



'It's a dead place': A qualitative exploration of violence survivors' perceptions of justice architecture

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ABSTRACT

Each year, thousands of victims of violence enter the Canadian criminal justice system and, by extension, justice buildings, such as police stations and courthouses. The architecture and design of these buildings communicate symbolic messages about justice and may influence the emotions, behaviors, and well-being of survivors. This qualitative study explored survivors' emotional experiences with justice architecture. Findings reveal that survivors experience justice architecture as cold and hard; a facilitator of feelings of insignificance; lacking in privacy and; representative of their raw emotional state. The author discusses implications of these findings for victim engagement in the context of justice spaces.

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Introduction

Each year in Canada, approximately 380,000 individuals enter the criminal justice system after reporting violent crime to the police (Allen, 2016). This involvement in the justice system brings these survivors into justice buildings, such as police stations and courthouses, to receive various justice-related services. The look, feel, smell, and sensory impact of these buildings communicate, albeit often symbolically and unintentionally, messages about the nature of the justice process and victims' role within it – both of which having the potential to positively or negatively impact victims' experiences with the justice process and their subsequent journey after the crime. Understanding how victims experience and understand the architecture and design of justice spaces may offer insight into how justice architecture serves, and does not serve, victim needs. Scant literature exists exploring victims' experiences with the architecture and design of justice buildings. This study aimed to address this gap and explored how victims emotionally experience the design of justice buildings and its relationship to their experiences with the justice process and transcending the aftermath of the violence.

Justice, architecture, and victims

Architecture communicates. In the justice context, this means that buildings, such as courthouses and police stations, through their architecture and design, send messages to the public about the values and philosophies that guide and expectations that the public holds regarding law, the justice process, and the professionals who work within the system (Branco, 2016; Greene, 2006; Mulcahy, 2010; Resnik, Curtis, & Tait, 2014). This is most clearly evidenced with the monolithic and grand exterior of courthouses, designed to narrate the awe-inspiring strength and seriousness of the process and garner its respect from the public (Flanders, 2006). The interior rooms, especially the typical criminal courtroom – with the judge seated on a raised dais, the defense and prosecution facing the judge, and the community, including the victim, seated behind a barrier – speak to the expertise of the judge and the competition that occurs between the defense and prosecution (Gruzen, Daskalakis, & Krasnow, 2006; Hrynczewicz-Lamber & Lamber, 2012; Mulcahy, 2010). This design summarizes the current criminal justice adversarial philosophy (Hrynczewicz-Lamber & Lamber, 2012) which focuses on pitting the offender against the state in a determination of guilt, followed by a meting out of punishment. In this case, the form of the building communicates its function (Nasar, Stamps, & Hanyu, 2005).

Some justice advocates argue that this justice philosophy is inadequate and misaligned with the needs of victims (Herman, 2010; Zehr, 2015). Notably missing from center stage of both the justice philosophy and its design expression are the survivors of crime who are most directly harmed by offenders' actions and who arguably have the largest stake in the outcomes of the justice process. Research and practice wisdom suggest that many victims experience the justice process as re-victimizing because of the way in which they are relegated to the sidelines of their own experiences, receive little validation and vindication, and achieve little, if any, reparation of the direct losses they experienced because of the crime (Herman, 2010; Zehr, 2001, 2015). Over the past four decades, professionals have sought to prioritize victim needs in the justice process through victim advocacy and direct service programs, the introduction of the Victim Bill of Rights, and the increased use of victim impact statements (Erez & Roberts, 2007). The proliferation of restorative justice practices, such as victim offender dialogue, also prioritizes attention to survivors' needs following the crime and offenders' meaningful accountability and repair of the harms. Restorative justice, as a philosophy, seeks to facilitate justice experiences and achieve goals that are healing, transformative, and meaningful for survivors (Zehr, 2015). The result is a philosophical shift that assumes that justice is an emotional, experiential, and repair-oriented venture, radically different from contemporary justice philosophies.

