WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN AN INTERVIEW-BASED STUDY ON SEXUAL ASSAULT DISCLOSURES

by

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A thesis submitted to the faculty of
The University of Utah
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Science

Department of Educational Psychology

The University of Utah

August 2010

The University of Utah Graduate School

STATEMENT OF THESIS APPROVAL

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to develop a conceptual model of women's experiences of participating in qualitative research on a traumatic topic, namely sexual assault. Prior literature addressed participants' motivations to participate in a study, their experience of participating, and the effects of participating. However, this research does not connect to provide a holistic understanding of participants' experiences. Research questions were the following: 1.) How did research participants who participated in personal interviews on traumatic events experience the research process? 2.) What motivated women who had been sexually assaulted to agree to participate in an interview-based study of their experiences of trauma? 3.) How did these women experience their participation in the research from their first awareness of the study, throughout the study, and after the study ended? 4.) What benefits or harms did these women identify as a result of participating in the study?

Women who participated in an interview-based study on sexual assault disclosures participated in individual interviews and follow-up interviews about their experience of participating in the prior study. Using a feminist paradigm and grounded theory design and analysis, the results indicated two core themes: (a) Safety and (Dis)comfort; (b) Relationships (including the subthemes of the participant's relationship with herself, her relationship to the researcher, and her relationship to other women, both those who participated in the prior study and those who are affected by sexual trauma). These two themes influenced five different segments of the Temporal Process of Research Participation: (a) Decision to Participate; (b) The Interview; (c) After the Interview; (d) The Write-up; (e) Long-Term Growth and Challenges. Based on these results, there are implications for conducting qualitative research on sensitive topics and for clinicians working with trauma survivors who may participate in a research study on their experience of trauma. For example, researchers should consider informed consent an ongoing process and help participants navigate unexpected reactions to participating. Researchers should provide a diversity of ways for people to participate in ways that feel comfortable to them. Researchers should engage in multiple follow-up contacts with participants as the effects of participating may occur over time.

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INTRODUCTION

> Yeah, I mean, I can see how it might be helpful to [tell] other people [about being molested], but basically only in terms of awareness or if something had happened to them too, and maybe if they didn't tell anyone else. Maybe it would be useful in those points to bring it up myself. I guess why I don't is - This [interview] is cool because this is the point of it.

This quote is from Natalie, a participant from a study I conducted concerning the disclosure of coercive sexual experiences (Hoover, 2008). In this context, Natalie chose to participate in an interview for the study, even though she normally would not talk about a personal topic such as being molested as a child. When the topic at hand is one that is hush-hush, why talk in a research interview, even if it is confidential?

Researchers know that people choose to participate in research for many reasons (Beck, 2005; Dyregrov, 2004; Hiller & DiLuzio, 2003; Lowes & Gill, 2006; Phoenix, 1994), but they have little insight into how those reasons and expectations evolve throughout the research process. For example, numerous studies in psychology and health disciplines have examined the after-effects of research participation on sensitive topics (Carlson et al., 2003; Dyregrov, 2004; Grinyer, 2004; Hess, 2006; Hutchinson, Wilson, & Wilson, 1994; Newman & Kaloupek, 2004). However, none of this research speaks to the entirety of the experience of research participation. What does it mean to be a research participant in such a study?

Overview

In this chapter, I address the role of research participants in qualitative method-oriented studies, particularly those studies on traumatic topics. I highlight studies that have explored qualitative research participation. This review demonstrates the need for more specific, in-depth research examining the insights and overall experience of participants taking part in a study on personal trauma. I conclude this chapter by articulating the research rationale, purpose, and questions.

Literature Review

Lincoln argued, “Perhaps nowhere is the ethical dialogue more profound than in the treatment of human subjects, or, more appropriately, human research participants” (2008, p. 152). Historically, research ethics were developed in response to the Nazi regime’s “scientific experiments,” which, in reality, were torture techniques (Huang & Hadian, 2006). The founding document of research ethics is the Nuremburg Code, established in 1947, which has the basic mandate to disclose risks and seek voluntary consent (Huang & Hadian, 2006; Mazur, 2008). In response to additional questionable research studies in the mid-1900s, movement began for further development of ethical standards (Mertens & Ginsberg, 2008). Beecher’s (1966) article on informed consent in the arena of medical research was a landmark writing that influenced the development of oversight committees for the ethical treatment of human participants (Institutional Review Boards) (Huang & Hadian, 2006). Then, federal mandate established four ethical standards: informed consent, full debriefing of any deception, guarantee of confidentiality or anonymity, and requirement of expressed consent in accessing personal documents (Lincoln, 2008). Contemporaneously, ethical guidelines have become increasingly nuanced, yet they continue to focus on protecting participants (Banister, Burman, Parker, Taylor, & Tindall, 1994; Huang & Hadian, 2006; Mazur, 2008).

