up to me, then I know my boy’s gonna look up to me, too.

**Theme Cluster: Repairing Relationships**

The themes in this cluster focused on the need to repair relationships with family members, victim(s), friends, and others. The others included girlfriends, peers at school, teachers and school officials, and members of the neighborhood or community.
**Theme: Family**

The experience of remorse enlightened all participants regarding the level of pain and suffering family endured as a result of their criminal activity, and it prompted them to try to repair their relationships. Participants were most affected by how much they hurt their families. Some were haunted by scenes of family members’ distraught reactions or by their tearful episodes during phone calls or visits. Most felt deeply sorry for hurting them and for letting them down. They regretted not listening to them in the first place as so much heartache could have been avoided. All participants apologized to family members more than once; some continued to apologize even though more than a year had passed since committing the crime.

Most participants recognized how their criminal behavior negatively impacted family including a loss of trust and damage to relationships. The strain on family relationships was an eye-opening experience for many participants.

Like, I apologized to her [mom] whenever she had came down there on the scene. And then I had told her, ‘cuz my grandma was like, my grandma was right beside my momma, and she was like, ‘You don’t love her. You only think of yourself. If you loved her you wouldn’t be doin’ this.’ And I told my momma that I love you and I always love you no matter what anybody else got to say about it. You know. And I apologized, and then she was like, ‘I love you, too.’ We hugged. She kissed me on my cheek and then she started leavin’ and then later, I apologized again.

Participants’ remorse eventually had a positive effect on most family relationships. Most of them believed it strengthened their relationships, helped them to be more honest, and improved communication among members although very few
participants discussed remorse with family. Nonetheless, they started to appreciate and value family more. They felt grateful family did not give up on them, even after they gave up on themselves as noted by one participant: “I don’t want to hurt anymore of my family, people that tried to help, that helped me even when I thought I was beyond help. They still tried to help me.” Participants were thankful that most family members gave them another chance, and that they still loved them despite what they put them through.

A number of participants spoke of their relationships with siblings as well. Some had multiple siblings and other relatives in prison, and participants did not want themselves or younger siblings to end up in the same situation. They felt guilty for being negative influences on them and hoped they could turn things around. They wanted to take more of an interest in them, steer them away from criminal activity, and be there for them as role models.

That’s what I think about when I think about him --that I kinda let him down, probably led him down the wrong path. But at the same time when I get out, I’m gonna try to patch that up, you know, like try to get his head right. He fixin’ to be in the sixth grade next year. Tell ‘em to start playin’ football or somethin’ like that. Do somethin’ you like and you know, just like get him on the right track about school and stuff like that so he don’t gotta, you know, put my momma through what I put her through. And he can do somethin’ with his life.

Participants wanted to regain the family’s trust. Most felt supported by family and wanted to prove they had changed for the better. Many participants hoped their families would be proud of them because of these changes, “Usually I just sit there and think
about it and think how I’m gonna change it in the future and how happy I’m gonna make them, how proud I’m gonna make them…”

**Theme: Victims**

Some participants perceived “victims” in a broad sense. Some considered victims as the actual persons who were the targets of the crime while others believed the victims were those who were hurt in any way by the crime such as family and friends. For some participants, the actual victims were people they knew such as friends or neighbors. Because participants had a previous relationship with them, they felt more remorseful about these crimes than crimes committed against strangers. These participants had a hard time accepting they could commit a crime against someone who befriended them.

…like my neighbor, man. I can’t believe I did that to him. I mean, I could’ve, we’re supposed to be friends. I used to mow his lawn for him every summer, and he’d give me twenty bucks for a little, little front, little yard, and half an acre in the backyard. Nothing really, he gave me twenty bucks for just, to be really nice, and I just screwed him over.

Many participants never knew the victims of their crimes; a few met the victims upon arrest. Meeting or facing the victims at the time of the crime or thereafter had an impact on participants, and they still thought about it or replayed the encounters in their minds. Participants hoped to regain respect and make things right through an apology. For those who knew the victim, they hoped an apology would allow them to renew the relationship or friendship as though the event never happened.
Theme: Friends

Some participants thought their experiences of remorse affected their relationships with friends while others saw no connection. Some had at least one friend whom they could talk to about remorse, but others did not feel comfortable discussing it. One participant shared an experience of how he risked talking about remorse to his friends while on pass, and decided it was the last time he would bring it up to them: “My friends, you know, I go up to them and tell them I feel bad for what I did, they be like, ‘Man, you better get yourself together. Quit acting like a punk.’ That’s what they’d say.”

Many participants discovered that peers at school, whom they once considered acquaintances, were really true friends as they continued to help, support, and encourage them before and after the arrests. In the past, they did not recognize that these particular friends were just trying to help them. They felt bad and apologized for not paying any attention to them. They learned to appreciate and value friends who were loyal, trustworthy, and sincere. Some participants were quite disillusioned with friendships; they learned who they could and could not count on for support.

The first time I got locked up at [name] county I realized. ‘Cuz I got in there, and I was writin’ everybody letters, but no one was writtin’ them back. All the people that was there when I was makin’ money weren’t there when I went, when I was broke, and I was in jail. They didn’t care. They stopped carin’. And then as soon as I got out, they wanted to try to come around and act like they were there for me the whole time. And then the first thing that came out of my mouth was, ‘Now, where were you when I was in the [name] county writin’ you letters, and you were out here not writin’ me back?’ And they didn’t have anything to
say. They’re like ‘Oh, it’s like?’ I mean, you couldn’t even write me a letter after everything I’ve done for you, after everything I’ve bought for you? Everything we’ve been through, you couldn’t even write me a letter?

Most participants had several close friends, but a few said they did not have any real friends. They had acquaintances, but they did not have anyone they trusted enough to call a true friend. One participant did not think friends were possible given the lifestyle he was living.

No one has friends… I mean, you can have friends, but not in like, what I was doing. Like church people, they have friends. But criminals, they don’t have friends. They are always looking… Someone is always looking to climb up the ladder. If you’re at the top, someone is going to want what you got. Like, if I got… 20 pounds in my house. Someone is going to want that. They are going to want the money I am getting. They want the life I am living. They are not worried about me, how I am doing… They are worried about themselves. That how I see it…I did it, too, but I don’t want to do that no more.

Some participants became more selective about choosing their friends. Some chose to develop new friendships with those who had a positive influence on them. A few, however, planned to maintain relationships with the same friends who continued to offend.

Theme: Others

Participants discussed whether or not they thought remorse affected their relationships with others including girlfriends, peers at school, teachers or principles, and
neighbors or community members. Again, some believed remorse did have an effect while others did not.

Most of the participants did not think remorse affected their relationships with girlfriends, as most of the girlfriends broke up with them while the participants were in detention or placement. A few of the girlfriends stood by them, especially if they shared a child together. Some participants felt remorseful for hurting and disappointing their girlfriends, and a few felt they could talk openly about remorse to them.

But I know… she’s there for me, not because of what I have or things I’ve done. She’s there for me no matter what. And um, I kinda wish I can go back and either erase my past with drugs and all that, but since I can’t, I kinda wish I can, kinda thank her for just everything she’s done, everything I put her through. And uh, things she put up with that she didn’t have to.

They regretted the broken promises and not giving their girlfriends the attention they deserved. They wanted to make it up to them. They kept in contact through letters and, occasionally, saw them on pass. They vowed to show them more respect in the future by changing their behavior and not reoffending.

Some of the participants did not know if remorse affected their relationships with people at school (students, teachers, school officials) since they had not been in school for quite some time. Some dropped out and others were expelled. However, most of the participants who planned to return to school after discharge, believed remorse would have a positive effect on their relationships with teachers. Participants had plenty of time to think about their relationships with teachers and school officials, and most of them
spoke positively about those who tried to help them. Teachers and principals not only tried to help them obtain an education, but they also tried to help them stay out of trouble.

I kinda feel remorse for that on that type of topic because like the teachers used to try to keep me in the right track, you know. They used to try to tell me the same thing my mom and them used to tell me, like, some teachers noticed like I was saying, and they’ll pull me to the side or keep me after class and talk to me… And tell me like you know this ain’t gonna last forever. You either gonna end up in the jail, in jail or you know, you end up, end up dead. They’re just basically telling me you know you’re too smart, you know you’re like one of my best students, you know, you got potential to do something with your life. I just don’t want to see you like everybody else.

Most participants now realized most teachers were trying to help them succeed, not fail. Participants felt sorry for dismissing their efforts. They felt regret for misinterpreting their actions and for not listening to them. They planned to apologize upon their return to school if they had not done so already.

One participant had more negative experiences with teachers than others. He believed some teachers did not like him, saw no hope for him, and wanted to see him fail. He hoped to use his experiences of remorse to make better choices and succeed.

‘Cuz I always, like I always had someone to tell me that I wasn’t goin’ to be nothin’. Like, I had a couple teachers at school tell me that I wasn’t goin’ to be nothin’. And they, I just look at them, say whatever. You know, I know I’m gonna be somethin’, because I’m gonna graduate high school. Remorse changed me by
thinking before I act, and try to, tryin’ to find a positive way around a situation instead of a negative.

Most participants did not think remorse would play a role in their relationships with other kids at school because they did not really know them very well, but a few participants felt differently.