Despite these improvements and attempts at a philosophical shift, victims remain largely out of sight and anonymous within the courtroom itself. Indeed, 'each time a section of floor is raised, a barrier installed or a segregated circulation route added,' (Mulcahy, 2010, p. 1), users of justice buildings receive new messages about where they belong and experience empowerment and where they do not belong and are powerless (Hrynczewicz-Lamber & Lamber, 2012; Mulcahy, 2010). Typical courtroom design suggests three roles for survivors:

- (1) Community member, relegated to the audience space at the back of the courtroom. They belong in the justice process only to the extent that they live in the community and do not have any voice from behind the barrier (Mulcahy, 2010).

- (2) Witness, who temporarily takes a seat next to the judge while testifying. They belong in the justice process for the time that they are on the stand but only as witness to the crime, not as a directly impacted human with a stake in the outcomes (Mulcahy, 2010).
- (3) Public speaker, invited to deliver a victim impact statement at a podium, front and center in the active judiciary space. They belong in the justice process for the limited time they deliver their statement but their voice typically comes after the trial is complete; an addendum, rather than integral to the justice process.

These roles, which are enacted within the physical design of the courtroom, reinforce the minimal voice that survivors have within the criminal justice process. This silencing creates barriers to understanding the ways in which survivors experience crimes and their resulting needs, which in turn minimizes the extent to which justice outcomes address those needs. If prioritizing victims and their needs is considered a valuable function of the justice system, the architectural form of justice requires modification to communicate this function. A starting point in this modification includes understanding how crime victims, through their eyes as individuals seeking justice in response to the violence they experienced, perceive justice architecture and understand their experiences within it.

No empirical literature exists specifically exploring crime victims' experiences with justice architecture and design. A small set of literature explores the perceptions of community members and justice professionals. This literature suggests that the public appreciate, or like, facades that communicate that the building is of high status within the community and elicits positive feelings from those who see it, especially in the case of police stations (Kalayc, Pinar, & Bilir, 2016). Architectural features and facades of courthouses and police stations, influence how users perceive the skill level of workers and the services they will receive inside. Pragmatically, individuals perceive justice employees who work in run-down buildings as unskilled and inefficient (Clinton & Devlin, 2011). Building design may also have a psychological impact on those who approach or enter them. Users experience newer, modern court house and police station designs as more intimidating than older designs (Clinton & Devlin, 2011; Maass et al., 2000), a feeling which then may translate into a belief that the offender has an increased likelihood of being convicted (Maass et al., 2000).

These studies carry limitations which impact the degree to which we can understand crime survivors' responses to justice buildings. Researchers showed study participants images of justice buildings, rather than asking them to physically enter the building or reflect on times they entered such buildings; the real-time, visceral reactions to actually interacting with the building architecture is lost. They do not address issues related to choice and how choice may influence perceptions and experiences with the building – e.g. study participants were not being compelled, without choice, to enter the building presented to them. Victims have few options other than to enter police stations and courthouses, if they want justice in their cases.

Perhaps most importantly, researchers did not recruit crime victims for their samples; rather, respondents included college students, teachers, architects, police officers, and judges. Some of these individuals likely have been crime victims, yet researchers did not solicit that experience specifically. Pati, Rashid, and Zimring (2010) assumed courthouse users would be too stressed to participate and when several actually participated, the researchers dropped them from the analysis as outliers; they do not report what type of user

these individuals represented, however. Additionally, the researchers in these studies aimed to quantify design characteristics and participant interpretations, rather than exploring the meaning behind those designs and interpretations, a meaning which would largely be shaped by the violence experience and the resulting emotional, physical, and psychological harms. Assumptions, then, cannot be made about what victims want in terms of architecture and design, especially when architects' design decisions do not necessarily produce the perceptions and experiences they intend when realized in real life (Pati et al., 2010).

The emotional, physical, and psychological injuries of violence and resulting intense emotions – including the very stress that led to two participants being dropped from analysis (Pati et al., 2010) – should be considered in design (Hryniewicz-Lamber & Lamber, 2012). Kennedy and Tait (cited in Missingham, 2003, p. 3) state:

Court buildings can be understood as living systems or cultural environments in which decisions are made about people's lives, property and civil rights. A court is not just a set of rooms, corridors and entrances, it is a social and emotional world.