In addressing ethical concerns, researchers are increasingly critical of the role of Institutional Review Boards in mandating ethics because they question how congruent IRB procedures are with the actual ethical concerns confronted in qualitative research (Morse, Niehaus, Varnhagen, Austin, & McIntosh, 2008). Researchers have criticized the subjective nature of IRB decisions related to “vulnerable populations” and asserted the importance of data to support IRB decisions (Newman & Kaloupek, 2004; Widom & Czaja, 2005). Researchers have called into question specific guidelines. For example, in regards to the maintenance of confidentiality or anonymity, Giordano, O'Reilly, Taylor, and Dogra (2007) argued for a re-evaluation of this ethical norm. They questioned whether or not confidentiality should be the participants’ individual choices. Giordano and colleagues were specifically concerned about the possibility that maintaining confidentiality may undermine research that has the intention of giving voice to silenced, marginalized individuals. In keeping participation confidential, participants may experience this ethical norm as disempowering and silencing (Giordano et al., 2007).

Informed consent has been a basic ethical protocol for deflecting the potential to harm. However, current researchers have considered the possibility that informed consent is not a discrete process but rather an ongoing aspect of the research endeavor (Bhattacharya, 2007; Ellis, 2007; Olesen, 2005). Although researchers continue to be concerned about fully disclosing information about the research study and participation involved, some have questioned whether or not this is information that researchers can ever fully disclose because the research process is full of unknowns (Banister et al., 1994; Morse et al., 2008; Stuhlmiller, 2001). Participants may be completely informed of the research procedures and consent according to ethical guidelines, but they may not completely know what to expect or be able to assess risks (Knafl, Webster, Benoliel, & Morse, 1988). Thus, researchers may intend to fully disclose information in establishing informed consent, but researchers may not be able to predict the implications for participants (Banister et al., 1994). In summary, scholars have questioned the possibility of protecting participants from harm and emphasized the unpredictability and complicated nature of the research process, especially in terms of qualitative methods (Bhattacharya, 2007). Researchers have theorized that procedural ethical guidelines outlined by IRBs are distinct from the actual ethical practice of qualitative research (Guillemin & Gillam, 2004).

Scholars from a variety of disciplines have theorized how individuals experience research participation. The literature on research participation falls into three thematic areas: 1. Why are individuals motivated to participate in a particular study? 2. How do participants understand their involvement in the research? 3. How are participants affected by their participation in the study?

Motivations for Participation

Numerous empirical studies have explored the expectations and motivations of individuals choosing to participate in a research study. For example, Fisher (2007) found that although informed consent is an important ethical procedure, many participants have already decided to take part in the study before receiving specific information about the study during the informed consent process. Therefore, it may be important to understand the underlying motivation for participating in a study. Hiller and DiLuzio (2003) argued that individuals' motivations to participate are different from the formal research objective. Specifically, they proposed that "ego-involvement" functions as the motivating factor (2003, p. 7). Hiller and DiLuzio suggested that a study allowing for ego involvement provides the opportunity to self-reflect or share thoughts and feelings that participants have few outlets for sharing. These motivators are similar to those articulated by Corbin and Morse (2003). In addition, Corbin and Morse suggested that participants may desire information or to help others. Researchers have suggested that these expectations can be both unconscious and conscious (Corbin & Morse, 2003; Hiller & DiLuzio, 2003). In a study on women's postabortion experiences (Hess, 2006), a participant stated, "Maybe it would be good for me because no one ever talked to me about it before. Maybe there are things that are still inside me that need to come out" (p. 584).

Lowes and Gill (2006) found similar reasons for participation in two separate studies, one involving parents of children with recently diagnosed diabetes and another involving kidney transplant donors and recipients. They identified altruism as the primary reason for participation (2006). Secondary reasons for participation were that participants believed they would learn something helpful, and it gave them an opportunity to talk about the topic during a specified time (2006).

