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EVERYDAY PERSPECTIVES OF COMMUNITY-BASED PEACEBUILDING

THE PRACTICES OF THE RIVER PHOENIX CENTER FOR PEACEBUILDING IN GAINESVILLE, FLORIDA

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ABSTRACT

Eric Estling: Everyday Perspectives of Community-Based Peacebuilding: The Practices of the River Phoenix Center for Peacebuilding in Gainesville, Florida
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As the field of peacebuilding continues to shift focus toward local manifestations of peace and conflict, community-based peacebuilding practices are receiving increased attention for their unique, contextualized approach. This research aims to utilize the River Phoenix Center for Peacebuilding (RPCP) in Gainesville, Florida as a case to elucidate the perspectives of community peacebuilders concerning conflicts in their community and effective strategies for cultivating peace. Utilizing interviews with five people involved with RPCP and certain observational data, this research explores the unique perspectives of community-based peacebuilders and the strategies that they employ to cultivate meaningful change within their local context. The study devotes specific consideration to RPCP's police-youth dialogue (PYD) program which has been implemented to address the conflicts that exist between law enforcement officers and marginalized youth. The results demonstrate how the informants understand their work and role within their community. Further, the study explores how peace practices such as dialogue can be implemented into community programs to heal divisions, promote understanding, and address community conflict. These perspectives provide an illustration of how community-based organizations help to foster everyday peace through community peace practices.

Keywords: everyday peace, community-based peacebuilding, peace practices, police-youth dialogue

The originality of this thesis has been checked using the Turnitin OriginalityCheck service.

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1. Introduction

As the liberal paradigm of peacebuilding and peace research continues to be the object of increased criticism, peace research is discovering new ways of understanding how peace manifests and functions in various societies around the world. Galtung's (1969) distinctions between positive and negative forms of peace, as well as between forms of violence (e.g., physical and structural) has contributed to a radical reevaluation of how we understand peace and violence, and how peace can be developed in community. With a relatively new awareness of positive peace, peace is seen as an active rather than passive process. Peace is no longer understood as simply the absence or avoidance of violent conflict, but rather the active, creative process of establishing the resources, attitudes, and norms necessary to allow and sustain peaceful coexistence. Furthermore, a new understanding of violence as being perpetuated only by physical means, but also through oppressive social structures, institutions, and policies has allowed for new strategies for deconstructing structural forms of violence. All of these shifts have contributed to a refocusing within peace research on localized and everyday forms of peace and violence.

Local, community-based peace organizations engage with these localized understandings and manifestations of peace and conflict and promote solutions that are based on the specific needs of the community and derived from the experience and wisdom of community members. In this way local organizations serve as drivers of localized, everyday forms of community peace.

One such organization is the River Phoenix Center for Peacebuilding (RPCP) located in Gainesville, Florida. This community-based peacebuilding organization utilizes tools such as dialogue, restorative justice, and social-emotional learning to explore the conflicts that exist within its local community and embed new strategies to better understand, resolve, and heal divisions. These divisions are often the result of oppressive structures that lead to radical disparities and deep resentment within the community. RPCP, being made up of and within the community it serves, is

best equipped to identify the obstacles to a local peaceful society, and brings relevant, approachable solutions that respond to the specific needs of community members.

Due to its geography and socio-cultural dynamics, Gainesville represents a unique context for peacebuilding and peace research. This project, utilizing ethnographic interview methods, aims to examine how community-based peacebuilding is understood and implemented through localized peace initiatives in Gainesville, Florida. My thesis will focus on how everyday peace is made manifest in the local community of Gainesville, using RPCP as a specific focus subject.

To add to the existing body of research on community-based peacebuilding, and provide specific insight into the realities of peacebuilding within the US context, the projects specific research question is the following: *How is community-based peacebuilding understood and implemented through localized peace initiatives at the River Phoenix Center for Peacebuilding in Gainesville, Florida, USA?*

My research relies on an ethnographic observation of the programs of RPCP and utilizes interviews with five people closely related to RPCP who can provide both insider and outsider perspectives. These interviewees within the organization represent trainers, program designers, and facilitators of RPCP programming while those outside the organization include law enforcement officers who collaborate with RPCP to embed peacebuilding strategies in local law enforcement institutions. Utilizing an ethnographic approach, I analyze these interviews through a conceptual lens of everyday peace. My hope is that this project and research question will provide further insight about how the interview participants engage in meaning making, understand peacebuilding at the community level, and define peace.

To provide a context for my research, the following chapter will provide important background information about the community of Gainesville and RPCP.

2. Background - Gainesville, Florida and The River Phoenix Center for Peacebuilding

Gainesville, a city in north central Florida, holds a unique identity in the region due to its geographical and cultural characteristics. With a population estimated at around 134,000 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2019), Gainesville is too small to be considered a metropolis and too large to be deemed a small town. It is, however, by both size and population, the largest urban center in Alachua County, the broader, rural region of north Florida in which Gainesville is situated. Gainesville is likely best known as the location of the University of Florida, a major, state university with an enrollment of over 56,000 students, constituting more than a third of Gainesville's total population (University of Florida Institutional Planning and Research, 2020). Likely due to the presence of the university, Gainesville has a significantly younger population than Florida generally. While around an estimated 79 percent of Florida's population is below the age of 65, residents of the same age make up around an estimated 90 percent of Gainesville's population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2019). Similarly, the significant presence of the university has contributed to a socio-political culture in Gainesville that is notably more politically liberal or progressive than that of the surrounding, rural areas of Florida. For example, in the 2020 US Presidential election, while Republican Donald Trump's statewide vote totals in Florida outpaced those for Democrat Joe Biden by over three percent, Alachua County vote returns showed a preference for Biden over Trump by more than twenty-seven percent (The New York Times, 2020). Simultaneously, Gainesville's culture is still firmly rooted in the American South. Much of the food, music, language, and cultural norms of Gainesville are reflective of a broader Southern culture and lifestyle. In this way, Gainesville's unique local character includes both political/social progressivism and Southern (of the USA) cultural identity, social facets that are often characterized as oppositional.

Despite Gainesville's more liberal modern orientation, much like other Southern US cities, its history is marked by significant racial oppression, including instances of both institutional and overt

violence, which has left a lasting legacy on the community. The community has struggled to reconcile its relationship with the history of the Confederacy and the United States Civil War. During the war, Florida fought on the side of the Confederacy, a secessionist movement of southern states that aimed to preserve the institution of slavery. Gainesville was even the site of a small battle in 1864 which ended in victory for the Confederate troops. Historical cemeteries in Gainesville and Alachua County often contain the interred remains of Confederate soldiers, and a prominent Confederate monument, referred to fondly as "Old Joe" by community members, was only removed from its conspicuous position in downtown Gainesville in 2017 following the violent clashes between white supremacists and protestors in Charlottesville, Virginia. Furthermore, during the era of Jim Crow discrimination and segregation practices, businesses and governmental institutions of Gainesville continued to participate in the overt structural oppression of Black people well into the 1960s. Alachua County Public Schools, for example, did not fully integrate white and Black students until 1970, more than 16 years after the US Supreme Court ruled in *Brown v. Topeka Board of Education* that school segregation was unconstitutional (United States Commission on Civil Rights, 1972). Due to the relative recentness of these segregation practices, many elder members of the community still actively remember when Gainesville was strictly segregated along racial lines.

Sadly, even these instances of segregation and structural oppression do not account for some of the most painful moments in Gainesville's history concerning race. Recent research conducted by the Alachua County Historical Commission, for instance, has documented over 40 cases of lynchings—racially-motivated, extrajudicial executions of Black people—within the county between 1867 and 1926 (Kovankaya, 2020). As this figure only represents the number of discovered and documented lynching cases, the actual number of lynchings occurring in Alachua County is likely greater.

While not occuring within the boundaries of Alachua County, one case that received significant national attention was the 'massacre' of Rosewood, Florida, located only about 45 miles

southwest of Gainesville. In 1924, a white woman's disputed accusation of assault by a Black man set off a week-long series of violent events which resulted in the complete destruction of an African-American town, the forced displacement of hundreds of Black townspeople, and the death of at least eight residents—six Black and two white (González-Tennant, 2018). Hundreds of white residents (both from within the immediate area and beyond) formed deputized and vigilante mobs that intimidated, interrogated, tortured, and murdered Black residents of Rosewood and ultimately burned all structures of the town to the ground including homes, churches, and a school (González-Tennant, 2018). Gainesville, though not directly involved in the events of Rosewood, had significant indirect involvement due to its proximity to the events. For example, the violence was likely fueled in part by the presence of substantial numbers of Ku Klux Klan members who were in Gainesville at the time for a large New Year demonstration (González-Tennant, 2018). Furthermore, in the aftermath of the Rosewood Massacre, many of the displaced residents ultimately settled in Gainesville. It was even reported that during the chaos of the incident, a train collected displaced and fearful Black women and children and carried them to relative safety in the Gainesville area, where some of their descendants still live today (González-Tennant, 2018). Even though the incident garnered significant media attention at the time, it was largely forgotten in the decades that followed. The event was rarely if ever discussed prominently in mainstream discourse until it was again brought to public attention through a series of articles in the 1980s and a comprehensive public research project in 1993 (González-Tennant, 2018).

These histories of profound injustice, though often relegated to the margins of collective consciousness, still exist in the collective memory of the community. LaVon W. Bracy—the first Black student to graduate from Gainesville High School in 1965—describing her experience with school integration explains, "I still carry scars. Time has not yet healed all of them" (Bracy, 2017). The same is largely true of the greater Gainesville community as it attempts to make sense of the racial inequities and atrocities that exist in the collective memory of the community and provide an

important context for more recent events. In 2017, for example, Gainesville received significant attention in national media for being the site of an event that featured a speech by Richard Spencer, a prominent proponent of white nationalism. The event gave rise to large-scale protests both inside and outside of the speaking venue and even prompted a declaration of a state of emergency by the governor of Florida, Rick Scott (Thelen & Robinson, 2019).

But, aside from providing a context for present events, these past harms also provide a historical context for understanding the current stark disparities in outcomes for residents along racial lines in terms of income, housing, education, and medical access. For example, in Alachua County, the median income of Black households equals only 51 percent of the median household income for non-Hispanic whites (BEBR, 2018). This local disparity is greater even than the statewide or nationwide estimates, meaning that Black community members in Gainesville are at greater risk of poverty than elsewhere in Florida (BEBR, 2018). Similar disparities can be identified in terms of child poverty in the county; a full 44.6 percent of Black children in Alachua County live in poverty, making them 3.3 times more likely to be in poverty than white children (BEBR, 2018). Due to these economic disparities (as well as further forms of structural racism), Black children greatly underperform in the public school system. For example, in Alachua County, while 74 percent of non-Hispanic white students are proficient in reading by the third grade, a rate that is significantly greater than that of Florida generally, only 27.7 percent of black students reach the same benchmark (BEBR, 2018). Like previously, this local statistic demonstrates worse outcomes for Black residents in Alachua County than across the state of Florida (BEBR, 2018).

To a slightly lesser extent, many of these disparities also hold relative to the social positions and resources of Hispanic residents when compared to white community residents. While Hispanic people in Alachua County are similarly disadvantaged in the terms described previously, I largely focus on Black residents because they make up the most significant racial minority as a population percentage, and consistently face the worst overall outcomes.

Geographically, the city is still largely segregated along racial lines. The north and western neighborhoods are made up of predominantly white residents while some southern and eastern neighborhoods are predominantly made up of Black residents. Within the city itself, certain areas and neighborhoods represent significantly poorer outcomes for residents than other areas. A 2013 study data visualization mapped Gainesville to demonstrate the areas with the highest densities of Medicaid births (births in low-income households), confirmed cases of child maltreatment, and police responses to domestic violence (Hardt, et al., 2013). The maps clearly revealed "hotspots," or areas in which there is an overlap of reduced medical access and/or financial disadvantage and increased occurrence of child maltreatment and/or domestic violence (Hardt, et al., 2013). These disparities of outcomes that exist between the micro communities of Gainesville demonstrate the way the community continues to be segregated and exemplifies how very specific populations within the Gainesville context can be extraordinarily marginalized.

In Gainesville, the presence of these and other socio-historical dynamics make it a particularly interesting context for peace research. From a certain point of view, it would not seem to meet the traditional criteria of a conflict zone. It is, after all, a city in a so-called "developed nation" that does not appear at first glance to be actively engaged in any major domestic conflict, nor in the midst of a protracted or frozen conflict within its borders. However, the United States is a highly volatile environment where deep polarizations divide communities along lines of race, ethnicity, and socio-economic class. Many of these ongoing polarizations, oftentimes rooted in the history and continuation of racism, are still reflected in the local tensions present in Gainesville.

My personal knowledge and understanding of Gainesville is largely based on my experience. I was born in Gainesville in 1989 and spent the first 19 years of my life there. I lived in a quiet northwest neighborhood and attended fairly diverse public schools. I, as a white person from the northwest side of town, witnessed the segregation and racial isolation described previously firsthand, and hardly, if ever, traveled to the east side of the city.

In 2012, Heart Phoenix and Jeffrey Weisberg co-founded the River Phoenix Center for Peacebuilding (RPCP) in Gainesville as a community peacebuilding center that could acknowledge and help to heal deeply rooted divisions in the community, such as those described concerning racial oppression, mistrust, and division. The mission of RPCP was and is three-fold: (1) facilitate peacebuilding programs, trainings, events, and services featuring best and next practices; (2) promote local empowerment through collaboration, coordination, and partnerships with other organizations; and (3) create and represent a comprehensive community peacebuilding model that can be translatable and reproducible for communities in other parts of the country and world (RPCP, 2019). In practice, the fundamental peacebuilding strategies that RPCP advocates for and cultivates in Gainesville are "restorative justice and practices, social and emotional learning (SEL), dialogue, and trauma awareness and resilience building" (RPCP, 2019). Embedded within each of these strategies is a specific attentiveness given to racial justice and equity.

The United States' history of overt and systemic racism is well documented. Since the time of the nation's founding, the institution of slavery formed deeply-rooted divisions between racial groups. Even after abolition, these divisions remained through the era of segregation and Jim Crow, and (to a consequential extent) continue today. I have already demonstrated how, in parallel with broader national forms of overt and structural racism, Gainesville has its own unique history of racial oppression and unique conditions of ongoing disparities. Currently, a major divide among racial communities relates to fragmented perceptions of justice and police. According to recent reporting, about one in every one thousand black men and boys in the US dies from encounters with police, a rate that is 2.5 times that of white men/boys (Khan, 2019). 'Black Lives Matter,' a rallying cry that first emerged following numerous public incidents of black citizens being killed by law enforcement, has since developed into a significant, worldwide social movement. Most recently, the police killing of George Floyd has ignited protests in numerous US cities and even around the world. Studies have shown that while perceptions of police in the US are multidimensional and not necessarily fixed (Wu,

2014), level of trust in the police is correlated with racial identity, with African Americans and Hispanics reporting less trust in police overall than white Americans (Dowler & Sparks, 2018). Furthermore, age is also a relevant factor, as hostility between youth and police officers has been continuing to escalate (Borerro, 2001). In response to this polarization between police and the community they serve, especially in racially diverse communities, some police departments have sought new ways to build trust.

The city of Gainesville and the community therein has not gone unaffected by these tensions. In Alachua County, black teenagers are almost 7 times more likely than white teenagers to be arrested by law enforcement, and nearly 10 times more likely to serve time in a juvenile detention center (BEBR, 2018). Much as in other cities across the US, Gainesville has seen numerous Black Lives Matter demonstrations, and community members have taken part in actively renegotiating their relationship with local police through everyday conversations and encounters. Weisberg, current Executive Director of RPCP explains: "The conflict that exists between our African American, black and brown community members and law enforcement is not new. It's been happening for the last several hundreds of years. And yet, it's so highlighted right now, through the media, [that] these tensions can have life or death consequences" (RPCP, 2017). RPCP, in partnership with the Gainesville Police Department (GPD), has developed and launched an initiative aimed at reducing disproportionate minority contact (DMC) of local youth by the criminal justice system. RPCP now coordinates and facilitates dialogues between local officers and minority youth community members which allow both sides an opportunity to share personal experiences and ask questions to build empathy, understanding, and trust.

Projects such as these aim to shift the dynamics of power such that populations who have been historically oppressed by socio/political structures and institutions can break free from cycles of systemic violence. In this way community-based peacebuilders, such as the RPCP, have developed a

keen understanding of the conflicts that persist in their community and find novel, community-based approaches to respond.