For better or for worse, crime survivors, as well as defendants, families of defendants and survivors, community members, and even working professionals, bring their emotional selves to the justice process (Knight, 2014; Missingham, 2003). If courthouses are emotional worlds, their design, no matter how trivial, may impact victims in positive and negative ways. This potential impact necessitates attention to the victims' perceptions, experiences, and needs when designing courthouses (Missingham, 2003) and, by reasonable extension, other buildings in which victims receive services, such as police stations. Just as victims and offenders benefit from interactions with emotionally literate criminal justice professionals and organizations (Knight, 2014), survivors may also benefit from an emotionally literate architecture.

Three critical and related characteristics of such architecture include provisions for psychological relief, privacy, and safety. Missingham (2003) contends that:

... specific relief is required at specific times – particularly for victims, witnesses, jurors and some litigants. People will want to gather their thoughts and wits before continuing, they may wish to cry, they may wish to vent their anger or they may need to let their anger subside. This should be possible away from the scrutiny of others. If it is not possible, people may be unnecessarily further stressed, they may not be able to continue (and thus threaten the smooth operation of proceedings) or they may upset others who observe their distress – with similar possible consequences for personal psychological trauma and disruption of the operation of the courts. (p. 22)

Such relief is often best achieved in private spaces, for the way that privacy facilitates emotional regulation, stress reduction, reflection, and overall psychological well-being, including in times specific to victimization (Alalouch, Aspinall, & Smith, 2008; Margulis, 2003; Pedersen, 1997, 1999). Victim-specific waiting rooms – courthouse rooms specifically set aside for victims and witnesses – serve as an example of safe and private spaces of relief (Carey & Lowney, 2015; National Center for State Courts, 2017). These rooms, however, are not available in all courthouses and the extensive emotional world of court requires more than just one designated room. Courthouse design guides offer little, if any, guidance on designing spaces for victims specifically (National Center for State Courts, 2017). They offer guidance for spaces for witnesses but care must be taken to not equate designing for witnesses with designing for victims; to do so perpetuates the reality that crime victims are consistently treated as mere witnesses to the crimes that they experienced and potentially blinds the architect/designer to the psychological and emotional impact of crime and violence on victims, which may differ than that of a witness.

It is critical to understand how victims, as people most directly impacted by the crime, perceive and experience justice buildings on an emotional level and consider how those perceptions and experiences influence their journeys after crime and through the justice process. Such understanding makes it possible to better design justice buildings with the victim in mind. This study explores how victims emotionally experience the courthouse and its impact on their justice experience.

Methodology

The findings discussed presently emerge from an evaluation conducted to gather design input for a Canadian victim service organization (abbreviated to be VSO) that seeks to offer survivors of violence a place of respite while they attend trials and other court proceedings. The offering of respite constitutes the primary victim service, making the building design critical.

Six survivors of violence participated in four semi-structured interviews and 12 VSO and community organization representatives participated in two focus groups. To recruit survivors for interviews, the VSO Director sent an email, written by the researcher, to provincial victim service and advocacy organizations, asking them to distribute information about the study among the victims associated with their agency. Interested individuals then contacted the researcher directly. One of the two focus groups included eight VSO board members and staff. The second focus group included four representatives from VSO community partners, including other victim service agencies and law enforcement. To recruit these community partners, the VSO Director again sent an email, written by the researcher, to community partners she identified, inviting them to participate in the focus group. Interested organizational representatives then contacted the researcher directly. Interview and focus group participants straddled multiple identities – e.g. some participants were simultaneously survivors of violence themselves and organizational representatives, but only participated in either an interview or focus group. Two organizational representatives spoke directly about their personal experiences as a violence survivors; it is unknown whether other representatives were also survivors who chose not to disclose it.

A similar process of inquiry was used in both interviews and focus groups. Participants first brainstormed the locations and spaces in which they (or their clients) dealt with the impact of the violence they experienced – e.g. spaces in which they received services or social support or interacted with the justice system. Participants then selected one of the spaces that they deemed most important to them (or their clients) and chose an image that best represented a key quality (positive or negative) of that space. The images from which they made their choice came from a deck of image cards created by *Designing Justice + Designing Spaces*¹ (Toews & Van Buren, 2015) and intended to be used to engage justice stakeholders in considering the design of justice spaces. The 104-card deck includes a variety of images, including landscapes, buildings, streetscapes, people, activities, and objects. The images range from beautiful and constructive (e.g. gardens, joyful celebrations) to ugly and destructive (e.g. barbed wire, war damage). In both the interviews and focus groups, the cards were spread out, in no specific pattern, on a table and participants searched through the cards to find the ones that best answered the question posed to them. For the focus groups, two identical card decks were used, allowing for shared imagery responses across participants. After selecting the cards, participants presented each one and talked about how the image answered the question, pointing out critical features of the image and

making literal or metaphorical connections between those features and the characteristics of the spaces in which they dealt with the impact of the violence and their experiences within those spaces.