In other research, Phoenix conducted a study on mothers under 20 years old (1994), in which she examined issues of power related to the decision to participate. Specifically, Phoenix found that Black women were concerned about the exploitative potential of the research, and this led some Black women to participate and others to not participate. Additionally, women reported participating because of a curiosity about the research, a desire to talk and be listened to, a desire to help the researcher, and an opportunity to complain about the research study's purpose.

As in the study conducted by Phoenix (1994), Beck (2005) inquired about participants' reasons for participating in a study on traumatic birthing experiences. Political reasons were important motivators, such as wanting to raise awareness and to motivate policy changes so as to prevent others from also experiencing a traumatic birth. Similar to the young mothers in Phoenix's study, participants in this study on traumatic birth reported a desire to assist the researcher.

Brzuzy, Ault, and Segal (1997) conducted qualitative interviews with female survivors of sexual trauma. They reported that participants chose to interview because they believed the research would create social change, that they would have access to services, and that their participation would please researchers. These findings are similar to previous studies in that political/social change, personal gain, and helping the researchers were key motivating factors.

In summary, individuals have participated with the intent of benefiting personally, assisting the researcher and researcher's goals, and helping others also affected by the research topic. In expanding upon this research, other questions become relevant: How do these motivations play out throughout the research process? How do participants' expectations, desires, needs, and decisions affect the short- and long-term outcomes of their participation?

Participants' Perspectives on the Research

A few studies have investigated how participants have understood the research studies in which they participated. For example, in research with sex workers, Wahab (2003) reflected on the participants' understanding of the research process. Although she called the interview a "dialogue session," Wahab noted that participants "insisted" on using the term interview. Based on Wahab's (2003) report of discrepancy in what to call interviews/dialogues, it seems that participants may have a perspective on the research process that is quite different from researchers. What perspectives and insights do participants have about their participation as well as the overall research process?

Other researchers have noted how participants responded to the research process. In interviews with imprisoned women, Wincup (2001) reflected, "Even in the early stages of the project, I sensed that those I spoke with wanted more than to answer my questions and bombarded me with their own questions" (p. 25). Other researchers have reported that participants (on topics as diverse as disaster relief work and organizational change) ask questions about whether or not their experience was typical and how they compared to other participants (Hiller & DiLuzio, 2003; Kearney & Hyle, 2004; Owens, 2006; Stuhlmiller, 2001). In a powerful example, when 1 participant shared her interest in meeting the other sex workers, Wahab (2003) asked the other participants about their interest; all but one, due to a scheduling conflict, participated in the gathering. Based on this research, it seems that participants view a research study as a potential venue for connecting with others who have a similar life experience.

Research has yet to fully explore participants' perspectives on the research process: How do individual participants understand themselves in relation to other participants? How do participants understand their role in relation to the researcher and the researchers' aims?

Effects of Participation

With relatively few studies that address the perspective of participants in the midst of the research process, a greater quantity of studies from various disciplines have focused on the outcomes of research. Many scholars have argued that telling a traumatic or highly personal story of trauma within a research setting is potentially harmful, whereas others have theorized about the potentially cathartic outcomes. Morse and colleagues (2008) collected survey data from qualitative researchers on their perception of risk and harm in qualitative interviews. The data suggested that qualitative researchers believe that the benefits of participation outweigh the risks. A cathartic effect is one potential outcome that many researchers have emphasized (Corbin & Morse, 2003). Morse argued, "Secondary gain from participating in a qualitative research project is tremendous" (Knafl et al., 1988, p. 215). The possibility of catharsis is especially relevant when the research topic is traumatic (see Corbin & Morse, 2003).

Narrative methodologists have argued that participants construct and maintain control over the narrative that they tell during interviews (Dyregrov, 2004; Tillmann-Healy & Kiesinger, 2001). Dyregrov considered narrative control to be positive because participants are able to make meaning of their lives. Rosenthal (2003) asserted that narrating their story of trauma helps participants realize that sharing their experience of trauma is cathartic. Another narrative researcher, Stuhlmiller (2001), argued that individuals experienced participating in disaster research as healing and growth-oriented. According to these narrative researchers, the process of piecing together a personal narrative enhances the potential for cathartic effects. In addition to the construction of a narrative, Lowes and Gill (2006) emphasized the role of the interviewer as outsider in contributing to the potential for cathartic effects. Lowes and Gill suggested that participants' perception of the interviewer's interest as genuine is fundamental in determining whether or not participants experience the interview as validating.