3. Literature Review and Theoretical Approach

3.1. Everyday Peace

In light of liberalism's recent crisis of legitimacy in the context of international peacebuilding (Richmond, 2009), there has been a significant paradigm shift in peacebuilding and peace research away from understanding peace as a top-down process to a recognition of peace as emerging from people's everyday lives and interactions. In this sense, "the everyday" is defined as follows:

> …a space in which local individuals and communities live and develop political strategies in their local environment, towards the state and towards international models of order. It is not civil society, often a Western-induced artifice, but it is representative of the deeper local-local. It is often transversal and transnational, engaging with needs, rights, custom, individual, community, agency and mobilisation in political terms. (Richmond, 2010, p. 670)

In slightly different terms, "the everyday" is also defined thus:

> the site within which people affected by conflict and insecurity engage with ongoing difficulties and challenges of building and sustaining routines in the face of institutionalised marginalisation and disregard, and which has the potential for small (but potentially radical) change while perpetuating everyday rhythms of relationships, practices, and roles. (Berents, 2018, p. 36)

Given this conception, "everyday peace" represents a bottom-up process made manifest through an assortment of practices that organically and directly respond to experiences of everyday violence and conflict. Unlike the liberal paradigm's conception of universal "peace," practices of everyday peace are rooted in a specific, local, socio-political, and/or embodied context. So, in the context of the everyday, peacemaking may include a variety of mundane practices and social strategies aimed at limiting harm or building trust in the context of violence. For instance, Mac Ginty (2014, p. 555) points to "avoidance, ambiguity, ritualized politeness, telling and blame deferring" as examples of everyday peacemaking practices. While these kinds of practices may seem purely

reactionary and somewhat superficial, the specific manifestations of these practices require "considerable innovation, creativity[,]... improvisation[,]... [and] agency at the individual and group levels" (Mac Ginty, 2014, p. 555). Other scholars (e.g., Williams, 2015) have offered conceptions of everyday peace that are less strictly defined, including an array of practices and attitudes which help foster a more tolerant, inclusive coexistence. Williams (2015, p. 15) argues that the everyday peace framework offers an opportunity in research for "a wider perspective of how these practices are differentially constitutive of peace."

By shifting focus to the everyday manifestations and dynamics of peace and conflict, peace research can be more inclusive of diverse, often marginalized voices as authorities of their personal and unique experiences in order to offer novel, context-dependent strategies in response to conflict.

Building on this conception of everyday peace, some scholars have borrowed from feminist literature to explore the corporeal manifestations and implications of peace and conflict, recognizing them as embodied processes (Berents, 2018; Väyrynen, 2018). Everyday peace allows for an embodied analysis of peace because this framework neither privileges the rational above the material nor the universal above the particular. As an orientation for peace research, everyday peace acknowledges that even within broad violent conflicts, or under wide institutional or structural systems of violence, violence meets the experience of humans at the human level; therefore, it should be understood in particular, context-dependent terms. Likewise, peace moves from the theoretical to the physical realm at the human level through acts of everyday life that transcend conflict in meaningful—albeit sometimes minor—ways.

Focusing on the everyday has resulted in new ways of understanding peacebuilding efforts. For example, everyday diplomacy is an emerging conceptual framework that utilizes ethnographic methods to examine how local communities pursue diplomacy in their daily lives (Marsden et. al., 2016). To reiterate, by examining diplomacy—a field traditionally reserved for political and elite

actors—through the lens of the everyday, scholars can devote attention to the crucial role of non-elites in peace processes and challenge the distinction between people's political and material lives.

This shift toward the everyday in peace research and peacebuilding has been the basis of the recent, so-called, "local turn" in peace development (Mac Ginty, 2015; Mac Ginty & Richmond, 2013). This new approach turns the focus away from universal conceptions of peace, and instead, it directs attention to the local- or micro-level processes and conditions that make local and/or international peace possible. In practice, this broadly means that recent peacebuilding efforts have put forth a more decentralized strategy that empowers local actors to take ownership of their means of resolution.

Perspectives differ on how to implement such an approach, especially regarding the level of local agency in peacebuilding participation. Despite a near unanimous agreement among international peacebuilding actors that "local empowerment" should be pursued, Leonardsson and Rudd (2015, p. 831) point out that local empowerment has been interpreted by some INGOs to merely refer to a process of "consulting and involving locals in implementing externally designed models," which places the outcome's responsibility on local actors without involving them in essential processes, such as identifying concerns, developing programs, and implementing specific interventions. A more comprehensive conception of local ownership must involve the local actors in every aspect of peacebuilding, from problem identification to the development and implementation of strategies. Under this approach, the roles of historically primary peace and conflict actors (e.g., governments and large-scale NGOs) become largely supportive by providing local, grassroots actors with material assistance, planning support, and the implementation of locally-owned peace processes (Leonardsson & Rudd, 2015).

Importantly, however, this "local turn" is not without due criticism. One such criticism is that building a policy based on local, contextualized peace is less efficient than the liberal model for effecting change (Richmond, 2009). Also, empowering grassroots actors may *increase* polarization

and make achieving stability or security even more difficult in certain situations (Leonardsson & Rudd, 2015). Other scholars note that a strict binary of "local" and "international" in the theoretical lexicon is unhelpful, as these descriptions are often misleading and do not accurately account for the more nuanced relationships between local and elite actors (Paffenholz, 2015). Indeed, for the notion of the "local"—or "everyday" for that matter—to have any meaning, it may require drawing imprecise, normative binaries (e.g., outsider-insider). This potentiality leads to a paradox: Everyday peace and the subsequent local turn in peacebuilding—a paradigm that fundamentally challenges hierarchical binaries by demonstrating plurality and interconnectedness of identities—requires and gives rise to new, problematic normative binaries (Randazzo, 2016).

Likely, the foremost challenge to forming a theoretical conception of peace under this new paradigm lies in precisely identifying the "local." Some scholars argue that when an attempt is made to identify everyday peace in practice, it likely only points toward forms of local agency that conform to the precepts of liberal justice, including equality and free speech, while ignoring or dismissing elements that lack conformity, thereby demonstrating a need for further conceptual clarity (Randazzo, 2016). Mac Ginty (2015), a principal proponent of the "local turn" freely admits that the term "local" is nebulous and may ultimately be unhelpful when strictly defined as that which concerns physical place. Rather, Mac Ginty recommends utilizing "a loose epistemological lens" (p. 851) when attempting to locate and understand how the "local" is defined (2015). In this sense, the local is defined as,

> ...a system of beliefs and practices that loose communities and networks may adopt. There should be no expectation of consistency in these beliefs and practices: they change with time and circumstances. In this view the local may have territorial characteristics, but it can also be extra-territorial. As well as taking the form of small and intimate spaces (for example, around the kitchen table) it can also encompass vast transnational networks, sets of ideas and belonging. (Mac Ginty, 2015, p. 851)

Therefore, according to Mac Ginty, the "local" is somewhat undefined by definition. Its unfixed nature allows the "local" to transcend space and place to include various modes of human interaction. Importantly, however, the "local" includes those small, familiar, and private "spaces" of human interaction and relationships. When considering this new conception, the "local turn" presents the possibility that the peacebuilding process is partly a function of interpersonal relations at every level of community. Consequently, the "local turn" requires that peace research reconsider the practices that contribute to building, making, or sustaining peace in local space in order to provide fresh insight.

Some scholars have presented a distinction between "peacebuilding" and "peacemaking." As Susan Allen Nan (in Price, 2011, loc. 9782) explains, "Peacebuilding emphasizes structures and institutions. Peacemaking emphasizes the human dimension, creativity, openness, trust, and welcoming otherness." Price (2011, loc. 9787) offers this definition: "As a technical term, *peacemaking* has to do with the range of actions and activities involved in diffusing feelings of threat; deepening insight into the other; and otherwise healing, mending, and connecting relationships strained, broken, or disconnected by conflict." Other scholars argue that the distinction between peacebuilding and peacemaking is not as clear-cut because peacemaking includes actions that are intended to relieve structural forms of violence and conflict to foster a peaceful community (e.g., Mack & Eliatamby, 2011). Nevertheless, everyday peace and peacebuilding's "local turn" necessarily include peacemaking, which involves locally-directed, everyday practices of peace that manifest local peace in the first place. These local peace practices can include relational practices, such as mediation, dialogue, and restorative justice (e.g., Saunders, 2011), but they may also involve "inner" practices, such as social-emotional learning and trauma awareness (e.g., Diamond, 2011). To be clear, these practices did not emerge as the result of relatively recent conceptions of everyday peace and the "local turn." Rather, these practices were utilized and studied long before peace researchers introduced the paradigm of everyday peace. To better understand the complex dynamics and impacts of these

community-based peace practices, everyday peace offers peace research a new lens to examine these issues, raising important questions about the future of peace development.

Perhaps the most radical change that has come with the "local turn" is a reexamination of who should be considered a peacebuilding actor. While the "local" may remain somewhat emergent and elusive, the recent "local turn" in peacebuilding involves a newfound enthusiasm to engage "voices from below" in bottom-up peace processes (Leonardsson & Rudd, 2015). Some NGOs and local organizations note that local communities have a keen awareness of the conflict they are embedded in and already have contextualized conceptions of peace (Leonardsson & Rudd, 2015). Importantly, local peacebuilding actors, such as peacebuilders within the civil society (e.g., local organizations and religious groups), are more likely to gain credibility in local-level peacebuilding efforts. This is partly because they tend to gain their legitimacy from the community itself rather than a hierarchical structure (Leonardsson & Rudd, 2015; Omach, 2016). If a distinction exists between peacebuilding practices (concerning structures or institutions) and peacemaking practices (concerning interpersonal relationships), then local, community-based organizations and/or civil society actors often must walk the line between these two dynamics. For example, Bartoli (2011) explains an NGOs' critical role to offer a unique capacity for cultivating and effectively implementing peacemaking and/or peacebuilding practices. Furthermore, local organizational and institutional actors meaningfully contribute to local peace development by promoting, utilizing, training community members in, and holding space for these strategies and practices that ultimately foster a more harmonious community.

Local NGOs and civil society actors contribute to a community's overall social capital by engaging in peacebuilding activities, such as community dialogues and capacity-building pursuits (e.g., conflict resolution training) (Verkoren, 2008). These local actors can be understood as participating in community-based peacebuilding, a peacebuilding process in which the local community defines the conflict present in their context and devises a localized response based on

their system of values and resources. In this way, community-based peacebuilding emerges from, supports, and is supported by local forms of everyday peace.

3.2. Community-based peacebuilding

Community-based approaches to peacebuilding vary widely both in terms of which local actors it involves and the nature of intervention goals. According to Haider (2009), different forms of community-based approaches to peacebuilding can include security, socioeconomic recovery, media/communication, civic education, traditional justice/reconciliation, and heritage/cultural preservation. Local institutions capable of assuming the role of community-based peacebuilding actors include associations, cooperatives, civic associations, community-based organizations, and local leadership initiatives (Haider, 2009). These local actors work either independently or with the guidance and/or financial support of large-scale NGOs/governments to prevent conflict in fragile contexts or build the conditions for peace in conflict-affected contexts at the grassroots level.

Commonly, community-based peacebuilding initiatives emphasize participatory action, representative decision-making, and local empowerment as the foundational aspects of a peacebuilding strategy (Haider, 2009). As previously discussed, the empowerment of local communities provides those affected by the conflict with the authority to define what is needed. Encouraging forms of participatory governance can lead to a more sustainable peace by being inclusive of marginalized populations (e.g., women, youth, and ethnic/religious minorities), who are important stakeholders in the conflict but may be excluded from the discussion. Further, it is assumed that empowering local communities to manifest solutions can have a profoundly positive psychological and social impact by building a sense of confidence, ownership, and communal pride (Haider, 2009).

Emphasizing local agency and empowerment involves significant risks and challenges, however. One such risk is that a push for local empowerment can sometimes exacerbate (rather than resolve) a conflict (Haider, 2009). For example, some peace efforts that have relied on the

decentralization of power have resulted in increased polarization, especially in situations when the local governance was ineffective and strong political identities were regionally based (Leonardsson & Rudd, 2015).

Despite the intention to support marginalized populations, another potential risk involved with utilizing a local empowerment strategy is that it may actually result in excluding certain populations if the community in question either strictly functions within a social hierarchy (e.g., one based on gender) or is intolerant of specific perspectives (Haider, 2009). If inclusion is not valued by local actors but only larger institutions, such as the governments or NGOs that fund these localized initiatives, then the more powerful actors may feel the need to exercise some level of control over the local processes. This raises another potential concern: In certain contexts, donors and powerful interests may be unwilling to allow communities to have complete control of their peacebuilding initiatives. Haider (2009, p. 9) explains,

> ...in order for empowerment to be genuine, donors have to relinquish control over the identification and prioritisation of needs and other decision-making. In some cases, however, donors have limited the empowerment of communities to deciding the order in which to implement a list of pre-defined items. This pre-defined list may not match with community priorities, rendering community organisations as simply aid disbursement mechanisms.

Relatedly, it may be difficult to identify the proper local actors to empower. While local leaders are often essential to any peace process, there is always a risk of elite capture in regard to decision-making, prioritization, and funds (Haider, 2009). It may even be unclear whether these localized initiatives should be targeted to specific groups within a vulnerable community or toward the whole community on a broader scale (Haider, 2009).

Another common tenet of the community-based peace approach is to meet specific community needs—whether material or social—as either a means or an end in peace's development (Haider, 2009). Material needs may include improvements to infrastructure and access to resources,

while social needs may include an increase in social capital as well as the strengthening of relationships. Haider (2009) and Verkoren (2008) argue that grassroots actors are often better equipped to identify the conditions on the ground that need to be addressed in order to foster a peaceful outcome; therefore, they may focus interventions in the most effective manner possible.

While these features are not meant to be exhaustive, one last important function of a community-based approach to peacebuilding is expanding networks of resources and local knowledge bases to build local capacities (Haider, 2009). These networks may be local, but they may also be more far-reaching. Local organizations, for example, may expand local capacities by directly providing skills training (e.g., mediation) to community members. They also may connect local community members, sectors, organizations, and institutions in networks that provide a collaborative support system (Haider, 2009). Furthermore, local organizations can foster horizontal linkages that connect the peacebuilding efforts of various communities, thereby increasing understanding and resources in both places (Haider, 2009). Local organizations can even help facilitate vertical linkages to large-scale institutions, such as governments, international NGOs, and academic/research institutions (Haider, 2009; Verkoren, 2008). When properly utilized, these linkages can help bring about a greater knowledge base within local communities and connect local peacebuilding projects with significant sources of funding, but they can also support the numerous research goals of these greater institutions by providing on-the-ground local peacebuilding cases (Haider, 2009; Verkoren, 2008).

Community-based approaches to peacebuilding can vary from context to context. The specific peacebuilding strategies and practices utilized in these differing contexts significantly depend on the specific conditions of the conflict and community in question. As previously discussed, grassroots organizations play a critical role in facilitating the capacity for and implementation of peacebuilding strategies and practices because they represent a bridge between larger peacebuilding networks and the grassroots. Community-based organizations can claim local legitimacy from within the

community while still introducing new concepts, strategies, and peacebuilding from the outside. This is the case with the River Phoenix Center for Peacebuilding (RPCP) in Gainesville, Florida, USA. This small community-based organization has had a significant impact on the community by cultivating trust from local actors and embedding peace practices in local organizations, institutions, schools, neighborhoods, and families. RPCP designs and facilitates service programs and training programs which utilize and integrate four key peacebuilding strategies: (1) dialogue, (2) restorative justice and practices, (3) social-emotional learning (SEL), as well as (4) trauma awareness and resilience building. These strategies are employed to meet the specific and unique needs of the community. RPCP believes that when these strategies are developed into local programs and services that emerge from the community to serve the community, they are the best tools available to foster a more peaceful community culture. Racial and community justice goals, a central focus of RPCP's work, are also pursued throughout all intervention and training programs, utilizing the aforementioned strategies. Since the work of RPCP is the focus of my study, I will provide further conceptual and practical explanations for each of these strategies, discussing each in detail, including examples of how they are used in RPCP's community programming.

