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Building and Restoring Relationships Using the Art of Invitation: An Exploratory Phenomenological Study

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Relationships are fundamental to quality of life and purpose, yet the importance of motivation to build and restore relationships is often overlooked. When one perceives relationships absent of personal benefit, motivation to invest in relationships is challenged. Social exchange theory suggests that when individuals value altruism—putting others' needs above one's own needs—they are more likely to invest energy and time into building and restoring relationships without immediate personal gain. The Art of Invitation (AOI), a psycho-educational approach to relationship building, aims to help participants connect the altruistic value of being “invitational” to the desire to build and restore relationships. This phenomenological qualitative study used purposeful sampling to examine the impact and application of the Art of Invitation on the lives of thirteen former participants. Findings indicated main themes of one's motivation to be invitational, increased openness/non-judgmental approach to others, increased self-awareness, and utilization of second thought as a relationship building skill. It also found support for universal application of the AOI across a wide variety of populations.

RELATIONSHIPS ARE FUNDAMENTAL TO ONE'S QUALITY OF LIFE AND purpose. The need to belong is a strong motivator to seek and sustain positive interpersonal connections (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Everyday human connections undergird health and well-being as support is shared and feelings of loneliness are alleviated (Cyranski

et al., 2013). Social relationships can positively influence one's coping ability, health status, and opportunities for guidance and support (Lincoln, 2008). Cardiovascular health is linked to interpersonal awareness (Uchino, Sanbonmatsu, & Birmingham, 2013). Rook & Charles (2017) confer that positive close social interactions are tied to improved health outcomes.

Courtship, marriage, and parental relationships provide a basis for healthy social exchanges (Paat, 2013). The significance of relationship on purpose and productivity is demonstrated by Bainok, Puddesters, Mac Donald, Archibald, & Kuhl (2012), who find team building among healthcare workers impacts communication, trust, satisfaction, and enhanced quality of care.

People engage with others to fulfill basic human needs. However, when needs are not met, social interactions are avoided or eliminated altogether (Thomas & Iding, 2012). Social exchange theory explains that individuals or "actors" invest in relationships when interactions are of personal benefit and withdraw if interactions prove too costly (Cook, 1987; Stafford, 2015). This theoretical perspective focuses on the outcome or payoff within an exchange or sequence of exchanges (Chadwick-Jones, 1976). Richard Emerson, one of the founders of social exchange theory, suggests that relational exchanges materialize at the subconscious and conscious level and are influenced by one's conditioning. According to Emerson (1987), individuals have choices and subconscious conditioned responses that account for first reactions and ongoing responses (Cook, 1987). For example, receiving a criticism or an insult may trigger an initial impulse to retaliate or withdraw, however, consciously connecting to the benefits of the relationship may motivate the individual to suppress such urges and respond in a more mutually satisfying manner.

Recent developments in social exchange theory include an understanding that individuals have self-interests and interdependent interests. Some interactions are pursued out of self-interest, while others are pursued with the understanding that what benefits everyone also benefits self (Stafford, 2015). Interdependence occurs as exchanges stemming from the efforts of one influence the outcomes of another (Stafford, 2015). However, mutual exchanges do not always achieve equity, profit, or loss, and can develop over time (Segre, 2014). Rook (1984) points to the importance of assessing the quality of social ties, noting that problematic ties with others was found to have potent negative effects of psychological well-being in older women.

Human needs, basic drives, and goals generate energy behind social exchanges. Needs create yearnings, which energize individuals toward growth and action. Satisfying needs and moderating motivations drive individuals toward the pursuit of goals (Thomas & Iding, 2012); motivation drives choices (Vogl-Bauer, 2003). The amount of energy one exerts to satisfy a need or the amount of sacrifice required for another's need is proportionate to the intensity of the need (Thomas & Iding, 2012). Positive and negative

outcomes of the relationship are broadly defined and include any positive reward (i.e. companionship, security) or negative consequence (i.e. financial expense, disappointment) (Leary, 2010; Bradbury & Karney, 2014). Honeycutt (1981) notes that rewards in social exchange may not be immediate or direct. Extrinsic or material rewards often have intrinsic value. For example, one may be employed and receive a salary and also enjoy the company of coworkers. Psychological needs contribute to what rewards are sought in relationships (Blau, 2008).

