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## A psychological sense of community as experienced among immigrant survivors of torture

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A PSYCHOLOGICAL SENSE OF COMMUNITY  
AS EXPERIENCED AMONG IMMIGRANT SURVIVORS OF TORTURE

A Thesis  
Presented in  
Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the Degree of  
Master of Arts

BY  
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JUNE, 2010

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This academic effort has been supported throughout its entirety by a community of friends, family and classmates. Their love and support has been essential, and is much appreciated.

Those who have survived torture have touched my heart and soul. Their generosity in sharing their stories extends a glimpse into how human suffering and resilience can challenge and support the human spirit. Their stories are the inspiration of this study.

VITA

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## CHAPTER I.

### INTRODUCTION

Torture survivors are people who have experienced a particularly cruel and injurious form of psychological or physical violence. According to the definition of the United Nations Convention Against Torture and Cruel, Inhuman and Degrading Treatment (1987), the infliction of violence upon persons must be intentional. The perpetrator must have one of a number of purposes: to punish or coerce, to intimidate, to elicit information or a confession, or to discriminate for any reason. Under this definition, the perpetrator must be acting under color of law, in an official capacity

Torture is designed to destroy the relationship of the target of torture with all others. It breaks down the connection between individuals and their social environments (Center for Victims of Torture, 2005). Perpetrators of torture isolate the reality of the victim into one the torturer controls. Torture usually occurs out of sight from the observation of others, in basement chambers or hidden cells.

The violation of trust is a profound characteristic of the torture experience. Torture is often committed by agents of the government: police, military and prison guards (Amnesty International, 2000). Those who survive have learned that their trust in a safe world, in protection by government, and in the relative safety of interactions with strangers is unreliable, even dangerous (Behnia, 2004; Gonsalves, Torres, Fischman, Ross, & Vargas, 1993). Violating the victim's capacity to trust is a deliberate tactic. Those who have been tortured must

overcome these challenges in order to rebuild relationships with others.

Individuals who have experienced extreme psychological or physical distress may believe themselves to have been tortured and not meet this definition. Women's rights advocates argue that women who have experienced cruel and sexualized physical assaults experience torture, whether the perpetrator is acting officially or not. Those who have experienced extreme poverty and denial of basic human needs over prolonged periods might also argue this is torture. For the purposes of this study, however, a torture survivor must have experienced a particularly cruel form of psychological or physical injury by a perpetrator who acts intentionally under color of law. This definition limits the participants to those who have experienced state-sponsored torture. It also limits the study to those whose injury is not that which happens from the explosion of a random grenade or landmine; the harm must be intentional and it must be particularly injurious.

Despite the guidance offered by the U.N. definition, it is difficult to determine how many torture survivors live in the United States (U.S.). To the extent that torture at the hands of local, state and federal authorities occurs in this country, it is often denied and certainly not recorded. Perhaps it is easier to make estimates from immigrants who come to the U.S. seeking asylum, if only because there are fewer immigrants than citizens in the U.S. For those who come as refugees or asylees, we know that many of them have experienced torture. According to the Center for Victims of Torture (2005), there are an estimated 500,000 immigrants living in the United States who have experienced torture. Of

those, 17,000 survivors of state-sponsored political torture live in Chicago, according to a very rough estimate by the Marjorie Kovler Center for the Treatment of Survivors of Torture.

When torture survivors come to the United States seeking refuge, they leave their countries to find safety away from the communities that perpetrated and/or allowed their torture to take place. At some point, after the trauma has subsided or a change in political regime suggests that return may be possible, survivors of torture may wish to return to their homes, to the relationships and settings where they once lived their lives. Other survivors may choose to settle in the communities that afforded them refuge when they were forced to flee their homes and countries. In both cases, survivors will have the opportunity to (re)build relationships with others and to establish a sense of community.

Understanding how a psychological sense of community is experienced by immigrant torture survivors residing in the United States may advance efforts for healing. Communities aid in defining how experiences become socialized in persons' lives. Communities can offer support for survivors and condemnation of the torture. They offer settings and events through which survivors of many kinds of trauma can find meaning for what has happened (Bloom, 1998). The ability to make meaning of their torture, and subsequently recover from it, can be aided and inhibited by communities (Bloom, 1998). Ultimately, social reconstruction of countries that have histories of torture must determine how to rebuild a community among those who have suffered, and those who have not.

This research may also help further define and develop the concept of a

psychological sense of community. The nature of torture is such that it isolates its victims from community ties and community life. Survivors are physically and emotionally removed from communities, and that isolation can be even further exacerbated when they are compelled to leave communities where they would remain vulnerable to further abuse. Following this displacement, survivors in the United States find themselves in a country that might have supported the political regime that targeted them for torture. Survivors who overcome these challenges and build a psychological sense of community with others may offer poignant insights.

This section will explore how a psychological sense of community may be formed among immigrant survivors of torture who live in the United States. It begins by defining what is meant within this study by survivor and victim. It provides an overall definition of “psychological sense of community” and relies upon the explanation of individual elements drawing from the work of McMillan and Chavis (1986).

#### “Survivor” or “Victim”

The terminology of “survivor” and “victim” communicates different constructs in how and what we understand when we think about who has been targeted for political violence and torture by perpetrators. The use of “victim” conjures up images of passivity and a lack of agency, of someone who has experienced harm unfairly (Leisenring, 2006). It also suggests the presence of a perpetrator. Those who have been tortured are victims in the sense that a perpetrator targeted an individual, and made that individual passive through

threats, and physical and psychological attacks. People who have been tortured have no responsibility for the injury done to them and they were denied the ability to act in any meaningful way to defend themselves. To the extent that “victim” is the terminology used in this paper, it is done to reinforce the complete lack of culpability of those who have experienced torture.

“Survivor,” on the other hand, moves beyond the sense conveyed by “victim” to conjure up the image of someone strong and powerful, who has been significantly challenged and who has overcome whatever obstacles were created as a result. It transforms a person who at one time might have experienced a lack of agency into one whose personal power allows them to reclaim identities, power and agency, and hope (Leisenring, 2006).

In studies of torture survivors from Turkey, Başoğlu (1997) found that symptoms of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder were ameliorated best with treatment that offered a sense of control over traumatic stressors. Identifying those who have been tortured as survivors changes the focus from the perpetrator to the way the ones who were tortured conceive of their own actions. “Survivor” is the term preferred by the torture survivors whose contributions have guided the formation of this research.

#### Torture and its Impact on Individuals and Communities

Torture is deliberately used to break down the connection between individuals and their communities (Center for Victims of Torture, 2005). The violation of trust is a profound characteristic of the torture experience. Using the United Nations definition of torture, perpetrators will be agents of the

government, most frequently police, military and prison guards (Amnesty International, 2000). Those who have been entrusted with social safety become the ones who make the community more unsafe. Survivors thus learn that their trust in a world they had found reliable was eroded (Behnia, 2004; Gonsalves et al., 1993). Tortured once, survivors believe they may be tortured again (Magwaza, 1999.)

In all ways in which we understand it to affect people, torture is used to destroy the human spirit. Its impact is felt beyond the individual, and affects the family, community and society (Fabri & Portillo-Bartow, 2006; Gonsalves et al., 1993). Torture has been used as a weapon to remove individuals from community life, and to destroy their relationships with community. Perpetrators of torture intend to dismantle social and political structures of community life in order to maintain their power (Gonsalves et al., 1993). Rebuilding relationships with others, and reestablishing that sense of community are thus important components of many torture treatment center practices (Larson, 1997).

Central to an individual's recovery is the ability to reclaim one's identity, one's voice (Gorman, 2001). Claiming a voice suggests the need for an audience, for people who can listen with sympathetic ears to the truth of torture, its existence, its impact, and the ways in which it affects individuals. Survivors need relationships with people who acknowledge their pain (Staub, 2001). For survivors whose cultures are unfamiliar with therapy, it is community members who have helped out when individuals are in need (Fabri, 2001). Recreating the positive sense of community experienced previously in the country of origin can

facilitate relationship-building in the therapeutic setting (Fabri, 2001).

Intentionally or not, communities may multiply the harmful effects of torture (Anckerman, Dominguez, Soto, Kiaerulf, Berliner & Mikkelsen, 2005). Most people live in communities, but the importance of collective, communal living varies by culture. As one example, in some communities, death is associated with solitude. Torture moves people into places of solitude and the community may view tortured people as the living dead (Peddle, Moteiro, Guluma & Macaulay, 1999). Community members may also avoid those who have experienced torture for fear of endangering themselves by association. Those who wish to facilitate healing of individuals who have suffered must account for such community norms and concerns (Peddle et al., 1999).

Torture invades the social memory (Green, 1994) as does the fear it generates, affecting the community as well as the individuals tortured. In Guatemala as an example, the Guatemalan army targeted particular communities as the focus of their terror tactics. Not all individuals within the community were tortured. The army's tactics were both arbitrary and systematic, intended to silence the community by torturing select individuals seemingly chosen at random. The Guatemalan army thus used torture to control organized political dissent and to inhibit collection action (Green, 1994). Failing to acknowledge the massive human rights violations taking place allowed individuals to shrink from public attention, while also fulfilling the government's goals to suppress speech (Ehrenreich, 2003; Green, 1994).

Just as individuals may need community support to recover from human

rights trauma, communities need individuals' support to regain their political and economic strengths (Anckermann et al., 2005). Community development of countries that have experienced human rights trauma may engender support from institutions outside the country, but it is the country's citizens who build the social infrastructure that strengthens developing nations. Individuals build and experience a psychological sense of community.

Torture survivors benefit in particular ways from their relationships with communities. The ecological understanding of the impact of torture is important in the recovery of both individuals and communities (Fabri, 2001; Gonsalves et al., 1993; Larson, 1997), in helping document torture and its impact (Ehrenreich, 2003), and in arresting the cycle of violence that is perpetuated by systemic violence (Staub, Gubin & Hagengimana, 2005).

#### Psychological Sense of Community

Communities are entities through which we share identity, values and culture with others (McMillan & Chavis, 1986). Members of a neighborhood live side by side in a specific geographic location; they share membership in the community by living next to each other. Other communities are formed through common identification or status. Sometimes members of a community are defined by how they describe their own characteristics, location, language and customs. Feminists form a community that is not bound by geography, for example. So might people who have shared an experience, such as those who have survived torture.

Because communities are complex entities, their psychological value can



be difficult to determine. If motivation, attitudes and personality explain individuals' behavior, as asked by community psychologist Seymour Sarason (1974), what explains *community* behavior? Communities may be motivated to form in reaction to the injustice of oppression (Fisher & Sonn, 2002; Long & Perkins, 2007) and may have attitudes that grow from the common appreciation of their members. A psychological sense of community can be dependent not only on its members, but also on its setting (Brodsky, 1996). Other factors may also affect psychological sense of community, such as gender differences among members, and the reactions of others to the community in question.

Fisher and Sonn (2002) assert that all individuals want to be part of communities. They describe how the ability to share a history and make sense of that history with others forms bonds among community members. The psychological sense of community experienced by its members may vary in intensity depending upon how each member internalizes those bonds (Sarason, 1974). Language, symbols, rituals, history, and other shared characteristics – these form the manifestations of how people reflect and form community.

For geographically based communities, there is evidence that community development and a psychological sense of community are iterative. Individuals' psychological sense of community is related to the both the individual and the community, and the interaction of each with the other (Sarason, 1974).

Individuals in a low income area of Baltimore who engaged with community institutions to improve their neighborhood had a greater sense of community than those who did not (Brodsky, O'Campo & Aronson, 1999). Those who were not

engaged and who perceived their neighborhood as declining (independent of crime rates) experienced a lesser sense of community. Brodsky et al. theorized that the involvement of community members in local institutions promotes a sense of community.

Another study conducted by Chavis and Wandersman (1990) also examines the iterative nature of a psychological sense of community. They studied a depressed area of Nashville and documented opportunities for membership, control and empowerment as results of community development. These opportunities provided the basis for community- building, as those who share the same environment worked together to acquire neighborhood resources. The neighborhood resources provided community members settings and information about how neighbors could come together. In working for improved or additional community resources, at the same time using already-obtained community resources for communication and coming together, a psychological sense of community was built and strengthened.

Community is a shared construct of reality, emerging from interactions of people both within and outside of the community (Hunt & Riger, 1986). Institutions may define communities to specify areas for services, as one example. Community outsiders also define communities, sometimes “labeling” a community in all of the negative ways that the labeling of individuals connotes. Not all communities are good or stable; events or circumstances may trigger the creation, or even devolution, of a psychological sense of community. The creation of a community can happen among those who share similar catastrophes

– those who have lost loved ones to murder, for example, or those in the United States who bonded together following the events of September 11. Torture survivors may bond as a community, not because they share a history together, but because they share an experience that has often been defined by the setting in which their torture took place, the common effects and feelings they may have as a result, and the marginalization they experience. The experience of torture, however, can also inhibit the building of community. Torture survivors may be unable to overcome the barriers to relationship-building that are a common aftermath of torture.