The choice to incorporate a creative, imagery component to the procedures was intentional. Creative visual methods are well-suited for those concepts that are taken for granted and rarely consciously considered, such as the awareness and impact of one's environment. Images also bring life to the idiom 'a picture is worth a thousand words' for the way participants can use chosen images to express experiences and emotions that are difficult for them to put into words (Fischl & Garling, 2008; Leavy, 2009; Zeisel, 2006). The participant's presentation of the image and the way in which the image answered the question, coupled with the researcher's probes, began the process of understanding the words behind the image which was then continued in the analysis stage. The images also brought a materiality to the survivors' emotions, lived experiences, and needs. This materiality made it possible to not just hear a survivor's experience but also see a representation of that experience, making it more tangible. Anger and revenge, for example, are not just words but also are experiences seen through sharp and heavy metal tools. The result is a richer, often visceral, understanding of the survivor's experience. The materiality of these experiences can then serve to inform architects and designers about the materiality and design of buildings. The experience of insignificance, for instance, is represented through a façade with a grand staircase and tall columns, suggesting the need for justice buildings to be on a smaller scale. The chosen images begin to form the design concept for justice spaces and, in the case here, for ways not to design justice spaces.

The research data consisted of interview and focus group transcriptions and the participants' chosen images and a similar coding approach was used for both. An inductive analytic approach, which drew on constructivist grounded theory approaches, made it possible to interact with the narratives and images through increasingly higher levels of coding and engage in constant comparative methods both within and across each type of data (Charmaz, 2006). Given the constructivist contention that researchers bring their own biases and preconceptions to analysis, analysis began with sensitization to conceptual issues drawn from literature relating to victim experiences with crime and justice and the design of spaces intended for crime victims as well as those that facilitate physical and emotional healing. Images were coded for their physical characteristics, making it possible to understand how people use the space within the image, 'how they feel about their surroundings, and generally how that particular environment meets the needs of its users' (Zeisel, 2006, p. 159).

Results

Narrative and image analysis revealed three central and interconnected themes related to survivors' emotional experiences with the architecture and design of courthouses and, to a lesser extent, police stations, and its relationship to their experiences with the justice process. They experienced these buildings as:

- (1) Cold and distant ('It's a dead place');
- (2) Contributing to a sense of insignificance ('You're at the bottom looking up');
- (3) Void of opportunities for privacy ('Get me out of here!').

These design experiences reflected survivors' pain following the violence, which they expressed materially ('The claws kind of digging in'). The results presented below are

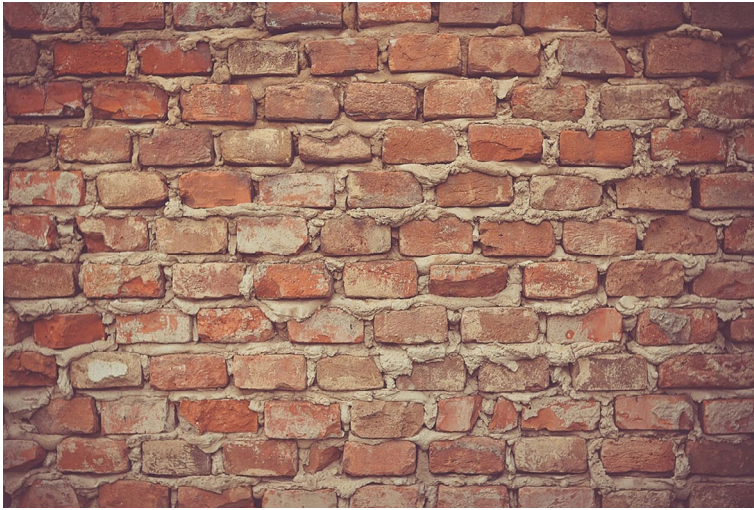


Figure 1. A brick wall, representing the hard and cold materiality of justice spaces, does not offer the warmth and sense of possibility desired by survivors.

organized by the parenthetical quotes above, which were made by participants. The images in this section are those selected by participants that exemplify the theme.