3.3. Dialogue and Restorative Justice/Practices

In the simplest terms, dialogue is a conversation that requires participants to listen deeply to one another (Stearns, 2018). These intentional conversations usually have a specific aim, but are distinct from debates, as they do not yield winners or losers (Stearns, 2018). Instead, the goals of dialogues can include, for example, promoting understanding, addressing conflicts, or collaborating on an initiative. One of the most discussed models of dialogue is "sustained dialogue," credited to Saunders (2011). Sustained dialogue (Saunders, 2011) emphasizes the relational dynamic of participants as the foundational process by which dialogue functions. In this conception, dialogue is not simply a negotiation, but an emergent, ever-evolving process of sharing, understanding, and relationship. The sustained dialogue model opens up new possibilities to utilize dialogues to reveal

many of the often ignored, human aspects of conflict that drive division and violence. For example, Hicks (2018) emphasizes how dialogue can be used to explore issues related to dignity.

Saunders (2011) points out that by taking an approach centered on the role of sustained relationship, dialogue can help to resolve conflicts and reach agreements. The unique dialogue space allows for participants and even adversaries to engage in perspective-taking without compromising their own identity (Saunders, 2011). The process often leads to the discovery of shared interests or goals which open new possibilities of collaboration (Saunders, 2011). It also allows a space for assumptions and stereotypes to be challenged by lived experience, and helps transform relationships based on anger (Saunders, 2011). Additionally, dialogues may provide an especially unique forum to explore issues of social identity (e.g., race) and equity (Cohen, 2018; McDowell, 2018).

All of these aspects are true of RPCP's police-youth dialogues, which allow specifically youth from marginalized communities as well as law enforcement officers to their experiences and perspectives and humanize each other. But these dialogues are not the only context for practices based in dialogue. In fact, as internet platforms become a more primary means by which communication occurs, some scholars are considering whether social media sites may be new sites of transformative dialogue (Yiftach et al., 2020). Within RPCP, other peacebuilding strategies, especially restorative justice, rely on dialogue as means by which experience is shared and community is strengthened.

Restorative justice practices represent the next of RPCP's four peacebuilding strategies. RPCP utilizes restorative justice practices as a theoretical basis for various community programs and offers extensive training in restorative justice to community members and local institutions. Restorative justice remains a contested term, so while it is challenging to precisely define (Van & Strong, 2014; UNDOC, 2006), restorative justice foundationally represents a philosophy that affirms reparation of harm as the central function of justice (Van & Strong, 2014; UNDOC, 2006). It also refers to a process, or set of processes, that responds to harm by involving victims, offenders, and the broader community in dialogue to collaboratively resolve a conflict (Van & Strong, 2014; UNDOC, 2006).

Restorative justice is often understood as a modern and less punitive alternative to the current criminal justice system. Some scholars (Van & Strong, 2014; Zernova, 2007) point out, however, that many early forms of justice more closely aligned with a restorative model. Over time, justice has evolved into a more universal system (especially in Western society) that isolates the victim from the offender and treats the government/state as the victim in all criminal proceedings. In this way, the recent turn toward restorative justice as a model for justice represents the revitalization of an ancient tradition, as opposed to an entirely new approach (Zernova, 2007). Relatedly, restorative methods are often associated with non-Western and indigenous systems of justice (Zernova, 2007).

Restorative justice, as a theory of justice, holds some basic assumptions. First, a response to crime should aim at repairing harm (UNDOC, 2006). Second, offenders must understand and take responsibility for the full extent of the harm (UNDOC, 2006). Third, victims should be allowed to express their experience and contribute in determining the best way for reparations to be achieved (UNDOC, 2006). Lastly, the process of justice is enriched by the community's involvement (UNDOC, 2006). With these assumptions in mind, restorative justice programs tend to better support victims, repair relationships, empower communities, require responsibility, explore the underlying causes of harmful behavior, reduce recidivism, and promote positive outcomes (UNDOC, 2006).

In practice, restorative justice programs include victim-offender mediation, sentencing circles, community boards, family conferences, and others. These generally consist of one or more dialogue sessions with participants that may include victim(s), offender(s), community members, and facilitator(s). In these facilitated dialogues, participants discuss questions, such as the following:

- "What happened?"
- "What were you thinking and feeling at the time?"
- "How have you felt since then?"
- "Who has been affected and how?"
- "What could make things right?"

As participants explore these questions and share their personal experiences, they gain a deeper understanding of what occurred and eventually reach consensus about how to proceed.

Over the last few decades, restorative justice has increasingly been incorporated by traditionally punitive systems at all levels on a worldwide scale (Van & Strong, 2014; UNDOC, 2006). In fact, The United Nations' Economic and Social Council approved a resolution describing and advocating for the use of restorative justice in criminal affairs (ECOSOC, 2000). Although restorative programs have even been successfully implemented in cases of severe crime, such as felony sexual assaults (Koss, 2013), they have mostly been utilized in low-level crimes and cases involving minors (Van & Strong, 2014; UNDOC, 2006; Zernova, 2007). From small, community-based programs to state and international governments, restorative practices have been utilized to create better outcomes for criminal and/or delinquent cases.

Restorative justice has also been prominently discussed in the context of school discipline. The term, "restorative practices" usually refers to strategies that are utilized in cases when restorative methods are not intended to replace or enhance aspects of the criminal justice system. Instead, these are implemented within disciplinary systems in highly specific communities, such as a company office or classroom setting. The current literature is widely in agreement over the profoundly negative effects of punitive measures in school discipline systems, from student outcomes to those reaching broader society (Gomez et. al., 2020; Payne & Welch, 2017). There's also discussion concerning the frequency of severe and exclusionary punishments in US schools, which has increased despite the falling rates of violence and delinquency in schools (Payne & Welch, 2017). Furthermore, evidence suggests that these harsh measures are disproportionately administered to low-income students and students of color (Gomez et. al., 2020). In this way, restorative practices in school not only have the potential to foster more positive and transformational outcomes but also promote educational equity as a whole (Gomez et. al., 2020).

While the potential for improvement is clear, the effectiveness and appropriateness of restorative justice and restorative practices continues to be disputed. A study conducted by Zernova (2007) challenges the validity of restorative justice by observing that the experiences of some participants in a restorative justice conference seemed at odds with restorative justice's central tenets. For example, while restorative justice programs require voluntary participation, in practice, many offenders are compelled to participate through a court-order or other forms of coercion (Zernova, 2007). Similarly, Daly (2002) argues that proponents of restorative justice rely on romanticized myths that are not reflected in restorative programs. Furthermore, researchers argue that a pronounced practice-research gap exists in restorative practices at schools, and further research is needed to inform these practices (Zakszeski & Rutherford, 2021).

Still, numerous studies suggest that restorative justice is effective, appropriate, and efficient. For example, the RESTORE project employs restorative methods in conferences between sexual assault offenders and survivors, which has resulted in complicated yet largely positive outcomes (McGlynn et. al., 2012; Koss, 2013). Some programs, such as RESTORE, demonstrate that restorative justice can be a helpful framework, even in cases that involve the most serious offenses. A systematic review of studies concerning restorative justice conferences finds that both victims and offenders benefitted from participating in restorative justice sessions relative to standard criminal justice proceedings (Strang et. al., 2013). Offenders who participated in a restorative justice conference, as opposed to those adjudicated in the standard system, were less likely to commit a crime again. Furthermore, victims who participated in restorative conferences reported higher levels of satisfaction and suffered less from symptoms associated with post-traumatic stress disorder (Strang et. al., 2013). While the literature remains limited, anecdotal studies provide some clarity as to how restorative justice can be utilized to mediate conflicts, empower communities, and challenge systems that lead to structural oppression.

RPCP relies on restorative justice as both a conceptual framework and practical process in all of its community programming. In some cases, the organization facilitates restorative justice conferences directly with community members who are experiencing a relevant issue, but it also offers open training opportunities in restorative theory and facilitation to community members, local organizations, and institutions. Local schools, after-school youth programs, juvenile justice programs, and law enforcement agencies are just some of the local actors that have received training in restorative philosophy and methods through RPCP's initiatives. These training programs are intended to shape the practices of these organizations that directly serve the local community. As a part of these training sessions, RPCP integrates and emphasizes training material related to social-emotional learning and trauma because they understand these topics as conceptually inseparable from a comprehensive understanding of restorative justice.

3.4. SEL and Trauma Responsiveness

RPCP utilizes SEL and trauma awareness/responsiveness as critical tools for understanding everyday forms of community conflict and advancing peaceful change. SEL, a subset of education that has received increased attention recently, can be defined as, "the process of acquiring core competencies to recognize and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, appreciate the perspectives of others, establish and maintain positive relationships, make responsible decisions, and handle interpersonal situations constructively" (Durlak et. al., 2011, p. 406). Specifically, SEL is focused on developing skills in five key competencies: "self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision making" (Durlak et. al., 2011, p. 406). SEL programs are primarily implemented in schools and designed to provide a safe environment for students to foster understanding about these competencies through various forms of instruction while improving their interpersonal and intrapersonal skill sets. These programs aim to inspire empathy,

instill a sense of acceptance toward difference and diversity, and provide resolution skills that can be utilized to nonviolently solve conflicts (Hymel & Darwich, 2018).

The literature illustrates how these programs are both positive and effective. For example, a meta-data analysis shows that universal school-based SEL interventions "yielded significant positive effects on targeted social-emotional competencies and attitudes about self, others, and school" (Durlak et. al., 2011, p. 417). This study also shows that participation in SEL programs had a significant positive impact on behavior, as students demonstrated "increased prosocial behaviors" and "improved academic performance" while reducing "conduct and internalizing problems" (Durlak et. al., 2011, p. 417). Thus, the comprehensive development of SEL competencies in students is anticipated to slow, or even block, the so-called, "school-to-prison pipeline," in the US (Coggshall et. al., 2013).

SEL and restorative school programs are increasingly understood as forms of peace education. These programs are lauded for their capacity to build peace by promoting social connection and understanding among youth (Hymel & Darwich, 2018). SEL curricula and intervention programs are predominantly targeted toward children because research suggests that the potential for a lifelong impact is significant as "behaviours that contribute to adult violence begin to develop earlier in life" (Hymel & Darwich, 2018, p. 346). Transformative SEL, "a form of SEL intended to promote equity and excellence," further builds on SEL's potential to build peace by incorporating issues pertaining to "culture, identity, agency, belonging, and engagement" in the SEL competencies previously discussed (Jagers et. al., 2019, p. 162). Overall, these programs aim to confront underlying social inequities in order to help resolve broader structural violence. SEL is also beginning to be utilized in other environments and among other population groups, such as adult education (see Berg, 2018), but more research is needed in respect to these contexts. A key component of developing a better conception of emotional expressions and needs involves recognizing trauma's impact on individuals and communities. On the individual level, trauma is defined as that which "results from an event,

series of events, or set of circumstances that is experienced by an individual as physically or emotionally harmful or life threatening and that has lasting adverse effects on the individual's functioning and mental, physical, social, emotional, or spiritual well-being" (SAMHSA, 2014, p. 7). The range of potentially traumatic experiences can be extremely wide, as trauma relates to how events are experienced and the impact they have (SAMHSA, 2014).

Much of the research about trauma's effects focuses on adverse childhood experiences, commonly referred to as ACEs. The term "ACE" comes from a landmark study which showed "a strong graded relationship between the breadth of exposure to abuse or household dysfunction during childhood and multiple risk factors for several of the leading causes of death in adults" (Felitti, et al., 1998, p. 245). The study found that exposure to ACEs significantly affects the eventual physical, mental, emotional, and behavioral outcomes of adults (Felitti, et al., 1998). One of those behavioral outcomes is an increased tendency toward violence. For example, traumatic experiences in childhood have been shown to predict both homicidal and suicidal ideation (Heirigs, 2021; Johnson, 2017). Further research suggests a link between ACEs and the risk of committing serious, violent, and chronic juvenile offenses (Fox et al., 2015).

Community and social factors can further exacerbate both frequency of exposure to trauma as well as the impact. Johnson (2018) notes that factors such as race and socio-economic position play a significant role in determining an individual's level of childhood trauma exposure and ability to access support. This distinction demonstrates how trauma also exists on the community level, exposing certain communities to greater levels of trauma and worsening already existing disparities. By acknowledging the impact of trauma, individuals and communities can better understand the violence that they witness in their everyday lives.

Certain protective factors and strategies can help to relieve the impacts of trauma and build resilience. These strategies make up what is known as a trauma-informed approach, which can be implemented by community services, organizations, and institutions to mitigate the impact of trauma.

According to SAMHSA (2014), a trauma informed approach in a community service includes these key principles: safety; trustworthiness and transparency; peer support; collaboration and mutuality; empowerment, voice and choice; [and] cultural, historical, and gender issues. At the level of community, transforming trauma and building resiliency entails dismantling oppressive social structures that proliferate and sustain trauma, and building a more equitable society. RPCP emphasizes SEL skills and competencies (in programs for children and adults) and trauma-awareness to empower community members to build a meaningful conception of self and forge more healthy community relationships.

4. Methodology

This section will consider this study's methodological approach. To begin this chapter, I will describe the overall ethnographic orientation of this research, noting how both theory and practice come together to inform the research design. I will also briefly describe the practical use of interviewing to uncover research participants' subjective truths. Next, I will describe the interview participants and lay out my method of data collection, organization, and analysis. Lastly, I will acknowledge issues related to reliability, limitations, and ethics, before presenting my findings in the following chapter.

4.1 Ethnographic Approach:

This study's overall methodological orientation is based in an ethnographic approach. Ethnographic methods utilize and engage with subjective perspectives to elucidate personal truths. While ethnography is difficult to precisely define due to its wide range of research applications and methods, O'Reilly (2003) provides a definition that considers what, at a minimum, constitutes ethnography:

> Minimally ethnography is iterative-inductive research (that evolves in design through the study), drawing on a family of methods, involving direct and sustained contact with human agents within the context of their daily lives (and cultures); watching what happens, listening to what is said, asking questions, and producing a richly written account that respects the irreducibility of human experience, that acknowledges the role of theory as well as the researcher's own role, and that views humans as part object/part subject. (p. 3)

Ethnography, then, is rooted in an anthropological tradition, meaning that it is human-centered (O'Reilly, 2003). Its aim is to elucidate what is true to those who are the object of inquiry, considered through the course of the study. Research that emerges from this approach requires building relationships, communal embeddedness, and conversations based in trust to discover personal truths

and subjective meanings. In ethnography, the researcher must employ a degree of reflexivity in their research design which simultaneously acknowledges their own position and theoretical orientation, but also allows for fluidity based on how the study develops (O'Reilly, 2003). For this reason, while theory certainly informs the researcher's interest and perhaps helps to define the underlying research puzzle, ethnography must not limit itself to the confines of any particular theoretical framework. Instead, it should allow the unique perspectives of people at the center of the study to guide the development of the research. In this way, Ethnography assumes that people are the most capable of describing their own perspectives (e.g., opinions, fears, desires), and therefore, employ research methods which engage with people directly.

A useful way to engage in people's subjective understandings is by communicating directly with them, and in research, this occurs predominantly through a process of interviewing. After all, as Knapik (2006, p. 88) points out "[I]nterviewees are experts on a phenomenon in terms of their experience." While the reason for a researcher's use of interviews may vary depending on the nature of their research, one reason for conducting interviews is to create a space in which ideas can be communicated and developed through a shared dialectic. This dialectic is capable of not only uncovering conscious truths that already exist, but also constructing new understandings of those truths as a result of the influence of both participants and the collaborative unfolding taking place. Kvale (2007, p. 21) notes that under this constructionist perspective,

> an interview is literally an inter-view, an inter-change of views between two persons conversing about a common theme... The interview gives access to the manifold of local narratives embodied in storytelling and opens for a discourse and negotiation of the meaning of the lived world.

In other words, under this view, the conceptions of the researcher are as important to the understanding that is revealed as those of the interviewee.

Often, in ethnography, interviews are used to supplement and clarify observational data. However, the opposite can also be the case. Interviews can act as the main source of ethnographic data, with participation and observation serving as research tools that provide meaningful context and allow the researcher to build appropriate familiarity and rapport (O'Reilly, 2003). In fact, under the factist conception of research, interviews may represent the only way to actually reach the desired truth (Alasuutari, 1995). Nevertheless, the cultural embeddedness that comes from participatory or observational ethnographic fieldwork is also critically important as it allows the researcher to provide a more authentic representation of the interviewees' perspectives. Further data, from a diversity of sources, can also provide meaningful context for analysis.