Developing social neuroscientific discoveries provides evidence of how biological/neurological body systems impact social connection (Gerdes, Lietz, & Segal, 2011; Hari, Henriksson, Malinen, & Parkkonen, 2015; Gottman, 2011). Skill at interacting with others is developed as one's genetic makeup provides a range of potential and is influenced by the environment in which the skill of interaction is learned (Thomas & Iding, 2012). The need to receive support is universal, yet the ability to reciprocate this response in providing support to others is not inheritably genetically connected. Personality influences one's perception of others and the context of the relationship (Lincoln, 2008).

However, within one's genetic and cultural context, social exchange is a voluntary process which relies on trust and goodwill (Stafford, 2015). Expectations vary and are specific to each human exchange. The context of a social exchange influences individual interaction (Blau, 2008). The time frame in these relational exchanges is negotiable, flexible, and undetermined (Stafford, 2015).

Von Lange (2014) identifies six ways in which individuals orient themselves toward others relationally:

- (1) altruism (enhancement of other's outcomes), (2) cooperation (enhancement of joint outcomes), (3) egalitarianism (enhancement of equality in outcomes), (4) individualism (enhancement of one's own outcomes), (5) competition (enhancement of relative advantage over others), and (6) aggression (minimization of other's outcomes).

Although some (Blau, 2008; Honeycutt, 1981) within social exchange theory conclude that altruism does not exist, Von Lange (2014) suggests that altruism exists in the context of empathy and interpersonal connection. Chadwick-Jones (1976) proposes that altruism is an infrequent occurrence and is most likely supported as an internal reward linked to the approval of others. Similarly, cooperation enhancement of outcomes for all involved is more likely fostered when individuals identify with the group, value others, and feel connected.

Stafford (2015) finds reviewers of social exchange theory conclude that relationships based upon "love" do not always equate to a simple

exchange and that the notion of altruism tests the basis of the theory. Pure motives of altruism are difficult to establish because in giving to others, latent and often subconscious, expectations are embedded. Helping others brings social rewards of recognition, psychological self-satisfaction, social approval, and possible reciprocation (Blau, 2008). Acting altruistically can be a reward in itself because of the positive feelings one receives from helping and acting charitably for another person (Stafford, 2015). Blau (2008) suggests that following one's moral imperatives, regardless of cost, is a guide and restraint for human behavior. He contends that complete moral compliance in the face of negative consequences is rarely achieved and only found by "saint and fool" (p.18). Bell (2009) supports the notion that when a person's motivation to act benevolently toward another comes from a moral conviction, an intrinsic reward will be gained by following such conviction. The sociological literature suggests morality as the most plausible explanation to explain why actors, being naturally self-seeking, choose to restrain from self-interests in favor of others (Bell, 2009). Jost and Kay (2010) find the existence of altruism relates to social justice concerns, where people are known to be motivated to make the world a better place.

Judeo-Christian traditions support altruistic behavior without an expectation of personal reward (Friedman, 2002). Additionally, altruism is often identified with The Golden Rule—do unto others as you would have them do unto you (Matthew 7:12, Luke 6:31, The King James Version; Scott & Seglow, 2008). Christianity identifies charity as the highest form of altruism and an important human virtue (Arnold, 2008). The reward in these contexts is suggested to be contained in the personal satisfaction of following the moral and spiritual practices of love (Arnold, 2008). Meaningful connections with religious concepts increase prosocial behavior (Duhaimé, 2015). Research links prosocial behaviors to elevation, an emotion linked to spiritual uplift from morally sanctioned behaviors (Erickson & Abelson, 2012).