'It's a dead place'

Participants frequently referred to the atmosphere and materiality of justice buildings as cold, hard, and distant (Figure 1). Within the buildings, they experienced little comfort, support, and attention to their needs as individuals impacted by violence. The interiors did not communicate a welcoming of their experiences or emotions nor offer the possibility of transcending the aftermath. One survivor referred to court as 'a dead place,' suggesting that it didn't offer the life and hope desired by survivors – e.g. opportunities to express a range of emotions (from painful to joyful) and safely speak to their victimization experiences as well as experience respect for their humanity. The key design characteristics that contributed to these experiences include hard materiality (e.g. stone, cement, marble, and brick), bland colors, institutional furniture, and even fake plants. Little design variation, individuality, or flexibility existed within or across the settings, and this design characteristic mirrored how many experienced the justice system – for instance, immovable and standardized with little flexibility for survivors' unique experiences and emotions.

'You're at the bottom looking up'

Participants spoke to their feelings of being unimportant and insignificant throughout the justice process and within the buildings. They perceived that few justice spaces were designed with them, as survivors, in mind. Some felt small in the presence of the grandness and size of the courthouse, that 'you're at the bottom looking up' (Figure 2). Others did not experience a fit between their intense and complicated emotions and the building design (e.g. marble floors, ornate rotundas, and tall columns). As one participant noted:

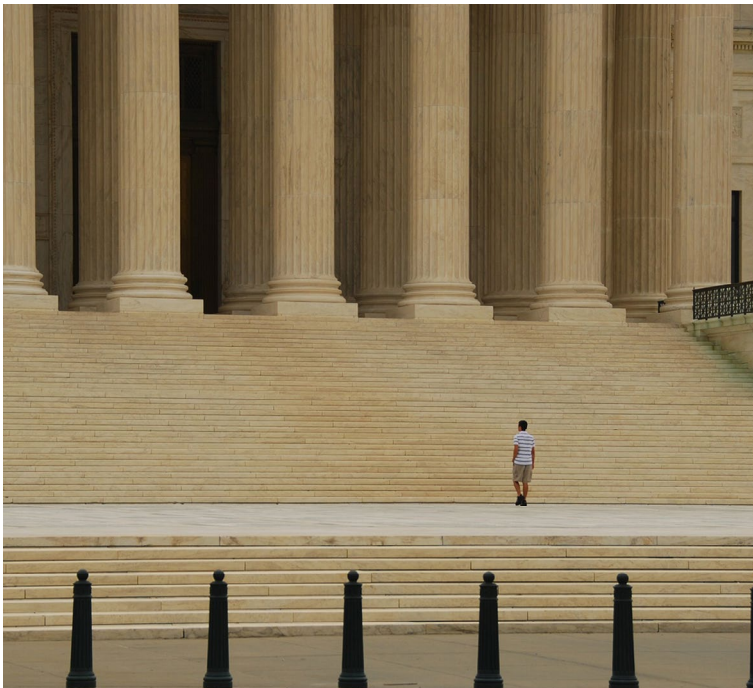


Figure 2. Tall columns and a grand staircase, representing the grandness of justice architecture and design, contribute to survivors' feelings of insignificance.

It has a sense of royalty. It has a sense of importance. So there's a comfort in the fact that it is grand. But it also has a two-way kind of message about it's important but you're not important. There's no warmth there. There's no emotion.

This experience of insignificance, as suggested above, relates to the coldness of the design. The survivors sought warm spaces which recognized their pain and status as the person most directly impacted by the violence but, instead, found themselves in spaces which did little to communicate their worth as the victim/survivor and the centrality of their experience to the justice process.

'Get me out of here!'