They used to try to, they used to, like, I didn’t really know ‘em, so like they used to try to help me. And I’d be like, “I don’t even know you. What you tryin’ to help me for?” Or I’d be trying to not even talk to ‘em. And like, sometimes they would be like, “[Name], we’re just trying to help you. We ain’t trying to, we ain’t in here just tryin’ to hurt you or anything like that.”

Some participants thought some peers at school might look at them differently and not want to associate with them because of their past criminal behavior. Most were not bothered by this possibility because they really did not know the other students well enough. One participant expected his peer group would continue to accept him and interact with him because peers naively glamorized the lifestyle and those who engaged in such risky behavior.

Some participants thought remorse would have an effect on their relationships with neighbors or members of the community. Some participants’ experiences with neighbors were similar to those with other students, teachers, and school officials, although many did not have much of a connection to the neighborhood or community. The participants who had ties to their neighbors recalled several instances when neighbors tried to help them get on the right path and stay out of trouble. Participants, however, had a hard time understanding why people, who hardly knew them, would want
to help them. Participants responded to them in a similar manner, and chose not to listen or accept their help. Some participants had a chance to talk to their neighbors while on pass, and they were happy and relieved to know they still supported and encouraged them.

A few participants did not look forward to facing the community. They thought it might be difficult to be around people who perceived them as dangerous or criminal. Some participants claimed they did not care what others thought of them; some did care and wanted to prove they had changed. One participant felt very awkward and uneasy. He preferred to hide out at home rather than face the community.

**Theme Cluster: Seeking Forgiveness**

Remorse involved the desire to seek forgiveness. Participants felt sorry for their actions and for hurting others in the process. They, very much, wanted to be forgiven. Three themes emerged in the Seeking Forgiveness cluster: From Family/Others, From Victim(s), and From Oneself.

**Theme: From Family/Others**

Remorse prompted participants to apologize and seek forgiveness from family and friends. Most participants apologized multiple times to multiple family members. Some believed they could not possibly apologize enough to ease the harm that had been done and earn forgiveness. One participant stated, “I wish that they would all forgive me for what I’ve done.” Another stated, “I apologized, thousand, probably a million times, *slight chuckle* apologized so many times…”

Participants had a strong desire for forgiveness and they hoped they would be given a second chance. They needed to know they were worthy of forgiveness, “I mean
I’ve forgiven myself for hurtin’ all them people, but really I’m still hopin’ that they, they have forgiven me…”

**Theme: From Victim(s)**

Participants wanted forgiveness from the victims. Some participants spent a significant amount of time thinking about apologizing and receiving forgiveness. Many participants believed they would find relief and comfort from forgiveness by having the chance to explain why they committed the crimes and from knowing the victim understood the circumstances.

I want to say like relief, but at the same time like forgiveness. Like, it’s just something else that, to me in my eyes, I feel like it’s the right thing to do. If they were to forgive me, I’m not saying that they have to forgive me, but if they were to forgive me, it would make it feel… it would make me feel better. Because like, uh, …like the person I did it to, they understand what I was going through.

Some participants believed that even if the victim did not accept their apologies or forgive them, it would still provide a sense of comfort or relief. Some believed that if the victim forgave them, they might be able to move on and leave the past behind them.

That it’s [apology] like a good deed. I did somethin’ that I should have done a long time ago that I did, and it’s over now. Like, I can kinda throw that, to that person if they kinda forgive me for it, I can kinda throw that away. Like, it’s over with. And, uh… I kinda just want to do that.

One felt ambivalent about apologizing to the victim. He feared the victim may not forgive him and may want to hurt him instead. Over time he found the courage and
strength to apologize and seek forgiveness. Many participants were willing to risk rejection of the apology:

I just didn’t want to talk to’em. Didn’t want to say nothin’ to ‘em. Didn’t even really want to be by ‘em but then, but then I just started facing it like, well, I’m gonna have to do this. So why not just start getting brave enough to go… I mean you don’t have to, but I made it that choice where I have, I have to do this.

**Theme: From Oneself**

Over time, most participants had forgiven themselves for their crimes and for the pain and suffering they brought on others. They still, however, experienced on-going remorse and guilt. A few participants forgave themselves for some behaviors, but not all.

I’ve forgiven myself…well, on a few things, but some things I haven’t forgiven myself on because I guess I just didn’t want to. Hmm, I mean I kind of forgive myself for puttin’ my momma through this hardship, but kinda I don’t because my momma didn’t deserve this, and espec…especially I didn’t mean to put her through it…

Some participants were not so sure they deserved forgiveness, and they learned that, perhaps, some acts were unforgiveable. One participant struggled with repeated failures and self-forgiveness: “Sometimes, I think. I wish I’d probably would of died instead of committing most of the crimes that I’ve committed, ‘cuz I’d probably be a lot better off, uh, in a better place.”

**Theme Cluster: Transforming Remorse**

This theme cluster focused on the manner in which participants transformed the negative aspects of remorse into something positive. The participants wanted the chance
to apologize, explain circumstances, be understood, make amends, be forgiven, and use remorse as motivation to change. Three themes emerged from this cluster: The Need to Apologize, Alternate Means of Making Amends, and Hope for the Future.

**Theme: The Need to Apologize**

Remorse produces the desire to apologize, but not all participants followed through with it in all cases as noted by one participant: “I mean remorse would get to me and tell me to go apologize and sometimes I will, sometimes I won’t.” Most participants repeatedly apologized to their family members for the crimes and the pain family endured as a result. Some participants also apologized to friends and family for putting them in harm’s way. Most participants wanted to apologize because it was “the right thing to do” and the least they could do to try to remedy the situation. Apologies helped them to feel better; they provided a sense of comfort and relief. Participants did not have trouble apologizing to family or friends, but some struggled with apologizing to victims.

Most participants wanted to apologize to the victims, and a few had already done so. For those who did apologize, the interaction was awkward and uncomfortable. Therefore, the apology was kept at a brief or superficial level. One participant spoke of his experience of apologizing to a child for stealing her bicycle. The police officer made him return it and apologize:

I felt retarded sittin’ there like, ‘Ah, I’m sorry I stole your bike.’ She didn’t say anything at all. She looked like she was scared to death of me. So…Well, after I did it and sat there, I was glad I did it. ‘Cuz I don’t know, a sense of relief somehow. She got her bike back, and it was perfectly fine. And uh, I was embarrassed. Her mom was sittin’ there giving me the death stare.
Many participants thought about apologizing to the victims. They wondered how the victims might react, and if they would forgive them. Some participants prepared or rehearsed what they would say. A few wrote apology letters and planned to give them to the victims when discharged. Thinking about apologizing to the victim created anxiety; however, most participants were willing to endure the discomfort. They believed it would be worth the risk. They wanted the victims to know the apology was genuine and not just empty words. One participant agonized over the creation of an apology. He struggled with the uncertainty of not knowing if or when it would happen or how it would be received.

But um, its just one of them things that I’ve just got to wait until it happens, you know. ‘Cuz if it don’t happen, then its gonna make a lot of stress on my mind, like me preparing what I’m gonna say and then it don’t happen.

Some participants believed apologizing was simply not enough. They believed their words had to be supported by their actions so family, friends, victims, and the community would know they were truly sorry.

*Theme: Alternate Means of Making Amends*

Participants spent a lot of time trying to think of how they could make amends to family and victims. The most common means of making amends was through an apology. Most participants tried to convey they were truly sorry by following the rules, working toward achieving their goals for treatment, and working hard in school. Some were working toward obtaining a GED or certification in various trades. While at home or on pass, they made a point to follow the rules, clean their rooms, and contribute to the household.
When I got out of jail like they could tell that I felt bad about what I did, they
could just tell becuz, I was like doing everything to 100%, I did it, everything they
asked me and more…and I think I did everything, you know, clean the house,
spot, spotless, everything, did everything I could, and, I know mom could tell…

Some participants also tried to make it up to their families by spending time with them,
and one participant earned money to pay back his grandmother who bailed him out of
jail. They did not make any demands on family as they felt they had done so much for
them already.

Most participants wanted to apologize to the victim, but few had the opportunity
to do so to date. Those who did apologize were glad they followed through with it. Some
participants made amends by returning the victims’ belongings and by paying restitution,
“And I was like, if there was anything I’d do. I’d pay the restitution first thing. Like, first
time I had money, every time I got my paycheck, that’s where my money went to.” A few
offered to do odd jobs for them for free such as mowing the lawn or helping them with
car repairs. One participant volunteered every morning at the local public library. He
enjoyed working with kids and teens, and felt like he was contributing to society.

Participants planned to continue making amends by making good decisions in the
future and not reoffending. They wanted to earn respect and show others they had
changed by making something of themselves either by obtaining an education or trade, or
by earning an honest, respectable living.

**Theme: Hope for the Future**

Participants discovered remorse had both positive and negative qualities. As
participants surrendered to remorse, they were able to transform a negative experience
into hope for the future. They used remorse as a source of motivation, a catalyst for change. Experiencing remorse gave them the opportunity to see their behaviors as negative and destructive. As a result, they developed an awareness of how much they hurt victims, family, friends, and themselves through criminal acts. They strived for change; they wanted a normal life and a hopeful future.

Remorse helped participants learn how to think before taking action. It helped promote accountability, maturity, personal growth, and goal-oriented behavior. It empowered them to be more in control of their futures. They saw opportunities for success, and they did not want to throw them away by reoffending.