Relational communities are often defined by common interests or goals and may hold stronger ties than those communities defined by geography. A study of science fiction fans identified stronger measures of a psychological sense of community than that found among communities based on geography (Obst, Zinkiewicz, & Smith, 2002a). This population lives around the world; with ages ranging from 17 to 79; an approximately equal male/female ratio; their interactions were most frequently internet-based. Using Principal Component Analysis to analyze the results of a questionnaire, the study confirmed science fiction fans' stronger sense of community as articulated in the four dimensions identified by McMillan and Chavis (1986). In addition, these science fiction fans experienced a new dimension, labeled as conscious identification. In a subsequent study, the same authors compared psychological sense of community based on geography with interest-based communities. The psychological sense of community was stronger among the interest-based community, (e.g., science

fiction fans) suggesting relational-based communities may form a stronger collective identity than those that are based on geography (Obst, Zinkiewicz, & Smith, 2002b).

The degree to which a community is marginalized may also affect how its members relate to each other, and what elements of the psychological satisfaction in community life are most salient. A study of gay men (Proescholdbell, Roosa & Nemeroff, 2006) evaluated how this community defined their psychological sense of community within the four constructs identified by McMillan & Chavis (1986). Through Exploratory and Confirmatory Factor Analyses, the measures of fulfillment of needs and membership/belonging loaded onto one factor. The authors theorized that society's marginalization of the gay community resulted in members' reluctance to identify as members unless to do so fulfilled their needs. Sonn and Fisher (1996) described how members of a marginalized community used their membership to redefine the basis on which they are identified as "colored." While the label "colored" to describe people of color in South Africa was pejorative, in Australia that label was transformed by those it identified into something more positive. South African immigrants in Australia labeled their shared bond by identifying themselves to others as members of the "colored" community. They elevated their minority status within a majority culture by claiming a racist label and redefining its significance.

Most of the literature on a psychological sense of community describes it in positive terms, suggesting that the lack of psychological sense of community is detrimental. There are positive effects for a low psychological sense of

community, however. A study of single mothers in Washington D.C. suggested that their survival was dependent upon their rejection of identification with the low income, crime-ridden neighborhood community in which they lived (Brodsky, 1996). The shared rituals and clothing that may have defined their neighborhood-community might deter these mothers' prospects for relationships with others outside the neighborhood. Identification with some members of the neighborhood community might also jeopardize their safety, as association with one gang would make its members vulnerable to another. The low psychological sense of community the single mothers experienced was a form of protection.

The difficulty in measuring a psychological sense of community is not to be underestimated. McMillan and Chavis' 1986 definition is relied upon by many researchers and texts. Their definition includes four elements: membership; mutual influence; integration and fulfillment of needs; and shared emotional connection. The idea of "membership" is characterized by boundaries that facilitate a sense of belonging, a sense of being in, while others are out (and not members of the community). "Mutual influence" is the ability of the community to urge conformity among its members and the ability of individual members to create the parameters of conformity expected from the community. Members' "needs" are fulfilled by others in the community, reinforcing the values of need fulfillment by creating community expectations to offer and receive. "Shared emotional connections" are often strengthened through the spiritual union found in social rituals or ways in which members bond with each other.

Each of those elements is addressed within the context of torture

survivors' experience in this research study.

### Membership in the Community

Communities are not just groups, they are collectives of people who share relationships with each other and exclude those who do not. Those boundaries are important; within them community members can find the emotional safety to take risks and form closer relationships (McMillan & Chavis, 1986). Membership in a community can offer its members a place to belong, where shared symbols and identification reinforce communal bonds (McMillan & Chavis, 1986).

Torture is used by perpetrators to deliberately isolate individuals and break down their relationships with others. Upon return to the community, that isolation can continue as community members avoid those who have been tortured for fear of jeopardizing their own safety or relationships (Green, 1994; Stover & Weinstein, 2004). Survivors' membership in communities where once they may have experienced influence, safety and emotional bonds is consequently jeopardized, often lost.

On the other hand, survivors of torture share an experience that crosses borders, gender, religion and other personal status categories. A psychological sense of community may be formed among those who have survived. McMillan (1996) indicates that people are attracted to a community based on their emotional sense of it. When they are accepted by that community, they are more likely to feel a part of it. Survivors interviewed by Meredith Larson (1997) for her master's dissertation indicated how important community and social networks of survivors were to them. Survivors were able to share the "normality" of

nightmares, flashbacks and other triggers of post-traumatic stress symptoms. Survivors feel understood by other survivors (Larson, 1997).

### Mutual Influence Among Community Members

Survivors of torture may have few opportunities to exercise influence, even among each other. Within the communities in which they have been tortured, they have obviously lost influence. Within newly formed communities where they have found refuge, many refugees are often limited in their ability to exercise influence because of the nature of their shared immigrant experiences (Behnia, 2002). In a new community where refugees are often strangers to the culture, together they share powerlessness (Behnia, 2002).

Trust is an element of mutual influence. Ten years after the publication of the McMillan and Chavis (1986) article on psychological sense of community, McMillan (1996) revisited and revised how he constructed the four elements. Mutual influence, said McMillan, is facilitated by trust in the sense of order created within the community. A community's authority structure, leadership, and symbols must be reliably counted upon. The ability of survivors to trust in community authority is very specifically what torture undermines (Gonsalves et al., 1993; Green, 1994).

The ability to trust in oneself is a deeply felt loss of many torture survivors (Behnia, 2004; Center for Victims of Torture, 2005; Miller, 2004; Salo, Punamaki & Outo, 2004; Staub et al., 2005). As these individuals recover, they seek to restore the ability to trust and to establish trusting relationships. Becoming trustworthy and experiencing trust is interactive (Johnson & Johnson, 1997) and

cannot happen in a vacuum. Many survivors may need communities in order to develop the capacity to engage in trusting relationships.

#### Fulfillment of Spiritual, Emotional, Physical or Mental Needs

Spiritual, emotional, physical and mental needs are abstract concepts that begin to describe the essentials of what people need in order to live. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) provides insight into what spiritual, emotional, physical or mental needs are. The UDHR offers universal standards defining the minimum necessary to meet human need, to assure human dignity. It defines as human rights the right to shelter and food, education, work and leisure, to participate in governing and to be free from torture. Meeting these needs is essential for health and daily living (Zuluaga, 2000). Unstable living arrangements, lack of economic opportunity, and internal displacement are among the things that lead to poorer mental health outcomes; the mental health of post-trauma refugees requires these needs to be met (Ringold, Burke & Glass, 2005).

Torture survivors may also have needs that are particular to the experiences they have survived. McMillan (1996) argues that the community will not exist without truth. Torture is frequently denied, and those who have survived torture are told that their stories of torture will not be believed. For the community to exist using McMillan's terms, the experience of survivors would need to be acknowledged. Both the individual and community have physical and mental needs, if not also spiritual and emotional. The spirit of a group or community may be hurt, as well as those of its individual members (Ehrenreich, 2003).



Community members' needs may also be met by others within the community. Larson (1997) and Behnia (2002) both indicated how important the survivor community is in meeting the needs of its members. Survivor community members help provide concrete services, for transportation, social services, housing and the like. Community members are also available to hear the stories that torture survivors need to tell. Survivors often voice a need to share their stories. South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission, for example, provided community forums for survivors to offer their stories. Survivors testified before others so that their pain might be acknowledged, to establish historical and evidentiary records, and to establish the record needed to seek reparations (Lykes, Blanche & Hamber, 2003).

In her work with torture survivors, Larson (1997) identified two major needs that can be met by forming a community. Community life provides survivors with the opportunity to reconnect with others, to build trust. Communities also offer people the opportunity to join in something bigger than themselves, to finding meaning through the collective.

### Shared Emotional Connections

McMillan and Chavis considered this element definitive in their definition of psychological sense of community (McMillan & Chavis, 1986). It can be experienced through rituals and behaviors; it evokes a sense of spirituality, a bond that transcends behavior. Shared emotional connections provide the basis for close loving relationships.

Those who have survived torture share emotional connections with each

other. The basis for this emotional connection may have been established before they became tortured. Many torture survivors were political activists, members of human rights movements that resulted in increased visibility and therefore, increased vulnerability. According to Başoğlu (1997), this shared emotional connection among political activists in Turkey facilitated greater fortitude to withstand the Post Traumatic Stress Disorder after-effects of torture. It may also provide an emotional bond among activists, post torture.

Not all those active in political and human rights movements form a community, however. The particular emotional connection built among survivors of torture within a community may be related to how they define what happened to them. As a community, survivors shape what it meant to have been tortured. The meaning they attribute to their torture becomes “art,” the basis of shared ritual and stories (McMillan, 1996). Wheelchair-bound rugby players defined their disability for others by playing hard-fought, competitive rugby (Goodwin, Johnston, Gustafson, Elliott, Thurmeier, & Kuttai, H, 2009). The attitude they shared among each other and conveyed to others was that their identities went beyond their wheelchairs; they were powerful and engaged athletes. The shared meaning of their disability was the basis of an emotional connection that bonded them together. Similarly, torture survivors may use their survival of torture as the basis of an emotional bond that can be celebrated.

#### Rationale

The meaning of a “psychological sense of community” is dynamic. Research on this issue seeks to measure what about community life makes it part

of the human experience, makes it important in how people live together.

Understanding what a psychological sense of community means among survivors of torture may enrich our understanding of how individuals experience and recover emotional bonds with communities when the relationship has been severely strained or broken. Such understanding may suggest specific strategies to rebuild community relationships when trauma has ruptured members' capacity to engage in those interactions that build communities.

This study is based on qualitative interviews with immigrant survivors of state-sponsored torture. Survivors were asked about their experiences of community, based on definitions of elements drawn from the works of McMillan and Chavis (1986). Additional questions were also posed, specifically addressing trust, empowerment and safety. For this study, only the elements of a psychological sense of community as posed by McMillan & Chavis (1986) are used to describe the formation of a community among survivors of torture. Future research studies will examine the implications of the dynamics of trust, empowerment and safety within community contexts other than that experienced within the torture survivor community.

The three research questions examined in this study are specific to community life as experienced among immigrant survivors of torture.

### Research Questions

- I. How do survivors believe that their experiences of torture affect their capacity for forming relationships with a community?
- II. How does the McMillan and Chavis (1986) framework explain interactions among immigrant survivors of torture?
- III. Do immigrant survivors of torture experience a psychological sense of community with other survivors?

## CHAPTER II.

### METHOD

Because of the sensitivity of torture survivors to retraumatization, the process for engaging in this research is provided in detail. Essential to this study has been the engagement with a broad community of survivors and their advocates, as well as the creation of a Thesis Consultation Group (TCG). The descriptions of those relationships are intended to allow others to examine elements of a process that is informed by the values of community psychology. As this research was conducted, input from survivors and those who work with them was continually solicited, in order to anticipate and be sensitive to research participants' needs.

The purpose of this research is to find out how torture survivors experience a sense of community among each other. The importance of establishing relationships with communities is a long used strategy in recovery advocated by the Marjorie Kovler Center staff. Nonetheless, the mechanisms of a psychological sense of community among torture survivors have not yet been thoroughly studied. This study is foundational; it seeks to unveil information about the phenomenon of a psychological sense of community among survivors of torture. Such conditions are ripe for a qualitative research study (Patton, 2002).

This study used an emic, phenomenological approach, allowing those who experienced what is being studied to offer their own words in describing it (Garko, 1999). The interview protocol was designed to offer ample opportunities for participants to describe in their own words what their relationships with the

survivor community have (and have not) been. Comparisons about how participants answered questions helped form the coding framework used for further analysis.

A Thesis Consultation Group of torture survivors, social scientists and torture abolition advocates has worked with the researcher throughout the course of this study. The group provided ongoing information and accountability for the research product and process. More information about this group is in a separate sub-section entitled “Thesis Consultation Group.”

The following section describes the methods used to conduct this research. It includes information frequently found to describe the qualitative research process. It also attempts to describe the rich relationship building with survivors and torture abolition advocates that helped fully explicate the meaning of psychological sense of community among immigrant survivors of torture.

#### Community Partnerships

As suggested by the Thesis Consultation Group, I worked with two organizations that were crucial in helping create this study. The preparation and design of the recruitment strategies, interview instruments, protocols for interviews and approaches for interviewing torture survivors was done with close cooperation of the Marjorie Kovler Center for the Treatment of Survivors of Torture, a program of the Heartland Alliance for Human Needs and Human Rights. The staff of the Kovler Center reviewed several versions of the interview protocol and made necessary suggestions based on their experiences of interviewing torture survivors and their concerns for their clients. They sent out a

letter to all clients who received services from Kovler to inform them that the study was being conducted, and provided contact information so that survivors might contact the researcher directly. Kovler staff served as a constant source of information and advice throughout the process. In addition, several members of the Kovler staff participated in the Thesis Consultation Group.

Torture Abolition and Survivors Support Coalition (TASSC) International also participated in this study. TASSC is a Washington, D.C. based non-governmental organization with a chapter in Chicago. TASSC brings together torture survivors from over 60 different countries and ethnic groups who work together to expose and eradicate torture, and to hold accountable those who have perpetrated torture (TASSC, 2006). Unlike TASSC in Chicago, the TASSC organization in D.C. includes staff people who assist in making referrals for services, organizing special events for survivors and engaging in torture abolition advocacy with Congress. They also host a major event for International Day of Victims of Torture, which many Chicago members attend. Several of the staff of TASSC in the District of Columbia are survivors of torture.