During breaks in the court proceedings, participants found themselves constantly surrounded by other people – e.g. the defendant and supporters, attorneys, law enforcement officers, courthouse staff, and the public. They struggled to find places to which they could escape from people and from other case-related intrusions, such as media and phone calls. Survivors sought relief from the visual and audial scrutiny and judgment they felt from other people. If they remained inside the courthouse during breaks, they typically waited in courthouse hallways and bathrooms, public lounges, and cafeterias, which offered little in the way of physical and emotional respite. On the rare occasion, survivors had access to a victim-only waiting room which provided a way to physically get away from people and courthouse activity, however, concerns about cleanliness and upkeep often contributed to further



Figure 3. Crowded bar, representing the lack of privacy during breaks, creates barriers to achieving respite.

feelings of insignificance. As such, survivors often experienced these rooms as cold and distant, little different from other spaces in the building.

Some survivors left the courthouse and spent time in nearby coffee shops, restaurants, and malls (Figure 3). These locations did not offer the relief they sought:

When we did the preliminary hearing, we went to a restaurant for lunch just down the street, and it was awful because I just felt like 'get me out of here.' ... People sitting there almost talking like [nothing has happened].

Regardless of location, survivors experienced little privacy to cry, laugh, be sick, decompress, or 'be human.' As one participant indicated, 'they needed a place to just take their shoes off, cry, talk, have something to eat.'

'The claws kind of digging in'

While considering the design of justice buildings, participants reflected on their anger, desire for revenge, questions, and feeling lost in the vastness of the system and their emotions. These emotions revealed themselves in hard materiality – e.g. chain fencing, sharp points, and metal implements. One participant explained his image by saying '[i]t's steel. Anger. You know, it represents the things I might want to use on the perpetrator. So it's hammers and hatchets.' Another noted that the pain she experienced was relentless, like '...the claws kind of digging in. Coming back, again and again' (Figure 4). The materiality of survivors' emotions was cold and hard, mirroring the materiality of the justice buildings they encountered.

Discussion

The design of justice buildings communicates the principles of the justice process and, in doing so, sends message about the role and value of crime survivors in that process. The

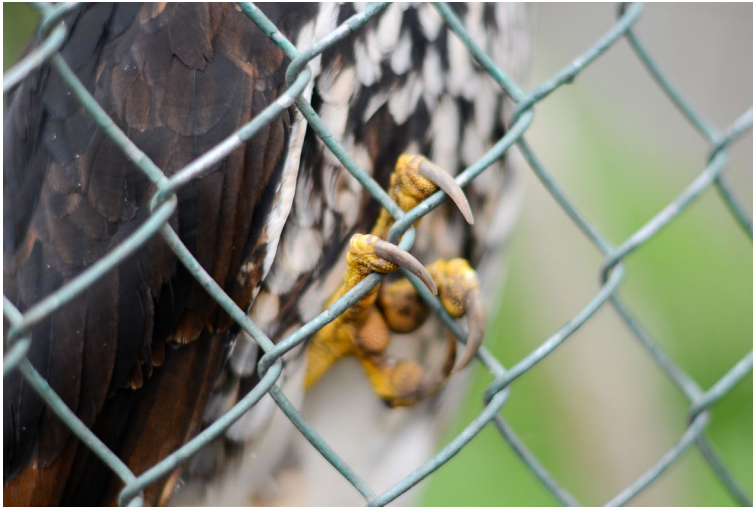


Figure 4. A chain fence and sharp claws, representing survivors' emotions, mirror the materiality of justice spaces.

contemporary justice system minimizes the role of victims, giving little attention to their experiences, emotions, and needs for justice. The survivors in this study give voice to the way in which this minimization plays out in the architecture and design of justice buildings. Survivors experienced the buildings as cold and hard, mirroring their feelings of revenge and anger toward the perpetrator. They felt insignificant in the face of the grandeur of the building, especially courthouses. They struggled to find respite from the people and processes of justice. Overall, the architecture and design of courthouses and police stations do little to acknowledge or attend to survivors' emotional experiences.

The survivors in this study experienced courthouses and police stations as cold, hard, and 'dead' spaces. The design did little to represent, or create space for, the emotional world of justice – the suffering and pain associated with the murder of a loved one, the need for support and comfort, and a vision for hope for the future. One could argue that these emotions have no place in the justice process and subsequently should not be acknowledged, let alone, encouraged. These emotions are present, however, whether acknowledged or not (Knight, 2014; Missingham, 2003) and the survivors in this study suggest they seek, at minimum, a materiality that recognizes, if not attends to, their emotions and emotional needs.