While ethnographic interviews can be unstructured, semi-structured, or structured, most ethnographies rely on unstructured interviews in order to yield results that are more organic and less influenced by the researcher (O'Reilly, 2003). O'Reilly (2003, p. 117) explains "an ethnographer is usually attempting to learn about people from their own perspective, to get an insider's view, and this cannot be done by imposing one's own line of questioning on people." Further, the use of open-ended questions allows the participant to broadly interpret the question as they may. The data, then, not only reflects the interviewees' answers to the questions but also their understanding of the questions that are being asked. It also creates a space for the interviewee to not be trapped in a dichotomy (i.e., between "yes" and "no"), but rather, it helps to show what they deem to be most important. Open-ended questions provide participants with a certain level of freedom to take the question where they prefer, allowing them to build on a theme or personal story, for example. This approach allows participants to engage in the nuance of their perspective.

Building on this idea, in unstructured ethnographic interviewing, participants' answers to these open-ended questions can actually direct the conversation. By following the participants' lead, the researcher can let conversations further build upon the themes that the participants developed originally. Furthermore, by allowing participants to direct the themes being discussed, the aspects of

their perspectives that are most important to them (as opposed to the assumptions of the researcher) are revealed. Through this process, the interviewee as well as the interviewer grow in their understanding through a collaborative process. In other words, as participants actively involve themselves to a certain degree in the research process via collaboration, the role of the researcher becomes largely to aid participants in understanding or articulating their beliefs, roles in the community, assumptions, hopes, and concerns.

Peace research, a specific branch of the social sciences concerning peace and conflict, can greatly benefit from ethnography that engages communities in conflict and/or involved in peacebuilding (including, for example, populations related to specific geographical or cultural identity, but also less formal communities such as schools and organizations). Specifically, Millar (2018) offers two definitional features of Ethnographic Peace Research (EPR): the incorporation of "thick description and the attempt to understand how and why" (p. 606). Further, Millar suggests "reflexivity" and "a diversity of potential data collection methods" can "enhance the rigor and nuance of EPR" (Millar, 2018, p. 606). Ideally, EPR should also establish "collaborative or emancipatory goals" (Millar, 2018, p. 606). In practice, these aspects combine the methods of ethnography with the normative aims of peace research, or in other words, utilize ethnographic methods as a tool to promote expression, understanding, and emancipation.

4.2 Research Design

To add to the existing body of research on community-based peacebuilding, and provide specific insight into the particular realities of peacebuilding within the US context, my research question will be the following:

How is community-based peacebuilding understood and implemented through localized peace initiatives at the River Phoenix Center for Peacebuilding in Gainesville, Florida, USA?

Given that my research question relates to only the subjective understandings of a specific population, the use of ethnographic methods is not only justified, but required. Ethnography is the only approach to these kinds of subjective inquiries. My research further explores the connection between peacebuilding and the local/grassroots and what peace means, in practice, to those who develop local peacebuilding programs.

4.2.1 Data Collection and Analysis

Data collected for use in this study came mostly from the use of interviews, with observational, participatory, and supplementary materials providing further context for eventual analysis. I chose these sources of data instead of other potential sources because what is important with regard to my research is the subjective perspectives of local peacebuilders as well as the meaning that they give to the work that they do. With this in mind, interviews (especially those that are open-ended) represent the best method for allowing individuals to share their unique perspectives.

In February 2020, I met with Heart Phoenix and Jeffery Weisburg, co-founders of RPCP, at the main office in downtown Gainesville to discuss the possibility of an internship, which they agreed to. The internship began on September 18, 2020 and lasted until January 11, 2021.

As an intern, I participated in various training sessions that were offered by RPCP, with topics including, for example, Restorative Justice and Community Justice. I also assisted with some administrative and clerical tasks, such as writing and sending communications to program participants. I even co-represented RPCP at a Carnegie Project for Education Doctorate (CPED) conference. Further, I offered assistance with curriculum development in various training programs related to community peacebuilding and contributed to the development of new programs as well such as a new series of community dialogues centered around political polarization. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, my internship consisted entirely of remote work, using Zoom as a platform for in-depth communications.

This internship allowed me to not only learn about RPCP and their programs, but it also allowed me to deeply embed myself within the community and culture of the organization. In this way, I was able to form deep connections and build relationships and come to understand the group in a deeper sense, look under the surface and see beyond the superficial. With respect to ethnography, my internship at RPCP functioned as my fieldwork. It allowed me to observe and actively participate in the inner-workings of RPCP, giving me the opportunity to build trust and a strong rapport with the people who would eventually be the participants in my interviews and providing a wealth of observational data which aided in my analysis.

In order to get a more detailed account with regard to the research question, this study relied on five interviews. Three of the interviews were with people actively involved with RPCP (Jeffrey Weisberg, Heart Phoenix, and Dr. Micah Johnson) and two of the interviews took place with people outside of RPCP who work closely with the organization (Capt. William Halvosa and Sgt. Paul Pardue).

Jeffrey Weisberg is the Executive Director and co-founder of RPCP. Also, as RPCP's lead facilitator and trainer, Weisberg has designed and implemented many of RPCP's community programs including the police-youth dialogue (PYD). He has been a certified mediator for over twenty five years, and, before founding RPCP, was a co-founder of The Peace Alliance, an organization which advocates for, among other things, the creation of a US Cabinet-level Department of Peace. He is also married to the other co-founder, Heart Phoenix.

Heart Phoenix, in addition to founding the organization, currently serves as the President of RPCP's Board of Directors. Additionally, she serves on the Board of Directors of the Florida Restorative Justice Association, and serves the programs of RPCP by helping to design new program offerings, leading training sessions about community peacebuilding strategies (e.g., restorative justice), and assisting in the facilitation of programs. Along with Weisberg, Phoenix is a co-founder of The Peace Alliance. She is also the mother of River Phoenix, for whom the organization is named.

Dr. Micah E. Johnson serves as the Board Secretary of RPCP and continues to advise in the development and delivery of programs. He also delivers training about equity and the impact of trauma. Dr. Johnson is an Assistant Professor in the University of South Florida's Department of Mental Health Law & Policy. His research focuses on the effects of childhood trauma, the juvenile justice system, social and racial equity and justice, among other themes. He is also the author of the children's book, *Never Had A Friend*, and co-author of *The Little Book of Police-Youth Dialogues* (along with Jeffrey Weisberg).

William Halvosa is a retired Police Chief at the Gainesville Police Department (GPD), and now serves as the coordinator of the DMC initiative, designed to reduce the police department's disproportionate minority contact (DMC) of local youth. Halvosa, in collaboration with RPCP, has helped to design and deliver the police-youth dialogue program. He co-facilitates the dialogue sessions and offers training to officers in topics related to community peacebuilding and equity.

Sgt. Paul Pardue serves in a similar capacity, as RED/DMC Coordinator, at the Alachua County Sheriff's Office (ASO). Much like Halvosa at GPD, Pardue trains fellow officers in topics and strategies intended to reduce ASO's rate of disproportionate contact of minority youth. He has also helped to deliver police-youth dialogues with RPCP and ASO.

By utilizing both insider and outsider perspectives on RPCP, my intention is to demonstrate not only how RPCP's strategies are understood by those from within the organization, but also how those programs impact the work of community members who represent local institutions that respond to (and to some degree perpetuate) community division and violence. While I refer to each interview participant by their full name here, in my analysis, I refer to them as I address them in person, by their first names. This intentional decision reflects familiarity with the participants and should not be misunderstood as a sign of any disrespect. Each interview was about an hour in duration, and took place remotely using the Zoom platform (with the exception of Capt. Halvosa's interview which took place in-person at the Gainesville Police Department Headquarters). The Zoom platform was used as

a response to COVID-19 precautions. Each interview was recorded either as a video or audio file and stored securely. Further details about the interviews are provided below (Table 1):

Table 1

Interview participants

Informant Name	Informant Title	Interview Setting*	Date and Duration
Jeffrey Weisberg	RPCP Co-founder, Executive Director, and Lead Facilitator/Trainer; Co-founder of The Peace Alliance	Virtually on Zoom Jeffrey was in Toronto, Canada	November 6th, 2020 - 1 hour
(Ret.) Capt. William (Will) Halvosa	GPD DMC Coordinator	In-person at GPD Headquarters in Gainesville, Florida	November 25th, 2020 - 1 hour
Heart Phoenix	RPCP Co-founder, Board President; Co-founder of The Peace Alliance and and Peace Alliance Educational Institute; Florida Restorative Justice Assoc. Board Member	Virtually on Zoom (Heart was in her home in Micanopy, Florida)	December 14th, 2020 - 1 hour
Sgt. Paul Pardue	ASO RED/DMC Coordinator	Virtually on Zoom (Paul was in the ASO office in Gainesville, Florida)	January 11th, 2021 - 1 hour
Dr. Micah Johnson, Ph.D.	RPCP Board Secretary, Assistant Professor in the Department of Mental Health Law & Policy at the University of South Florida	Virtually on Zoom (Micah was in his home in Tampa, Florida)	January 11th, 2021 - 1 hour
*For all interviews conducted virtually on Zoom, I was located in Gainesville, Florida			

I chose these particular participants as a sample based on participant recommendations. Jeffrey Weisberg, who I interviewed first, suggested that I reach out to the other interviewees, who accepted the invitation to participate. In total the interviews provided an illustrative sample, covering both inside and outside perspectives of RPCP and peacebuilding in the local context.

These interviews were largely unstructured which allowed the participants to take the conversation where they wanted. Furthermore, I used mostly open questions and allowed participant responses to direct the topics of the interview. By utilizing questions that were highly generalized, participants were afforded an opportunity to express their unique perspectives, clarify their role in the peacebuilding process, and share any specific needs or challenges that they have faced. Closed questioning was only used as a way to clarify the meaning of statements that had already been said.

In addition to the observations made during my internship, I utilized a variety of textual and visual data as a way to further contextualize my findings. These materials consisted of, for example, curricular resources for training, marketing materials, and news articles. They did not provide any data for direct analysis, but did support the analysis by clarifying particular issues or topics that were unknown or providing real examples relating to statements that were made in the interviews.

As is consistent with an ethnographic approach, this study's analysis relies on participant statements in order to discover underlying meanings. The organization and analysis of this study's findings involves the identification of specific emergent themes in the interview responses. According to Ryan and Bernard (2003, p. 87-88) "[T]hemes are abstract (and often fuzzy) constructs that link not only expressions found in texts but also expressions found in images, sounds, and objects… Some themes are broad and sweeping constructs that link many different kinds of expressions. Other themes are more focused and link very specific kinds of expressions" I have reviewed the recordings of these interviews multiple times, making detailed notes, marked by timestamps, corresponding to identified themes. To identify specific themes, I utilized a variation of a comparative method (Ryan & Bernard, 2003). I compared the statements across all of the interviews, paying especially close attention to areas of thematic similarity, but also potential tensions or contradictions. As Ryan and Bernard (2003, p. 91) note, these "abstract similarities and differences... are themes." From there, I then used these areas of similarity or difference as a starting point from which I could employ a modified "cutting and sorting" method to organize specific statements with their correlated timestamps into specific, thematic groups. Once the themes had been identified, for varied reasons I selected certain themes for further discussion in this study to reveal the subjective meanings of the participants, incorporating (when appropriate) further sources of supplementary material.

As this process of theme identification and selection leaves much discretion to the researcher, I have provided Table 2 below, showing which themes were identified and selected. For any themes that were identified but not selected, I have provided a rationale.

Table 2

Theme identification and selection

Identified theme	Selected specifically for study?	Rationale
Peace as personal, collective, and/or systemic	Yes	Sufficient data. Consistent with aim and research question.
Peace and conflict in the local context? (and how is it defined/understood?)	Yes	Sufficient data. Consistent with aim and research question.
Peace as subjective/universal	No	Insufficient data.
Mission/Purpose of RPCP	Yes	Sufficient data. Consistent with aim and research question.
Possibility of peace (and inevitability of conflict	No	Related data was consolidated into a broader theme for analysis.
Practicalities of peacebuilding	No	Related data was consolidated into a broader theme for analysis.
Race, equity, and conflict	Yes	Sufficient data. Consistent with aim and research question.
Dialogue as peace practice	Yes	Sufficient data. Consistent with aim and research question.
Competing/conflicting identities of interviewees	No	Inconsistent with aim and research question.

After these thematic meanings were discussed, I reviewed them again through the lens of everyday peace as a conceptual tool to better understand the role of peacebuilding within the local context from the perspective of the participants.

4.2.2 Reliability, Limitations, and Ethical Considerations

This study, as with all research projects, will be limited in its scope. While I do take my sample to be a relatively representative sample of RPCP, it is limited by the selection of interviewees and the time allotted for each interview. Surely, a series of follow-up interviews as well as further interviews with other individuals involved with RPCP would reveal an even richer data set and allow for an even more detailed analysis. Similarly, the finite amount of time of my participant observation and internship also presents a certain limitation to my understanding of the cultural understandings that I am attempting to elucidate. Furthermore, the existence of the COVID-19 pandemic has presented certain challenges and limitations to this research. In the interest of safety, all RPCP programs were

either significantly altered or cancelled, which has limited my ability to deeply embed myself into the culture of the organization and get the most accurate depiction of organization processes through the course of my internship. Further, the necessary use of Zoom to conduct interviews imposed a degree of separation between myself and the participants which was not ideal. Nevertheless, despite these limitations, my research can be justified as reliable with respect to the specific research question. The interviews still provided a rich account which, in combination with observational and supplementary material, uncovered the subjective truths of local peacebuilders.

The research did entail potential risks and therefore required certain practical and ethical considerations to be made. Since this study involved human participants, my first priority as researcher was to do no harm. With this goal in mind, I took concrete steps to ensure that my actions do not abuse the rights of others in terms of privacy, confidentiality, and informed consent. Delamont and Atkinson (2018) point out how the capacity for informed consent in ethnographic research is both vital and never completely achievable: "the nature of ethnographic analysis – iterative and emergent – makes it all but impossible to provide fully informed consent as to the purposes and outcomes of the research" (p. 123). Despite this reality, I took every precaution to keep informed consent as central to my process as possible. Firstly, even before my internship took place, I received explicit permission to interact with RPCP as an organization from Jeffrey Weisberg, the Executive Director. I further received expressed consent from any individual that was used specifically as a source of potential data in my analysis. This consent was documented through signed informed consent forms which detailed the study and participant rights to privacy. Additionally, I maintained open dialogue with participants (as needed) and allowed any participant of an interview, observation, or written correspondence to decide at any point to no longer take part in the research, or change any statement they had made, even if data had been already collected. While I allowed all participants the option of having their actual names anonymized, none found this to be necessary, as they preferred to be quoted

as a representative of their specific title, office, or organization. I stored all of my collected data (including interview recordings) in a secure, private location.

As a participant researcher, the fluidity of my position throughout my internship posed further ethical considerations. The duality of my role (i.e., researcher on the one hand, intern on the other) created risks to the objectivity of my research, as I maintained my position as both an insider and outsider. Similarly, it blurred the specific relationship between my research participants and myself. At times they related to me as a researcher, and at other times, a colleague. This concern, while important, is likely present in most ethnographic research, as the methodology requires both immersion and objective scholarship. To mitigate this risk, I just repeatedly and transparently clarified consent to use specific aspects of communication that I found helpful to my research. That way there was always a clear understanding that statements that were shared with me were not intended to be kept private.

5. Findings

5.1 Understanding Peacebuilding: Personal and Collective Perspectives

To capture the understanding of the interviewees' perspectives about their work, it was important to first discern how they understand peace itself. The interviews revealed that the informants see peace as both a personal state and a universally-achieved ideal. These two simultaneous understandings demonstrate a tension, or, perhaps, even a contradiction worthy of investigation. On the one hand, peace as a state of individual being may be referred to as personal peace, and on the other hand, peace as a state of community or society may be called social/collective peace. Parallelly, conflict exists also as both a personal and collective phenomena to varying degrees. Throughout my interviews with RPCP informants, this supposed contradiction became more resolved. Jeffrey, for example, explains his understanding of peace and conflict as follows: “I see so many things on a continuum. I see violence on a continuum. I see peacebuilding on a continuum.” Ultimately, it became clear that peacebuilders within RPCP understand the development of peace to be an individual process that influences the wider society. For this reason, RPCP molds its programs across multiple domains of social ecology with a recognition that each domain influences the other. The tension is ultimately resolved through a recognition that personal peace and universal peace are part of the same continuum.