Community consultation contributes to an informed consent process that, particularly in non-Western cultures, has often relied on community decision-making to inform personal and family decisions (Molyneuz, Wassenaar, Peshu & Marsh, 2005). In many ways, TASSC performed that role. Once TASSC International in Washington D.C. came to support this study, they conveyed that endorsement to others. TASSC International was particularly helpful in recruiting women participants, whose reluctance to participate could have undermined the

breadth this study has to offer. In addition, the support of Sister Diana Ortiz, founder of TAASC International and with whom the researcher had worked in the past, was crucial to further relationship-building with survivors and survivor groups.

In order to make referrals for services that torture survivors may seek, and to identify appropriate resources such as translators for the research study, the researcher worked with two torture treatment centers in preparation for participant interviews. The numerous contributions of the Kovler Center are described throughout the study. In addition, the Minneapolis-based Center for Victims of Torture (CVT) offered advice and directed the researcher toward needed resources at a national level. Both CVT and Kovler were reliable sources of support and information.

### Settings

Interviews took place at the offices of TASSC and Amnesty International USA in Washington, D.C., and at the Kovler Center in Chicago. The TASSC office is located in an often sunny basement of a building located at Catholic University. There are numerous private offices, and a large meeting space. Staff, volunteers and survivors regularly trek in and out of the office. The other Washington, D.C. based setting in which interviews took place was the office of Amnesty International USA. The researcher is a former staff person of Amnesty International and through ongoing collegial relationships, secured their permission to host interviews. TASSC and the interviewer thought that participants might be familiar with Amnesty, which did turn out to be the case



with several of the participants interviewed.

The Marjorie Kovler Center is located in an immigrant-friendly neighborhood of Chicago. The building is a former seminary and is large enough to provide space for various kinds of meetings. Kovler also provides opportunities for social interactions among survivors, through special events and shared meals scheduled irregularly throughout the year. The local chapter of the Torture Abolition Survivors Support Coalition International also meets at Kovler. The Chicago-based participants did not offer great distinctions between their perception of TASSC and Kovler, with the exception of acknowledging the staff roles in Kovler. There are no Chicago-based TASSC staff.

The interview rooms were made as comfortable as possible. Water for the interviewee, as well as a candle and box of Kleenex, were made available. A suggestion that participants bring with them something that offers comfort was made to those who seemed a bit apprehensive. As the participant relates experiences of the past, this object can be used to recall the present (personal correspondence, M. Songasonga, 2006.)

#### Community Participation: The Thesis Consultation Group

The Thesis Consultation Group (TCG) included eight people. Three people are torture survivors. Six are torture abolition activists. Three are men; the remaining five are women. Two are academic advisers to the researcher; one is a social psychologist with a specialization in gender issues and the other a community psychologist. The members are from Chile, Guatemala, Democratic Republic of Congo, and the United States. The researcher encountered all except

the thesis advisors through her work with Amnesty International USA. Three members have worked for Amnesty International; five have relationships with the Marjorie Kovler Center for the Treatment of Survivors of Torture. One person resigned from the group after a year because of personal obligations. Another person was added to the group one year after the group was established. Thesis group consultation member names and affiliations are listed in Appendix B.

Most correspondence with Thesis Consultation Group took place through personal contact, email and telephone conversation. The consultation group also met regularly to review the work products of the researcher. Members reviewed the interview protocol, outreach strategies, results and discussion. In addition, a pilot interview was conducted with a torture survivor in front of the group. The survivor was also a member of the group. He and the TCG then reviewed the researcher's style and skill and made suggestions on how to proceed. Individual members were consulted from time to time on specific issues as well. The group met at the Steans Center for Community Based Service Learning on the Lincoln Park campus of DePaul University. Babysitting services and refreshments were provided as needed.

In addition to participating in the research process, the Thesis Consultation Group required specific self-help strategies of the researcher. The researcher was exposed to emotionally distressful testimony from participants. The TCG required the researcher to identify strategies for minimizing stress. Those strategies during the course of the interview required the interviewer to provide plenty of time for the interviews, with breaks in between multiple interviews.

Following interviews, the researcher indicated that her regular routines of swimming, listening to music and sharing time with friends would provide decompression opportunities.

Research team members were also recruited through DePaul University whose work also contributed to this effort. The research team assisted with the transcriptions, coding and interpretation of results. They also occasionally attended Thesis Consultation Group meetings. They are listed in Appendix B as well.

### Researcher

The researcher is a committed human rights activist who has worked to abolish torture and to promote human rights for over twenty years. My activism and advocacy through work with the Farmworker Justice Fund, American Civil Liberties Union and Amnesty International helped establish my credibility with this population. The collaborative nature of feminist and human rights work easily influenced the research process used in this study.

Throughout the course of this study, I had occasion to interact with survivors as a participant observer. I attended events celebrating June 26, the International Day in Support of Victims of Torture, in Chicago and Washington, D.C. I worked with the Kovler Center as a consultant for a short period of time, and was able to interact with survivors in the course of that work. I also facilitated a survivor focus group that reviewed Kovler Center operations. The results and discussion of this study rely in part on the rich understanding of community life that such participation afforded.

### Participants

Those eligible to participate in this study were immigrant adult survivors of politically-sponsored torture who currently live in the United States. The Kovler Center and TASSC International sent letters to their survivor lists seeking participants. The technique for recruitment minimized the risks of a recruitment strategy that sought specific information about the act of torture itself. Rather, participants' identification as survivors was self-selected, i.e., recruitment strategies sought people who identified themselves enough as torture survivors to respond to solicitations seeking them. In addition, as part of the pre-interview preparation sessions, participants were told that the study was about survivors of torture and asked if they qualified. Within the course of the interview, if there was some question as to status, gentle inquiries were made to determine if participants had been tortured by a state-sanctioned agent.

Participants interviewed were from Albania, Angola, Cameroon, Chile, Congo, Eritrea, Gabon, Guatemala, Philippines, Rwanda and Uganda. Eight men and seven women were interviewed, with an additional interview of a woman from Zimbabwe whose husband had been tortured and who had been threatened herself when she took legal action on his behalf. Because she did not actually qualify as a survivor, her interview was excluded from the survivor results. Her interview, however, did help provide context for understanding the impact of torture on family and community relationships.

Patton (2002) has observed that the number of participants needed for a sample depends on the purpose. Generally, he says that a sample has reached its

necessary number at the point when the answers become redundant. The sample must offer enough diversity among the individuals to allow an exploration of the community-survivor relationship, and do so in a way that minimizes the possibility that each survivor's experience is impacted by idiosyncratic factors. Sixteen people were interviewed. The data they offered provide pictures of community life rich in detail. There was also enough similarity to identify consistent themes.

The difficulties of recruiting survivors of torture into this study were quite formidable. With one exception, the initial outreach into the community resulted in responses only from male survivors. One woman volunteered to be interviewed, and only at the encouragement of her therapist who thought to do so would be beneficial. One man cancelled his appointment a half hour before it was scheduled, calling to explain that his family did not believe it would be healthy for him to share his story again. Others sought to volunteer who were family members, rather than those directly tortured. Yet another man disqualified himself, explaining that he was tortured because of his union membership and activism – making him no different than any other laborer in his country. All other survivors who wanted to be interviewed within the extended period of participant outreach were included.

The most difficult obstacle in recruiting participants, however, was in finding women who were willing to be interviewed. It is only because of the diligent effort of a staff person for TASSC in Washington D.C. that so many women were recruited. Working with TASSC, the researcher was able to

schedule nine interviews in one trip. Despite the reassurance of TASSC and the researcher, three women either did not show up for their scheduled interviews or cancelled them immediately prior. Any explanations about this phenomenon are speculative, but the stigma attached to rape may have discouraged women from participating in a study about their torture. Most women who have been tortured were raped according to the Center for Victims of Torture ( 2005).

TASSC International strongly advocated for the inclusion of people from multiple countries, rather than one. Their belief that survivors are united by experience, across national boundaries, was determinative. Given the difficulties of recruitment, it may have been nigh impossible to recruit participants from only one country.

The data collected from this survey is confidential. Each completed interview was assigned a pseudonym and the identity of each participant was known only to the researcher and translator. The translator was also required to maintain confidentiality. The list of pseudonyms and their countries of origin are included in Appendix C. While each person's identity remains confidential, the list of pseudonyms and countries provides the opportunity to remember each person's humanity, from within a setting and a country different from each other and the United States.

### Interviews

Participants engaged in semi-structured interviews using a survey protocol with open-ended questions (Appendix A.) Interviews lasted from 45 minutes to three and a half hours. The researcher conducted all interviews.

The launch of the interview began with the protocol established by the IRB to obtain informed consent. Once participants provided informed consent, the initial set of questions sought to ask participants about themselves. They were asked to describe their age and gender, where they were living, and about their family. Participants were provided the opportunity to share their stories of how they came to be in the United States. Survivors were not asked to describe their torture but were provided opportunities to share whatever parts of their stories that they wished to share.

There were essentially three sets of questions that directly explored a psychological sense of community. One set of questions elicited information about the participant's ideas about communities based in their country of origin. "How important was it to be a member of a community?"; "Do you consider family to be a community of which you are a member?"; and "What communities were you a member of in your country of origin?" are examples. The second set of questions was virtually the same, changing the setting to the United States e.g., "How important was it for you to be a member of a community in the United States?"

The third set of questions were based on two frameworks of a psychological sense of community. The McMillan & Chavis (1986) framework offered four elements to explore: membership boundaries, mutual influence, needs fulfillment and shared emotional connections. In addition, questions based on the work of Cantillon, Davidson and Schweitzer (2003) were also posed. Cantillon et al. explored how empowerment, safety and trust affect a

psychological sense of community within a socially disorganized community. Participants were asked to describe how they felt that these elements might describe their community relationships.

### Procedure

Because there is so little research with this population, proper methods for conducting ethical studies with torture survivors are not yet established (CVT, 2005). This study does rely on lessons learned by those who work with survivors in torture treatment centers. Research protocols from the Center for Victims of Torture (2005) and Survivors International (2006), as well as the Istanbul Protocol (1999) and the World Medical Association Declaration of Helsinki (Zion, Gilliam, & Loff, 2000) were reviewed. The research also relied on feminist researchers' studies with rape victims and survivors for identifying participant-sensitive approaches to research (Campbell, 2002; McCullough-Zander & Larson, 2004).

The researcher used the interview protocol only as a guide and the interviews were conducted in an informal, conversational style with the researcher prepared to respond to questions, direction and emphasis from each participant. Patton (2002) suggests that this approach may result in interview data with different emphases, depending upon the participant. Given that this study seeks to understand the phenomena of community relationships as understood by survivors, the differing emphases yielded valuable data.

The interview format was intended to encourage interviewee story-telling by building trust between the researcher and participants. As advised by a



member of the Thesis Consultation Group (J. MacLean, 2006), asking participants to “share stories,” rather than answer questions would be more likely to put them at ease. The Istanbul Protocol (1999) admonishes physicians engaged in documenting torture to note that listening is more important than asking questions. Asking questions only results in answers, it explains. The Thesis Consultation Group as a whole believed that it was important for the interviewer, as well, to avoid a series of questions and instead use a narrative form that encourages “story-telling” by participants. The researcher was sensitive to these admonishments; at the same time, the interview guide was relied upon during the course of the interview to insure adequate coverage of topics of interest.

The researcher was prepared to listen closely to identify survivors’ wishes about how to conduct the interview, as well. According to Survivors International (2006), that means that survivors must be free to leave, and to refuse to answer questions as they wish. As recommended by Survivors International (2006), the researcher tried to listen with emotional detachment but with sensitivity to the stories shared. This negotiation was very difficult. The clinical staff of the Marjorie Kovler Center warned the researcher that to promote too much disclosure of the torture event could result in serious harm to the participant, of which the researcher was fearful. While conducting the interviews, the interviewer also did not want to be overcome by her own emotions while sharing the pain of those being interviewed. This dilemma had been cautioned by a torture survivor in a Thesis Consultation Group meeting. There was a delicate balance required in how an interviewer can experience and share emotion without

overwhelming or being overwhelmed by the interviewee. According to Campbell (2002), an interviewer must seek to remain focused on the participant and try not to offer any response that shuts down the interviewee's participation.

Interpreters were used for four interviews, each requiring translation in English and French. Three of the interpreters were recruited through Kovler and/or TASSC. A fourth interpreter was found through networking. All of the interpreters were coached on their ethical obligations for accuracy and confidentiality. Techniques such as how to interrupt when there is a misunderstanding between the researcher and participant were also discussed. Many of the participants knew enough English to add to or correct interpretations as they heard them. In one interview, a participant answered several questions in Eritrean that were later interpreted from the tape. Several interviews conducted in English, as chosen by the survivor, might have benefited from an interpreter also being part of the interview. Participants were unable to thoroughly explain their thoughts and it appeared that an interpreter would help facilitate the interview dialogue.

The survey instrument and procedure were developed with sensitivity to the risks of retraumatization and objectification of the participants. It was approved by the Local Review Board of the Psychology Department, the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of DePaul University and the IRB of Heartland Alliance for Human Needs and Human Rights. In May of 2008, however, the research was out of compliance with IRB standards when the approval certificates from DePaul and Heartland Alliance expired. All data had been collected by that

point. As soon this was discovered by the researcher, research was suspended and new certificates sought. The research continued in conformance with IRB standards.