This unemotional building materiality intersected with the insignificance survivors felt while in the buildings. They felt small in its presence and did not see themselves or their experiences in the design. This feeling of unimportance carries similarities to the way in which victims are positioned within the contemporary justice process – for instance, as bystanders or witnesses to their own crime – that predominantly focuses on the offender, his/her defense against the state, and the final determination of punishment. Courthouses, in particular, are designed to communicate the importance and power of the law and justice process (Branco, 2016; Greene, 2006; Mulcahy, 2010; Resnik et al., 2014) and often do so with an ornate and beautiful style. This beauty, and appreciation for it, exists separate from its psychological impact (Maass et al., 2000), however. Indeed, survivors in this study appreciate the beauty of the courthouse at the same time as noting that this beauty did not communicate their worth as victims.

The desire for privacy comes as no surprise, given the way it serves to relieve stress, create opportunities for reflection, and facilitates coping strategies (Pedersen, 1997, 1999). First and foremost, they seek spaces in which to release the many emotions that swirl around their interactions with the justice system. The potential for revictimization is also high when constantly interacting with people who may be related to the defendant and supporters or are the unsuspecting public. Victims need validation and vindication, safety, and predictability and control (Erez & Roberts, 2007; Herman, 2010), all of which are at risk when forced to interact with others who may present with defensive or angry reactions to them (e.g. blame them for the fate of their offending loved one), unwittingly disrespect victims, or do not think that victims and their experiences are the central concern of the justice process. Such interactions can weigh heavily on survivors and heap judgment, shame, and blame upon them and the community who cares for them, contributing to a depletion of energy as the justice process proceeds.

The cold and hard materiality of survivors' emotions share striking similarities to the cold and hard materiality of the buildings. The cold emotions, whether outwardly expressed or not, exist within a cold *unemotional* environment. Participants did not offer definitive answers about how the two influence each other, however, some speculation is warranted. Following the crime, survivors begin a long journey of accepting what happened to them, establishing a new normal for their lives, and moving forward in all facets of their lives (e.g. emotionally, psychologically, spiritually) (Herman, 2010; Zehr, 2001). The justice process is an important part of that process and can obstruct or facilitate that movement. Research suggests that physical environment influences humans' ability to experience physical and emotional healing and improved mental health. Environments that positively facilitate health and well-being are *not* designed with cold and materiality like that used in justice buildings. Rather, environments designed for health, including for those who have experienced trauma, are rich with natural elements, a design characteristic that is often missing inside justice buildings in a meaningful and holistic way.

When coupled with the lack of privacy and feelings of insignificance, the design of justice buildings is arguably one of malnourishment, where, at best, the survivor emotionally stagnates or, at worst, experiences an exacerbation of already painful emotions. This overarching finding is not surprising for several reasons. Humans are inextricably impacted by the environment and its features and research indicates that some environments are more salutogenic and restorative – e.g. those with natural elements, allow for reflection, and offer choice and flexibility – than others (Golembiewski, 2017; Kaplan, Kaplan, & Ryan, 1998; Wener, 2012). Justice spaces have few of these healthful characteristics. Perhaps more importantly, these buildings are designed based on a justice philosophy that prioritizes offenders and their punishment over victims and their needs. The form of current justice buildings communicates their function – identify the broken law, determine guilt and innocence, and mete out punishment (Zehr, 2002). When it comes to the design of justice buildings, however, the form-function equation is not enough. A fuller equation is needs-function-form. Just as the restorative justice philosophy seeks to first understand how victims have been harmed by the crime, the design of our justice buildings should start by understanding what victims need from the justice process. By considering their opposites, the findings here suggest that victims seek expressions of life and hope, recognition that their needs matter, opportunities for safety and privacy, and a transformation of pain. Victim/survivor and restorative justice literature suggest they also seek respect, vindication, validation and opportunities to speak

about the experience and harms of the crime and violence they experienced (Herman, 2010). These justice needs then inform the function of the justice building and then its form, its design (Van Buren, 2009).