Gaps in Research

Altruism, caring for others' well-being and needs, is associated with terms like prosocial, compassion, and empathy (Lown, 2016). The origin, motivation for, and benefits of altruistic efforts are debated (Einolf, 2011; Friedman, 2002; Simpson, Harrell, & Willer, 2013; Beardman, 2012). Morality may also be an influencing factor, yet has been largely ignored by the fields of sociology and psychology (Simpson, Harrell & Willer, 2013). Schilbach et al. (2013) suggest the influence of reward as a motivating force in social interactions needs to be investigated as it not only impacts cognition and self-regulation, but also relationships.

Prosocial behaviors can be taught. Kramer, Caldarella, Young, Fischer, and Warren (2014) report increased prosocial behavior from teaching emotional and relational skills to children. Lown (2016) demonstrates that teaching compassion and empathy increases prosocial behaviors in medical students. Bankard (2015) suggests that moral intuition, emotional and cognitive processing as the primary energy for relational and prosocial actions, can be trained to increase prosocial behavior. Many religions see, as part of their teaching, the importance of the Golden Rule (Joseph, 2012) as a moral and behavioral imperative. However, exploration of programs intended to connect altruism with relational skill building are absent in the literature. This article seeks to fill this gap by gleaning the lived experiences of participants who have completed an Art of Invitation workshop.

The Art of Invitation Overview

The Art of Invitation (AOI), a psycho-educational approach to relationships, aims to help participants connect the altruistic value of being “invitational” to the desire to build and restore relationships. AOI equips participants, interested in becoming more inviting to others, with concepts and tools for gaining interpersonal awareness and removing relational barriers. It aims to help participants develop a sense of relational “belonging,” whether an “insider” or “outsider” in any particular circumstance. In addition, AOI seeks to strengthen one’s ability to gain self-control when relationally triggered and establish congruence between internal experience and external expression (Teike, 2012). Initially created by its founder, Debbie Teike, for seminary students whose future profession requires them to transcend communication barriers in uncomfortable or unfamiliar settings, the program was subsequently presented in churches, a county jail, and nonprofit settings (Art of Invitation, n.d.). By the spring of 2014, approximately 450 people had participated in an AOI workshop.

The eight sections of workshop training include: understanding insider and outsider relational experiences, three interactional approaches (i.e. invitational, presentational, and confrontational), three keys to invitational communication, the second thought process, barriers to invitation (i.e. conflicting values, unmet relational needs, emotional dysregulation, and non-invitational thought), and strategies for overcoming relational barriers through invitation. The Art of Invitation framework is shared through the presentation of ideas, individual and group exercises, videos, discussion, and accompanying written materials. AOI explains how an “invitational mindset” is key to successful interactions and communication.

An invitational approach, as taught in AOI, strives to relate to others as equals, regardless of role or position. It sees value and worth in others and self, despite overt or subtle differences which can be equated to disparities

in power and privilege. Power is a significant factor in relational experience and outcomes, and power differentials between individuals are expressed in style of communication (Albarracin & Vargas, 2010; Fiske, 2010). Gordan, Tanrel, and Duff (2014) discuss an individual's ability to adapt to a communication style, a term called synchrony, as an essential ingredient for social connectedness. Whereas, Echterhoff, Kopietz and Higgins (2017) suggest that human exchanges are often adapted to the audience's attitude. In one study involving referees testing the notion of fairness, a calmer tone of voice and consideration of content were significant to players' acceptance of an on-the-field decision (Simmons, 2010).

Communication style involves characteristics such as directness, length and rate of speech, and manners, all of which can impose power upon another (Fiske, 2010). AOI distinguishes between three types of communication. A presentational approach focuses solely upon conveying information, relating much like a teacher in style. A confrontational approach is directive, highlighting disagreement and using a corrective, oppositional, and pressuring style, whereas, learning to utilize an invitational approach allows for reciprocal relationships. The purpose of distinguishing between these styles is to highlight subtle differences in approach, redirecting individuals from "telling" to mutual sharing (Schein, 2013, p. 58). Participants learn that sharing information (i.e. presenting) and working through differences (i.e. confronting) are natural and normal elements of human communication in a relationship (Epley & Waytz, 2010). AOI helps participants match motive (i.e. altruistic or other) in exchanges with communication style (i.e. invitational, presentational, and confrontational) to provide clarity of intention and approach. Invitational communication takes into consideration the perceived level of trust in the relationship, and information or correction is not forced upon another. Trust is a factor in positive exchanges (Zhao, Ha, & Widdows, 2013; Fidler, 2005; Siegrist & Zingg, 2014; Lieberman, 2010). At the end of each AOI program, participants offer feedback on the relevance of the material as well as suggestions for improvement.