Remorse was very painful and intense, but it seemed necessary in order for them to learn from the experience. Most participants believed remorse would stay with them to a degree in the future; however, they hoped the intensity of remorse would stay at a manageable level. Most of them wanted and needed a certain level of remorse to remain with them as a reminder of the stressful experience, and to motivate them to make the right decisions in the future. Participants vowed to do honest work and not reoffend so they would not have to re-experience the trauma of remorse.

But there’s always gonna be the part of me that remembers what happened to me for selling those drugs, what I had to go through from selling the drugs. Gettin’ locked up, causin’ my family pain, causin’ even my guardian’s family pain. That’s like a second family to me. It’s like all the pain that I caused them came from me selling drugs.

Although participants regretted the criminal behavior and hurting others, they did not regret the overall experience. They believed that, if they had not been caught for
engaging in criminal behavior, they would not have had the chance to experience and learn from remorse, or find hope for the future. They thought getting arrested, being in placement, and experiencing remorse, would help them make better choices.

I regretted it, but what my mom’s told me ‘Don’t regret anything that I’ve done,’ because what you have...what everything that you...that I have done set me up for bigger and better things. Coming here has unlocked a lot of doors, and I mean I’m settin’, settin’ up for more stuff. I...before I came here, I never thought I’d go to college, I never thought I’d go back to high school to play ball. I mean really I just thought I’d be incarcerated or go straight back to the streets, and do other stuff, but now a lot of doors and opportunities have opened for me, and I’m just going to fulfill them.

The participants maintained a positive attitude about being successful in the future; however, the possibility of failing was still a fear for many. They knew staying on the right path would not be easy; they would face many obstacles upon their return home. They realized they could not change the past, but they could change the future.

Summary

The results of the data analysis of the lived experience of remorse were included in this chapter. The analysis revealed 8 theme clusters and 17 themes. Theme clusters and themes were addressed individually, and significant statements in the form of quotes were included to clarify and support the meaning of the themes.

The first theme was Definition of Remorse. This theme included participants’ definitions of remorse and various characteristics of remorse. The second theme cluster, Battling the Power of Remorse, focused on the painful, intense aspects of remorse that
many participants had to endure on a regular basis. This theme cluster included five themes: Pervasive Thoughts, Affective/Emotional Aspects, Haunting Effects, Repressing Remorse, and Fighting Remorse Alone. Coping Strategies, the third theme cluster, consisted of a description of both positive and negative skills participants used to cope with remorse. The fourth theme cluster was Searching for Identity. This theme cluster focused on the influences of being judged by others due to criminal behavior on their identities and participants’ attempts to redefine the self. It consisted of two themes: Will I Be Judged and Evaluating the Self. Repairing Relationships was the fifth theme cluster. This cluster emphasized the damage that occurred to relationships as a result of criminal behavior. Themes included Family, Victims, Friends, and Others. The next cluster, Becoming Accountable, involved a description of how the experiences of remorse helped participants to assume accountability for their actions. The seventh theme cluster, Seeking Forgiveness, focused on the participants’ desire to be forgiven for committing the crimes and hurting others in the process. The cluster included the themes of From Family/Others, From Victims, and From Oneself. The final theme cluster was Transforming Remorse. This cluster addressed the participants’ desire to apologize, make amends, and use remorse positively as motivation to change behavior. This cluster consisted of three themes: The Need to Apologize, Alternate Means of Making Amends, and Hope for the Future.

Participants’ experiences of remorse involved many pervasive, recurrent, thoughts about the crime and its negative effects on family, victims, friends, and others. They caused considerable distress and triggered a host of negative, painful emotions such as intense guilt, deep regret, shame, anxiety, and depression. The experienced was
compounded by traumatic memories of the crimes, family reactions to the criminal behavior, and scenarios of negative events that might happen to them in the future that replayed over and over in their minds.

An internal battle ensued between the participants and remorse. The experiences of remorse occurred involuntarily and caused considerable pain and suffering. Tolerating and coping with remorse challenged them. As a result, participants fought back to repress remorse and avoid the experience, but it would always recur despite their efforts to control it. Eventually, they realized they could not escape remorse, and they became more willing to deal with the experience. However, most participants continued to deal with it without assistance from counselors or others. In time, the positive aspects of remorse emerged. Participants worked toward becoming more accountable and redefining the self. They recognized damaged relationships and wanted to repair them. They made or planned to make amends to those harmed, and seek forgiveness. They believed remorse would motivate them to make the right choices in the future.
CHAPTER 5
DISCUSSION

The discussion in Chapter five compares and contraststhe results of this study to multiple theories of adolescent development and findings from the existing literature and conceptual analysis. The chapter concludes with study limitations and implications for future research, nursing practice, and policy.

Relationship to Adolescent Development

The purpose of this study was to describe the essence of the lived experience of male, adolescent offenders who experienced the phenomenon of remorse in the context of their crimes via the proposed research question, “What is the lived experience of remorse among African American and European American male, adolescent offenders?” The qualitative, phenomenological approach to inquiry was an appropriate method to capture the true essence of remorse as experienced among this population as evidenced by identified theme clusters, themes, and the rich descriptions provided in the previous chapter. The ecological model provided a suitable context to explore and understand many aspects of adolescent development including cognitive processes, personal identity, and moral behavior as remorse appeared to play a role in the adolescents’ individual, immediate, and broader environments.

Cognitive Development

During Piaget’s Formal Operations stage, adolescents develop the ability to think and reason in an abstract fashion. They acquire the ability to plan, think ahead, and problem-solve (Craig & Baucum, 2002). In addition, they learn to create, test, and evaluate hypotheses in their current environments and circumstances, as well as in
hypothetical, non-factual situations. Fifty-four percent of the sample functioned at less than the expected grade level although all participants were able to communicate their experiences of remorse. Some were more articulate than others, and the ability to think in an abstract manner varied among participants. At times an interview question had to be rephrased to promote understanding for some. The ability to plan, think ahead, and problem-solve were important skills in coping with remorse now and in the future, and several participants needed further assistance to enhance these skills.

**Adolescent Psychosocial Stage of Development**

The developmental stage of adolescence according to Erikson (1964) is Identity versus Role Confusion (Identity Confusion). The primary task of this stage focuses on the development and maintenance of a positive sense of identity and a secure sense of self. Adolescents reflect on who they are and who they want to become in the context of how others judge them and expect them to be. The theme cluster *Searching for an Identity* and its two themes, *Will I Be Judged?* and *Evaluating the Self* related to this psychosocial stage.

Remorse helped the participants to re-examine their identities as they reflected on their past behaviors and how they were perceived by others as noted in the theme, *Will I Be Judged?* Many of them had earned negative reputations through criminal behavior, and it was important to them to prove to others that they had changed. The opinions of others mattered and influenced their self-perceptions. They did not want to be perceived as criminals, bad persons, or failures. Some participants felt anxious about returning to the community not knowing how they would be received. On the other hand, several participants claimed they did not care about what others thought of them. They valued the
opinions of family and friends who did not judge them, and planned to simply avoid those who did. Most realized it would take considerable time and effort to undo the negative reputations, earn trust, and gain respect from self and others. They were willing to work hard to achieve these goals.

Participants spoke positively about staff members, and staff’s role modeling positively influenced the youths’ identity. They paid attention to how staff interacted with the residents and with each other, and they wanted to be like them in many respects. They wanted to adopt similar, positive behaviors, and in turn, model these behaviors for younger siblings, friends, or their own children hoping they, too, could become positive influences for others who might be at risk of making similar mistakes.

Marriott (2007) and Singer (2004) emphasized the importance of addressing self-integration issues through the assimilation of good and bad aspects of self as a means of working through remorse and redefining one’s identity. This process was evident in the Evaluating the Self theme. Some were shocked by their own criminal behaviors. To them, the negative behaviors seemed very out of character. Some participants made reference to “the real me,” “the bad part of me,” or the “old me,” while a few spoke in the third person as if they were referring to someone else. Most participants believed they were “good” persons, yet they struggled to understand how “good” persons could do such “bad things.” Experiencing success within the program such as achieving goals, obtaining a GED, or learning a trade positively influenced their identities. These accomplishments helped them to see they had the potential to become successful and productive individuals of which others could be proud.
Moral Development

Prior to placement, the level of moral development among participants was consistent with Stage 2 of Level 1, the Preconventional level, which is prevalent among 4 - 10 year-olds (Kohlberg, 1981). At this level of moral development, personal gain motivates behavior. Participants engaged in criminal activity to obtain money and material possessions for personal gain. They also believed they gained power and respect in the process. At that time, they were most concerned with profit, recognition from negative influences (peers), and not getting caught. They knew the criminal activity was wrong, but they did not care. Most participants did not think much about their behaviors or see it as out of control until they were removed from their immediate environments and placed in detention. Detention provided them with plenty of time to be alone with their thoughts and feelings, and many of them experienced remorse for the first time.

Based on the interviews, the level of moral development may have increased since being in placement and experiencing remorse. The Becoming Accountable theme cluster related to the moral development of participants. As they thought about their behavior over time, they learned to accept responsibility for most wrongful actions and behaviors, and wanted to make things right. Some appeared to be functioning at Level II, the Conventional level in which behavior is motivated by the need for approval and acceptance (Stage 3), and a respect for authority (Stage 4). A few participants may have reached Level III, the Post-conventional level, where the respect for moral principles and universal laws, and an internalized value system drive behavior (Stage 5). These participants believed that they would not reoffend because criminal behavior and hurting others was wrong. It should be noted that the above levels of moral development were
identified based on data obtained during the interviews while in placement and not on actual behaviors. It is possible that participants shared what they believed the researcher wanted to hear. The true test of moral development will occur when participants are released from the controlled environment and are functioning freely in the community.