5.1.1 Peace is Personal

Personal peace can be defined as the capacity to endure life’s many challenges; relate to others with kindness, compassion, and empathy; and foster supportive relationships in one’s personal and community life. Therefore, peacebuilding, when seen as the development of a personal process, refers to equipping individuals with skills and strategies to transcend the suffering they experience. Heart emphasizes that what they do at RPCP is not necessarily about changing nations or major world paradigms but changing people. Heart says:

> We are not stopping wars, although we believe that if we were able to train all of our soldiers across the world in this, they would be a peacekeeping group. But we're not aiming that high. We're just kind of trying to change the interior of our human connection to something much more benign, centered, caring, loving.

She's describing a personal process, but she also admits that through this process, she does believe that world peace could be achieved. In other words, she sees her role as both something deeply personal and capable of achieving global change.

In her interview, Heart expresses the simultaneous satisfaction that she receives from cultivating peace in her own personal life as well as collectively, demonstrating how she understands both aspects as being part of a single, interdependent process. She also sees this personal process as a kind of responsibility that she holds as a peacebuilder to the wider collective process. In this sense, when Heart is acting to cultivate peace within herself, she understands it as being part of a much broader process.

One of RPCP's four main strategies of peacebuilding is "trauma-informed practices/communities and resiliency," with trauma being impactful incidents of stress or suffering with lasting effects, and resiliency being the capacity to overcome those incidents. Trauma is a predominantly personal phenomena (although there are some shared experiences of trauma in particular communities). Resiliency, then, is also a personal process as it reflects one's personal power to withstand and overcome suffering. With RPCP's focus on trauma and resilience, it is clear that the organization recognizes peacebuilding (at least to some degree) as a process that happens within individuals and promotes inner-strength, allowing people to have their personal pain acknowledged and ultimately healed.

Heart emphasizes that resilience is a necessary component of building peace because it raises people above the various difficulties they face. She even describes how her family's choice to adopt their last name, Phoenix, was in part symbolic of their ability to "start anew" and "[rise] from the

ashes" from their previous life. However, Heart also emphasizes that the decision to change her name was not reflective of some far-off hope about the future; rather, she explains, "it matched what we were already doing." Similarly, RPCP's emphasis on resilience not only teaches individuals strategies for overcoming trauma but empowers them through a sense of recognition that they are *already* resilient for overcoming the harms that they have experienced. Heart explains:

> I think that what people need to understand is that everyday, most people are practicing [resilience] and are resilient. I mean, the fact that we're all here, and especially those who have been so deeply harmed and have a very hard time getting out of that frame of mind of being a victim because they had been for so long.

Heart explains that building resilience, then, happens through human connection and by affirming the inherent value of people's personal stories.

In addition to RPCP's formal services and training around trauma and resilience, Heart acknowledges that some of the most profound moments of personal empowerment derive from individual instances of kindness and compassion. These encounters alone are often sufficient for building resilience in those who have been harmed by making them aware of their personal worth. Heart explains this process as follows:

> I think that just the idea that one matters … I've seen it with kids a lot and adults crying, 'I mean, this is the friendliest place I've ever been. I've been in the criminal justice system, going to court. No one has ever said "good morning, how are you?" or
> "Come in, we have a comfortable place for you to sit. Here's some cookies and tea.
> You want some coffee?"' They're just never treated that way. I mean, just that alone
> helps … So, we don't teach resilience that we don't practice. … [Kindness] is something that opens up a new awareness. That awareness, [people think,] 'That's my anchor. All my life, I've been saying, "Nobody cares"' … And then, all of a sudden somebody cares, somebody is showing up every week.

This example is significant because it demonstrates how RPCP cultivates personal peace within the participants of RPCP programs. It also illustrates how many formal institutions and systems, which hold authority over so many lives to varying degrees (e.g., schools, prisons, courts), compound trauma by failing to acknowledge people's value and not providing a context within which participants become aware of their self-worth.

Heart explains that her experience with trauma and tragedy has informed her ability to see resiliency in others:

> [I am] learning to rest in life no matter what happens. And I have successfully done that in very horrific situations and allowed myself real feelings but didn't stay in that. I came back, rose up, like the phoenix, and moved forward because I am resilient. We are all resilient. And nothing is guaranteed in this life.

Perhaps peacebuilding itself is an act of resilience, as Heart describes how one recognizes a wound and purposefully works toward healing it. Her personal trauma and resilience has enabled her, as part of her peacebuilding process, to recognize both the pain and resilience in others. Similarly, by empowering others through love and support, she considers their capacity for recovery and their inner value.

5.1.2 Systems of Peace

On the other side of the personal/collective spectrum, peace can be understood as a state of community, whether that community be a town, country, or throughout the world. Peace, in this sense, is cultivated by identifying systemic forms of violence and finding systemic solutions. In our interview, Micah emphasized this collective (as opposed to personal) peacebuilding approach. He understands peacebuilding work as building systems in which a more equal distribution of power exists, which happens, for example, through community empowerment, racial/social justice initiatives, and building cultures of dialogue.

Specifically, Micah's emphasis on the collective dynamic of conflict comes from his recognition that it is based in relationships of power. Micah understands community empowerment, for example, as a systemic form of community service, which is a necessary component of peacebuilding. Micah says:

> Community empowerment is allowing people to have more control over their destinies and of their lives, and having their stories, their voices, and their struggles be heard. So, it is a form of community service, right? Think about it as a systemic, or more of a systems-level, approach to community service. You could feed people in a kitchen ... or you could help the community to build the kitchen, using their recipes, their cooks, and have them come up with menus and proper distribution that better serves them. … It is truly a form of creating systems within that community structure. You literally strengthen that community instead of it being something that's imposed from the outside.

Micah illustrates the concept of community empowerment not as a personal process that entails the empowerment of individuals but as a process of establishing systems that are informed by the communities that make them up and aim to serve their specific needs. Empowerment, then, represents just one example of how peacebuilding can occur through changing inequitable, or inefficient systems.

In a more general sense, Micah describes how hierarchies and more socially designed systems of privilege and marginalization create conflict, "You can't have peace where there is suffering and injustice. The enemies to peace are these power systems, this idea of better than, on top of, these false hierarchies. … This creates conflict." Here, Micah explains that social constructions, such as hierarchies, always lead to conflict and violence because they create systems that afford resources for some while denying it to others. Peacebuilding, then, from a systems approach, means building social systems that are less hierarchical and more equitable in their distribution of resources.

Will offers another example which supports Micah's perspective about systems of power and how they create and sustain conflict. He describes how the juvenile justice system is maintained by financial interests that are incompatible with successful outcomes for youth. On this matter, Will explains:

> The system itself systemically, institutionally needs youth to fail to feed it. We have to have this big massive system, whose primary financial focus is on punishment. The other pieces, prevention and intervention, are important, eh, but they're not as funded as the animal that needs to be fed. If you want to keep feeding state attorneys and prisons and prisons for kids and juvenile assistance centers and juvenile delinquency centers, you have to feed it kids.

This systemic problem requires a systemic response, and Will explains that he sees a major part of his role as attempting to build new systems within the police department with the intentional aim of keeping youth from entering into the criminal justice system. He goes on to discuss how children fare much better if their contact with the system is minimized, but that poor outcomes for youth serve the juvenile justice systems by legitimizing the need for their own existence. Will reiterates that the system "needs the product, and their product is kids."

Paul offers "over-policing [or] oppressive policing" as an example of what he refers to as "an archaic policy," which only exists "because we've always done it that way." Specifically, the areas of over-policing that Paul describes are only in low-income neighborhoods, which are considered to be "high crime areas." These areas are predominantly minority neighborhoods, meaning that arrests will happen disproportionately against communities of color. Paul also describes how the policing taking place is not illegal because it is a response to real violations; however, these are largely considered petty instances of crime. Paul says, "Would we be doing this in a higher tax bracketed neighborhood? The answer is a resounding no." Paul is describing a form of systemic racism, and in this case, it consists of a law enforcement mechanism that wields power over communities of color to a greater degree than in white, affluent communities.

This system of over-policing operates as a kind of self-fulfilling prophecy in the same way that the juvenile justice system does, according to Will, in which disproportionate results provide a kind of justification for uneven enforcement. Also, similar to Will, Paul understands that a systemic problem requires a systemic solution: “That’s why it’s so important to write those policies because [police officers] have to follow policy.” Clearly, there are racist attitudes or particular racist biases that exist among specific officers, but these officers also operate as representatives of a larger system. In this way, Paul is arguing that by implementing change at the systems-level (e.g., mandating implicit bias training), society can force a change in personal behavior.

5.1.3 A Dual Approach

As I alluded to earlier, the tension between collective/systems-level approaches to peacebuilding or personal/relationship approaches raises a question about how best to efficiently and comprehensively effect change.

RPCP’s founding was inspired by the Peace Alliance, the primary mission of which was to create a US cabinet-level department of peace. Heart was involved with this organization before founding RPCP, and she says, “We weren’t working directly with people. We were working on legislation, lobbying, and lobbying was really good, but you’re so far away when you’re talking to some of those senators until you can get to the human place.” In other words, the Peace Alliance was a systems-level, macro-approach to peacebuilding. Heart felt that the human component was missing, which inspired her to start RPCP in Gainesville, Florida: “We’re going to start a center. We’re going to go right in the middle of a human community and see what we can offer.” Thus, with RPCP’s creation, Heart was reorienting her conception of peacebuilding by focusing on an approach that simultaneously engages with the micro and macro levels.

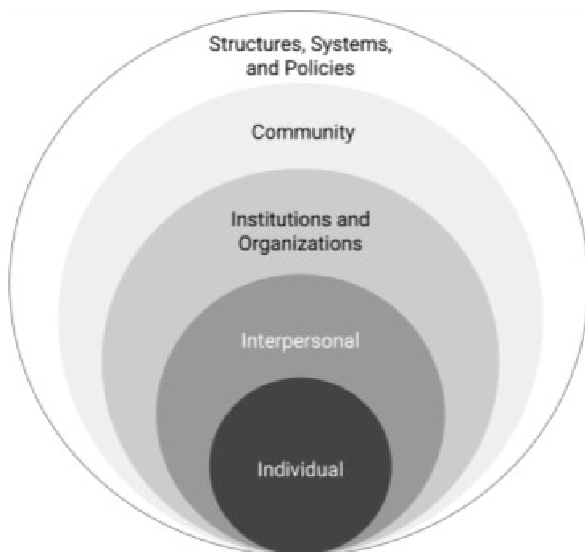
Jeffrey explains how RPCP understands peacebuilding as an expanding process that moves from the realm of the personal to more comprehensive domains of society:

Peacebuilding starts from a personal space. I really relate to and use what is called the social ecological model. The metaphor is that when you drop a pebble in a pond, you get these ripples that go out. The starting place is ourself, and then we go into intimate relationships, into our families, into our community, into society, into the world.

In this quote, Jefrrey explains that RPCP uses the social ecological model, which was originally adapted from the work of Bronfenbrenner (1992). It is a conceptual tool that illustrates different domains of society, starting with the individual and expanding to the structural (see Figure 1). People occupy and interact with each of these spheres at the same time, and conflict at each level influences the others. For example, conflict within an individual often gives rise to interpersonal conflict, which can spur conflicts within institutions, and so on. RPCP addresses conflict within each of these domains to generate sustainable change. Fortunately, peacebuilding strategies and practices introduced within each of these domains are capable of similar compounding, wide-reaching effects. RPCP's holistic approach to peace, then, recognizes the transformative power of and interplay between the personal as well as the collective.

Figure 1

The Social Ecological Model (based on Bronfenbrenner, 1992)



In this regard, Micah further explains how peacebuilding in the personal realm and realm of system are both needed and part of a single process:

… the etiology of violence and struggle and suffering exists at multiple levels, so the solution has to be equally dynamic and multi-dimensional, where we have people that say, 'I'm going

> to target communities.' Others will say, 'I'm going to target individuals.' And others say, 'You know, we're going to completely change this world. We're going to change the structure of this country. We're going to change nations and larger macro-level societies.' ... All of those different levels are needed, right? … The best place to start is an individual's quest in self-reflection of 'What is the best way for me to contribute?' And then, do it.

As Micah asserts, RPCP recognizes the value of peacebuilding at every level of society and this appreciation shapes their dual approach to peacebuilding efforts and various training programs, which include programs aimed at equipping individuals with personal peacebuilding skills as well as institutions with systemic-centered solutions.

5.2 Building Peace in the Local Context: Philosophical and Practical Implications

5.2.1 Informants' Understanding of their Local Context

It is important to understand how the informants see themselves as agents within the various spheres of belonging they occupy. On one hand, they feel tied to a narrow community (e.g., town, county, neighborhood), but they also understand that they are simultaneously tied to a national context, where they are members of a wider community. While conflicts are manifested and addressed at the local level, they are also sometimes reflective of broader, national conflicts and tensions. Jeffrey even identifies his national identity as being "at the core" of conflicts in his local community context: "We, as a nation, in particular, I think it's fair to say, are more I-centered, individualistic versus collective. And that translates into a billion different examples of *my* rights over *our* rights or *my* rights over *our* collective needs and values and concerns."

Similarly, Will explains how national conflicts, especially in regard to national politics, often appear in the form of local tensions. He mentions, for example, how he felt supported in his efforts to reduce disproportionate minority contact in law enforcement under the Obama administration but

not under the Trump administration. In other words, he felt there was greater institutional interest in and support for the work he was doing before Trump came into office. Similarly, Paul explains some of the local reforms of the ASO through the lens of Obama-era national policing reforms: "When Ferguson happened, Obama sent out his twenty-first century policing plan, but we already had all of those things in place. In fact, we were farther along than what was the expected minimum." Paul explained that this provided a sense of validation to the sheriff that what they were doing was worthwhile. In fact, they were ahead of the movement to reform policing systems throughout the country.

Will also describes another local response to a national issue:

> Locally, they were responding to what was happening in the country. That was kind of an interesting phenomena, realizing the power of how whatever was happening in a small pocket of Washington was going to affect community leaders here and protests.

Here, Will describes the "powder keg" of national unrest that occurred after the killing of George Floyd, a highly publicized police killing of an unarmed Black resident in Minneapolis. Even though the event did not include the Gainesville police department in any direct way, people responded locally as if it did, making demands of local policing procedures and questioning the legitimacy of their local policing system.

Will goes on to explain that even though "cops have earned the wrath sometimes around the country," after the George Floyd incident, he says, "You begin to see our existence being challenged. 'Why do we even have cops? What's their purpose?'" In this sense, he is describing the national context (e.g., the "Defund the Police" movement) and how it affects the local situation. Regarding the idea of holding immediate dialogue in response to these shootings, Will thought that there would be "too much raw emotion" because "People weren't ready to have a conversation, [look] at reconciliation, or [restore] certain parts of law enforcement." He explains that this was a barrier to performing police work in Gainesville because people needed him to be held accountable for the

actions of the Minneapolis police department. Will says, “We always knew we had to be accountable for our own, but now, we had to be accountable for what happens around the country.”

In response to this national conversation, local tensions were made visible in the form of protests. Paul explains,

> Our local leaders were participating in Black Lives Matter marches. And since they had already been doing this work … [we] were way more prepared for it. When they did the demonstrations downtown, they stopped 13th [Street] and University, our main thoroughfare. ... Their plan was just to keep the people safe and block off the roads.

Paul commended the GPD for being willing to heed the requests of protestors. When protestors informed officers about their intentions to march in demonstrations, the officers would block off the roads to keep citizens safe, and some even marched with them in a “show of solidarity” (Paul). According to Paul, “It was refreshing here (in Gainesville), as opposed to where you see the ultra-violence happening, the clashes, and I attest to that with the work that is already being done here.”

Paul, however, gives an example of a local police shooting in March 2016 (five years before the George Floyd incident) of an unarmed Black youth in Gainesville named Robert Dentmond, who was sixteen years old. Paul explains:

> Robert was one of my former students. I wasn’t involved in it, thank goodness, but he had told his girlfriend … ‘I’m going to go get the cops to kill me.’ We call that ‘suicide by cop.’ People do that a lot. So, he went out and had a very realistic-looking rifle, an AR15-looking rifle. It wasn’t—it turned out to be a BB gun or a pellet gun, but it looked real. … These guys talked to him for thirty minutes, got him to put the rifle down, but he picked it back up. And there’s a certain line that you draw in the sand, a virtual line … if he picks up this gun and runs into an occupied building, what have I got to do? I have an obligation to protect the public.