Studies have tended to emphasize personal benefits, such as catharsis, as a common outcome of research participation on a personal topic. Corbin and Morse (2003) reviewed a number of sources that specifically argued that participants experience in-depth interviews as beneficial. In another synthesis, Dyregrov (2004) reviewed five bereavement studies and found that participants often reported positive outcomes because of being the focus of interest, concern, and caring attention. In a content analysis, Hutchinson, Wilson, and Wilson (1994) analyzed participants' unsolicited remarks about participating in research interviews on a variety of health topics. Participants reported feeling validated, feeling empowered to change and heal, and having an increased self-awareness about their personal experience with the topic. In addition to these outcomes tied to personal benefit, participants also reported having a sense of purpose, in that their expertise would contribute to the research and have positive long-term consequences.

Other researchers reported participants' comments on cathartic outcomes for a variety of research topics. In research on diabetes (Lowes & Gill, 2006), no one regretted participating but rather considered the process healing and cathartic. Participants in a study on postabortion experiences made unsolicited remarks that the interview was therapeutic (Hess, 2006). Wahab (2003) reported that "both Jasmin and Deborah reported that the dialogue process allowed them to reflect on some of their experiences in a manner that enriched their understanding of their individual realities" (p. 634).

Further, Tillmann-Healy and Kiesinger (2001) engaged in autoethnographic and interview methods that enabled them to experience the dual position of researcher and participant. Their reflection demonstrates the deeply emotional and personal consequences of research participation:

> For each of us, it was comforting and validating to have someone in her life who was trying, with every ounce of her energy, to understand her experience. The presence of an invested other permitted each of us to work through and express emotions. Uncovering our most closely guarded secrets was frightening at first, but ultimately, quite empowering. (p. 101)

Cathartic outcomes are particularly salient when the research topic is personal and perhaps traumatic (Riessman, 1993). Morrow (1992) conducted in-depth interviews and focus groups with women survivors of child sexual abuse. Even though all participants expressed their appreciation for participation, Morrow noted that participants' experiences were highly varied. For example, 1 participant chose to discontinue focus group sessions because her participation triggered body memories. At the same time, another participant emphasized how empowering it was to be a coresearcher, and being involved in generating the final theory led to a sense of "shared voice" (p. 322). Morrow (2006) asserted that, for many of the survivors, participating in the study was part of a greater journey of finding one's voice.

As another example, Beck (2005) conducted research with women who had experienced a traumatic birthing experience. Although Beck did not ask participants how the research affected them, 78% of 40 participants articulated to Beck that they benefited from participating. As testament to the importance of participation, 1 participant said, "I think I will always remember the day I received your first e-mail reply and I felt as though I'd been thrown a lifeline" (p. 416). Women reported that writing their traumatic birth stories had the consequences of helping them to make meaning of the experience, to feel empowered, to make change, and to have a sense of purpose by helping to change childbirth practices. These consequences of participation parallel many of the motivating factors, such as benefit to self and to others, which were evident in other studies (Brzuzy et al., 1997; Hiller & DiLuzio, 2003; Lowes & Gill, 2006; Phoenix, 2005).

Research participants with traumatic birth experiences also reported a sense of belonging, which helped them feel less isolated (Beck, 2005). This finding is unique because participants never met each other; their participation involved emailing a written narrative to Beck. Research has yet to fully explore the possibility that a sense of belonging is a positive outcome that perhaps parallels other reports that participants asked questions about other participants (Hiller & DiLuzio, 2003; Kearney & Hyle, 2004; Stuhlmiller, 2001).

In regards to research on personal trauma, another consequence of participation may be a step toward healing (Newman & Kaloupek, 2004; Newman, Risch, & Kassam-Addams, 2006). Winkler (2002) asserted that ascribing meaning to trauma like sexual assault is the last step to full recovery. If meaning-making is part of the in-depth research interviews, as narrative methodologists have suggested (Dyregrov, 2004; Tillmann-Healy & Kiesinger, 2001), perhaps individuals who have experienced trauma feel a sense of closure because of their participation. Stuhlmiller (2001) described research participation as a kind of "testimony." In this way, the traumatic experiences may be laid to rest.