### Data Coding

Each interview was recorded and transcriptions were prepared by undergraduate students who were overseen by the researcher. Several of the undergraduates spoke Spanish and English, which was helpful in understanding the tape recordings of participants for whom English was not a first language. Because some interviews were difficult to understand, each transcript was reviewed by a second student to ensure it captured what was actually said. The researcher also reviewed tapes and transcripts to spot check undergraduate students' work.

The analysis of this data was conducted using grounded and phenomenological theories. Consistent with use of grounded theory (Corbin & Strauss, 1990), individual research team members reviewed interviews line by line to identify themes that might provide the basis for a coding scheme. Agreement about the major themes found within the data were then determined through group processing. When disagreement about coding occurred, the team worked together to understand the data within the context of the overall interview of the participant. This technique sought to understand data within the phenomenological meaning offered by the participants. Through this process, a set of exhaustive, mutually exclusive codes was formed.

The transcripts and coding scheme were then loaded into Nvivo software.

This software program made it possible to further explore relationships across coding structures, enriching the understanding of the data. Once a final coding scheme was determined, research team members then coded each transcript in the Nvivo software. As disagreements about the meaning of certain text occurred, the researcher consulted with her academic advisors and to some extent, the Thesis Consultation Group. Agreement about coding of data was eventually achieved.

### Credibility

There are four main criteria for evaluation of a qualitative study. The data must be credible; the theory must be relevant; the research process must be adequate; and the study grounded in empiricism (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

In this study, participants provided data that was reliably collected. Participants were recruited through a modified snowball sample strategy. Snowball sampling is often used for studies where the target population is invisible (Singleton & Straits, 2005). Potential participants were recruited through persons or entities that had personal and professional knowledge of those who identified as survivors and/or victims of torture. Once those potential participants were referred to the researcher, they were further screened to determine if they were survivors of state-sponsored torture.

A relevant theoretical foundation for this study is based on the intersection of concepts addressing a psychological sense of community and the impact of torture. Torture isolates individuals from communities; the isolation has long-lasting effect. The concept of a psychological sense of community as defined by McMillan and Chavis (1986) may help understand how community life

contributes to survivors' recovery. At the same time, the experiences of a group of people whose sense of community was deliberately injured may contribute to understanding community life.

The research process was adequate; it relied upon several group processes to review initial results and check interpretation of their meaning. Throughout the process, the Thesis Consultation Group worked with the researcher to examine the research process and results. Chicago-based TASSC members were also consulted, to seek their understanding of particular results and to provide additional explanation for a phenomena. In addition, the results were shared with the Kovler staff. This collective analysis lent authenticity to the research results, as the group's input and expertise was used to understand varied contexts and meaning.

The process of group consultation also enhances the empirical basis of the study. Tentative results of this study were presented at psychology conferences where members of the Thesis Consultation Group, research team members and the researcher sought review and evaluation from psychology peers. Dr. David McMillan, co-author of the seminal article on psychological sense of community (McMillan & Chavis, 1986) was among those who engaged in the review.

## CHAPTER III

### RESULTS

The following section reports the results of this study. It is divided into subsections, each devoted to answering one of three research questions. 1) How do survivors believe that their experiences of torture affect their capacity for forming relationships with a community?; 2) How does the McMillan and Chavis (1986) framework explain the interactions among immigrant survivors of torture?; and 3) Do immigrant survivors of torture experience a psychological sense of community with other survivors?

Much of the literature that addresses recovery from torture focuses on the individual. In contrast, the questions above explore the bonds that may form among this vulnerable group, bonds that may result in the creation of a psychological sense of community. Each subsection of the results includes extensive quotes that are used to support the conclusions being made about a psychological sense of community. The quotes are representative of themes discerned through analysis of the data. In addition, group meetings of torture survivors and torture treatment staff had opportunities to review and support or challenge conclusions. Insights from these discussions also influenced how themes were identified. Because the researcher has acted in the role of participant observer for the several years in which this research took place, insights from those experiences enrich the meaning and context of themes found among survivors.

#### The Impact of Torture on Survivors' Relationships with a Community

Immigrant survivors of torture in the USA face many challenges in developing a psychological sense of community. Challenges are created by immigration status, language barriers, a U.S. culture focused on individuals, and the myriad of adjustments required when people are uprooted from their homes and compelled to flee to a more secure place. These are the challenges many immigrants may face; torture adds an additional barrier. The experience of their torture has typically been perpetrated for the purpose of isolating survivors from communities, intended to diminish the influence they may have within communities (Gonsalves et al., 1993; Green, 1994). The impact of torture lingers long after the physical violence. The community that is created by and from immigrant survivors of torture must overcome these and other challenges in order to experience a psychological sense of community.

Participants describe challenges that inhibit their trust in others, and their ability to form close emotional connections. While some participants are comfortable sharing their experiences through story-telling, others are more inhibited. Torture survivors may be from every country in the world. When survivors come together, lack of familiarity with each other's cultures sometimes inhibits the ability of participants to form a community.

#### The Volatility of Torture

Several participants discussed fear and reluctance in sharing their histories with people outside the survivor community. Survivors of torture may worry about how emotional they themselves might become when discussing torture; they must anticipate how others may react as well. Participants discussed their

reluctance to engage in community events with other expatriates, for example. Describing how he dreaded interactions with people of his country, Okello said it was “because you don’t know who is going to take you lightly.... People are going to know what happened to me in detail and somehow shutting them out to me is a simple solution.” Okello was a well-known journalist; his detention by the local authorities and what happened to him was broadcast throughout his country. Like several other survivors, his story was one of inquiry and examination by people within his country. Their reactions, and his anticipation of their reactions, were sources of dread. Anamaria explained, “One of the things that I have not wanted was to be with (my) community. It is very hard... I am always concerned are they going to ask me, ‘What happened to you?’, ‘Why are you here?’, or ‘Where did you live?’ Those are questions I really don’t want to answer to them because I think part of me is afraid of who are they, why are they asking me those questions”.

Another fear is that any examination of torture may lead to a flashback. At the beginning of one interview, the participant expressed her fear that she would have a flashback and provided specific direction on what to do should it occur. Another participant described the vulnerability he and other survivors experience. Said Rodrigo, “at least for my experience as a survivor, every little example that you see, a movie that you are watching, brings you back constantly to a situation that you were going through.” This fear of the flashback, of the reliving of the experience of torture, is a manifestation of post traumatic stress disorder (Brewin, Lanius, Novac, Schnyder & Galea, 2009) among survivors.



Those who encounter survivors may also be concerned with their own reactions to people who have been tortured (Green, 1994). Sensitive to the vulnerability of themselves and others, inhibitions may keep survivors from interacting in supportive meaningful ways, even within “their” community.

### Difficulty in Sharing Emotions

Another survivor described how difficult it was for him to express emotions, any emotions. He goes on to describe the reaction of his children when he did not express emotion during the divorce from their mother, and how hard it has been for him throughout his life to show emotion. This survivor attributes his inability to share emotions as a self defense strategy learned when he was being tortured. Said Rodrigo, “you don’t show your feelings very easily.... Normally I try to repress them. It is a mechanism of survival.... When you were in the condition in the torture center or the camps, the conditions are so averse you don’t show your feelings to the enemy....”

Okello described it this way. “You are physically uprooted from one country to another – but you come with your emotional baggage. You don’t know what to do with emotional baggage.... It’s not as easy as before.” Yet another survivor described her emotional isolation following a genocide in her country. Said Angelique, “it really hurt me because after the genocide, I was alone. I don’t have a home.... I was, ‘why am I living?’” The feelings of isolation may act as a catalyst however. It was because of her isolation, that Angelique described her need to find a community. The challenge of expressing emotion became a force for both Rodrigo and Angelique to find a community in

which they could develop emotional safety and “practice” emotional connections.

Not all challenges arise from the experience of torture. One woman attributed her reluctance to engage in emotional expression as typical of her culture and upbringing. She nonetheless used an experience of torture (specifically, the disappearance of her father) as the example explaining it. Said Anamaria, “When my father disappeared, my favorite room was the bathroom. It was because I can lock the bathroom and I can go and cry and yell or whatever—not yell because they would have heard that.... I think that we would take turns to go to the bathroom... we needed to use it just to hide.” In Anamaria’s case, culture, family custom and torture worked together to keep her from feeling free to share her emotions with others, even those with whom she was otherwise emotionally close. Anamaria’s family was very important to her. The loss of her father and the inability to express the pain about that loss remain poignant in Anamaria’s relationships with others. It is also representative of the ways in which family members of those who have been tortured and disappeared are also impacted by torture.

#### Blocks to Community Participation

Survivors who gather at TASSC meetings may share stories of their recovery and survival from torture. For many, being able to share what happened to them among sympathetic others is cathartic. Two participants in this study, however, indicated how uncomfortable they were by TASSC meetings where survivors frequently shared what happened to them. Perhaps the assumption that descriptions of their torture would be sought was inhibiting. Said Anamaria: “I

came, I think, twice or something like that for a meeting at TASSC. I think it's very hard for me to be with them because sometimes they start talking about what happened to them, and it's just very hard for me.... So it's hard for me to be with them when they are sharing things, and after that I said I think I will not go.”

Simon was also reluctant. He said about TASSC, “I don't appreciate it that as a person himself who has gone through torture, survived it and everything, has lost parents because of that, I don't want to get together with other survivors and talk about this again. What for? It's just too much pain. You should talk about those things once and then that's it, and move on. Life goes on.... Just yesterday I was talking with another survivor about this and that the other person said ‘what, you're going to talk about this again? Why do you want to talk about this again?’”

Although the story-sharing may be an important activity in helping survivors understand what happened to them, their stories come with a terrain that is emotionally fragile. For Simon and Anamaria, that fragility imposes a barrier that separates them from TASSC meetings, and the psychological sense of community that springs from those meetings. Similarly, to what was explained above, this could be an obstacle created from the reluctance to share and disclose emotions.

### Challenges From Cultural Differences

Participants in this study expressed appreciation for the inclusion of people from all countries in the survivor community. Even before their torture, many participants were engaged with people from outside their neighborhoods,

cultures and countries. Participants worked with others from nearby countries that were active in similar political struggles against colonialism, for example. Others were engaged as human rights activists in the same struggles for basic rights that challenges people throughout the world. Despite this appreciation for diversity and inclusion, the lack of knowledge about customs of other countries sometimes inhibits relationship forming. Only one participant described this lack of knowledge, yet it seemed representative of how culture, even gender, may create barriers among survivors. He inserted this point within a description of how powerless he felt in helping others in the detention center where he and others were being tortured. Describing how he sometimes does not know how to react or to support others when they are disclosing their stories, Rodrigo said:

I talked about this with other fellows of different countries. You have to be so careful sometimes depending on the culture, religion, the way they would feel. I don't know how someone from a different religion, Muslim or whatever, will feel if I give them a hand. If she interprets in a different form, then you feel a little repressed with your feelings there.

Rodrigo's extension of sympathy began with his emotional recognition of others' needs. Not knowing how they might react to his expression of acknowledgement and sympathy keeps him from being able to express the connection he feels. Rodrigo is unable to share emotional recognition of their shared suffering because of his lack of knowledge about what is culturally appropriate.

Table 1 summarizes the challenges to a psychological sense of community

experienced by the torture survivors interviewed for this study.

Table 1: Challenges to a Psychological Sense of Community

Challenges	Interactions that acknowledge torture are volatile.	Torture survivors have particular difficulty in sharing their emotions.	Sharing stories sometimes keeps people from participating in the survivor community.	Lack of information about others' cultures sometimes creates challenges
Survivor quotes	<i>There are some things why I don't want to be with them. First, it's the memories. Being with them brings memories to me, and so then it's hard. But then the other things is, I am always concerned are they going to ask me, 'What happened to you?', 'Why are you here?', or 'Where did you live?' Those are questions I really don't want to answer to them because I think part of me is afraid of 'who are they, why are they asking me those questions'.</i>	<i>You are physically uprooted from one country to another – but you come with your emotional baggage. You don't know what to do with emotional baggage.... It's not as easy as before.</i>	<i>I don't appreciate it that as a person himself who has gone through torture, survived it and everything, has lost parents because of that, I don't want to get together with other survivors and talk about this again. What for? It's just too much pain. You should talk about those things once and then that's it, and move on.</i>	<i>You have to be so careful sometimes depending on the culture, religion, the way they would feel. I don't know how someone from a different religion, Muslim or whatever, will feel if I give them a hand. If she interprets in a different form, then you feel a little repressed with your feelings there.</i>

### The Need for Community

Counteracting the challenges described in the section above may be the desire to be included in communities that Fisher and Sonn (2002) claim drive everyone. This theme was articulated by Okello, a survivor who came to the United States rather abruptly, suffering from the physical injuries of his torture even as he traveled to get here. A friend had provided an apartment for him, but he chose instead to live in the basement of a Chicago church. He expressed fear about living alone, and said that at the church he found “a home community, where there is people, people you talk to, people comfortable to be around.... You end up making people your friends, trying to live as normally as you can in a very abnormal setting.” It was important for Okello to emotionally connect and live with a community on a day-to-day basis. “They were understanding, you live with them, you go to service.... It’s important to feel like you have a family, people to live with.” Okello described the reasons for staying at the church as “you somehow feel like when I wake up in the morning, someone will know it.”