Methodology

Research design

This study examined the lived experiences of AOI participants utilizing an Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) qualitative design. Phenomenology assumes that human beings can consciously express lived experiences (Creswell, 2013). Utilizing participants' descriptive narratives, the researchers gained insight into the overarching themes in order to understand the impact from participants' personal and relational experiences (Giorgi, 2012). Qualitative

methodology allowed the researchers to collect and analyze data from thirteen individuals who completed the AOI workshops in order to discover the essence and application of their experiences. According to Smith and Osborn (2014), Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis gives an understanding of the insights into how purposefully selected attendees have integrated their experience of AOI. The data gathered from interviews with the participants was used to interpret the significance of their experience with AOI and to appraise the meanings attached to their experience (Creswell, 2013). The purpose of this study was to develop a description of the integration of AOI experiences. Qualitative research of this nature takes into account variation and context of participant experiences, which can then be applied to Art of Invitation improvement and future research surrounding the effects of altruism and communication style on relationships (Gentles, Charles, Ploeg, & McKibbon, 2015). Purposeful sampling, with maximum variation (Patton, 2002) facilitated the inclusion of as many variables as possible within the research sample of those who had completed the AOI workshop training.

Sampling Design and Participants

Upon the Institutional Review Board's (IRB) approval from Indiana Wesleyan University, the researchers first reviewed the 25 AOI presentations, taking place between the fall of 2009 and spring of 2014 for diversity of group size, presentational format (i.e. one day workshop or weekly/bi-weekly), and setting (i.e. faith-based off campus, church, seminary, jail, small group, not-for-profit). Leaders and organizers from these diverse venues were then contacted to extend an invitation to past participants who might have an interest in volunteering for the study. Those who volunteered were then contacted via email or telephone by the researchers to explain the study, its purpose, their voluntary participation and rights. A purposeful sample consisting of 13 former AOI participants was secured. Participants ranged in age from 28 to 81 years old, with a mean age of 46. Seven of the thirteen participants were female. Participants' employment status included: unemployed while incarcerated, stay-at-home parent, business owner, business employee, volunteer coordinator, seminary student, case manager, director of a community service agency, nurse, church musician, teacher, social worker, and retired. Ten participants were married, and three were single. Two participants were African-American; eleven were Caucasian. An average of one year and ten months transpired from when the participants participated in AOI to when they were interviewed. Table 1 depicts the demographics of participants.

Table 1
Demographic of Participants

PARTICIPANT #	AGE	ETHNICITY	OCCUPATION	MARITAL STATUS
1	81	Caucasian	retired	married
2	29	Caucasian	stay-at-home mom	married
3	59	Caucasian	volunteer coordinator	married
4	50	Caucasian	nurse	married
5	64	African American	business employee	married
6	63	African American	social worker	married
7	28	Caucasian	church music director	married
8	35	Caucasian	social service director	married
9	39	Caucasian	case manager	married
10	39	Caucasian	teacher	single
11	33	Caucasian	unemployed, incarcerated	single
12	50	Caucasian	business owner	single
13	28	Caucasian	pastor	married

Interview procedure

The interviewer was a retired LCSW who offered participants the opportunity to be interviewed in her residence or other private space. Jones, Sherr, and Ashenfelter (2012) suggest that purposeful partnerships between researchers and participants attend to the particulars important to both. At the onset of the interview, each participant was able to ask questions and review the informed consent, prior to subsequent signing of the informed consent form. Three of the participants preferred to be interviewed at their place of work, one was interviewed over the phone, and all others were interviewed in the interviewer's home. All but one, resided within an hour, geographically, from the interviewer in central Indiana.