Creating this new justice architecture necessarily means challenging our current understanding of the justice process and its function; a shift from solely focusing on the conviction (or acquittal) and sentencing of offenders to prioritizing victims and addressing the harms and damages they experienced. We cannot just design better justice buildings without first critically examining building functions and their roots in justice philosophies.

Survivors play an integral role in this examination and professionals do well to solicit their meaningful involvement in the design process. When constructing new buildings or renovating existing spaces, architects and program administrators should actively engage survivors in the design of space, soliciting their ideas for the type of experiences they want to have and the design elements that could achieve that goal. This engagement is critical for the way it prioritizes victims' needs in the design of justice spaces, just as that prioritization needs to happen in the justice system. Survivors have much to offer about the impact of justice design on them and what they seek in terms of design, whether it be the literal materiality, design, and layout of buildings and rooms or the symbolic messages represented in the built form. Table 1 offers question to guide such engagement.

The challenge becomes how to integrate their input, given centuries of design conventions for justice architecture and the limitations of new construction or extensive renovations to existing spaces. First steps can include creating victim-centered separate and secure waiting areas within the existing architecture (Carey & Lowney, 2015; National Center for State Courts, 2017) or specialized victim spaces outside police station and courthouses, such as the goal of the VSO in this study. Those who work with survivors – be they police officers, legal professionals, victim service professionals, or justice administrators – can also consider how building facades, entrances, offices, meeting rooms, and even the surrounding outdoor landscape impact survivors. A simple re-arranging of space or the addition of live plants can demonstrate care and concern for the survivor and facilitate relief from intense emotions. At its most basic, professionals do well to remember that the survivors with whom they work experience the design of justice spaces in real ways, just as they experience and are impacted by the relationship with the professional.

This study is not without limitations. The sample size is small and was confined to one Canadian geographic region and only included individuals who had experienced homicide and sexual abuse, limiting the extent to which these findings hold for those outside these parameters. Further, the recruitment process introduced the potential for bias – e.g. survivors and community partners were affiliated with organizations that had an existing relationship with the VSO. This process limited the pool of participants to those who were actively

Table 1. Questions to guide the design and evaluation of buildings that respect survivors' needs.

Design

- (1) What do crime victims need while going through the justice process?
- (2) What do these needs suggest about the necessary function of the building?
- (3) What does this function suggest about the form of building?

Evaluation

- (4) How do survivors perceive and experience the building, both inside and outside?
 - (5) Is the building achieving the function it was designed to achieve? Why or why not?
 - (6) What changes will be made to improve survivors' perceptions and experiences?
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involved, though to varying degrees, in the victim rights community and may have had a vested interest in assisting the VSO in fulfilling its mission. Few First Nation peoples and people of color participated in the study thus limiting what we know about the experiences of those who are disproportionately involved in the justice system and who embody critical cultural worldviews and practices related to justice, architecture, and design. No information or photos were gathered about the specific courthouses that the participants frequented and thus referenced in their interviews. An important reference point for their experiences and specific insight into actual architectural features that contribute to those experiences remains missing from the analysis. Future research will address these limitations, with the goal of advancing knowledge generally about the impact of justice architecture on violence survivors. Such research will expand the research questions beyond evaluative ones specific to a particular VSO.

Justice architecture communicates. The survivors in this study suggest that the architectural messages offer little hope or comfort in response to violence they have experienced. With thoughtful consideration of survivors' perceptions of existing justice architecture and learnings from evidence-based design, justice architecture – from the scale of the room to the building as a whole – can begin to offer a more restorative and transformative experience for victims.

Note

1. Card images were crowd-sourced from friends (Figure 4 from Samuel Auger), Flickr (Figure 2), and Unsplash (Figures 1 and 3).

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

Notes on contributor

Barb Toews is assistant professor in criminal justice at University of Washington Tacoma. Her research focuses on the relationships among criminal/restorative justice, architecture and environmental design, and psycho-social-behavioral-judicial outcomes for victims, offenders, and justice professionals. She has taught restorative justice and design courses inside correctional facilities and co-founded Designing Justice + Designing Spaces (DJ + DS), an initiative that engages incarcerated individuals in the design of justice spaces that promote accountability and victim and offender healing. Barb has numerous publications related to restorative justice, including its relationship to design. Prior to joining the academy, she held leadership positions in criminal/restorative justice non-profit organizations.

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