### Framing Community Interactions

This next section addresses question 2 regarding how immigrant survivors of torture in the United States describe their interactions among other survivors in settings offered by the Kovler Center and TASSC International. The framework used to examine this phenomenon is that developed by McMillan and Chavis (1986) to describe a psychological sense of community. The four elements of this framework include membership boundaries, mutual influence, needs fulfillment and shared emotional connections. Briefly, membership boundaries identify who

is *in* and *out* of the community. Mutual influence describes how community members share and influence each other's values and culture. Needs fulfillment describes the extent to which community members' needs are met by each other. Shared emotional connections describe the sense of belonging members experience within the community, and their bondedness among each other.

The data provided by participants in this study help explain their interactions and further understand the elements of McMillan and Chavis' (1986) framework. Survivors of torture find safety in each other's company. In settings offered by TASSC and Kovler, survivors find that others are sympathetic to their stories in deeply empathic ways. Survivors and nonsurvivors are bound within the community because of that shared empathy. Working together, survivors of torture mutually influence each other's healing. The healing process is characterized as a journey from victim to survivor. It is important to both individuals and the community to reclaim the influence and empowerment captured by their declared status as survivors.

Survivors can access a full range of referrals and services at TASSC and Kovler, finding resources for their psychological and spiritual recovery as well as their physical wellbeing. Survivors can thus count on the survivor community that they associate with TASSC and Kovler to help them meet their spiritual, psychological and basic human needs. The International Day in Support of Victims of Torture (June 26) provides survivors the opportunity to celebrate and reclaim their identities as powerful agents. This day provides an experience in which survivors of torture emotionally connect to each other and celebrate their



status as survivors. These concepts are explained more fully below.

### Membership Boundaries

In a geographically defined neighborhood, a boundary may be a street, a viaduct or a fence. With a relationally defined community, the boundary markers are perhaps not so clearly defined. MacMillan and Chavis (1986) and Chavis (1996) describe membership boundaries as forming a perimeter within which members experience belonging and emotional safety. Immigrant survivors of torture form a community based on their relationship to torture and with each other as survivors of that torture.

At TASSC International and the Marjorie Kovler Center for the Treatment of Survivors of Torture, participants engaged in activities that defined and reinforced the sense of belonging and emotional safety survivors could find among each other. Within those settings, members found a place in which they could be themselves. Survivors of torture shared their views on torture with each other and visitors who joined them at celebrations, events or in waiting rooms. It is within these settings that survivors also shared personal stories of what happened to them, and what happened to their families. They could reveal their innermost thoughts within the community in which they felt safe.

Torture survivors feel safe among other survivors. While the settings provided by TASSC and Kovler demark physical boundaries that help define the community, it is the knowledge and appreciation of the torture experience that forms the psychological basis of membership boundaries. “It was very important for me to find TASSC... I had stories I couldn’t tell anywhere,” said Evrard.

Joelle spoke of how “their actions pulled me to them because they made me feel free among them.” One participant, having fled her country because of genocide, attended a small religious college in Nebraska. She discovered TASSC’s existence through internet searches. With limited English skills, she made her way from Nebraska to D.C. on her own in order to connect with this community where she could safely share her experience, and her recovery. It is among the other survivors that community members find unconditional acceptance.

Empathy for torture survivors. The relative safety experienced within the community is not dependent upon members being survivors. Included at community events such as cooking nights or U.S. holiday celebrations are family members, volunteers, torture abolition advocates, and other supporters of TASSC International and Kovler. Said Kharen, “I don’t want it (the survivor community) to be an exclusive club for survivors. They could be fans of survivors who are empathizing.... You know, the fact that they put their shoes in that person [walked in that person’s shoes] is really something good.” Other non-survivors may work or interact with staff and survivors at the Kovler and TASSC settings. Volunteers come in to help with maintaining the physical space of Kovler and TASSC, or to offer their expertise. They may participate in celebrations or shared meals; their presence seems to be welcomed. Francie explained, “If we open the doors just for survivors, how are people going to know the difficulty of torture?”

Understanding torture’s impact. For many, the survivor community was the first place where they could finally describe what happened to them. Given the invasive and intimate experience that occurs during torture, the sharing of

their stories is often emotional. Because they are all familiar with the emotional vulnerability each has experienced, they are often comfortable enough to reveal their stories. Said Okello, “We’ve talked in detail about the torture experience to friends – but it is so much easier to talk to someone in TASSC.” Eddie allowed as how he had friends, but “I wanted more in an emotional way. My family was back home... But everything was different here and I just needed that connection and I found it here.” The basis of safety needed to share their stories is that community members condemn torture. This theme was implicit and consistent through survivors’ interviews.

Settings offer a safe space for survivors. “When you meet me here at Kovler, that means I am part of the Kovler community,” stated Japhet in response to a query asking whether he considered himself a part of the Chicago survivor community. It is at the Marjorie Kovler Center that Japhet can count on being known by others. Japhet, upon concluding his interview, was able to find a staffperson who had a copy of a publication in which he was featured. He was able to ask a caseworker who knew him to find his profile and when she did, he was then readily able to show it to this researcher. Kovler was not only a safe space, but also a space where Japhet could comfortably rely on others to help explain his identity.

Before and after all of the Kovler Center-based interviews, participants were able to greet others who recognized them. In one case, a participant had not been in the center for a few months. He was greeted by survivors and staff alike as an old friend; he was back “in” with the “in” crowd. The setting created the

space in which people could be recognized, trusted and set apart from other communities. It was also a repository of information about Japhet and others, that could be called upon as Kovler clients wished to make something known about themselves.

Embracing diversity across national boundaries. The survivor community seemed open and willing to include many diverse peoples. Kharen described her desire to become a member of TASSC, to join “an international community of people who went through the same experience.” This broad description encompasses an appreciation for the way in which this community exists beyond national borders or boundaries. Marcelo was describing a mural at the Kovler Center, expressing how it represents the survivor group. “It’s beautiful to see people from so many different countries, different cultures.... It’s beautiful to see.” Angelique described how important it was for her, a survivor of the genocide in Rwanda, to see “how people from different countries – Ethiopia, Iraq, everywhere in the world, people come...”

When consulted about the design of this research, the Executive Director of TASSC International gently insisted that this study include cross cultural, rather than country-specific, survivors. The shared experience of torture and its impact, across cultures, is an important value statement of TASSC and its members. Their appreciation of diversity implicitly acknowledges how vulnerable everyone is to torture, and how the future of any one person, or any one country, is dependent upon condemnation of torture by all persons, and all countries.

Conclusion. Survivors of torture experience life-long after-effects of their experience. To form relationships with others such that they may begin to feel the identification and emotional connection to a community, they must feel safe. TASSC and the Kovler Center provide physical settings that enhance members' sense of security. Also important is that survivors find others who condemn torture. This absolute boundary about torture provides the safety necessary for the community to include survivors and nonsurvivors, among people from diverse countries and cultures.

### Mutual Influence

Mutual influence is a form of exercising power within a community. Measures of mutual influence in psychological sense of community scales often identify mutual influence as caring about what others think, or the idea that others will seek and listen to one's views. Members choose to join a community in order to find others who share their understanding of what is real in the world (McMillan & Chavis, 1986). According to McMillan (private correspondence, 2009), those communities with the strongest psychological sense of community share power (and influence) among members mutually.

This section describes the exercise of mutual influence within the survivor community. The exercise of mutual influence and the exercise of fulfilling needs are often the same. Through influence on each other within the community, members' influence their journeys from victim to survivor. This is an empowering journey for individual members. The community as a whole then relies on its empowered members to contribute to collective empowerment, and

influence. As a community, survivors of torture who were often politically active in their own country, come together to influence U.S. policy on torture.

Survivors of torture. The members of the survivor community interviewed in this study are gathered together through two organizations whose very purpose is to influence the recovery of their members. Throughout these interviews, participants described how difficult healing from torture is. They seek recovery of the body and spirit, and they seem to do it best among other survivors. The terminology that rejects victim and embraces survivor serves as a metaphor for the journey that they take.

Rodrigo eloquently described how the label of victim was imposed upon him and other survivors. “Victim to me is a concept that you stay there. You are not able to heal and go far beyond being a victim... Victims are people who are there to suffer.” At Kovler, he explained, we “discuss with people about the concept of survivors and victims.” He described how important the difference was “because survivors can act, survivors can denounce... we let people know what happened.” The rejection of the label of victim, and the reinforced commitment to move beyond the powerlessness it suggests, describes how each community member helps guide the other in their recovery. Claiming life as a survivor is an affirmation, and one that requires resistance to powerlessness. It is a journey of empowerment and acts as a foundation for the need to recover from torture that community members seek to fulfill.

Women participants in this study explained how important the survivor community was in influencing how they feel about themselves. Angelique

described how TASSC members help her recover. “They say ‘you been through that?’ and ‘you helped me; I saw you as strong’. The way you say it makes me feel okay.” To have their stories of torture interpreted as strength is the power shared among community members. The mantle of victimhood has been imposed on them by perpetrators, by helpful but unempowering or disempowering service providers, or by their own interpretation of their life events. At TASSC and Kovler, this mantle is refashioned into a tale of survival that is the essence of community influence.

Community members seek advice, and provide it to others. Being in a role to help others is important. Said Joelle, “It (influencing others’ recovery) is very, very, very important to me because it makes me to exercise what I know to those who don’t know. It helps me change most people from negative to positive. It helps me change part of their darkness to light.” Joelle explains the psychological benefit to herself by adding that helping others “is very, very, very important to me because it makes me fulfill my heart’s desires.”

Community influence. The way in which influence is exercised by a community goes beyond the attempts of individuals to encourage or discourage, to reinforce or ignore each other. Most of the participants interviewed in this study were human rights activists and/or political organizers in their home countries. They sought to promote democracy, hold accountable despotic rulers, advance women’s rights, move forward the integration of disabled people into society and share resources with impoverished people. They also worked to advocate for rights of ethnic minorities, protest the practice of torture, challenge

one-party rule, encourage collective action through free speech, undermine attempts to censor the press, and create a socialist country based on human rights. Not surprisingly, participants were leaders with influence. Their activism often strengthened their individual influence, and that of the communities (of women, political activists and poor people, for example) with whom most were working.

Several participants expressed how important it was to them that TASSC members seek to influence U.S. culture. Said Simon, “What I expect from an association like TASSC is basically to write to the United Nations or do something about it (torture) so that it doesn’t happen again.” The desire to engage in more advocacy and to exercise more influence was expressed by Joelle as well. She described how important it was to her that TASSC “sent me to the radio for some interviews.” For her, a main purpose of TASSC is to engage in advocacy and to change public policy and perception that condones torture. Joelle continued, “They’ve sent me to meetings. As a survivor, I talk. We’ve been to the Congress. We went round the Congress members appealing to them for certain laws not to be like this or to be like that.”

Individuals influence each other in the journey from victim to survivor. Similarly, in order for the community to overcome its label as victim, it too seeks to declare a more powerful identity. TASSC leads this effort through its advocacy activities devoted to the abolition of torture. TASSC sponsors lobby days in which survivors and their allies are asked to come to Washington, D.C. to discuss torture policy with members of Congress. Kovler supports these efforts as well. In these efforts, the individual empowerment of community members is



dependent upon the community's ability to organize individuals into a more powerful and influential collective (as represented through TASSC and Kovler as organizational entities). Individuals become more powerful because they are members of the community that acts together; the community is more influential and powerful because its members participate in activities that influence others. This reflects the mutual nature of power-sharing that McMillan (private correspondence, 2009) says is the ultimate goal of mutual influence as an element of a psychological sense of community.

Conclusion. The exercise of influence within this community has the goal of mutual recovery. It is described as a journey from victim to survivor. The declaration of survivor, as opposed to victim, is an empowering concept that is critical to each survivors' recovery. Survivors rely on the influence of others to help them recover.

The community also relies on its members to influence its collective empowerment. The abolition of torture is an important community value. In order to exercise influence on torture policy, the community relies on individual members to participate in collective action by lobbying Congress and other governmental entities. Individual members and the community as a whole thus influence each other's progress as empowered survivors.

#### Needs Fulfillment

McMillan and Chavis (1986) describe the integration and fulfillment of needs as reinforcement, a rewards system that communities offer their members. Sometimes communities offer members survival strategies, as may be the case

among immigrant survivors of torture. Other times, communities may offer shared values and convey a status to members based on the community's success or competencies. In personal correspondence (2009), McMillan called this a system of trade. The members of the community of immigrant survivors of torture trade interpretations of their stories as ways to fulfill their mutual needs to find honor in each other's experiences. This section describes the way in which survivors' needs are fulfilled by each other and by the staff with whom they work.

Members offer advice on how to heal. Within TAASC and Kovler, survivors share tips among themselves on how to survive, how to move beyond those times when they go through periods of sleeplessness, emotional distress or "bad feeling." The advice shared among survivors is rooted in how to recover from their experiences. "It (TASSC) has helped me heal," said Felizardo. "It's still very painful for me, but little by little I am not crying anymore." Their advice to each other is practical. Said Francie, "If I have difficulty to sleep.... People from TASSC can give you some advice, 'do like this' or 'close the door like that'.... It's hard to explain." Through their understanding of each other's needs, participants are able to offer practical tips that reflect understanding of the particular effects that torture has had.