**Human Ecological Perspective**

The ecological (Bronfenbrenner, 1977) approach to understanding adolescent development was an appropriate context to explore the experiences of remorse among adolescent offenders. This systems model emphasized that development did not occur in isolation; adolescents’ experiences, relationships, and interactions with family, peers, schools, neighborhoods, communities, and environments influenced their development either positively or negatively. The theme clusters, *Repairing Relationships, Seeking Forgiveness,* and *Transforming Remorse* and their associated themes related to this ecological perspective. Remorse assisted participants to recognize how their behavior affected their relationships within the family, school, and community environments, and it prompted them to make amends, seek forgiveness, and repair damaged relationships.

Interesting, no cultural differences were identified in the remorse experiences between African American and European American participants.

Although participants had some positive influences in their lives, the negative influences appeared to outweigh them. Most participants were poor, and many of them lived in high crime neighborhoods. Several participants were gang members. Many participants were raised in a single-parent environment in which the head of household was forced to work multiple jobs and long hours just to meet the family’s basic needs. Many of the participants did not have consistent, positive role models in their lives. Some
parents and family members abused alcohol and drugs, sold drugs, and taught the participants to sell drugs as well. Some participants had multiple family members who engaged in criminal activity and experienced repeated incarceration. These factors, likely, played a major role in the participants’ development.

Participants were asked how remorse affected their relationships with family, friends, girlfriends, victims, school peers, teachers, school officials, and community (neighbors). Although not all participants thought remorse played a role in every subsystem, some believed it did impact all aspects of their environments.

All participants believed remorse impacted their relationships with family members. They felt very sorry and remorseful for hurting them by engaging in criminal activity. Remorse prompted them to apologize, make amends, seek forgiveness, and work to repair their relationships. They believed remorse aided in strengthening family relationships over time.

Although many participants did not know their victims, several had prior relationships with them. They believed remorse stimulated a desire to apologize, make amends, and seek forgiveness. They hoped they could reestablish a positive relationship with them in the future. Those who did not have a prior relationship with the victim believed remorse affected how they felt toward the victim. They also wanted to apologize, make amends, and hopefully, be forgiven.

Friendships were also affected by participant remorse. Some believed remorse helped them to distinguish true friendships from acquaintances who used them or took advantage of them for personal gain. Some participants recognized they were at risk of reoffending if they continued these relationships, and therefore, planned to have friends
who could be positive influences in their lives. A few participants were not as insightful. They believed they could maintain friendships with those who continued to break the law, and not be tempted to reoffend.

Remorse had the least impact on relationships with past girlfriends, school officials, and the community (neighborhood) because participants had not established very close ties with these individuals in these settings. Some participants had not attended school for quite some time, and had either dropped out or were expelled. Participants did not have much of a connection to their communities or neighborhoods; some did not know any of their neighbors. In hindsight, many participants recognized that there were a number of school peers, teachers, coaches, and neighbors who tried to help them stay on the right path, but they rejected their assistance. They regretted not listening to them, and felt remorseful for letting them down. They had a hard time understanding why people, who did not really know them, would go out of their way to help them. They figured out that others really did care about them, and they planned to apologize and reestablish relationships upon discharge.

The experience of remorse was not limited to the individual experiences of participants. Remorse helped participants to see how their behaviors affected others and their relationships in multiple settings and environments. It appeared to help them value relationships and work harder to reestablish or maintain them.

**Relationship to the Concept Analysis and Literature Review**

This study was the first known study to focus on the lived experiences of remorse among adolescent offenders in the context of their crimes. Most of the theme clusters and themes were consistent with the literature and concept analysis although findings from
this study provided new details about the experiences of remorse among this population. For example, the literature contained little information about *Coping Strategies* and *Repressing Remorse* whereas findings from this study illustrated these themes as major issues in the remorse experience. The interrelationship among attributes and consequences of remorse was also evident among theme clusters and themes. There was some overlap in the theme clusters. However, given the nature of human experiences, some overlap is expected (Colaizzi, 1978). The following paragraphs compare and contrast study findings with the concept analysis including the definition, competing concepts, attributes, and consequences of remorse.

**Definition and Competing Concepts**

Very few definitions of remorse were found in the literature; therefore, participants were asked to define remorse during the first in-depth interview, and it was identified as one of the themes. Consistent with the concept analysis, participants had difficulty defining remorse. Many of them used the competing concepts of guilt, regret, and shame in their definitions, and most participants referred to remorse as a feeling or emotion. The concept analysis revealed remorse had three competing concepts: guilt, regret, and shame; remorse was found to be most similar to regret and most distinguishable from shame (Prove, 2001). However, the results indicated that participants most often used guilt to define remorse, followed by regret, and then, shame.

Freud’s definition of remorse included guilt and anxiety as well as the statement, “…it is itself a punishment and can include the need for punishment” (1961, p. 84). Consistent with this definition, participants also perceived remorse as a form of punishment and they believed they deserved to be punished for their actions. One
participant emphasized the harshness of remorse as a punishment by stating the State could not possibly come up with a punishment that was more severe than the turmoil associated with remorse. Participant definitions of remorse did not aid much in clarifying the definition of remorse, but they did lend support to the concept analysis findings regarding the complexity in defining remorse and the presence of competing concepts.

**Attributes**

The concept analysis identified the multidimensional aspects of remorse, which included cognitive, psychological, affective, and behavioral attributes. A discussion of the relationship between the study findings and each attribute follows.

**Cognitive Component**

The theme, *Pervasive Thoughts*, was consistent with the cognitive component of remorse; the thoughts or perceptions that occurred during remorse as noted in the literature. These thoughts included the acknowledgement of the committed act as wrongful (Tavuchis, 1991; Taylor, 1996), morally wrongful (Hauck, 1989; Kroll & Egan, 2004; Taylor, 1996) or a violation of a social norm (Goffman, 1971; Lazare, 2004; Weisman, 2004). All of the participants acknowledged their criminal behavior as wrong and unacceptable, which was evident in the theme of *Becoming Accountable*. Also consistent with the concept analysis, the participants wished the actions had not occurred, attempted to “mentally undo” the event, and ruminated about the event. In addition, participants thought about potential consequences including how the harmed individual would perceive and respond to them because of the transgression as noted in the literature. Findings from this study provided much more information regarding the
prevalent thoughts that occurred among adolescent offenders including the most frequently asked question of “why” they committed the crime.

Findings from the concept analysis revealed that an acceptance of responsibility was implicitly conveyed through remorse (Hoyt, 1983; Taylor, 1996; Weisman, 2004) as well as an awareness of how the act affected those harmed. The theme, *Becoming Accountable* supported these findings. Participants appeared to become more accountable after experiencing remorse compared to their descriptions of accountability prior to experiencing remorse. Yet, they were not accountable 100% of the time and they did attempt to minimize or justify their actions at times. Participants also spent much time thinking about how the criminal act affected the victim and others who were harmed in the process such as family and friends.

*Psychological Component*

The theme, *Haunting Effects*, related to the psychological component identified in the concept analysis. Descriptive accounts of the psychological component included terms such as “painful anguish,” “mental anguish,” “psychological suffering,” “self-punishment,” “re-biting,” “symbolic reparation,” and “dread;” however, the literature did not contain examples of what kind of experiences led to these descriptive states. Although the participants did not identify the descriptive accounts by name, the experiences noted in the *Haunting Effects* theme could conceivably fit into these categories. For example, some participants were repeatedly haunted in vivid detail by memories of the crime, scenes from the crime, images of the victim(s), or family’s distraught reactions upon discovery of the youths’ involvement in criminal behavior that played repeatedly in their minds. A few relived the event and resultant remorse through
dreams and they feared retaliation or payback from other criminals upon release. These haunting, traumatic experiences could reflect “painful anguish,” “mental anguish,” “psychological suffering,” and “self-punishment,” while the repetitiveness, intrusiveness and unwelcomed aspects of remorse related to “re-biting” and “dread” respectively.

**Affective Component**

The *Affective/Emotional Aspects* theme was fairly consistent with the affective component of remorse as identified in the concept analysis. This component refers to the range and intensity of feeling, feeling tones, and emotions that occurred during the remorse experience. However, the participants described many more feelings and emotions associated with remorse compared to what was found in the literature. Participants felt, guilt, anger toward the self, bad, deep regret, sadness, sorrow, sorry, stress, anxiety, depression, down, shame, embarrassment, and fear. A few felt foolish or humiliated while others felt “dumb” or “stupid.” The concept analysis findings noted guilt, regret, and shame as competing concepts, and feelings of anxiety and severe depression consequences of remorse, which were congruent with study findings. The *Affective/Emotional Aspects* theme also supported findings of remorse as painfully intense and distressing (Marriott, 2007; Weisman, 1999).

According to Weisman (2004, p. 125), “Feelings of remorse are supposed to be painful, unwanted, and involuntary. This information was supported by the *Affective/Emotional Aspects* theme. However, the participants also identified the thoughts that occurred during experiences of remorse as unwanted and involuntary as noted in the *Pervasive Thoughts* theme.