Semi-structured interviews lasted approximately 60 to 90 minutes. To protect confidentiality, participants' identifying information was separated from collected data. Each participant's data were coded with a corresponding number and the master key was securely stored in a locked office. In addition, all gathered data was held on a password-protected computer. A third party transcribed each interview. Once each transcription was finished, member checking included sending a copy of each transcription to individual participants for review and approval. All participants provided, through review and verification, the accuracy of their interviews; three participants made changes to clarify their thoughts and opinions.

Data Analysis

Interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) was utilized in grasping the thematic meanings AOI held for the participants (Smith & Osborn, 2014). Moustakas (1994), a phenomenological inductive reasoning method, was further applied to data analysis. First, researchers practiced epoché, which allowed them to focus upon the data without interfering bias. The beginning of the analysis was simply reading through each transcribed interview and maintaining a perspective of epoché throughout each reading.

The second level of phenomenological reduction included bracketing, horizontalizing, clustering the identified themes, and developing a textural description from the themes (Moustakas, 1994). Phenomenological reduction involved a second reading of the interviews with the specific goal of isolating possible themes (Moustakas, 1994). The researcher utilized bracketing in order to suspend preconceived realities in an effort to protect the phenomenological purity while analyzing the data (Farina, 2014). The transcribed semi-structured interviews were dissected into statements of horizontalization (Creswell, 2014). Horizontalization can be defined as a process that involves placing all the data out for examination and then approaching the data as if all are weighted equally (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Once this was accomplished, these particular units or statements were translated into thematic groups of subjective meanings (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

The goal of the third level, imaginative variation, was to develop a structural description built from the themes and accounting for the possible influences of “time, space, materiality, causality, and relationship to self and others” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 99). Imaginative variation includes the use of inductive reasoning, which Neuman (2006) described as moving from concrete data to interpretation. The analytical process of discovering the interpretive experiences of AOI for participants included examining the various perspectives from their described lived experiences after participating in the program.

Results

Findings indicated main themes of one’s motivation to be invitational, increased openness/non-judgmental approach to others, increased self-awareness, and utilization of second thought as a relationship-building skill. It also found support for the universal application of AOI across a wide variety of populations.

Motivation to be invitational

All thirteen participants expressed a heightened awareness of their motivation to enhance relationships as a result of participating in AOI. Participant 4 generalizes her motivation:

I mean as I think about going into a doctor's office or just places that I go in general... you know, instead of being confrontational to the check-out lady who's miserable in her job and just is watching the clock and the line's long, you know, if I seek to understand that she's a person just like I am and that maybe her child is home sick... I don't know what she's experienced in her day, but by her demeanor I can understand that she's probably not having the best day ever or maybe she's just on top of the world and I'm the one who's having a really bad day.

Participant 6 said:

You gotta have belief that man is important... there is certain things just as humanness that ties us together and you have to have that basic belief because if you do not believe that, you have no value for life, you have no value for yourself so there has to be that core value of people.

Eleven of the thirteen participants describe motivation to be invitational resulting from a connection made with AOI content to their Christian faith or social service values. Two participants experienced AOI in a secular setting, and yet, chose to share in the interview how AOI aligned with their faith as well as professional values. Participant 3 states, "How will I come across to them? You know, what do I need to say and how do I need to say it...that would please God?" Participant 5 shares, "I think we have to be respectful that God has created us all different." Participant 7 suggests:

And, so, I would say, you know, the AOI is just understanding how to be more and more like Christ in every single interaction that you have with anybody ever. Everything from the words you choose, to active listening, and not only just listening but actually hearing what that person's saying, what's spilling out of their heart, you know, what are they actually trying to communicate.

Participant 9 explains, "And I think with the Art of Invitation it kind of renewed and gave me a bit of a life and reminded me to stick to the core values." For participant 13, a paradigm shift occurred in his professional demeanor. He reflects:

I might add that I was quite struck by the frequency with which Jesus engages in invitational speech in the Gospels. It really changed the way I read the Gospels. It has really changed the way I've tried to relate to people as a pastor.