Honorably surviving torture. Within the survivor community, survivors may reveal what may not be revealed with others. They rely on each other and trust each other to be accepted into the community as they explain what has happened to them, or the effects of what happened to them. It was at a TASSC meeting, said Evrard, where he was first able to speak of the rape of a family

member. He said about TASSC and Kovler, these are “two communities that know about what I am, what I am in my country. What is my daughter, what is my wife, what is my kids. It is TASSC and Kovler who knows it.” To have a place to belong, to be able to be one’s self is an important psychological need (Obst & White, 2004). This may even be more true of survivors who were so traumatically isolated from their sense of self as well as their families and communities.

Angelique described how helpful it is to talk to those who have gone through similar situations, horrible situations, and who have moved on to build a future. “It’s like they comfort you to be strong, to be fine, you’ll be fine, you’ll be fine.” She goes on to describe how they offer a sense that there is a future, and one that may include a change from those conditions in their countries they fled. “They can talk to you... they can help you. You can change your mind.... We look forward to change. It happened in different countries; we talk and it helps.” This aspect of fulfilling each other’s needs is also representative of the way in which they influence each other. A positive future for one survivor of genocide or torture influences another’s vision of what is possible.

The staffs of Kovler and TASSC. Because TASSC in Chicago and Washington, D.C. both meet in places where professional staff offer services, the reliance of the survivor community to get needs met often moved beyond advice and strategy-sharing. It also included how to find housing, where to get medical treatment, and on occasion, how to obtain cash assistance. Participants in this study described how in several cases, they were also able to find assistance in

meeting the needs of family members, some of whom were not actual survivors themselves. Most of these needs were met by staff of Kovler and TASSC.

There are distinctions between those who have experienced torture and those who have not, nonetheless, participants in these interviews embraced the staff as community members. In comparing the assistance he has received from non-survivor oriented communities, Okello said, “There are lots of communities that go out of their way to help people....” He added that unlike the staff at Kovler, “they don’t know how to do it.” This appreciation was also explained by Joelle. It was not only the broad range of assistance they offered (although that was important). It was also that “they will take time to mix a cup of tea and serve me with it because they want me to feel good, just because they want to console me. They will refer me to counselors; they will refer me to hospitals. They will refer me to some other small human rights groups where I will go and get food. I will even get clothing. I will go somehow to get beddings. Everything that will make my life comfortable.”

Conclusion. In summary, members of the survivor community, not surprisingly, fulfill each other’s mutual needs for comfort, understanding, advice about physical and psychological recovery and to a lesser degree, how to negotiate the culture of the U.S. communities in which they live. Needs fulfillment is an important aspect of their community. Needs are met through the exercise of influence of survivors in the community on each other. Members also rely on the professional people who are part of the survivor community to assist in securing services to meet their physical as well as emotional needs.

### Emotional Connections

Emotional connections are often based on a shared history and the extent to which members invest in the community (McMillan & Chavis, 1986).

McMillan (private correspondence, 2009) described emotional connections as the act of constructing a new drama, a new life story. The emotional connection among community members may be formed as a defense against those who may condemn, be fearful of, or who may stigmatize those who have been tortured.

These emotional connections are experienced at a deeper level than membership, influence or needs fulfillment. Participants' emotional connections are developed in large part from the earlier important interactions described through the McMillan and Chavis (1986) elements.

Understanding torture. Sharing stories about how one has been tortured, or what it requires to recover elicits more than advice. Although most participants did not describe in detail their emotional reactions to others, that emotions were part of their reaction was clear. Said Rodrigo, in describing his appreciation for the survivor community, “when you are out of it – I’ve gone through a lot – but someone has gone through worse – so it is easier to connect to them, to survivors. There is another degree, another emotional connection that goes deeper.” Okello added, “The emotional connection of talking to somebody who understands what I’ve gone through is so different.” These two participants express love for and love from other survivors.

Another participant, Francie, compared the sense of community she felt within TASSC to how she felt about her family. “Family, like my husband or my

kids, is something God has given you, but the community like TASSC is family with the heart. TAASC is from the soul.” Kiki also likened her appreciation to TASSC as that of family, “I feel like I have family here in America because I have TASSC.” Participants did not describe what the emotional connection is, only that they experienced it. Said Claire, “in your mind you know that you have a person who will take care of you, take care for you.” This emotionality of their stories can be understood best among those who understand the depth and breadth of that emotion. Marcello described the love: “you feel that you are loved, that you don’t feel isolated and that you don’t feel lonely.” Summing up how important his emotional bonds are to the community, Japhet said “Even if you were to separate yourself from the community, there would still be parts of the community that would stay with me. Even if you leave there are things that would make you come back.”

Each statement described here conveys a strong connection, suggesting links of trust and love. These emotional ties are more encompassing than the safety experienced within the boundaries of membership or the support felt from fulfillment of needs. These emotional connections provide the foundation for the spark of friendship that McMillan (1996) says characterizes this element of a psychological sense of community.

United Nations International Day in Support of Torture Victims. There is a worldwide celebration of survivors of torture promoted by the United Nations on June 26 of every year. Both Kovler and TASSC celebrate this event. June 26 is an opportunity to renew and reaffirm emotional connections among survivors

throughout the country, even throughout the world. For 12 years, TASSC has organized a 24-hour vigil and program for survivors in Washington D.C.

Immigrant survivors of torture living throughout the United States attend a 24-hour vigil held in Lafayette Park, participate in events designed to educate the public and members of Congress, and engage in more private sessions of story-sharing and support. In Chicago, TASSC and Kovler clients sponsor a dinner. In 2009, 150 people came together to offer awards to volunteers who had helped survivors, to hear each other's stories of recovery, and to share the food made by the multicultural and multinational members of this community.

Both of these events provide the rare opportunities for survivors to celebrate each other, to honor the renewed sense of hope and life that each is achieving through their individual and collective recovery. That this event occurs is important. Said Felizardo, "I'm connected to the Kovler Center because every 26 of June, every year they have celebration of international survivors." This event is the opportunity to share joy in each other's company, to speak openly about torture in a world where others are not interested in it.

The TASSC vigil is inevitably an emotionally bonding experience. At the vigil, survivors, volunteers, staff and the public set themselves down in Lafayette Park across from the White House. There they listen to each other's stories, seek inspiration from speakers, catch up on each other's news. At the June 2007 event, children and survivors formed a parade through Lafayette Park, celebrating their joy in coming together as family and friends. Others chained themselves to the White House fence as other speakers urged the closing of the Guantanamo

detention center, site of the U.S.' active pursuit of the torture of those detained within. These celebrations were sometimes sobering; the awareness of the suffering of those being tortured around the world was poignantly related to the suffering most of those participating in the vigil had experienced. Yet there was also a great sense of empowerment, of freedom, of sassiness. Among each other, there was celebration. In part, they celebrated their message of survival, directing it toward the U.S. government as a testament to how to overcome U.S. policies that have trained torturers (at the School of the Americas, for example) and supported torture at Guantanamo and throughout the world. It is a "must do" event for many survivors from across the country.

The events in Chicago are similarly important. In 2009, a participant who was interviewed a year prior and who had not received any treatment for her experience of torture, proudly shared her participation in the June 26 event. In 2008, upon seeing the researcher, survivors that included two people who had been interviewed beckoned me to join them at their table. June 26 offers a day to recognize the emotional connection and joy of the celebration of survivors of torture.

In the formal interviews conducted by this researcher, June 26 was not discussed by many of the participants in this study. The researcher had seen many participants at various June 26 events, however. The lively participation of interview participants was quite evident. At an August 2009 meeting with Chicago-based TASSC members, this researcher asked what June 26 meant to them. They described June 26 as a "line of remembrance" that included people



who had just arrived from where they had been tortured to those who have lived here for 30 years and more. The importance of listening to each other's stories was stressed; some people had been tortured within weeks of the June 26 event. Said one member, June 26 is the "epitome of what a survivor is. It is where we embrace our spirit and each other... it is rebirth."

Conclusion. Survivors feel an emotional bond with all those who have experienced torture. Survivors describe this bond among survivors as different from other emotional connections. The bonds felt convey a sense of love, similar to those experienced among family. This emotional connection is celebrated and reinforced annually through events celebrating the United Nations International Day in Support of Torture Victims, June 26. At June 26 events, participants celebrate the sense that they have been reborn as survivors, rather than victims, of torture.

The definitions of each the four elements of the McMillan and Chavis (1986) are included in Table 2. Also included are the major conclusions formed about how these elements describe interactions among immigrant survivors of torture.

Table 2: Summary of the Application of McMillan and Chavis' Elements of a Psychological Sense of Community as Experienced by Immigrant Survivors of Torture

	Membership boundaries	Mutual influence	Needs fulfillment	Emotional connections
According to McMillan & Chavis	Boundaries form the catchment area within which members experience belonging and emotional safety.	The caring about what others think or the idea that others will seek and listen to one's views. Members choose to join a community in order to find others who share their understanding of what is real in the world	The integration and fulfillment of needs as reinforcement, a rewards system that communities offer its members. Communities may offer shared values and strategies that convey a status to members based on the community's success or competencies.	Emotional connections are often based on a shared history and the extent to which members invest in the community.
Within the community of immigrant survivors of torture  Conclusion /quote	Torture survivors feel safe among other survivors. <i>It was very important for me to find TASSC... I had stories I couldn't tell anywhere.</i>  Empathy for torture survivors is another boundary enclosing the community. <i>I don't want it (the survivor community) to be an exclusive club for survivors. They could be fans of survivors who are empathizing ....</i>  The appreciation of torture and what it does to people forms a boundary of who is "in" and who is not. <i>We've talked in detail about the torture experience to</i>	Within the survivor community, members influence each other's recovery as survivors of torture. <i>We discuss with people about the concept of survivors and victims... because survivors can act, survivors can denounce... we let people know what happened.</i>  The community relies on the influence of its members	Within the survivor community, members offer each other advice on how to heal. <i>I have difficulty to sleep.... People from TASSC can give you some advice, 'do like this' or 'close the door like that'.... It's hard to explain.</i>  Members meet each other's needs to be recognized as people who have honorably survived torture.	Emotional connections are created among community members in response to their mutual understanding of torture. <i>When you are out of it – I've gone through a lot – but someone has gone through worse – so it is easier to connect to them, to survivors. There is another degree, another emotional connection that goes deeper.</i>  The celebration of the United Nations International Day in Support of Torture Victims

	<p><i>friends – but it is so much easier to talk to someone in TASSC.</i></p> <p>Despite the fact that this community is not geographically defined, setting is important in establishing a safe space for survivors. <i>When you meet me here at Kovler, that means I am part of the Kovler community.”</i></p> <p>Community boundaries embrace diversity across national boundaries. <i>It’s beautiful to see people from so many different countries, different cultures.... It’s beautiful to see.</i></p>	<p>in order to become an influential force affecting U.S. policy on torture. <i>What I expect from an association like TASSC is basically to write to the United Nations or do something about it (torture) so that it doesn’t happen again.</i></p>	<p><i>These are two communities that know about what I am, what I am in my country. What is my daughter, what is my wife, what is my kids. It is TASSC and Kovler who knows it.</i></p> <p>Many physical and practical needs are fulfilled by the staff. <i>They will take time to mix a cup of tea and serve me with it because they want me to feel good, just because they want to console me. They will refer me to counselors; they will refer me to hospitals. They will refer me to some other small human rights groups where I will go and get food. I will even get clothing. I will go somehow to get beddings. Everything that will make my life comfortable.</i></p>	<p>offers the community an opportunity to redevelop their stories. <i>I’m connected to the Kovler Center because every 26 of June, every year they have celebration of international survivors.</i></p>
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### Experiencing a Psychological Sense of Community

The third research question seeks to know if the interactions among immigrant survivors of torture can be summed up as forming a psychological sense of community. Despite the challenges, the examination of participants' description of their interactions in this paper leads to the conclusion that yes, immigrant survivors of torture do experience a psychological sense of community among each other. Table 1 summarizes the challenges faced by immigrant survivors in forming a psychological sense of community. The challenges may be so powerful that they inhibit some survivors from forming relationships with others. The participants in this study, however, were able to powerfully describe relationships they have with survivors.

The framework developed by McMillan and Chavis' (1986) helps organize those interactions into conceptual themes. One theme describes membership boundaries within which participants feel safe with each other. The sense of safety experienced offers enough security that survivors can share painful, wrenching stories of what happened to them. Among each other, survivors of torture influence each other's recovery. An important contribution to the safety experienced among others is the unequivocal condemnation of torture. Survivors feel safe with nonsurvivors who share that value within the settings offered by TASSC and Kovler.

Survivors influence each others' journey of recovery as one moving from victim to survivor. That journey is empowering for individuals and requires the influence of others to reinforce and honor that theme. As a community,

individual participants can come together to influence policy that reflects their collective empowerment. The community thus influences individuals' empowerment and individuals influence the empowerment of the community.