Weisman (2004) stated the focus of remorseful expressions was on the manner in
which the words were spoken and the accompanying feelings. The expressed remorse was expected to communicate pain and anguish through a visual display of suffering. A few participants addressed this feature in the Affective/Emotional Aspects theme, but there was disagreement about the explicit expression of remorse. One participant pointed out that showing any emotion was not a common practice among criminals as it is not a masculine behavior. However, deliberately restricting the affective expression of remorse could pose problems for participants since treatment staff and juvenile justice not only expects to hear remorseful expressions, but to see them as well. Participants communicated previous experiences of remorse verbally and nonverbally during the interviews through rich descriptions of the emotional experiences, tone of voice, and nonverbal communication including changes in facial expressions.

Weisman also noted, “In popular and legal discourse, one is ‘afflicted,’ ‘burdened,’ or ‘cursed’ with feelings of remorse (p. 125). These descriptions may be supported in part by the Haunting Effects theme. Participants found it very difficult to tolerate or escape remorse; it inevitably returned to haunt them. In addition, Haunting Effects also partially supported the descriptions of remorse “as ‘breaking down’ or ‘losing control’ or as symptoms of emotional collapse” (p.125). Fear was prevalent among many participants. Some feared the intensity of remorse would consume, devour, or destroy them, or prompt them to lose total control. A few feared or thought about suicide. One participant attempted suicide prior to placement because he felt he let the effects of remorse get to him. Another spoke of his fear of what might happen if he allowed remorse to control him as it had controlled a friend who committed suicide.
**Behavioral Component**

The behavioral component consisted of the transgressors’ or offenders’ observable actions or the desire to engage in these actions as part of the remorse experience. Examples of behaviors illustrated in the literature included an open declaration of remorse and responsibility, demonstration of concern for the victim, an apology, a timely guilty plea, reparation, restitution, the absence of reoffending or repeating the behavior, and a willingness to make amends or undergo rehabilitation (Proeve, 2001; Weisman, 2004, 1999; Wood & MacMartin, 2007). Several themes supported most of these findings. For example, an eligibility criterion for participation in the study was that participants had to have experienced remorse in the context of their crimes. The participants’ counselors served as key informants for recruitment. They recommended residents who spoke of experiences of remorse through their interactions with them in treatment. Therefore, all participants in the study openly declared remorse and responsibility for their crimes to the researcher and counselors.

The *Becoming Accountable* theme cluster related to the open declaration of responsibility, demonstration of concern for the victim, and a willingness to undergo rehabilitation. This theme appeared to be an on-going process. Most of the time participants assumed responsibility for their actions and for hurting others, although, they did minimize or attempt to justify behaviors on occasion during the interviews. Initially in treatment, most participants perceived placement in the RTP as a punishment. However, after a short period of time, they viewed it as an opportunity for change. They chose to work the program and meet goals as a means of becoming better persons.

The *Need to Apologize* related to some of the behavioral components identified
in the literature. Most participants wanted to apologize to the victim even though the thought of it created distress and anxiety. They believed they should apologize because it was the right thing to do.

The *Alternate Means of Making Amends* theme directly related to the behavioral component. This theme consisted of examples of current amends or their plans to make amends after discharge. The participants did not limit making amends to the victim. They also wanted and needed to make amends to all those harmed by their behavior and to those whom they disappointed or rejected including family, friends, girlfriends, teachers and neighbors. This theme represented a broad range of actions. The actions were meant to convey how sorry they felt for the crime and harm they caused to others. They also wanted to demonstrate that they had changed for the better. Among participants, an apology was the most common means of making amends. Other examples of making amends included such actions as following the rules in treatment and at home, working toward treatment goals, making progress in school or skills training, paying restitution or bond fees, obtaining respectable employment, spending time with family and positive friends, and being a positive role model and source of support to younger siblings. The absence of reoffending or repeating the behavior also related to the *Alternate Means of Making Amends* theme in that participants planned to continue making amends by making good decisions in the future and not reoffending. However, participants remained in placement during data collection (except for an occasional pass); therefore, they did not have much of an opportunity to demonstrate improved ability to make decisions outside of the treatment facility.
Consequences

One of the key findings of the concept analysis involved the identification of both negative and positive consequences of remorse for the victim and offender. Since victims were not included in the study, the following section focuses on the relationship of the study themes to the negative and positive consequences of remorse noted in the literature.

Negative Consequences of Remorse

The negative consequences of remorse were identified in the anecdotal, psychotherapy literature as anxiety, severe depression (Kroll & Egan, 2004; Marriott, 2007; Singer, 2004), suicidal ideation, and suicide (Singer, 2004). The themes, Affective/Emotional Aspects and Haunting Effects supported these findings. Several participants reported feelings of anxiety and depression as part of their remorse experience. They also had past suicidal thoughts or death wishes. One participant attempted suicide prior to placement because he believed he let remorse get to him. The suicidal ideation varied among participants. One participant recalled a friend who committed suicide because he could not tolerate the feelings of guilt after doing something wrong. He feared the same thing could happen to him if he allowed remorse to control him. Another prayed to God to make it stop or take him from this earth so he would not have to endure remorse. While yet another reported the depression made him not want to be in this world any longer. None of the participants admitted to current suicidal ideations during the interviews, and the suicidal thoughts and feelings for most, occurred while in detention or jail.

Time in detention or jail was particularly disturbing for participants. Based on their descriptions, they did not have access to counseling services where they could
discuss their thoughts and feelings. Activities that could help distract them from the intensity of remorse were sparse. Some participants remained in detention for two to three months or more awaiting placement. The extensive time alone with the persistent thoughts and feelings of remorse led to considerable distress among several participants, and they did not know how to cope or manage their remorse experiences. The intensity of remorse and lack of adequate coping strategies puts participants at risk for self harm or suicide; thus, there is a need for risk assessments and supportive services from a mental health provider.

The literature contained very limited information regarding how individuals cope with remorse. The unfortunate consequences of anxiety, severe depression, suicidal ideations, and suicide suggested that some individuals did not have the appropriate means of coping, adequate resources, or support systems to manage the more devastating effects of remorse. This implication was supported by the *Coping Strategies* theme cluster, and the *Repressing Remorse*, and *Fighting Remorse Alone* themes.

Marriott (2007) addressed coping with remorse in his presentation of a case study of his extensive psychodynamic work with a 14 year-old male who was convicted of murder. Marriott reported the youth’s remorse experiences as painfully intense and difficult to tolerate. He assisted the youth to gradually modify remorse into a more tolerable form and transform the negative experience into something reparative. Marriott believed resilience factors allowed the youth to experience remorse and prevented him from existing in total denial and avoidance. Singer (2004) also emphasized the intensity of remorse, the difficulty in tolerating remorse, and the inability to express remorse as barriers to treatment among Viet Nam War Veterans.
The participants in this study had similar experiences as reported by Marriott (2007) and Singer (2004). Remorse was painfully intense and difficult to tolerate. As a result most of them chose to cope with remorse through denial and avoidance as noted in the theme cluster, *Coping Strategies* and the *Repressing Remorse* theme. They became proficient survivors of remorse. In addition, most participants did not feel comfortable talking about remorse in individual or group therapy even though they thought it would probably help them, so they chose to keep their thoughts and feelings to themselves as reflected in the *Fighting Remorse Alone* theme.

The few participants who did discuss remorse with counselors were grateful for the opportunity. They believed talking about the experiences was therapeutic. It helped them to feel better about themselves, and it helped them to learn from the experience. They were also willing to give support to other residents who struggled with remorse, but few were open to the topic. Several of the participants mentioned that talking about remorse in the interviews was helpful to them and it was the primary reason for agreeing to participate. One participant thought prisoners should have to undergo similar interviews as a requirement for release. He stated, “I just think the people should have to… ‘Cuz maybe, you know, just talkin’ about it, you know. Maybe just kinda like we are now like talkin’ about it, maybe something will click, you know. Maybe.”

During validation of findings, one participant mentioned attending two group therapy sessions that focused on remorse since completion of the interviews. And, although only 2 or 3 residents spoke up about their remorse experiences, he observed the other residents as attentive and respectful. This suggests that remorse can be addressed openly in a group setting without the bravado or judgment that tends to be common
among the detained population (Shelton, 2004). Even if participants were not ready to disclose their experiences of remorse to the group, listening to the discussion will, likely, stimulate thought. Participants may also find comfort in universality, a curative factor of group psychotherapy that involves the recognition that one is not alone in this experience (Yalom, 1995).

Participants shared other barriers to communication of remorse within the *Fighting Remorse Alone* theme. These barriers included a lack of trust felt toward the counselor and most other residents; a fear of being judged as weak or soft; a cultural influence of having been taught not to express thoughts and feelings; a belief that they brought it on themselves, and therefore, should deal with it by themselves; and a fear of acquiring new charges should they express remorse for a crime of which they had not yet been charged. Finding solutions to decrease these barriers would be essential to facilitate participant acceptance of assistance of mental health professionals.

The findings reflected additional information about coping with remorse among this population. Participants experienced remorse as a process that consisted of two phases. In the initial phase, participants focused on fighting remorse and doing anything possible to avoid the unpleasant experience. However, over time, they realized they could not avoid or escape remorse indefinitely. At this point, participants surrendered to remorse, and most became more open to the experience although most kept it concealed from others. They still experienced pain and suffering in phase two, but to a lesser degree; remorse became more manageable.