Paul explains that "the optics" of the situation were poor because even though the GPD and ASO were present at the incident, approximately "thirty" shots were fired, damaging the neighborhood (e.g., "cars") and ultimately killing Robert. Paul goes on to explain that this situation was sloppy because "there was no plan" in place, regarding exactly what the rules of the situation should have entailed.

Paul goes on to describe the police response to the incident and effort to repair community relationships:

> First we have to reconcile, this young man's life was just taken by law enforcement. … We were trying to reconcile. We had community meetings. It did not go well. The activists actually showed up—excuse me, the agitators showed up. Their whole goal was to start a riot. … They hijacked the meeting. … But we tried, which was something we never would have done before.

So, Paul's admission that an effort of this nature (which involved reaching out to the community) would not have previously occurred demonstrates how police shootings that become part of national narratives result in real changes in local approaches to similar issues that arise. Interestingly, Will notes that while these shifting paradigms between the community and law enforcement are present, ultimately the community is still not "ready" to move away from arresting youth: "The community still wants to pick up the phone and call 911 [to] have us show up and solve those problems."

Some national conflicts are locally negotiated, even when the local context is not immediately involved, but other national issues become manifest through real forms of local violence. Jeffrey explains:

> You have this historical context that exists in Gainesville, where we were lynching people in Alachua County. And that has never fully been addressed. The consequences of that and slavery lives today in East and West, across the tracks and in the disparate resourcing that exists.

As further evidence of these disparate outcomes, Paul explains that in his forty years of growing up in Gainesville, he did not even know that there was a crack/cocaine issue until he started to work at the sheriff's office. This was largely due to the continued racial segregation of the community and his privilege of being raised in an area that was sheltered from these problems.

This historical context and disparate outcomes inform RPCP's approach to racial conflicts in the local community. Despite the fact that many of these historical harms have never been adequately addressed, the study's informants often emphasized that Gainesville presents a unique context due to its progressive population's interest when it comes to engaging in these types of issues constructively. From the perspective of policing, both Paul and Will express pride in the willingness of their departments to engage in these initiatives. Paul describes that when he travels to other cities in Florida, the attitudes of other police departments that he encounters around the state is "shocking."

Paul notes that a combination of Gainesville's access to the University of Florida and its liberal tendencies create conditions that allow for "fresh ideas." Paul goes on to say:

> [Gainesville] is a wonderful place because we have more support. Societally, generationally, everybody's talking about these things … that's why the River Phoenix Center gets so warmly received. It's not all the time, you know, there's some people that say, 'that's a bunch of hippie nonsense.' But for the most part, we have a city that's very different.

5.2.2 Mission/Purpose of RPCP

The mission of RPCP is to identify conflicts, empower communities, and promote peacebuilding strategies (e.g., dialogue, restorative justice, trauma-informed response, and socioemotional learning) in order to encourage a society that sustains peace, ensures equality, and establishes justice. Specifically, Jeffrey introduces RPCP as follows:

> Our mission is to enrich the lives of individuals, families, and communities, to make people's lives better by providing and promoting best and next practices for peacebuilding. And what

> that translates to mean is that we have some core practices that we have … researched [and] developed, and we think are central to really making a difference in people's lives. … So, it's really about elevating some of these practices and getting them in the hands of people who would benefit from them, which is virtually everybody. We want peacebuilding to become a household term and for everyone to understand it.

First of all, the goal of RPCP is to implement its core practices in the community either through direct practice or training programs. Secondly, Jeffrey sees RPCP's role as being a resource for the research and development of these practices. Lastly, he would like to make peacebuilders out of everyday people by engaging as many people as possible in the understanding and practice of peacebuilding processes.

In RPCP-sponsored training events, I often observed an intentional and explicit point made concerning how peace, both personally and within the community, is possible. This credo was clarified in Heart and Jeffrey's interviews, and it represents an important starting place for understanding the mission and methods of RPCP. Jeffrey explains how this belief sets RPCP's intention and describes why it is is an essential place to begin the conversation when discussing peacebuilding with the community:

> If you have an image or an idea or some picture in your mind or in front of you, that's where you want to go, what you want to create, I believe that the universe will conspire to support that image or that intention. If you don't believe that peace is possible, maybe this isn't the training for you right now. … [M]ost people aren't convinced. Most people are pretty convinced, in fact, that peace is not possible, but they have hope at least or some faith or a little bit of trust. I start there because it all aligns with the power of our intention, the practice of our actions, our efforts, and the collaboration with Self and Others, of working toward something.

Jeffrey expresses that this idea (peace is possible) is both crucial to the peacebuilding process and requires convincing "for most people." In this way, the purpose of RPCP is not only to implement peacebuilding strategies but to persuade the community that the goal is attainable and the work is worthwhile.

Jeffrey's faith in the power of intention to effect positive outcomes represents a kind of optimism regarding the capacity to effect change. Jeffrey says, "I believe peace is possible because when people can, in fact, change their perception, [it] changes their attitude, which changes their behavior." In other words, once people are willing to buy in, or allow the possibility of an optimistic outcome, it changes the way they interact with the world, and it actually creates the desired outcomes.

The "peace" that Jeffrey and others describe, that which is deemed possible, is best represented by the ideal that Heart and Jeffrey refer to as "the beloved community." This phrase, which was borrowed from the words of Martin Luther King Jr., represent what they hold as a kind of utopian example of perfect peace in practice. In the interview, Jeffrey shares his understanding of "the beloved community" in the context of RPCP's mission and defines it as a society in which "we are living in … right relationship, kind relationship, considerate, respectful relationship. … most importantly, with those we don't know or like or agree with or understand… The beloved community considers well-being and practices respect, dignity, and fairness for all." Jeffrey's image of "the beloved community" helps to situate and contextualize the way in which RPCP understands the process of peacebuilding. Peacebuilding programs sponsored by RPCP utilize forms of dialogue and self-discovery to promote empathy and perspective-taking across lines of conflict.

Jeffrey further explains all that "the beloved community" entails:

> The beloved community is a diverse collection of all of us that is living in as much harmony as possible and functioning on a high level, [so] we can navigate through challenges, whether it be environmental or social or political or in our educational system, criminal justice system.

Through his conception of this idea, it is clear that peacebuilding strategies must be designed to address issues across various societal groups and systems. He mentions certain groups above to show that peacebuilding is not unidirectional. In order to be effective, it must recognize conflict and build positive outcomes in multiple fields simultaneously.

RPCP also recognizes that in order to connect these practices to all that would benefit, a major function of their community model is collaboration with other agencies, organizations, and institutions. Heart explains that RPCP's mission is to collaborate and connect people, specifically, because peace requires community stakeholders: "Certainly, we are not the only ones that are here. We are collaborators. … [A] very important part of our mission is to offer but also to lift up other organizations that are doing fine work." She goes on to mention "foundations for a peaceful existence," including organizations, like those that address "hunger, education, [and] housing." According to Heart, part of RPCP's mission is to train the staff of these other organizations to teach them that they are peacebuilders (i.e., that "this is not just a job"). In other words, they help them by addressing "interior work that needs to be done within oneself," which refers to a change of consciousness/understanding by recognizing one's impact and broader role in the community.

Under this conception, obstacles to achieving the beloved community are exactly the kinds of challenges that RPCP aims to address. The root of these obstacles, in Jeffrey's view, is the overwhelming individualism in the national identity of the United States, such as the idea that "I am separate from you, that I am more important than … anybody else or anything else" (Jeffrey). However, he also pointed out that the United States also has certain aspects of cultural identity that make peacebuilding—especially regarding reconciliation and transformative justice—more easily digestible. Speaking specifically about prisoners, Jeffrey says, "I think Americans love the underdog." People are inspired by the possibility of "resurrection," or a redemption story, where someone has emerged from the deepest level of despair to positively influence the community in some way. Jeffrey wants RPCP to better utilize these narratives of redemption to encourage

communities to imagine a more peaceful world, shifting people's perspectives toward one in which peace is possible. Jeffrey explains the role of storytelling and peace narratives play in shifting consciousness of groups. He believes that change does not only occur "one [person] at a time," but rather across communities or large groups (e.g. of a generation, around a certain interest). An example of this kind of rapid change in community consciousness could be the Me Too Movement which was inspired by people sharing their personal stories of trauma and resilience.

At times, the obstacles that prevent the "beloved community" from coming to fruition are too embedded within society to even notice or are more practical, or material, in nature; although, even these may be rooted in the central cultural issues that Jeffrey describes. In fact, an emerging theme from my interviews was the recognition that community-based peacebuilding requires the often difficult task of identifying problems that need to be addressed. Paul, for example, demonstrating how difficult it can be to see the issues in one's own community clearly, explained that prior to his involvement with RPCP, he would have believed and argued that there were no problems related to racism within law enforcement in Alachua County. He describes his experience with RPCP as an "awakening" which only occurred after learning that Alachua County was second worst in the state for racial disparity in law enforcement, a fact he found "shocking." After a shift in his perspective, Paul became more aware of discriminatory or unfair policies that exist simply because "We've always done it that way." Paul's description demonstrates how oppressive systems become so deeply embedded into society that they are perpetually unquestioned, if they are noticed at all. Building peace requires an ever-expanding definition of conflict to include these systemic forms of conflict which sustain oppression and violence in the community. These systemic realities, however, are often taken for granted, and therefore require a kind of critical curiosity. Community peacebuilders, therefore, must be able and willing to identify problems in those systems, imagine something better than what already exists, and share that awareness with the community in order to build capacity for positive change. Again, this is why it is so critical to first affirm that peace is possible.

Paul provides two examples of how, given his new perspective, he has come to understand that he has personally contributed to or participated in the perpetuation of harm to vulnerable populations in the community through his role as a law enforcement officer. First, he described how as a school resource officer, a police officer that is assigned to patrol a public school, he was having a deeply negative impact on youth without even being aware of it: "My job was not to put kids in jail, although my sergeant was patting me on the back. … It was a matter of realizing that I'm doing so much harm and not even realizing it, thinking that I'm doing the right thing." This example illustrates not only how Paul struggled to recognize the problem, but also how his actions yielded praise from his superiors, making that recognition even more difficult. In another example, Paul explains his experience working as a bailiff, an officer assigned to patrol a courtroom: "The judges were making us take people to jail. We were arresting people for showing up [to court] wearing shorts and flipflops." Paul explains that when people arrived at court wearing clothes that were deemed inappropriate, he would be asked to enforce further criminal penalties against them. In this case, the dress code for court did not take into account people who did not own or could not afford clothes that would be seen as appropriate. In other words, by criminalizing poverty in this way, the court would use a very trivial issue to levy extreme punishments with compounding effects on certain populations. In this case, Paul noted that one must recognize that there is a structural problem which creates and sustains the problem: "That system was certainly broken. … Allowing the system to hold people accountable for what [the authorities] expect rather than what [the citizens] can give." Paul explains that now within his department, he has moved from being a "supporter" of unjust policies and practices to an "activist." He says, "I've taken it upon myself to call out what's happening in my own agency with folks when I see it early and not wait."

In order to correctly understand and identify the issues that lead to conflict, Paul emphasizes the need to engage with various community actors across sectors who are actively working to address serious issues in the community. These actors may be able to see something that Paul cannot, due to

his role as an officer, and may even consider their interests to be at odds with those of law enforcement agencies. He mentioned, specifically, that he reaches out to organizations dealing with homelessness and racial injustice, for example, and asks for "a seat at the table" in order to better understand the ways in which law enforcement agencies are contributing to the problem and potential avenues for officers to support community efforts. In this way, Paul's acknowledgement mirrored Heart's assertion that a principal component of RPCP's mission is community collaboration.

Paul also described that, from his perspective, overcoming obstacles to peacebuilding in his agency can be as easy as using more effective language to describe the work or the dynamics of the community. As an example, Paul notes that by using the term "restorative justice," some fellow officers, especially the more senior officers, immediately respond with resistance. They will derogatorily say, "You just want to hug a thug." However, Paul explains that he has found the following language to be much more effective: "Let's hold these kids accountable. Let's teach them something. Let's make the victim's whole, and then, they're not criminals for the rest of their life for some nonsense kid behavior. Let's let them be kids and teach them something." In this case, it is not the practice of restorative justice that is met with cynicism or ridicule, but the term. By using more strategic language that corresponds to the interests and values of his coworkers, while still remaining true to the spirit of restorative justice, Paul has received more buy-in and support for the work in the community.

Similarly, Paul has found that language that is used by law enforcement agencies to describe the communities officers serve can have a significant impact on how those communities are perceived and treated. As an example, Paul explains that he has helped lead a campaign to replace the word "juvenile" with "child" in agency policy and in conversations among officers. He explains: "'Juvenile,' when you hear it, has a negative connotation to it. … Take everywhere you can in instances where you use the word, 'juvenile,' and replace it with 'child' or 'children' or 'youth.' And as soon as you do that, you soften it up." In other words, Paul has noticed how the word "juvenile" is

used as a way of legitimizing a more callous approach toward young community members, whereas "child" necessarily inspires more empathy, understanding, and care.

Overall, however, Paul believes that one of the best ways he can personally enact meaningful change is through altering agency policies to include more considerate, just, effective, or inclusive language. Paul admits that not every officer in law enforcement is committed to justice, but he also points out that the hierarchical system of law enforcement personnel and policy can help to ensure that officers do a better job interacting with and relating to community members. Paul likens the culture of law enforcement to that of the military in that officers do follow orders, especially written policies. Regardless of how individual officers may feel about any given issue related to peacebuilding, race, or justice, the existence of policies based on equity forces them to perform their role in a certain way. For this reason, Paul recognizes policy as one of the most important avenues for peacebuilding.

Paul's approach speaks to a recurring theme of my interviews, that within the local context, some harms are caused by systems which exacerbate tensions or make matters worse for community members. Even systems that are designed to solve conflicts, such as law enforcement, can perpetuate harms by avoiding relevant issues, or mishandling solutions.

Finally, in order to be as effective as possible, peacebuilders must be cautious in their approach with the community and in their work. Paul, for example, notes that he has learned that the changes he proposes and the training he offers must always be presented in a non-threatening way. Otherwise, it will be ignored or rejected outright. He explains that after receiving training in racial justice from Georgetown University, he originally modeled his police training sessions to reflect the tone and style of the training that he had participated in. He shares that he began by saying to his fellow officers, "'Hey, you are all biased,' and that went over like a fart in church. It was horrible. The very first response for every single person who is not in [the field of racial justice] is that 'you just called me a racist'" (Paul). After realizing that that approach was not reaching a receptive

audience, he altered his approach to engage officers specifically and gain their buy-in. Paul's story shows that the way the issue should be explored is highly dependent on the specific audience. This example, particularly, illustrates the difference between how information is received in an academic context versus a practical context, and shows the need for language to be strategically adapted. Similarly, Heart explains that in the case of facilitation (e.g., restorative justice, dialogue), an incompetent facilitator can do further harm even when they may have the purest intentions. She says, "I don't see a downside in [peacebuilding work], I really don't, unless you are not trained to do it, then you can be clumsy … Like anything, you can get it from a book and just go there and be yourself and just do more harm than good because you're not doing the work yourself." Heart's warning points to a critical function of RPCP. While the organization wishes to empower everyday actors to assume the role of peacebuilder in their community, they also recognize the need for sufficient and extensive training. An important function of RPCP, then, is to offer training and work with people to understand that best strategy for engaging the population they serve in order to get the best results.

5.2.3 Racial Equity: An Overarching Theme

It is critical to emphasize that while RPCP's five core pillars do not include racial equity explicitly, all of the strategies and concepts of RPCP's practice are informed by a racial equity lens and are understood as means of achieving a greater degree of racial equity in the community. This focus reflects the recognition that in the United States and within the local context of Gainesville, racial division (and the subsequent disparity of access to resources and contact with law enforcement) is currently understood as one of the greatest obstacles to peace. In practice, this focus means that RPCP's peacebuilding strategies are intended, at least in part, to address racial inequality directly and that training programs that RPCP offers include an equity component or require critical reflections of race from participants. For example, restorative justice programs and training sessions are explicitly designed as a strategy for reducing the disproportionate minority contact within law enforcement

agencies and school disciplinary systems. SEL training is utilized in programs involving juvenile offenders (disproportionately Black) to empower those populations, inspire a greater capacity for self-esteem, and equip them with specific skills that will help them be successful. When discussing trauma responsive care, RPCP facilitators make note of the effects of generational trauma within Black communities. Micah, while describing the importance of understanding trauma when attempting to grow peace in the community, draws an explicit connection between trauma and disparity:

> Trauma is one of those major barriers to peace building.… and one of the things that inequality produces is traumatic experiences. So, inequality is the biggest threat to peace building, and [one of] the mechanisms by which inequality impacts peace is through experiencing trauma.