Increased openness/non-judgmental approach to others

Twelve out of thirteen participants identified AOI as enhancing their willingness to expand personal parameters toward others. All twelve made general comments about becoming more open and non-judgmental as Participant 3 states: "I needed to just change my attitude toward others and how I could be more open and understanding of those that are different and knowing that I am responsible for my attitude." Participant 8 responded: "It would be that piece right there, Seeking to Understand, and really trying to figure out, you know, where that person's coming from, what might be affecting their thought process, what might be affecting their physical circumstances." Participant 1 explains, "Try to listen to the other person and don't prejudge and don't respond immediately which I have a tendency to do...."

Increased Self-Awareness

This theme is based on the importance of being self-aware to improve invitational communication and work through barriers. Eleven of the thirteen participants voiced greater self-awareness as the result of AOI. Participant 9 highlighted, "Probably the biggest thing that stood out to me was just being self-aware of how you interact, communicate with your clients, communicate with providers, how you can really create some change for the common good."

Furthermore, those eleven participants pointed to self-correction resulting from enhanced self-awareness. Participant 6 explains: "I learned that there was a couple of things that I did that I needed to put aside." In addition, Participant 10 discloses: "I've always been very reactionary and now since this class and being more invitational, you know, I still may think that I've got the right answer, but I find a different way to get that expressed to people."

Utilization of Second Thought as a relationship-building skill

Eleven of the thirteen participants identified utilizing a second thought process in their relationships. Participants understood the second thought as a concept and tool to help recognize the presence of a non-invitational first thought in order to allow the invitational second thought time to surface. The second thought halts unintended counterproductive responses in relationships and interactions. "I learned I have to adjust what I say and so second thought has come into that a lot because I don't immediately go off the handle on things" as stated by Participant 10. Participant 11 reflected

that “we’ve talked a lot about second thought process...How your first thought is often not the best thought.”

Universal application of AOI

All thirteen participants discussed the significance of AOI being applicable to a wide variety of populations from various socioeconomic, generational, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds. Participants verbalized populations that would prosper from attending AOI. Nine participants specifically stated that “anyone” or “all people” could benefit from AOI. Participant 3 stated: “I can’t imagine anyone not benefiting...if they can take the concepts and really apply it to their lives.”

Participant 6 identified division in the contemporary world and stated:

...we have a broad gap within acceptance of one another for whatever reason that might be. And so, because of that, there isn’t anyone or any organization within the realm of this world that should not be using openness in the AOI.

Seven participants specifically spoke from their frame of reference regarding the application of AOI. Participant 2 stated: “I was an inmate at the time I did this... I think other inmates could benefit from it.” Participant 11 reported: “I think it’s (AOI) definitely good for people, like I said, in recovery. I think it’s great for us.”

Six participants identified larger groups or organizations, including professions, benefiting from AOI. Participant 8 stated, “Definitely anybody who’s working in social work, anybody serving in an area of ministry or counseling... But even not-for-profits... probably anybody that’s in any kind of helping profession, you know, healthcare... anyone working at a hospital... occupational of a profession that wouldn’t be beneficial for it. I think about attorneys... even people who work in a grocery store....”

Limitations

While the sample size for this study is small in comparison to the number of participants who have completed AOI, thirteen is an adequate number for an exploratory study (Creswell, 2014). Since all but two of the twenty-five presentations of AOI were held in the Midwest, it is unknown if AOI would be received similarly in other geographic regions. Likewise, all but two presentations of AOI were held in churches or faith-based venues calling into question if similar results would have been found in secular circles.

The study’s findings may also be influenced by participant bias, as participants may give a favorable review of Art of Invitation due to personal

connection with the founder, who presented the workshops from which the sample was drawn. Debbie Teike, a Licensed Clinical Social Worker, developed AOI in meeting the need of clergy and congregations lacking awareness and skills in developing relationships. To combat this participant bias, a third-party interviewer was utilized to protect against this threat to internal validity. In addition, participants of the study were encouraged to be honest in sharing their thoughts, especially negative experiences or suggested improvements to learn about Art of Invitation. In each case, volunteers provided acknowledgement to the interviewer that they understood that all feedback was valuable.