Perhaps the experience of remorse as a process is similar to Marriott’s (2007) description of modifying remorse into a more tolerable form during therapy; however, it
appears as though the majority of participants managed to approach the second phase without the assistance of counselors since most were not open to self-disclosure. Since working through remorse requires considerable guidance and support from mental health professionals, participants may have paid a high price by choosing to battle remorse alone. Choosing not to share experiences of remorse prevented them from receiving much needed support and guidance during a very difficult and stressful time. It also prevented the opportunity to learn and practice effective coping strategies. As a result they may have extended the pain and suffering associated with remorse unnecessarily, and increased the risk of experiencing one or more of the potentially harmful consequences of remorse.

**Positive Consequences of Remorse**

The positive consequences of remorse relevant to this study were found in the anecdotal and psychotherapy literature, and in one qualitative study on remorse. For example, Brothers stated, “remorse, transformed, might become a vehicle for healing/wholing rather than a masochistic preoccupation” (1989, p. 47). Moore reported, “Remorse may hold us in the muck of past mistakes, but ultimately it is cathartic and renewing” (1989, p. 83). These findings were supported by the theme cluster *Transforming Remorse* and the theme *Hope for the Future*. As participants progressed to the second phase of remorse, they were able to transform the negative experiences of remorse into positive hope for the future.

Higgins’s (2005) study of remorse among at-risk adolescents between the ages of 18 and 21, some of whom had experience within the juvenile justice system as youth, also found that some participants perceived the remorse experience as transformational.
She reported that although the experience was painful, it promoted accountability, served as a catalyst for positive change, instilled hope, and encouraged making amends. These findings were supported by the theme clusters *Becoming Accountable* and *Transforming Remorse*, and the latter’s related themes of *Hope for the Future*, and *The Need to Apologize*, and *Alternate Means of Making Amends*.

The unpleasantness associated with remorse motivated participants to avoid similar mistakes in the future and make better choices in the future as noted in Higgins’ study (2005). Remorse was also perceived as a motivating factor or deterrent against future transgressions (Higgins, 2005; Shaw, 1989; Petrucci, 2002). Participants in this study reported the same beliefs as illustrated in the *Hope for the Future* theme, but they did not have much of an opportunity to test these beliefs or expectations since participants remained in placement during the study. They could demonstrate better decision-making skills within the confines of the program and while out on pass, but a follow up study would be needed to determine if and how remorse played a role in improved decision-making or reoffending.

Many participants felt anxiety about leaving the facility while only a few felt fairly confident about using their experiences of remorse and treatment to help them stay out of trouble with the law. They knew they would have to face many obstacles upon the return to the community. Many participants spoke of how they would handle remorse and future situations differently if they found themselves in circumstances similar to those that led to previous arrests. Some, however, lacked a concrete plan and did not seem prepared to implement effective coping, problem-solving, or decision-making skills. Unfortunately, upon discharge, participants would have to rely on these skills and the
assistance of supportive others, if available, since follow-up mental health services were not usually included as part of the discharge plan.

Remorse was also described as having the potential to aid in conflict resolution and repair relationships. (Goffman, 1971; Higgins, 2005; Petrucci, 2002; Singer, 2004; Tavuchis, 1991). The theme cluster Repairing Relationships and its associated themes of Family, Victims, Friends, and Others supported these potential positive consequences. However, before participants could focus on repairing relationships, they had to consider the source of the damaged relationships. They had to recognize the problem of engaging in criminal activity, acknowledge it as wrong or unacceptable, and understand how their behavior affected the victim, others, and the self. As a result, responsibility and accountability for their behavior increased as noted in the Becoming Accountable theme cluster. Remorse helped participants recognize how their criminal behavior negatively impacted many of their relationships, and it motivated them toward reparation. The Need to Apologize and Alternate Means of Making Amends themes also related to these potential consequences since participants used them as vehicles in their quest to improve relationships.

Other potential positive consequences of remorse included opening the door to forgiveness and restoring one’s place in the moral community (Goffman, 1971; Higgins, 2005; Petrucci, 2002; Singer, 2004; Tavuchis, 1991). Higgins (2005) found that remorse also helped participants to forgive themselves. These consequences were supported by the Seeking Forgiveness theme cluster and themes of From Family/Others, From Victim(s), and From Oneself. However, as noted above, participants first had to admit to the problem of criminal wrongdoing and its impact in order to progress toward Becoming
Accountable prior to seeking forgiveness. The Need to Apologize and Alternate Means of Making Amends themes also related to these potential consequences since participants not only used them as vehicles to repair relationships, but also as a means of seeking forgiveness. Most participants received forgiveness from family and friends. Most participants had reached the point of forgiving themselves for criminal behavior and hurting others, but a few struggled with self-forgiveness to date.

According to Weisman (2004) those who choose not to express remorse or apologize, fail to reestablish this membership within the community and invite forgiveness, an exchange that could potentially lead to reconciliation between the two parties. One of the interesting findings in the study was the participants’ strong desire to apologize and seek forgiveness from all of whom were harmed by the criminal behavior, especially the victim(s). Participants spent considerable time thinking about and preparing victim apologies. Some repeatedly rehearsed what they would say to the victim; some wrote letters of apology and planned to give them to the victim(s) after discharge. Others wrote letters to help themselves feel better and were not sure if they would give them to victim(s) or apologize directly.

The process of formulating apologies, along with the uncertainty surrounding the victims’ potential response, created considerable anxiety and stress among participants. A few had the opportunity to apologize and they reported it as uncomfortable and awkward. At the same time, they were glad they did it. They did not really know how to approach the victim, nor did they feel comfortable with what to say or how to say it. They did not know how the victim(s) would respond, if the apology would be accepted or rejected, or if they would be forgiven. However, they felt it was worth the risk. They wanted to
follow through with the apology because they believed it was the right thing to do, it would help them feel better, it may decrease the intensity of remorse, and they might be forgiven. Participants were not asked directly if counselors were involved in the process of formulating apologies; however, they implied that this was something they worked on alone. If this was the case, participants missed out on the opportunity to receive professional guidance, support, and assistance during this turbulent experience. The Counselors could have been valuable resources to them in the formation, preparation, and perhaps, practice of apologies had they been open to assistance.

**Limitations**

There were several limitations associated with the study. First, the sample size of 13 was relatively small, and it was limited to European American and African American adolescents between the ages of 16 and 18 who were placed in Residential Treatment Programs in a rural, southwestern state. Individuals from other ethnic groups, ages, settings, or gender may or may not have experienced remorse in the same manner. Second, only individuals who felt comfortable sharing their experiences of remorse in the context of their crimes and whose parent or guardian provided written informed consent were represented in the study. Third, although the primary investigator instructed the participants to refrain from discussing the contents of the interview with other residents, there was no way of knowing for sure if the participants complied with the instructions. Fourth, although five of the thirteen participants validated findings and thus enhanced credibility of the study, credibility could have been further strengthened through validation from all participants. However, due to the time frame between the interviews and data analysis completion, the length of placement, and early discharge of some
participants, all participants did not have the opportunity to validate findings. Lastly, data obtained regarding how remorse will impact relationships and future decision making was anticipatory in nature since participants remained in placement throughout the study, with the exception of going on pass for very brief periods.

**Implications for Future Nursing Research, Nursing Practice, and Policy,**

This is the first known study that focuses exclusively on the human experiences of remorse among adolescent offenders in the context of their crimes. Many of the preliminary findings contribute to the body of knowledge on remorse and suggest implications for future nursing research, nursing practice, and policy.

**Implications for Future Research**

There are multiple opportunities for future research based on the findings of this study. Replication of the study with a larger sample would add to the body of knowledge, and hopefully, validate preliminary findings. Additional studies comprised of female adolescent offenders, a broader range of ages, and multiple ethnic groups from a variety of settings could provide more information about gender, cultural, and developmental aspects of the remorse experience.

One of the limitations of this study involves the anticipatory nature of how remorse will affect the adolescents’ relationships, future decision-making, or offending behavior. Since they remained in placement throughout the study, it is unknown if the anticipated influences of remorse will occur as expected. A follow up study would provide further information about the role of remorse on reparation of relationships, and decision-making skills, and recidivism post discharge.
New interventions related to remorse should be developed and tested. For example, nurse researchers could develop and test the effectiveness of specific interventions such as cinema therapy, bibliotherapy, journaling, and letters of apology as means of exploring, coping, and facilitating the positive aspects of remorse. The development and testing of a remorse training program might also be an option in the future as researchers continue to discover additional new knowledge related to remorse.

The effectiveness of a face to face apology between the adolescent and victim and written apologies should also be explored. The adolescents want to apologize to victims for a variety of reasons. They believe offering an apology is the right thing to do. They also believe it may lessen remorse, help them to move on, and allow the opportunity to receive forgiveness. However, the effects of an apology on the remorse experience of youthful offenders have not been explored. Limited studies have been conducted on the effects of an apology on recidivism among youthful offenders and results were inconsistent. Further study is needed to clarify the effects of remorse in these areas.

Remorse is a complex concept and the determination of its presence and authenticity is made based on individual perception. The availability of instruments to measure remorse is extremely limited. Most instruments were intended to measure other constructs, and therefore, do not measure remorse in a meaningful way. None of the studies on instrument development involved adolescent or adult offenders as participants. Nurse researchers could use findings from this study to lay the foundation for the future development and construction of an instrument that relates directly to adolescent offenders.
**Implications for Nursing Practice**

The findings suggest several recommendations for nursing practice, counselors, and supportive staff who work with adolescent offenders. Since remorse is an understudied concept, APRNs, Counselors, and Support Staff (i.e., Program Specialists or Mental Health Technicians) may not have an adequate knowledge base regarding this concept. Providing education based on findings from this study and the literature will help clinicians gain a deeper understanding of the human experiences of remorse among this population including attributes, effects, and potential consequences.