Participants in this study described how important it was for them to get their basic needs met. The staff of Kovler and TASSC played important roles in fulfilling those needs. At the same time, it was also important for survivors to offer each other advice on how to heal. Together, survivors need each other to recognize each other as people who have honorably survived torture. Having both physical and emotional needs met enables survivors to experience a full range of emotional bonds. Those bonds include a capacity to celebrate as survivors of torture.

Perhaps the most important element necessary to seal the web of interactions that characterizes a psychological sense of community is that of emotional connectedness. Survivors in this study describe a kind of joy that they experience among each other. That joy is experienced when similar others understand and acknowledge what it has meant to survive torture. It is a shared critical consciousness, one that is greatly appreciated. That appreciation is celebrated through June 26 events. June 26 marks the International Day in Support of Victims of Torture. Survivors in this study are profoundly moved by the opportunity to interact with others to declare what it is to be a survivor. This emotional bond is expressed as love, joy and shared purpose.

In totality, these elements describe a psychological sense of community among immigrant survivors of torture and their allies. Overcoming the challenges

faced by torture, survivors find love among each other that seals the psychological sense of community they experience.

## CHAPTER IV

### DISCUSSION

This study discusses three questions about immigrant survivors of torture in the United States. The first question seeks to understand how survivors describe the challenges they experience in forming a psychological sense of community. These challenges are summarized with supporting quotes in Table 1 (p. 46). The second question examines the interactions of immigrant survivors of torture among each other, using the McMillan and Chavis (1986) framework to understand how the interactions relate to psychological sense of community. Table 2 (p. 67) provides a snapshot of representative quotes that illustrate how survivors experience each element of a psychological sense of community. The third question seeks to understand whether immigrant survivors of torture do indeed experience a psychological sense of community among each other. Each of these questions is examined within the results found by this study and the literature found to explain the phenomena.

#### Challenges Created by Torture

The challenges to forming relationships that participants in this study voiced are consistent with those that are identified with survivors of torture. Torture is used to destroy people's spirit and their ability to trust others (Behnia, 2004; Center for Victims of Torture, 2005; Gonsalves et al., 1993). This study contributes to our understanding of how the lingering impact of torture undermines survivors' ability to form relationships with other people, even with people from their own country. Participants disclosed their reluctance to closely

associate with people from their country of origin who are also in exile in the United States. That immigrant survivors of torture may be reluctant to engage with people from their own country was unexpected. Discovering this reluctance furthers our understanding of how torture can continue to separate people who were once part of the same neighborhood or ethnic community. It also reinforces the concept that torture affects individuals and communities.

Another notable challenge faced by survivors of torture is the risk involved with story-sharing about their experiences. For many participants, the ability to share their stories among other survivors, however they may wish to tell it, was important. For several participants, however, the risks associated with story-sharing kept them from participating in the community. While narratives are frequently relied upon to facilitate recovery of persons who have been traumatized, survivors may be retraumatized by the *telling* of what happened to them (Kaminer, 2006). Some participants in this study, however, described their reluctance to *hear* others' stories. Vicarious traumatization can be experienced (Dunkley & Whelan, 2006) even by those who have suffered torture. This poses a dilemma. The survivor community offers a safe place for people to tell their stories and be heard with empathy. For some, however, this exercise of community empathy is a trigger for retraumatization.

The impact of torture on a psychological sense of community is yet to be fully comprehended. Survivors of torture are an understudied population. Survivors are reluctant to engage with immigrants from their own country, and they can be traumatized when they gather to hear each other's stories. These two



points add distinctive understanding to the factors that affect how survivors of torture can begin to establish the relationships with others that may lead to their participation in a psychological sense of community.

#### The McMillan and Chavis (1986) Framework

The McMillan and Chavis (1986) framework has been used to explore a psychological sense of community among single mothers (Brodsky, 1996); low income residents (Brodsky et al., 1999); members of socially disorganized communities (Cantillon et al., 2003); South African immigrants to Australia (Fisher & Sonn, 2002); science fiction fans (Obst et al., 2002); corporate employees Pretty & McCarthy, 1991); gay men (Proescholdbell et al., 2006); Latino adolescents (Sanchez et al., 2005); and members of politically constructed groups (Sonn & Fisher, 1996), among others. This research contributes to that body of work by exploring how a psychological sense of community is experienced among a population whose experiences separated them from community life. The exploration of how survivors develop a psychological sense of community contributes to our understanding of the importance of community, and the psychological motivations that facilitate individuals to come together as a community. This study contributes to the growing body of literature that examines how the elements of the McMillan and Chavis (1986) framework contribute to explaining a psychological sense of community.

#### Membership boundaries: Safety and belonging

Unsurprisingly, it is essential for members of the survivor community to appreciate torture and what it does to the collective and individual humanity of

people. This understanding of torture and unequivocal opposition to it is a rigid boundary, one required to meet the safety needs of community members. The concept of rigid or flexible boundaries in exploring a psychological sense of community has not been fully explored. Some studies identify how important social identification is with a strong psychological sense of community (McMillan & Chavis, 1986; Obst & White, 2006). Others explore the importance of the “we” vs. “them” in establishing a boundary (McMillan, 1996; McMillan & Chavis, 1986). None of these studies describe these boundaries as a fixed requirement of membership in the community, although rigid boundaries may be essential for building strong group relations in some circumstances (Banett & Hayden, 1977). This study indicates that a rigid values-based boundary may be a necessary contribution to the sense of safety needed to protect the development of relationships within some communities, such as those of torture survivors. This rigid boundary makes it possible for survivors and nonsurvivors to create a strong sense of community.

Beyond establishing the safety that is essential for relationship building to take place, this community is a flexible and welcoming one. In addition to survivors of torture, volunteers and staff participate as community members. Also remarkable about the boundaries of this community is the diversity found within it. Torture survivors may be from any country in the world. Members of this survivor community may have different needs and may seek a variety of ways to meet them. Cultural norms and values about interactions among men and women, about what constitutes a family, about personal space and touching are

among the set of issues that could prove volatile as such a diverse group interacts. The identification of torture survivors across ethnic and national boundaries may be termed macrobelonging, a concept that describes how individuals and subgroups of a community may interact while also acknowledging the diversity within it (Wiesenfeld, 1996). The survivor community may establish subgroups based on language, length of time in the country, and whether individuals are staff or survivor.

### Mutual Influence

McMillan (1996) claims that the exercise of mutual influence unveils how power works within a community. A major finding of this particular study is that the community is established based on how survivors influence each other to travel the path from victim to survivor. While influence may be exercised for other reasons in this community, the exercise of influence for becoming a survivor is at the heart of community life and members' aspirations. The staffs of Kovler and TASSC contribute considerable influence in helping move individuals toward the more powerful self concept encapsulated by the term survivor. This exercise of influence again reinforces the inclusion of nonsurvivors toward establishing a psychological sense of community.

This study's distinctive contribution is that it underlines how a community may be formed when a new concept of identity or basis for social identification is sought among its members. The influence necessary to reinforce a shared concept of survival is an essential exercise around which the community is formed. It is also a basis for the emotional bondedness that celebrating each other's survival

from torture helps facilitate. The exercise of influence within the community, consequently, is important to the boundaries and emotional bonds of community membership necessary to establish and celebrate the community's identity. In the case of torture survivors, their shared history of having been tortured is not the only boundary that defines the community's membership. Rather, the elements of membership boundaries, mutual influence and emotional connections interact to form a community based on the prospect of shared identification as survivors. This also reinforces how important the concept of social identification with a community is, particularly when one chooses that identification (Obst & White, 2007).

The exercise of influence within the community also adds to our understanding of how community identification can be used to overcome the oppression of others (Sonn & Fisher, 1996). Victims are so categorized through social interaction (Leisenring, 2006). In the case of battered women, states Leisenring's article, the discourse around women as victims led to blaming victims who were so innocent of the fate they received that not to leave their batterer was attributed to women's weakness (and not the systems that failed to enable women to do so). Victims overcome the oppression experienced through torture by influencing each other's recovery in ways that empower individual members of the community and the community itself through the self subscribed label as survivor. This empowerment process contributes to the psychological sense of community experienced among participants in this study.

The influence that members are able to exercise within a community may

be iterative with the ability of the community to influence others. Torture survivors fear a continued vulnerability; they fear they will be tortured again (Magwaza, 1999). One method to undermine that vulnerability may be for torture survivors within TASSC and Kovler to advocate for policies that condemn torture and hold accountable those who perpetrate it. Their ability to effect policy is dependent, at least in part, on their ability to organize their individual efforts into a collective one (Bobo, Kendall & Max, 2001). To form the collective, individual members must encourage participation by others.

Potential community members become attracted to a community in which they feel that they are influential (McMillan & Chavis, 1996). The community's influence also contributes to the safety that survivors can experience within the country in which they reside. The organizations (TASSC, Kovler Center) through which community members interact are actively seeking to affect torture policies of the United States. Borrowing from the empowerment literature, empowering organizations create empowered individuals who, iteratively, help sustain empowering organizations. McMillan's (1996) vision that mutual influence is about how power is exercised within a community may also need to address how influence is exercised by a community, and the individual-community synergy possible in this exercise of mutual influence.

#### Fulfillment of Spiritual, Emotional, Physical or Mental Needs

Among survivors of torture, the ability to get basic needs met is vital to their ability to gain the sense of self needed to develop relationships with others. The ability of the settings to provide essential services for health, legal matters,

negotiation of a new country as well as physical and mental health care may be a primary underpinning of the safety members can feel within the community. Best practice models that provide services to refugees and survivors of torture often must rely on collaborations that utilize the specific talents and contributions of participating entities (Ramaliu & Thurston, 2003). The same kind of collaboration, only among individuals rather than entities, may be essential for meeting the complicated needs of survivors of torture. Nonsurvivors contribute to meeting the basic living and psychological needs; survivors enhance the understanding and resolution of the psychological needs particular to survivors of torture.

#### Emotional Connections

Torture often evokes very negative emotional associations. Suffering, fear, sorrow and shame can be provoked by torture. Yet among participants in this study, torture was also associated with appreciation for survival, love for others who continue to suffer from torture, joy at being with those who have had similar experiences of torture and a shared determination to seek torture's abolition. The conversion of torture from negative to also include positive associations is perhaps the essential ingredient for the emotional celebration of what it is to be a member of this community. The dynamic of converting the negative to positive was evidenced in the South African immigrants to Australia who converted the label "colored" from a pejorative into a political organizing construct to obtain a voice, influence and a sense of community (Sonn & Fisher, 1996). It was also a catalyst for the explanation of emotional connections

provided by McMillan and Chavis (1986) in their seminal piece, when they described “Black soul” as the embrace of Blackness as had been rejected by Whites. In all of these examples, community members asserted a more positive identity based upon the pejorative that others had assumed of them. The celebration of the more positive identity is, once again, an example of how empowerment strengthens a psychological sense of community. It also forms a positive source of love and the emotional connections that bind survivors to each other within the community.

#### Implications for Practice, and Further Theory and Research

This study has implications for torture treatment programs and immigrant support groups, as well as for social scientists examining a psychological sense of community. Torture treatment centers frequently advocate for survivors to develop relationships with communities in order to further survivors’ recovery. These centers and programs may need to encourage further research into the ways in which community life contributes to the recovery of survivors of torture over time. It is hoped that the research protocol described in this study may provide some guidance for how to do so.

A notable point about the challenges faced by survivors of torture is the risk involved with story-sharing about their experiences. For many participants, the ability to share their stories among other survivors, however they may wish to tell it, was important. For several participants, however, the risks associated with story-sharing kept them from participating in the community. The benefits of sharing and receiving support and the concurrent risks of vicarious

retraumatization merit thoughtful exploration. Torture treatment centers and programs may wish to develop methods to accommodate those who do not conform to group norms of sharing stories.

The examination provided in this study also uncovers the need to further understand each individual element of the McMillan and Chavis (1986) framework. The ways in which a community can construct a new identity based on its social interactions with others may further help us understand the porous nature of membership boundaries. The exercise of a community's influence on its environment, rather than a more narrow analysis of how influence is bartered and focused within a community, may help us understand what a setting can do to facilitate empowerment and community-building. Understanding the relationship between how basic human and psychological needs are fulfilled and the ability of those who have been traumatized to form communities may help develop further models of community-based recovery. Among people who are recovering from trauma, understanding how new identities can be created by a community may also aid in developing recovery models.

This study required more time than is usually the case to complete a master's thesis. Recruitment of survivors of torture as research participants requires building trusting relationships that develop over time. In the case of this study, that took over a year for the author who had previously been actively engaged with the survivor community for over a decade on advocating for human rights issues. Consultative processes exercised with survivor groups, the thesis consultation group, and torture treatment center staff also contributed to the length



of time needed to complete this study. Although engaging in this research has been a rich exercise, the length of time necessary for its completion suggests it is inappropriate for a master's thesis project.

### Strengths and Limitations

This study examined the life of community building among immigrant survivors of torture who participate in the events of the Marjorie Kovler Center for the Treatment of Survivors of Torture and in TASSC International, and who agreed to participate in this study. Its generalizability is thus limited. Those who agreed to be interviewed were self-selected and that may reflect the biases of individuals who are more likely to engage with others and consequently, to engage in communities. Despite that potential limitation, study participants revealed much about their understanding of what it means to be part of a community of survivors. They may not speak for all survivors, but the depth of their experiences is meaningful in understanding how a psychological sense of community may be built among immigrant survivors of torture in the U.S.