Generalizability of these findings is limited due to the small sample size, yet internal validity was protected by utilizing an outside interviewer.

Conclusion

This phenomenological exploratory study investigates the impact and application of the Art of Invitation for participants of the program. By utilizing Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), the themes of universal application of AOI, motivation to be invitational, increasing openness/being non-judgmental, becoming self-aware, and utilizing second thought emerged.

The Art of Invitation is undergirded by both social work values of dignity and worth of each person and the importance of human relationships (NASW, 2017), as well as the Judeo-Christian value to love one's neighbor as oneself (Matt. 7:12 The English Standard Version). Concepts and tools are derived from the merging of these two entities. AOI provides a psychoeducational approach for those who desire to connect the altruistic value of being "invitational" to the desire to build and restore relationships. Participants identify what they value, gain insights in communication skills, and work through obstacles identified. Findings indicate that participants were motivated to be invitational even in uncomfortable or challenging interactions. To stay connected to others when differences occurred, participants utilized the second thought process.

Study participants expressed living out their value of being invitational internally and toward others. Given the existence of personal and cultural relational challenges of today, (Woodson, 2017; Ruef & Soek-Woo, 2016; Wakefield, 2015; Hendon & Tonoyan, 2011), AOI is a timely option for those seeking to a way to overcome relational barriers and increase positive relational exchanges.

Recommendation for further research

This study's findings suggest several areas for future research. First is the question of the long-term effects of AOI and its ability to produce last-

ing change in participants. While some volunteers were interviewed five years removed from participating in a workshop, the long-term personal and relational effects on participant relationships are unknown. Furthermore, this study did not validate if invitational living creates more trusting, connected relationships. Yet, it explanatorily established that participants were motivated to look inward, be more open and less judgmental, and use a second thought to be invitational with others. Future research might address the long-term effects of AOI on personal and environmental outcomes pertaining to individual, family, marital, friendship, community, church, and/or provider/client relationships, to name a few.

Social exchange theory (Cook, 1987; Stafford, 2015; Thomas & Iding, 2012) suggests that human beings are motivated by benefits and costs. Liberman (2010) suggests that relationship building relies upon mutual trust, cooperation with one another, and a perception of fairness in the distribution of rewards and responsibilities. In that participants linked the concept of being invitational to already held values and morals, it is unknown if participants who do not hold strong values and morals akin to the Golden Rule would experience the same or similar changes. Additionally, future studies could help explain at what point altruism is too costly to personal or relational gain. Compassion fatigue and burnout may ensue from invitational living without an awareness of personal limitation.

Lastly, the connection between altruism and other Christian virtues could be explored. Wolfer and Brandsen (2015) wrestle with the internal struggles social workers face when virtues, embedded in their faith, contradict values set forth by their profession. Moreover, Wolfer and Brandsen urge social workers to recover some of their deeper meaning virtues and reclaim them, in order to build a solid foundation for social work practice. AOI could help practitioners better identify the context in which faith-based virtues, basic rules of communication, and relational challenges occur. Further, using AOI, practitioners might be able to enhance relational connections with peers and reconcile differences with non-Christians, especially where individual values and approaches may differ. ❖

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Appendix 1: Art of Invitation Interview Questions

1. Describe where, when, and in what venue you experienced the Art of Invitation Workshop?
2. What are some of the key concepts you remember from the training?
 - a) of those concepts you mentioned, which were of most value and in what ways?
 - b) of those concepts you mentioned, which were of least value and why?
3. Since completing the Art of Invitation workshop, how, if at all, have you altered your interpersonal contacts with others?
4. What do you remember about the concept "Second Thought"?
5. What do you recall about being invitational versus confrontational versus presentational?
6. In what ways, if at all, was the discussion about barriers and values helpful?
7. What populations do you think would benefit from participating in the Art of Invitation? Why and How?
8. What populations do you feel Art of Invitation would not apply to? Why?
9. How would you describe Art of Invitation to someone who knows nothing about the workshop?
10. What other thoughts, comments do you have that might be helpful to someone evaluating? The Art of Invitation?

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