In turn, APRNs and Counselors should educate the adolescents about remorse. Perhaps, if they knew more about the common experiences of other adolescents and what to expect, uncertainty and general anxiety may decrease. Providing written information about remorse in the form of a pamphlet upon admission may be a useful tool. The adolescents need to understand that remorse will, likely, be a part of them for some time in the future, and they need to learn how to live with it. Therefore, professionals need to assist them to develop and utilize effective coping skills to manage remorse now and in the future.

The experience of remorse in the context of crime should be a focus of treatment and APRNs and Counselors should explore these experiences in Individual, Family and Group Psychotherapies. Risk assessments also need to be completed routinely to ensure safety from self-harm. The adolescents need assistance from professionals who will listen, understand, and support them throughout this on-going process while at the same time, hold them accountable for their actions. Remorse triggers a number of issues that occur simultaneously and need to be addressed. APRNs and Counselors have the
opportunity to help youth face remorse rather than deny it. They can teach positive coping strategies, encourage practice of new skills, and evaluate their effectiveness. They can offer support and guidance in the processes of becoming accountable and establishing a positive identity. They can involve the family in assisting the adolescents to increase accountability and as they attempt to make amends, seek forgiveness, and repair relationships. In addition, peer counseling and peer-facilitated groups by adolescents who have progressed further through the process of remorse may be beneficial to those who continue to struggle with the experience of remorse.

It is also important for Support Staff to be aware of the issues related to remorse. Support Staff members spend time with the adolescents 24/7 and they are responsible for their supervision and safety on a daily basis. Since Individual and Group Therapy occur weekly, adolescents have more frequent access to Staff members than APRNs or Counselors. Staff could be a valuable source of support and guidance when adolescents need assistance in dealing with these issues outside of scheduled therapies. Staff members also serve as positive influences in the adolescents’ lives; therefore, continued positive role modeling should be supported and encouraged.

Many of the adolescents spoke about the lack of privacy and the need to be alone when remorse was intense or when trying to figure out issues related to remorse. Many experienced anger toward the self as part of remorse, and they withdrew from the group to avoid acts of aggression. It would be important for staff to pay attention and directly assess those who withdraw from the group or express anger as these behaviors could relate to remorse and may require more immediate intervention.
The lack of private time is a concern, but it is also a more complicated issue. The adolescents are in placement for a reason, and the loss of freedom and privileges are appropriate consequences for criminal behavior. It is staffs’ responsibility to ensure the safety of the public as well as the youth through close supervision. At the same time, imagine what it must be like to be confined to a facility for seven months without any time to one’s self. The adolescents need time to think, reflect, and problem-solve outside of therapies, but it is a challenge to accomplish these tasks in the continuous company of 15 other adolescents. This problem could be addressed by including time alone in a secure area, where youth could still be observed by staff, as a reward within the behavior modification level systems already in place at each facility. By demonstrating trust, appropriate behavior, and achievement of goals, time alone in varying increments could be earned as youth attain higher levels within the system.

The adolescents had a strong desire to apologize to the victim(s), but the thought of doing so created much anxiety. APRNs and Counselors could assist the youth in formulating a written and/or verbal apology. The use of role plays could also help the youth prepare for the apology and potential victim responses based on whether or not the apology is accepted or rejected.

The uncertainty of how one would be received by the community upon discharge was stressful for some participants. This concern could be addressed by creating more specific goals and experiences for integration passes. For example, school attendance during the pass could be required for those who plan to return to high school. This plan would allow the youth to interact with peers, teachers, and school officials prior to discharge. The youth would have the opportunity to return to the facility, process the pass
and create a plan for coping with any potential problems with the assistance and support of the APRN or Counselor.

Although findings suggest many implications for practice, little can be accomplished if barriers to communication are not resolved. Several barriers, such as the adolescents’ reluctance to talk about remorse or request help, a lack of trust, and a fear of being judged, were identified. The development of a trusting relationship between APRNs/Counselors and adolescents would be an essential first step in reducing barriers. Creating a therapeutic alliance would convey acceptance, and hopefully, facilitate trust and communication. Many of the adolescents engaged in journal or letter writing. These non-verbal interventions could be used to address remorse until the adolescents feel more comfortable with verbal self-disclosure. The use of cinema or bibliotherapy would also be less threatening approaches. Professionals would also have to be sensitive to the adolescents’ ability to tolerate remorse. They would need to adapt their approaches based on the adolescents’ comfort level and readiness.

**Implications for Policy**

Findings from this study illustrate the painfully intense nature of remorse, difficulty in coping with remorse, and its potentially devastating, negative consequences of anxiety, severe depression, suicidal ideation, and suicide. Participants found their remorse experiences most disturbing while in detention, but they did not have access to counseling services; if services were available, the participants did not know about them. Some participants were detained for several months before placed in Residential Treatment Centers. Since the intensity of remorse and lack of adequate coping strategies puts them at risk for serious, negative consequences, risk assessments and supportive
services should be provided by an Advanced Practice Registered Nurse or Counselor at regular intervals to ensure their safety.

The lack of follow up counseling services post discharge should also be re-evaluated. Participants spend 7 months in a supportive, therapeutic environment, but most are discharged without follow up mental health services. They receive post-discharge supervision from probation officers and the courts, but they do not usually receive supportive mental health services that could help them cope with on-going remorse or issues they may encounter as they reintegrate into the community. It appears as though the system may inadvertently set them up to fail by not providing valuable resources during this very vulnerable transition. Further research to test the effectiveness of follow up mental health care from APRNs or Counselors may support the need for post-discharge services and justify costs.

As Advanced Practice Registered Nurses continue to delineate their roles in Juvenile Justice, they should take advantage of the unique opportunity to contribute to the advancement of nursing knowledge through further research, clinical practice, and policy change. They can assist troubled youth to transform a very negative experience in to a positive one that has the potential to help them become healthy, responsible, and productive adults.

**Summary**

The discussion in Chapter five compares and contrasts the results of this study to multiple theories of adolescent development and the findings from the conceptual analysis/literature review. It also includes limitations, and implications for future research, nursing practice, and policy. The relationship of study findings to adolescent
development suggests that remorse may play a role in the adolescents’ psychosocial and moral development, and in the context of the immediate and broader environments in which the adolescents live. The adolescents worked to establish positive identities and overcome previously established negative reputations created through criminal behavior. Remorse helped them to become more accountable for their behavior and the harmful effects it had on others. It appeared as though the level of moral development may have increased as personal gain was no longer the motivation for behavior. Positive and negative influences in their immediate and broader environments were evident and they will continue to be factors after discharge. Many participants believed remorse had an effect on their relationships within the family, school, and community environments, and it prompted them to re-evaluate and repair them, make amends, and seek forgiveness.

The comparison of study findings revealed congruency between theme clusters/themes and the cognitive, psychological, affective, and behavioral attributes of remorse. In addition, there was consistency between theme clusters/themes and the positive and negative consequences of remorse as identified in the concept analysis. Much new information was gained regarding the experiences of remorse among adolescent offenders that was not contained in the literature due to a lack of research on remorse at the phenomenological level.

Implications for future research included exploring the lived experiences of remorse among varied samples; the effects of remorse on future decision-making and reoffending; the development and testing of interventions specific to remorse; the effectiveness of face to face apologies and letters of apologies on remorse; and the development and construction of an instrument to measure remorse that targets
adolescent offenders. Implications for practice focused on educating APRNs, Counselors, Support Staff, and adolescents about remorse and its potential effects; including the concept of remorse as a focus of treatment; teaching coping strategies; finding solutions to communication barriers; and developing and implementing interventions to help adolescents work through remorse and focus on the positive aspects of remorse. Recommendations for change in policy included the need for routine risk assessments while in detention, and the need for follow up mental health services post discharge.

The results of this study contributed new knowledge to the body of literature on remorse in the context of crime through rich descriptions of the unique, lived experiences of remorse among adolescent offenders. Future exploration of remorse will facilitate a more in-depth understanding of this concept and provide direction for assisting troubled youth through this experience.
Appendix A

Preliminary Model of the Antecedent, Attributes, and Consequences of Remorse

Antecedent

Attributes

Consequences

Harmful or wrongful act

Behavioral i.e.,
Action tendency to:
Make amends
Apologize
Reparation

Remorse

Cognitive i.e.,
Mentally undo
Assumed responsibility
Rumination

Psychological i.e.,
Psychological suffering
Mental anguish
Self punishment
Dread

Affective i.e.,
Visual display of suffering
Paralinguistic devices
Painfully intense

Offender Positive Outcomes:
Accept Responsibility
Apology
Forgiveness
Personal growth & change

Victim Positive Outcomes:
↓ Anger
↓ Fear of revictimization
Empathy
Forgiveness

Offender Negative Outcomes:
Anxiety
Depression
Suicidal Ideation
Suicide
This research project is being conducted as part of a dissertation for a doctoral degree in nursing. The researcher is a graduate student at the University of Hawaii. The purpose of the study is to learn about the experiences of remorse among adolescent offenders. Your adolescent is being asked to participate because he has experienced remorse related to his crimes.