Other limitations may occur as a result of the cultural, language and gender differences among the participants, interpreters and the researcher. Exacerbating such differences was the emotional nature of participants' experiences and the emotional reactions that occurred in response to them. There is no strict formula for negotiating such complexity and the potential for error abounds. At the same time, however, the richness of the experience of a psychological sense of community amidst such diversity could only have been captured by engaging, not avoiding, such diversity.

### Conclusion: A Psychological Sense of Community

Survivors of torture do not merely overcome the challenges posed by torture in order to develop a psychological sense of community among each other. Participants in this study used the understanding of torture and the unequivocal condemnation of it as a boundary within which they could develop connections with others. Among those who share this value, members influenced each other's new narratives about what it means to have been tortured, and about what it means to become survivors. This influence toward survivorship filled an important psychological need. The new narrative and the fulfilled needs also became the basis for the emotional bonds that strengthened the connections of individuals to the community. This insight helps us understand how the elements of the psychological sense of community can complement one another in working together. It clarifies how communities can aid in the recovery of those who have been significantly injured by torture.

## CHAPTER V

### SUMMARY

If Fisher & Sonn (2002) are correct, and everyone wants to be a member of a community, torture survivors will have particular challenges. To develop a psychological sense of community after being tortured, they will need to develop or recover the ability to trust, to feel emotional connections to others, and to participate in building the life of a community with a degree of personal agency. They have to become *survivors*, and not just victims.

This study examines the experience of forming a psychological sense of community among immigrant survivors of torture. It first describes how the experience of torture may inhibit individuals' abilities to form relationships with others. The study then uses the framework of a psychological sense of community as developed by McMillan & Chavis (1986) to identify the ways in which survivors of torture interact. The study concludes that survivors of torture do form a psychological sense of community with each other.

Survivors of torture have been irrevocably affected by their torture. Participants in this study who have been tortured, in addition to those who know and appreciate the consequences of torture, have together formed a community. Staff, torture survivors, volunteers and torture abolition advocates from diverse countries, culture and perspectives find safety among those who understand and accept each other. Community members work together to recover from torture, sharing tips on how to heal. As part of their healing, community members seek to influence not only each other, but also the setting in which the community exists.

Participants in this study sought opportunities to influence U.S. policy on torture, for example. Within the community, the story of victimhood that all those who have been tortured might have had is translated into a shared story of survival. The emotional connections made through their shared interpretations provide the basis for rituals of celebration and love among those who have been tortured.

Qualitative research methods were used to provide an in-depth understanding of how a psychological sense of community might work within this vulnerable population. Interviews were conducted with sixteen immigrant survivors of torture; eight men and eight women. Survivors were recruited with the assistance of two community partners: the Marjorie Kovler Center for the Treatment of Survivors of Torture and a survivor-led organization, Torture Abolition Survivors Support Coalition International (TASSC). Interviews were held in Chicago, Illinois and Washington, D.C; all were conducted by the researcher. Because of the vulnerability of this population and the effect that this vulnerability has in limiting research, the methods used to conduct the study are described in depth.

Torture survivors are vulnerable to retraumatization; the research protocol was planned to guard against any negative effects of participation. Community members actively participated in the research process. Meetings were regularly held with the Kovler Center staff and TASSC International to solicit their input. Another feature of the research methodology was the active engagement of a Thesis Consultation Group (TCG) that formally worked with the researcher throughout the entire research process. The Thesis Consultation Group included

survivors of torture, torture abolition advocates, academic advisors and a facilitator.

This study relied on grounded theory to build a coding scheme that was interpreted through grounded and phenomenological theories. Broad conceptual frameworks were identified and variations within them explored. Those frameworks helped explain the diversity of understandings and nuances within broad constructs and themes to determine the meaning of interactions among torture survivors.

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Appendix A

Interview Protocol for Survivors Regarding Sense of Community

Hi. Thank you so much for your willingness to participate in this research study. This research is meant to explore how torture survivors and communities relate to each other, and what community may mean to survivors.

I am interested in this topic for many reasons and thought it might help to explain a bit of my story and how we came to be here.

I have been a human rights activist for much of my life. Most recently, I worked at Amnesty International USA. There I met many survivors, and worked to stop torture and for holding perpetrators criminally accountable for what they have done. I think we did good things but I felt that we often ignored what happened in the lives of survivors, when they returned to communities, or when they moved to new places. Maybe an individual survivor can find some kind of justice now and then -- but how do survivors and communities relate with each other after the torture stops, or after the trial is over? Is a sense of community important? Is there justice within the community?

I left my job and became a doctoral student in Community Psychology at DePaul University to explore these questions about survivors and community. It's going to take a long time to pursue these issues! This study is one step of what I hope will be more research on how survivors and others form community relationships. The research I am doing right now is for my master's thesis.

I will ask you questions, designed to guide our conversation. Please feel free to stop at any time, ask questions and comment, or to stop the interview altogether. Also, there is something personal in our exchange, and most of the focus is on you and what you have to say. If you wish for me to answer questions, though, please ask them. We are in this interview together.

I am doing what I know how to do to help make this interview comfortable for you, and ethical in how I proceed. I am explaining what will happen so that you know as well as possible what we are going to talk about. Should you become uncomfortable at any time, we can stop the interview or go on to another question. I do not intend to ask you for specific *details* about your experience, but hope to hear your story as you would like to tell it. I will ask you about your experiences of violence in general terms only because I am trying to document that you are a survivor, so that I collect this information from a group of people whose experiences are shared. I will also ask about who the perpetrator is, for the same reasons.

I would like to tape record this session so that I will have a complete and accurate account of our interview. I can also pay attention to you better in this interview when I use the recorder, because I'm not writing so much. If there are times that you don't want something taped, that is fine. We can stop and restart the tape. Just let me know.

The information you provide will be kept confidential. The interpreter and I will be the only ones in the room with you. I will record our conversation so that I can transcribe it, and will then provide you the opportunity to check and change what you have said. Some students at DePaul will help with the transcription, but they will not know who you are. What I write will focus on major themes, not on reporting what particular individuals say. When I quote you or describe your ideas, it will be to illustrate an important theme and your name will not be used.

I have an agreement – a certificate of confidentiality - from the United States government that certifies that any information I receive from you cannot be obtained by any federal, state or local government for any reason.

There will be many questions about your relationships with communities. It is not necessary for you to think a long time to try to determine what communities you may have been a member of. I want to know if you have or have *not* been a part of communities. I also want to learn if there are some communities you have deliberately not wanted to have been part of, or if you have been generally unattached to communities. I am specifically not asking whether survivors should reconcile with torturers. There are no “right” answers. I am interested in your ideas and experiences.

I don't know what your answers will be, of course. Whatever they are, I hope that this research might offer insight into the kinds of ways that communities can support those who have been targeted for state-sponsored torture.

Some of the questions may seem repetitious or simple, but that is because I am trying not to suggest that there is a particular kind of answer being sought. There isn't, I just want to be careful in what I am asking, and clear.

If you would like a written transcript of this conversation, I will be able to provide that for you in a few months, after the recording is transcribed. You will be able to review it and correct any answers. I can only provide this transcript in English, however. I will ask XXX to help once again with translation if you need it, when the transcripts are done. Also, if you would like a final summary of my paper (or the whole thesis), I can send that to you. It, too, will be in English. I will be able to provide a summary in your language if you would like that.

If at any time you feel uncomfortable, please do let me know. We can terminate this interview at any time. You can also opt not to answer any or some questions. The research is important, however, to help understand how individuals and communities recover from torture. I appreciate your willingness to take part in it.

Is it okay with you that I start the tape here?  
*Start tape.*

This interview is *your* interview; it is your opportunity to speak about your



experience and what you think. If there are issues I don't ask, or you want to speak about in a different way, please do so. Is there something I can do right now or throughout the interview to make this comfortable for you? For example, I know that some people do not like eye contact. Do you prefer eye contact or no? Is this setting comfortable for you?

Do you have any questions about anything gone over so far? Is it okay to begin this interview?

Have you reviewed and okayed the form that says you are giving "informed consent" to be part of this study? If yes, may I have it? If not, should we go over it? I know that sometimes there are problems in accurately translating or communicating "informed consent". Can you tell me how you understand it?

Where is this interview taking place? (This is for the purpose of the tape recorder.)

Did you receive a referral to this interview? If so, from whom or what program?

Can you tell me about where you are currently living?

If probes needed:

For how long have you lived there?

How long have you been in the United States?

Can you tell me about your family?

If probes needed:

Does your family live with you or somewhere else?

Do you have a partner or spouse? Is your partner here or somewhere else?

What about children?

Extended family?

I'd like to ask now, what is your age? Gender?

Can you explain something to me about your country of origin and where you are from? Who are your people?

Can you tell me more about your own story? What led you to come to the United States?

If probes needed:

Some people are targeted for political violence by governments because of their politics, gender, activism or for no reason at all. Do you think you were targeted for a specific reason? If yes, on what basis were you targeted? Can you tell me about that?

I am going to ask questions about communities you have and have not been a part of.

To begin, when I use the word community, what does that mean to you?

Now that you are in the U.S., are there any communities that you feel you are connected to, or a member of?

If YES:

What are those communities? What about them is appealing to you?

When you say that you feel like you are a part of community, what does that mean to you?

For all, yes or no:

Are there U.S. communities you would want to be a part of?

If yes:

What are they?

What is it about these communities that lead you to think you would like to be part of them?

For all, yes or no:

Are there U.S. communities you do not want to be part of? Which ones? What is it about these communities that lead you to not want to be part of them?

May we go on to discuss the experience of communities in your country of origin?

Did you feel that you were a part of any communities in your country of origin?

If YES:

With what communities do you, or did you, most identify?

What is it about these communities that lead you to identify with them?

When you say that you feel like you were a part of these communities, what does that mean to you?

For all, yes or no:

Were there communities in your country of origin you wanted to be part of?

Which ones? Can you explain what about these communities made you want to be a part of them?

Were there communities you did not want to be part of? Which ones? Can you explain what about these communities made you not want to be a part of them?

For you, do you feel that being connected to communities is important, not important or somewhere in between?

Has being part of a community or communities affected your process of healing?  
How so?

Has not being part of a community or communities affected your process of healing? How so?

Is there any thing else you might want to tell me about your relationships with communities, or that you want to comment on?

I would like to ask you briefly about state-sponsored violence you may have been subject to. I am interested because I would like to know if survivors have a different view of community than people who have not had similar experiences. I do not want to ask about details of the experience itself, but you know I am here to listen to anything you share with me. Can we go on?

Have you experienced state-sponsored violence that amounted to torture? How long ago? To the extent that you are comfortable telling me, can you explain what happened?

Probe: Who committed these violations?

In reflecting on what we have talked about today, do you believe that your experience affected how you think about being a part of communities? Can you tell me about that?

Communities have been described in academic literature using the following elements. Can you review them and tell me which ones, if any, make sense to you? If so, how?

- trust among community members
- a sense of empowerment within the community
- safety - physical, emotional, spiritual and mental
- mutual influence
- shared emotional connections
- a sense that spiritual, emotional, physical or mental needs are being met
- membership, where some people are *in* and some people are not.

Can you rank each of the characteristics on a scale of 1 to 5, with 5 being very important to you, and 1 being not important?

Do you have any closing comments or questions? What are your reactions to this interview?

Thank you for participating in this research project. Your story and experiences are very important, and I hope that this interview will help develop information that promotes the healing of those who have survived torture.

I have asked XXXX to sit with you following this interview, to see if you would like to discuss how you are feeling or what you think about having gone through this process. XXXXX is waiting AT THIS LOCATION.

Thank you again.

Appendix B

Thesis Consultation Group and Research Team Members

Thesis Consultation Group Members

Janet MacLean – facilitator. Janet is a pediatric chaplain.

Mario Venegas. Mario is a survivor of torture from Chile.

Christopher B. Keys. Chris is a professor and former chairperson of the Psychology Department of DePaul University.

Midge Wilson. Midge is the Associate Dean in the Liberal Arts and Sciences College and a professor in the Psychology Department of DePaul University.

Adriana Portillo Bartow is a torture abolition advocate.

Martine Songasonga works for the Heartland Alliance for Human Needs and Human Rights, and is a survivor of torture from the Democratic Republic of Congo.

Aaron Spevecek is the former Administrative Director of the Kovler Center.  
Marianne Joyce is a staff person at the Kovler Center.

Research Team Members

Amanda Garcia

Ana Martinez

Carly Kaplan

Kelly Hughes

Kirsten Dickins

Margaret Miller

## Appendix C

### Pseudonyms and Countries of Origin

Males

Felizardo – Angola

Japhet, Congo

Eddie, Albania

Evrard, Congo

Okello, Uganda

Simon, Congo

Rodrigo, Chile

Marcelo, Chile

Females

Anamaria, Guatemala

Claire, Cameroon

Kiki, Eritrea

Francie, Gabon

Kharen, Philippines

Angelique, Rwanda

Joelle, Cameroon

Farai, Zimbabwe, family member