Speaking of traumatic events that result from social power imbalances, Micah explains,

> that trauma impacts all domains of life. It impacts how you connect with people. It impacts who you trust. It impacts your self image. It impacts all these things. That hinders peacebuilding. ... It hinders peaceful interaction. It hinders this high quality of life where people can be well internally… and in their communities.

Micah further points out that in certain, very specific spaces and among specific populations that have experienced historical and/or generational subjugation, marginalization, and atrocities, "the structural inequality creates... this microcosm of social conditions that breeds trauma… This is where trauma lives. This is where the disadvantage lives."

Speaking from his perspective as a restorative justice practitioner, Jeffrey explains that acknowledgement of harm is the first step to racial healing: "I really believe that in order for [historical racial injustice] to be addressed and healed, we do need to acknowledge it more forcefully, more directly." This belief is reflected in the central role discussions around race take in RPCP programs and training sessions. Ultimately, Jeffrey argues that open, honest dialogue is best way to address racial division:

> The way I believe moving through racism, the way to dismantle racism, is through humility, for white people in particular, to really listen deeply through dialogue and all its different forms and to acknowledge what's happened and its impact and how it lives today and have a deep, deep understanding about that. And from there, hopefully we build enough trust and willingness that we can actually create something together. And when we work together, for the common good, we can overcome the other contours of racism and mistrust and hurt and trauma and expand our capacity to engage in those constructive ways.

With this clarification in mind, I will discuss in greater detail one of several RPCP programs, namely the Police Youth Dialogue, that aims at achieving exactly the outcome that Jeffrey describes. Utilizing dialogue as a community peacebuilding strategy, this initiative aims at building capacity for relationship and understanding across populations who have been historically distrustful of the other, in part due to dynamics of race.

5.2.4 Peacebuilding Strategies of RPCP: Police Youth Dialogue as an Example

Though discussions about peacebuilding practices and programs with the interviewees covered topics specifically relating to each of RPCP's four core practices (restorative justice, trauma, dialogue, and social-emotional learning), this report will focus on dialogue and how it is realized through the understandings and practices of RPCP's community programming. To an extent, it is a mischaracterization to describe this focus as neglecting the other three since the underlying principles of restorative justice, social-emotional learning, and trauma-responsiveness often inform the manner in which dialogue is utilized in RPCP programs. Similarly, dialogue as a practice is commonly utilized as a component of programs nominally reflecting the other three. But, by focusing on the interviewees' statements about the practice of dialogue, this thesis shows how the informants' understanding of peacebuilding is reflected through practice. Further, by describing the interviewees' perspectives concerning a specific RPCP dialogue peacebuilding program, namely the Police-Youth

Dialogue program, this paper can illustrate how these understandings and practices can be implemented to help resolve a highly-charged and ongoing community conflict.

Dialogue, being one of RPCP's four central peacebuilding strategies, is a key component of RPCP's community programming. More specifically, dialogue is understood as a way to build bridges of understanding between polarized populations and heal historical wounds. In the Gainesville community, various deep polarizations define the landscape of conflict. These polarizations include, for example, race, gender, socio-economic position, and political affiliation. Making reference to the contentious 2020 election, which at the time of the interview was still undecided, Jeffrey explains, "When I think about the polarization that exists and has existed for a very long time, just seeing it literally in blue and red, [I think] we must engage in more effective, meaningful, and intentional, and courageous conversation with people who are different from us" (Jeff). Dialogue offers the opportunity for exactly this kind of engagement between different identities or perspectives.

Often, the polarizations that define community conflicts reflect personal or cultural identities which entail certain values or worldviews. When these are in contradiction, the conflict can seem intractable as both sides remain unwilling to compromise on what they understand to be at the heart of who they are and what they represent. Jeffrey makes clear that dialogue, in part, involves "a celebration and an acknowledgment of what is core to each of us individually, within our families, within our groups." But also, as Jeffrey notes, "this identity is etched in blood for a lot of us. We have our weapons out. We have our knives out. We have the barricades up." Jeffrey explains that through dialogue, these needs and values that relate to our identity can be adequately explored, and often, participants begin to recognize that while their needs and values remain crucial, the methods by which they insist on meeting those needs or reflecting those values can evolve. "So the peace building work that we're doing [in dialogue] is really about giving people a much broader perspective and image of ways of engaging within myself and between others and within groups" (Jeff).

One especially contentious conflict based in polarization is that of police officers and communities of color, and in particular, youth communities of color. In order to facilitate greater understanding across both sides of this conflict, RPCP, in coordination with GPD and ASO, has developed a community Police-Youth Dialogue (PYD) program. This program brings together local officers and at-risk youth together to participate in facilitated dialogue. At the time of the interviews, 115 Police-Youth Dialogues had been conducted (Paul) and over 2000 local youth had taken part (Heart).

Micah, a co-designer of the program, explains the PYD program had been inspired and informed, in part, by a dialogue program that he designed and facilitated at the University of Florida called Building Bridges. That event brought together local leaders in Gainesville to participate in "a really hard conversation about race. I thought that would be like a dinner table for a family … an intervention in our community. And it was a remarkable event" (Micah). The success of that program demonstrated to Micah the impact that deep conversations can have on a community in conflict, and provided a model for a method of building trust and healing divisions.

In some ways, the collaborative partnership between RPCP and local police agencies, an unlikely alliance between a historically punitive institution and a local non-profit organization advocating for systemic change, mirrors the kinds of bridges that are built during the dialogues themselves. Speaking about Will, Jeffrey shares:

> When we first started working with him, he was pretty proud of his positions on certain things. And those positions would largely be a bit counter to what I believe and what I think I'm talking about here. And over the course of these years of working very closely together in our police youth dialogues, in restorative justice, in our racial equity task force, and in other community initiatives, this person has come a very long way in considering a different perspective, a different outlook than the one he grew up with and the one that he's been trained in.

Jeffrey credits Will for being willing and able to make meaningful changes to police policy which has led to tangible improvements in community outcomes. Specifically, GPD has seen a 96 percent decrease in youth arrests in school, and a 47 percent decrease in community youth arrests due, in part, to the reforms that have been implemented as a result of Will's advocacy (Jeffrey). Just as RPCP and local police agencies have fostered a relationship that has benefited the community, the PYD program helps to build relationships between youth and officers so that trust can lay a foundation for a safer, more peaceful community.

The dialogues themselves consist of various stages of engagement and group activities. As Heart explains, the program involves "food, games, but mostly deep conversation." First, officers and youth are separated into different rooms, and each group is invited to create a list describing the other group using words that begin with each letter of the alphabet. The youth are additionally asked if there are any specific issues or concerns that they would like to discuss with the officers. Then, the two groups are brought together into one circle where they play a community building game. After the game, the lists are presented to the groups, read aloud, and discussed. An example of these lists is provided in Table 3, 4, and 5 which are representations from a PYD that I observed on March 17, 2021.

Table 3

Words youth chose to describe officers:			
Active, Assertive, Asshole	Guarded, Grounded	Motivated	Stubborn
Brave	Hostile	Noisy, Neglectful	Tenacious
Cold-blooded	Intimidating, Intuitive	Oppositional, Observative	Understanding
Defensive	Jerk	Protective	Vicious, Versatile
Educated	Killers	Questionable	Wise, Watching
Fierce	Loud, liable, late	Reliable	X-tra
			Y
			Z

Note: Spelling, punctuation, and capitalization choices reflect the original list. "Y" and "Z" were left blank. Observed March 17, 2021.

The A to Z lists relp to reveal prejudices and misconceptions that police and youth hold about each other. Once these conceptions are out in the open, they can be discussed in a way that builds understanding and empathy, and can even foster the collaborative development of new norms of interaction between officers and community members. Micah understands this A to Z activity as a kind of confession that both sides take part in:

> "They literally have to confess what they think of folks. Once it's on paper, I think, people begin to see, 'Oh, that's not fair.' And after exchanging and seeing the humanization of people, seeing that they are warm-blooded people that have fears, they have insecurities like everyone else, they have responsibilities, they have families; that also begins to break down some of that perspective of who these people are, youth and police officers" (Micah).

Table 4

Words officers chose to describe youth:			
Asshole(s)	Green	Mouthy	Selfish, Stankk, sneaky
Brats	Hostile	Noisy, Nice	Too much
Crazy, Creative, Childish	Ignorant	Obnoxious	Unique
Diverse, Disrespectful, DJJ	Joyful, Jealous	PETTY!	Violent
Extra, Entitled	Keen, Kleptomaniacs	Quick to react	Weird
Frustrating, Fun	Loud	Receptive, Rude	Xenas
			Youthful
			Zealous

Note: Spelling, punctuation, and capitalization choices reflect the original list. Observed March 17, 2021.

As Micah points out, this confession acts as a foundation for new understanding. The act of confession, itself, begins the process of healing as it requires officers and youth to consciously acknowledge and engage with their conflict in an intentional and honest way.

Table 5

Issues and Concerns (that youth wanted to discuss with officers)	
Racism	Jealous
Discrimination	Jail
Stereotype	Entitled
Prejudice	Over-powering
Lack of training	Intimidating
Unrelatable	Abuse of power
Police brutality	Wrong priorities
Crooked	Belittling

Note: Observed March 17, 2021.

Jeffrey believes that the youth descriptions of officers reflect the significant role the media plays in shaping the conceptions youth have about the officers (Jeff). He makes the point that even though most youth who participate in the PYD program have never had a negative experience with police officers in their personal lives, they most likely will still “say cops are pigs, and they’re killers, and they’re racists” (Jeff). Will explains that through the course of discussion, youth develop a sense of community with the officers as they begin to realize that they share much more in common than they had believed:

> “The kids find out how human the officers are, and how they were probably raised in the same neighborhood, maybe in the same way, [like] with a single parent. And how they probably got in trouble as well, and still made something out of their lives.” (Will)

The officers also learn about the youth, and specifically, are often surprised to find out that these young people who can be seen as delinquents actually have admirable hopes and dreams for their future (Will).

Furthermore, the A to Z activity helps to illuminate nuance and contradiction that already exists in each side’s conception of the other. For example, as shown in the figure above, the officers’ choice of both “Noisy” an “Nice” to describe community youth and the youths’ choice of both “Intimidating” and “Intuitive” to describe officers, demonstrates that the views held by both groups is often a complicated a mix of positive and negative attributes. As the dialogue progresses, this

nuance creates a space where people can explore the ways in which they do or do not meet the expectations of the other side.

In this process of rapport-building and trust-building, participants become more comfortable sharing their perspectives about difficult issues related to policing, and after the A to Z activity concludes, the facilitator guides the participants through a discussion which focuses on some of the topics or themes that the youth presented as their issues or concerns. In the specific case of the PYD I observed, the youths' interest in raising concerns regarding "racism, discrimination, stereotyp[ing], prejudice, and brutality" in the local police force, provided a unique opportunity for Black officers to share their perspectives and experiences regarding the challenges they have faced embodying two identities.

In another exchange spurred by discussion about officers being "over-powering [and] intimidating," one youth shared an experience in which she was detained for a very minor traffic infraction. Although the incident was routine and insignificant, it still resulted in several officers in multiple cars reporting to the scene. The youth explained that she found the response to be excessive and it left her feeling scared. In the exchange, the officers explained that although they did not remember this incident themselves, as they may or may not have been personally involved, they admitted that the response was likely due to officers being "bored" and that they had not considered the impact that this kind of response would have on community members. This exchange offered just one example of how these conversations can positively affect how officers and community members can relate to and interact with each other.

After this portion of the dialogue, the officers and the youth share a meal together in small groups of two to four. These dinner conversations allow officers and youth to get to know each other on an even more personal level. Will explains, "We always try to build these things so that they end positive… Usually by the time we have one-on-one dinner, you know, it's 'Where can we find common ground?'" (Will). Before the dialogue concludes, the officers and the youth participate in

some role play activities that involve youth pretending to be officers in a scenario in which they detain community members, played by officers, during a traffic stop. These role play activities extend an opportunity to both the officers and the youth to better understand how it feels to be on either side of the police-civilian power imbalance. Heart explains that this kind of critical awareness of active engagement with power dynamics is at the heart of the facilitative process: "When people that have power over [others]… sit in-circle and hear these stories and the effect of what they do, something clicks. And that is a huge part of the transformative possibility [of dialogue]."

Facilitation of these dialogues involves many specific skills that contribute to creating a safe space for discussion where all sides feel supported enough to be honest and vulnerable, but also heard and respected. Heart makes clear that facilitation is quite different from teaching, and therefore, the facilitator's role is distinct from that of a teacher's. Unlike in a classroom, the PYDs are "more of an experience. It's all experiential, actually. There's no teaching. It's being in-circle and having [participants] share their own stories, and having each [participant] ask the questions, the hard questions, to one another so that they can get some really authentic answers" (Heart). Rather than imposing a lesson, or a set of facts or topics on the group, the facilitator guides the participants through a process to define their own ideas about what is important to them, and share those constructively. Similarly, participants, not the facilitator, are encouraged to set their own norms of interacting through the course of the dialogue. This means that there are no set rules for discussion. Instead, there are agreements that participants make for themselves. Heart explains that the circle process is one without a leader, in which participants "create their own rules for their own safety—what they need in order to feel safe enough to share—rather than us putting anything on them" (Heart). In this way, the needs of the participants, rather than those of the facilitators, is central to the design of the dialogue. Jeffrey recognizes that this skill, of being able to guide and support participants, especially youth, share their authentic voices—what Heart refers to as the "part of us that never gets invited into the conversation" —without giving explicit rules, is a critical balance for facilitators in a dialogue process. He explains

that the purpose of dialogue processes like these, is to challenge power imbalances based in race and age. By imposing rules that limit people's free expression of their "experience," "culture," "language," or "identity," the facilitator is participating, wittingly or otherwise, in a paradigm of "supremacy [or] colonization" (Jeffrey). Jeffrey explains, however, that facilitation is not purely a hands-off approach. In fact, the facilitator is responsible for ensuring that those power imbalances do not negatively impact the process. But this raises difficult questions about the extent to which the facilitator should intervene. Jeffrey says, "It really requires a certain skill set in facilitation to be able to hold the space and not insert our own judgments and bias, and at the same time, be able to challenge certain norms and paradigms that are exclusive or dominating of others, [especially] minority voices."

Similarly, Micah points out that facilitation, almost paradoxically, involves an ability to both allow people to share freely, while also inviting those perspectives space to be challenged. As he states it, to be able to "bring out [people's individual] truth but also break it down" (Micah). The role of the facilitator, then, is to invite people to examine these truths in the open, through a recognition that people are complex and capable of change:

> Maybe police officers are racist, but maybe that's not fair to say all police officers are racist… or, maybe someone could be racist yesterday and maybe they aren't as racist this week. Maybe they learned something. Maybe they read something. Maybe they ate something… Human beings are very dynamic, and you may just see them on a bad day, youth and police officers. (Micah)

Often, this dynamic aspect of people is informed by complex and distinct experiences. By allowing participants to share the experiences that shape their understandings and behaviors, the facilitator can provide further space for participants to engage in the nuance of social life (Micah).

There are further logistical considerations that the facilitators take into account as they attempt to create a safe space. One such concern is the location of the dialogues. The PYD that I observed occurred at a local high school, but others have taken place in law enforcement facilities such as the

Gainesville Police Headquarters. While there is a concern about holding the PYD in a police facility, specifically that it will intimidate the youth participants or discourage them from participating at all, the evidence suggests that youth do not see this as a limiting factor, based on the high participation numbers and willingness to share their perspectives. Along similar lines, there has been much consideration given to the question of whether officers should be in uniform, complete with their badge and firearm, or whether they should be in civilian dress. The concern is that the images of badge and gun can be intimidating or even traumatizing to the youth. But, RPCP has intentionally and consciously taken the opposite approach in their program. Jeffrey believes that engaging in meaningful dialogue without the presence of law enforcement uniforms would lessen the impact of the dialogue itself. By engaging officers wearing their full uniform, the same uniform that youth might see them in as they patrol the community, the process allows youth the opportunity to practice seeing the person, not just the badge and gun.