The Residential Treatment Program Directors and counselors will assist with recruitment of potential participants by individually introducing the researcher to adolescents who have expressed remorse for their crimes. Participation in the study will consist of two, private interviews with the investigator that will be conducted about two weeks apart. Interview questions will focus on what it is like to experience remorse. Each interview will last approximately 1-1½ hours. Data from the interviews will be summarized into categories, and no names or personal identifying information will be included with the research results. The investigator will also meet with the adolescent for 20-30 minutes to share the summarized data and to ask if the summary accurately describes his experiences of remorse. The investigator will obtain background information from the adolescent’s file, which will remain anonymous (i.e., adolescent age, date of birth, race, educational level, employment, family make-up, prescribed medications, medical problems; history of arrests and psychiatric concerns among adolescent and parent/guardian). Approximately 15 adolescents will participate in the study. Interviews will be audio recorded and later transcribed.

The investigator believes there is little risk to participating in this study. However, there may be a small risk that your adolescent might experience psychological pain such as feeling anxious, uncomfortable, or embarrassed when talking about remorse related to his committed crimes. If necessary, a referral to one of the full-time counselors at the Residential Treatment center will be offered.

Participating in this research may or may not be of direct benefit to your adolescent. It is anticipated, however, that he may develop a better understanding of remorse and how it impacts him and others. Results from this research may also lead to the development of interventions that focus on the therapeutic effects of remorse for adolescent offenders now and in the future.
After completing the second interview, arrangements will be made to provide pizza and soda for your adolescent as compensation for time spent participating in this research project.

Research data will be confidential to the extent allowed by law. Agencies with research oversight such as SWOSU and UH Committee on Human Studies have the authority to review research data. All research records will be retained in a locked file in the primary investigator’s locked office for at least three years past completion of the study and then destroyed in accordance with SWOSU IRB policy. Audio tapes will be destroyed after the tapes are reviewed and transcribed.

Participation in this project is completely voluntary. Participation will not impact your adolescent’s length of stay at the facility, treatment program, or legal status. Your adolescent is free to withdraw from participation at any time during the duration of the study without penalty or loss of benefit to which he would otherwise be entitled.

If you have any questions regarding this research project, please contact the researcher, Kathleen Wolff, at 580-772-3262.

If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, please contact the UH Committee on Human Studies at (808) 956-5007, or uhirb@hawaii.edu, or the SWOSU Protection of Human Subjects Committee at (580) 774-3264, or Blake.Sonobe@swosu.edu

**Parent or Guardian:**
I have read and fully understand the consent form. My signature indicates that I agree to allow my adolescent to participate in this research project if he chooses to do so. I also agree to allow the researcher access to my adolescent’s file. I have received a copy of this consent form, and the researcher has adequately answered all of my questions.

_______________________________________
Name (printed)

_______________________________________
Signature _____________________________
Date

_______________________________________
Child’s Name (printed)
Appendix C
Adolescent Agreement to Participate in a Study on Remorse

Kathleen A. Wolff
Primary Investigator
(580) 774-3262

This research project is being conducted as part of a dissertation for a doctoral degree in nursing. The researcher is a graduate student at the University of Hawaii. The purpose of the study is to learn about the experiences of remorse among adolescent offenders. You are being asked to participate because you have experienced remorse related to your crimes.

Participation in the study will consist of two, private interviews with the investigator that will be conducted about two weeks apart. Interview questions will focus on what it is like to experience remorse. Each interview will last approximately 1-1½ hours, and will take place at the residential treatment facility. Data from the interviews will be summarized into categories, and no names or personal identifying information will be included with the research results. The investigator will also meet with you for 20-30 minutes to share the summarized data, and to ask you if the summary accurately describes your experiences of remorse. The investigator will obtain background information from your file, which will remain anonymous (i.e., age, date of birth, race, educational level, employment, family make-up, prescribed medications, medical problems, and history of arrests or psychiatric concerns among adolescent and parent/guardian). Approximately 15 adolescents will participate in the study. Interviews will be audio recorded and later transcribed.

The investigator believes there is little risk to participating in this study. However, there may be a small risk that you might experience psychological pain such as feeling anxious, uncomfortable, or embarrassed when talking about remorse related to committed crimes. If necessary, a referral to one of the full-time counselors at the Residential Treatment center will be offered.

Participating in this research may or may not be of direct benefit to you. It is anticipated, however, that you may develop a better understanding of remorse and how it impacts you and others. Results from this research may also lead to the development of interventions that focus on the therapeutic effects of remorse for adolescent offenders now and in the future.

After completing the second interview, arrangements will be made to provide you with pizza and soda as compensation for time spent participating in this research project.
Research data will be confidential to the extent allowed by law. Agencies with research oversight such as SWOSU and UH Committee on Human Studies have the authority to review research data. All research records will be retained in a locked file in the primary investigator’s locked office for at least three years past completion of the study and then destroyed in accordance with SWOSU IRB policy. Audio tapes will be destroyed after the tapes are reviewed and transcribed.

Participation in this project is completely voluntary. Participation will not impact your length of stay at the facility, treatment program, or legal status. You are free to withdraw from participation at any time during the duration of the study without penalty or loss of benefit to which you would otherwise be entitled.

If you have any questions regarding this research project, please contact the researcher, Kathleen Wolff, at 580-772-3262.

If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, please contact the UH Committee on Human Studies at (808) 956-5007, or uhirb@hawaii.edu, or the SWOSU Protection of Human Subjects Committee at (580) 774-3264, or Blake.Sonobe@swosu.edu

**Participant:**
I have read and fully understand the consent form. My signature indicates that I freely agree to participate in this research project. I also agree to allow the researcher access to my file. I have received a copy of this consent form, and the researcher has adequately answered all of my questions.

__________________________________________
Name (printed)

__________________________________________  __________________________
Signature                                      Date
Appendix D

Interview Questions

“My name is Ms. Kathleen Wolff and I am interested in learning everything I can about your experiences of remorse as it relates to crimes you have committed. I have 12 questions to ask you about your experiences of remorse, and you have the right to refuse to answer any or all questions. This interview will last about 1-1½ hours, but you are free to end the interview before that time or continue beyond that time frame. At the end of this interview, we will schedule an appointment for a second interview, which will take place in about two weeks. During the second interview, I will ask the questions that we did not get to today, and you will also have the opportunity to add to or change any of your responses to previous questions. What questions do you have before we start the interview?”

1. How would you define remorse?

2. What is it like to experience remorse related to one or more of your crimes?

3. What kinds of thoughts go through your mind when you experience remorse?

4. What kinds of feelings occur when you experience remorse?

5. What do you do when you are experiencing remorse?

6. How does your experience of remorse affect your relationship with family?

7. How does your experience of remorse affect your relationship with friends?

8. If there is a special person in your life, such as a girlfriend, how does your experience of remorse affect your relationship with her or him?

9. How does your experience of remorse affect your relationship with people at school (students, teachers, school officials)?

10. How does your experience of remorse affect your relationship with people in the town where you live?

11. How does your experience of remorse relate to the victim(s) of the crime?

12. How does remorse affect the decisions you make?
Appendix E

DEMOGRAPHIC DATA FORM

The following demographic information and contextual variables will be obtained by the P.I. from the participant’s Residential Treatment Program file (with permission of parent/guardian and adolescent in the informed consent/assent forms). Data will be reported in aggregate form to describe the sample and as part of the discussion as they relate to adolescent developmental theories based on findings.

Date: ___________   Participant Code Number: ________   Age: ____   Date of Birth: ____________

Race/Ethnicity: __________________   Highest Grade Completed in School: ___________

Previous Type of Employment (i.e., cashier, fast food, waiter, lawn care):

____________________________________________________________

Number of Arrests: ______   Age at first Arrest: ______________

Type of Offence(s):

____________________________________________________________

Offences committed alone or with others:____________________________________________

Psychiatric Diagnosis(es):

____________________________________________________________

Medical Diagnosis(es) or History of Trauma:

Prescribed Medication:

History of alcohol or substance abuse:

Family structure prior to OJA placement (i.e., nuclear, blended, single-parent, grandparent):

Members of the household prior to OJA placement (i.e., mom, step-mother, dad, grandparent, siblings, step-siblings, cousins, child):

___________________________

Parent/Guardian Occupation: Mother/Step-mother:

Father/Step-father: _______________   Guardian: __________________

Parent/Guardian: History of alcohol or substance abuse/mental illness/arrests:

___________________________
Appendix F

Clusters of Themes and Themes: Remorse

- **Definition of Remorse**
  
  Characterizations of Remorse

- **Battling the Power of Remorse**
  
  Pervasive Thoughts
  
  Affective/Emotional Aspects
  
  Haunting Effects
  
  Repressing Remorse
  
  Fighting Remorse Alone

- **Coping Strategies**

- **Becoming Accountable**

- **Searching for Identity**
  
  Will I Be Judged?
  
  Evaluating the Self

- **Repairing Relationships**
  
  Family
  
  Victim(s)
  
  Friends
  
  Others

- **Seeking Forgiveness**
  
  From Family/Others
From Victim(s)

From Oneself

- **Transforming Remorse**

  The Need to Apologize

  Alternate Means of Making Amends

  Hope for the Future
References


*Psychotherapy Patient, 5*, 275-290.