While there are, as of yet, no quantitative data to demonstrate the outcomes of PYDs and other similar RPCP dialogue programs on the community, many of the interviewees shared anecdotal accounts which suggest that the dialogues are well-received and actually inform positive developments in the community. Jeffrey explains that within the dialogue itself, he often notices a marked shift in the youth, from "isolation, body language [that is] closed off, to one of laughter, engagement, asking questions. And so you start to see a level of relationship and trust and interest to grow" (Jeffrey). According to Will, this result is mirrored in participation surveys that he collects from youth after their participation in a PYD. He explains, "the kids all want to come back to those dialogues. I get a lot of people that, when they write their comments, they say they really enjoy it. They enjoy the camaraderie. They enjoy the fellowship with the officers" (Will).

Will also believes that many of the officers who participate are significantly impacted by these dialogues, despite the fact that there's often initially "some reluctance" to participate. Ultimately, Will believes that "the cops have really stepped up and do a really good job of understanding," and

that he often receives feedback from officers explaining that they found it to be a “revealing” process (Will). To illustrate the kind of impact that he sees the dialogues having on officers, he shares a couple of anecdotal accounts. In the first example, Will explains how a relationship that grew out of a PYD led an officer to decline to arrest a youth for a very low-level infraction:

> We had a dialogue four years ago with one of our knuckleheads here at the police department… We had one cop that was really determined to just sabotage the entire dialogue. Just by what he said, how he said it to the kids, being totally disrespectful, and ended up coming around pretty good. A couple weeks later, … the officer actually… stopped this youth after seven o’clock, and the kid was on probation and had a curfew of 7pm… So, he went out and found this kid riding his bike with no light on at 8:30, 9:00 at night, and he wrote in his field contact [card], ‘I stopped this young man… and we had a good conversation. He was my partner when we did the one-on-one lunch in the youth dialogue several weeks prior. I just informed him that he needed a new light, and told him to have a good night and get home safe.’ Normally, he would have arrested him.

Will believes that this officer’s decision not to arrest was based, perhaps entirely, on the fact that he had participated in the PYD and had the chance to learn more about the youth’s experiences and perspectives. The importance of the officer’s decision to be lenient should not be understated since any arrest, even for youth offenders, can affect eligibility for employment, housing, education, and economic opportunities well into adulthood. As Will puts it, “any arrest is a lifetime sentence.”

In another example, Will explains how participation in a PYD, led a different officer to form a deep and supportive bond with a local youth and her family:

> I had another forensic investigator that had a relationship with a young lady, which they actually found out that she was kind of the mom of the family. She was a 14-year-old, and she was kind of raising the siblings that were younger than her. And she needed a bunch of resources, not to mention food. So, the cop, on her own, developed this relationship, again,

> through this one-on-one discussion, and would meet with her regularly and supply food for the family." (Will)

In this example, the relationship that was formed during the PYD yielded far more than just leniency. The officer recognized that the needs of this local youth were too great for any young person to bear on their own, and offered their support to help that youth and her family meet their needs. By being willing to support this youth in this way, the officer has helped prevent the youth from utilizing criminal or anti-social means of meeting the needs of her family, but also helped to build a perception of police being a supportive, rather than punitive, force in the community. These small but meaningful shifts away from polarization and mistrust may contribute to a slow transformation of the conflict that exists between officers and community members.

6. Discussion

Everyday peace, being a bottom-up response to local manifestations of violence rooted in everyday experiences, encounters, and practices, is a helpful conceptual lens through which to understand the work of RPCP and the context of Gainesville. As previously noted, Mac Ginty (2014, p. 555) offers “avoidance, ambiguity, ritualized politeness, telling and blame deferring” as classifications of various forms of everyday peacemaking. Other scholars, however, have introduced broader typologies which include categories or descriptions of behaviors and attitudes which may not fit neatly into Mac Ginty’s set, but do still contribute to a local, relational community peace amidst violence. Williams (2015, p. 15), for example, includes “coexistence, friendship, tolerance and indifference” as further modes of everyday peacemaking. Similarly, Berents (2018) emphasizes an even wider view and utilizes the term “embodied-everyday-peace-amidst-violence” to describe an active, creative, and dynamic process of peacemaking that is informed by and contributes to everyday spaces of interaction. Berents (2018) further points out that a comprehensive account of everyday peace requires a consideration of structures of violence and the strategies of navigation and resistance that communities utilize through everyday experiences and interactions. Additionally, Boulding (1998, p. 445) shows how these and other acts of “peaceableness” that emerge “in daily life and habitual interaction” can give rise to a “culture of peace,” or a society based on non-violence, sharing, and loving interaction. Using this broader, more comprehensive understanding of everyday peace as a conceptual lens, I will explain how RPCP and others that work with them in the Gainesville context are in fact driving everyday peace processes by not only taking part directly in everyday peacemaking, but also by introducing new strategies of everyday peacemaking into the local community with the intention of contributing to the development of a sustained peace culture in Gainesville.

The fact that the informants see peace and peacebuilding existing on a continuum from the personal to the structural demonstrates how all spheres of society intersect within the context of everyday lives and realities. The peacebuilding process that occurs at the personal level in the form

of recognizing individual needs, feelings, traumas, and fostering a personal sense of resiliency is seen as the same process that challenges and rebuilds oppressive structures. This recognition stems from the awareness that everyday life represents a space which integrates the personal and structural, and in order to effect a meaningful peace, both the inward and outward forms of violence must be addressed.

Even those informants that emphasized more structural or systemic forms of violence and peacebuilding still understood their own local relation and individual capacity to change those systems based on their identities and community roles. In other words, systemic change is still recognized to be a function of personal, localized, and everyday action. For example, both Paul and Halvosa, who are predominantly interested in challenging and changing systems that they deem to be oppressive and unjust (e.g., juvenile justice and policing systems), do so through personal and everyday interactions. They utilize their personal experience and their insider identity as officers to offer new perspectives to fellow officers and decision-makers and build more just policies or structures. This resistance, therefore, still relates specifically to their own understanding of their local context and is built at the site of everyday realities.

RPCP's explicit focus on issues of equity demonstrates that they recognize racial division and personal as well as structural and historical forms of oppression as central drivers of violence which actively shape the Gainesville context. This is not to say that RPCP sees inequity and disparity as being unique to this particular local context. Instead, the local context and the everyday is the site at which these broad (perhaps universal) issues and structures of violence manifest into reality and impact lives and relationships. As Berents notes, everyday peace includes an understanding of the structures that individuals and communities navigate through everyday activities and interactions. In Gainesville, RPCP sees that while racial violence (both physical and systemic) are not unique to the local context, the actual manifestations of those realities are unique because they are informed by a

unique geography, culture, and history, and they involve individuals with their own set of experiences, perspectives, traumas, and triumphs.

The local context and the everyday, then, represent the site at which broad national or even international dynamics manifest in actual lives. There is no better example of this localized manifestation of a broader conflict than the tension that exists between law enforcement officers and communities of color (especially youth). Although the incident involving George Floyd, and other high-profile instances of police violence against Black residents did not occur in or near Gainesville, local residents still navigate and understand the conflict through the lens of their everyday experiences. The everyday continues to be the site at which local residents make meaning of the broader conflict and attempt to find resilience. The wider dynamic's effects, then, impact local relationships, shape local understandings, inform local identities, and are based in local memory.

RPCP's PYDs offer safe spaces to explore these conflicts through person-to-person interaction. These spaces and conversations do not exist as discussions of coexistence in the abstract, but rather as reflections of lived and ongoing experiences of local officers and youth. In a community relationship built on hierarchy and power imbalance, these spaces allow power to be shared between law enforcement officers and youth. New understandings of the other can emerge even in a hyperpolarized climate of mistrust, pain, and fear. These new understandings are often a rejection of unhelpful and inaccurate assumptions or prejudices. They help to inspire a new empathy that brings both sides of a fraught community relationship inward toward a recognition of common humanity.

These spaces of dialogue allow for a degree of vulnerability and authenticity that is often not possible in the community generally, especially considering that community interactions between youth and officers most commonly occur as a result of a police stop, an arrest, or a crisis incident. Boulding (1998) emphasizes the need for various forms of "space" needed to sustain "peace culture." For Boulding (1998, p. 445), giving "space" is a way to ensure the honoring of our autonomy, providing "room enough to express our individuality." But also, Boulding (1998) notes that

designated spaces of peaceful interaction (e.g., sanctuaries, religious or heritage sites) provide zones of protection from everyday forms of violence serve a critical role in creating and sustaining peace culture. Similar to Boulding's conception of "peace culture" (1998), Martin Luther King, Jr. conceived of his ideal state of community, "the beloved community," as one in which "the powerless can find the personal and social capacity to acquire the intangible qualities and the tangible resources that matriculate from domination to liberation" and "the powerful can find the personal and communal capacity to acquire the moral growth that matriculates from mere power and prosperity to full civic life" (Mack & Eliatamby, 2011, loc. 3218) Along these lines, Berents (2018) shows that because youth voices are so often marginalized in everyday life, spaces of youth engagement that take their experiences and perspectives seriously provide a meaningful way for youth to be heard and make meaningful contributions to the community. It is clear that RPCP's PYDs perform each of these functions. They allow for free expression in a liminal space that is both separate from and at the heart of the conflict that exists in the community. They also allow a space that honors the contributions of everyone, regardless of their identity or social position.

So, what we see in the PYDs as well as other RPCP programs is a form of everyday peace in action. It is a grassroots strategy, utilized by the community itself, to find new ways of coexisting in the midst of conflict. The utility of these dialogues do not end once the meeting concludes. The interviews suggested that these experiences leave a lasting impact which helps to redefine the relationship between youth and officers as they return to their everyday lives. Both officers and youth ideally leave with a general disposition that is more respectful, compassionate, forgiving, and understanding. These shifts may seem minor, but considering the potential for deep harm that exists in interactions between officers and community members, these changes can have a profound impact on the health and stability of the community. Indeed, they are a significant contribution to the development of the kind of "peace culture" that Boulding (1998) describes.

Programs like these also demonstrate the role of community-based organizations like RPCP as promoters, introducers, and facilitators of everyday peacebuilding strategies. These small, community organizations such as RPCP represent an engine that drives real community progress not by imposing top-down solutions, but by empowering communities from within to find their own solutions. RPCP, by providing space for novel community interaction, and by modelling new forms of communication builds capacity for meaningful change in everyday life. These and other community-based peacebuilding programs help to embed strategies such as dialogue into the social and cultural fabric of the community which in turn fosters a greater capacity for localized, everyday peacemaking.

7. Conclusion

In this study, I set out to explore how peace practices are developed and implemented in a particular context of conflict. To that end, I selected RPCP in the context of Gainesville, Florida as a unique case study for peace research. The progressive peacebuilding practices of RPCP and Gainesville's unique history, culture, and geography provided a rich background for exploring how practices of peace are implemented and developed in a local context to address conflicts and cultivate a stronger, harmonious community culture.

With this aim in mind, I proposed the following research question: *How is community-based peace building understood and implemented through localized peace initiatives at the River Phoenix Center for Peacebuilding in Gainesville, Florida, USA?*

To answer this question in-depth, I took an ethnographic approach. I collected observations and interviews with five individuals associated with RPCP, including three organization members and two people associated with the organization on a more ancillary level. Overall, my findings focused on local perspectives concerning the Gainesville context as well as philosophical and practical reflections about local peacebuilding efforts in general. These findings were discussed conceptually in terms of everyday peace in an effort to present new, useful examples of the practice in action.

First, my findings explored how the interviewees understand their own subjective definitions of peace and consequently their ideas of what peacebuilding means in the local context. Some interviewees spoke of peace as a personal state, and therefore, they recognized peacebuilding as a personal process of growth. Central to this conception of peace, is a recognition of trauma's impact and the power associated with cultivating a sense of personal resiliency. On the other side of the continuum, participants also discussed peace as being a state of community. As such, it's developed by implementing systemic changes that empower marginalized voices, dismantle the hierarchies of

social power, and disrupt self-sustaining mechanisms of conflict (e.g., over-policing and the juvenile justice system). Thus, peace and its development exist simultaneously throughout all domains of social ecology's continuum, from the personal to the systemic. Interviewees demonstrated that they understood that peace development must target various domains of social ecology in order to cultivate a sustained community of peace, as change that occurs in each domain necessitates change in others. Based on this analysis, RPCP aims to empower community members to determine the role they play within that continuum, and as an organization, they strive to make meaningful changes at all levels of the continuum.

Next, my findings revealed how interviewees understood their local context and the dynamics of conflict that exist therein. It was clear from the interviews that participants recognized that they existed and operated within various "local" contexts simultaneously. In other words, they saw themselves as not only members of the Gainesville community but also members of the larger U.S. community. The interviewees' responses illustrated how national issues are made manifest in the local context, and social/political tensions that exist nationally are also reflected in specific cases and attitudes within the Gainesville community. In this way, the "local" is even more elusive, as it continuously blends with wider communities of identity that locally shape everyday attitudes and practices. Specifically, local culture was also discussed as the product of a wider national cultural tendency (e.g., individualism in the U.S.). Nevertheless, Gainesville was understood by interviewees as a unique context within the wider national community because of its openness to fresh, innovative programs, such as those developed and implemented by RPCP. Among all participants was a recognition and appreciation of the progress that has been made in Gainesville in regard to fostering positive relationships amidst current and historical polarizations (e.g., between law enforcement and local communities of color).

Despite this progress, interviewees also emphasized the ongoing conflicts and polarizations that continue to divide the community and how more work in this field is needed. In particular, my

interviewees focused on how local and national dynamics of race continue to cause rifts of division. National events (e.g., the police killing of George Floyd) as well as local events (e.g., the police killing of Robert Dentmond) spark and reflect these tensions by placing them at the center of public consciousness. The dynamic of race in the local context relates to the wide disparity between racial groups that continues to exist in Gainesville. These disparities contribute to historical and generational forms of community trauma. By utilizing an equity lens in community programs and peacebuilding practices, RPCP is helping to redefine community roles and build bridges of understanding and support aimed at healing racial harms and breaking cycles of exclusion, violence, and trauma.

Additionally, the interviewees shared how, as local community peacebuilders, they understood their role as not only bringing material benefit to the community (through the promotion and application of practices and programs) but also saw themselves as motivational or even moral actors. The participants emphasized that their role was, in part, to offer hope to the community, and serve as a reminder that "peace is possible." The informants emphasized the ideal "beloved community," and they utilized storytelling and personal narratives to bolster their optimism and provide the greater community with a context for alternatives to conflict and violence.

These various factors come together to inform local peacebuilding practices, including RPCP's Police-Youth Dialogue. The dialogue provides a safe, community space to explore tensions, experiences, and prejudices through an honest, compassionate forum. The unsaid perceptions of "the other" are brought into the open where they can be acknowledged and challenged. These experiences require that law enforcement officers and youth take responsibility for their assumptions and allow for the possibility of a new form of community relationship.

In the Discussion section, I discussed how these and other local peacebuilding practices can rightly be viewed as forms of everyday peace in action, as community members recognize their needs and develop solutions to elevate marginalized voices and enhance clarity of understanding. My

research suggests that local organizations, such as RPCP, play a critical role in the development of everyday community peace by implementing, training, and utilizing novel practices and approaches to localized conflicts. Further, these local, community-based organizations help drive everyday peace processes by providing spaces and contexts where new modes of relationship can be fostered and everyday forms of peacebuilding can be expressed.

It is my hope that this study contributes to the broader literature of peace research. Using Gainesville and RPCP as a case, this study demonstrates how the particular realities of a community shape the local understandings of conflict and help define what is needed to address these concerns. The unique context of Gainesville and RPCP's novel perspectives and approaches may provide insights into other contexts and may even influence the strategies of other local actors. This study opens up new possibilities for research that were not expressly explored within this thesis. For example, themes emerged in the interviews that concerned how intersecting identities of local peacebuilders influenced their understanding of self and the nature of their work. Although these issues were not broached in this study, they should be explored in greater detail. Also, because this study focused mostly on PYDs as an example of a community-based practice, there is an opportunity for further exploration into community programs and practices that local organizations offer to address conflict, such as RPCP's restorative justice initiatives.

The conceptual framework of everyday peace encourages peace researchers to explore the richness of less formalized forms of community peacebuilding in various, diverse contexts throughout the world. Going forward, further research is needed to study these contexts and how peace emerges from everyday forms of conflict and violence. Future studies may also wish to consider how peace practices are introduced or utilized in other contexts. Additionally, there is a need for future research to continue exploring the unique roles of community-based organizations in the context of everyday peace, as these local actors are increasingly critical to a decentralized, bottom-up approach to peacebuilding.

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