The aforementioned research on outcomes of participation is based on researchers' reports of participants' unsolicited remarks. In addition to these findings, other studies have explicitly examined the effects of research participation by following up with participants from studies with research topics that are personal and potentially distressing. As an example of follow-up research, Phoenix (1994) examined young mothers' perceptions of the research interview. Even though half of the participants reported enjoying the interview and being listened to, Phoenix found that some participants experienced the interview as intrusive, time-consuming, and focused on irrelevant questions.

<u>Studies in nursing on the effects of research participation</u>. In the field of nursing, researchers have studied the effect of research participation on the sensitive topic of

bereavement. For example, in the third phase of a research study designed by Dyregrov (2004), parents whose child died by suicide, accident, or sudden infant death syndrome completed a questionnaire that asked them to evaluate the research process, which involved a questionnaire for all participants and in-depth interviews for a subset of participants. Results from the evaluative questionnaire were positive. The questionnaire had nine close-ended questions and three open-ended questions that asked interviewees to mention the most positive or negative aspect, something the interviewer should have said/done differently, and any further comments. All parents reported experiencing participation as *positive* or *very positive.* Participants identified positive aspects of the interview, such as being able to tell their stories and help others. The interview format was rated positively because of the conversational format, the interview setting (taking place in their own homes without time limits), and the interviewer (being outside the social network, informed, and confidence-inspiring). None of the participants regretted participating, even though 75% of those who participated in an interview reported an increased degree of pain during the interview. Some participants said they experienced an emotional step-back in the grief process, but they reported making greater gains in a few weeks. Dyregrov's study highlights the importance of receiving feedback to inform later research decisions.

In another nursing study on bereavement, Grinyer (2004) followed up with participants, parents of young adults with cancer, the majority of whom died. Participants reported the experience as therapeutic because they were able to participate on their own terms. Grinyer concluded that for participants, constructing a narrative during the interview was both a painful, but an important part of the grieving process as well. Results were published as a book. For some study participants, this book represented a lasting memory and way to memorialize their children. Grinyer found that many appreciated feeling less isolated because they had read other participants' stories. At the same time, other participants experienced difficulty in reading the book. Some expressed concerned about betraying friends and family by allowing such a private issue to be made public. Grinyer's study brings up important questions about long-term consequences of participation in research study on personal trauma.

Studies in psychology on the effects of research participation. The prior examples focused on issues of grief and bereavement in the health sciences. In the psychological literature, there are an increasing number of studies related to psychological trauma. As an example, Carlson and colleagues (2003) conducted research with adults who were receiving inpatient psychiatric care. After completing questionnaires and structured interviews, participants were asked about their distress and the usefulness of participating. Carlson and colleagues found that 70% of participants indicated low to moderate distress, and 51% indicated that their participation was somewhat useful. Participants stated that remembering the past was the most upsetting and that discovering new insights was the most useful. Carlson et al. interpreted their findings as somewhat paradoxical in that being upset seemed to be a condition for having new insights; this interpretation is congruent with the literature that has been reviewed thus far.

Newman and Kaloupek (2004) reviewed twelve studies primarily on traumatic topics and summarized issues of risks and benefits. In reviewing prior research, Newman and Kaloupek asserted that participants reported positive gains. There was discrepant evidence related to whether or not meeting criteria for posttraumatic stress disorder is linked to greater distress, unexpected distress, and/or greater benefits. However, Newman and Kaloupek tentatively suggested that preexisting distress, multiple traumas, greater severity of a physical injury, and social vulnerability are related to higher distress. Based on these findings, the authors indicated that even as participants experienced emotional distress, they were not retraumatized by their experience of participating. This study highlights the importance of distinguishing between distress and harm.

Distress was measured in the studies reviewed by Newman and Kaloupek (2004) in a variety of ways, including the Response to Research Participation Questionnaire (Newman, Willard, Sinclair, & Kaloupek, 2001), Likert scale responses to questions related to distress and regret about participating, a participant discontinuing the interview, and a participant requesting mental health referrals when offered. Half of those studies reviewed by Newman and Kloupek utilized the *Response to Research Participation Questionnaire* to measure risks and benefits. In a study reviewed by Newman and Kapoulek (2004), Newman, Walker, and Gefland (1999) followed up with participants who were female survivors of childhood trauma and found that 86% of participants benefited from participating. Newman and colleagues (1999) reported that “nearly all women expressed appreciation for the thoughtfulness of the contact, and we believe that it was an important component of the overall satisfaction with the experience” (p. 194). Newman and Kaloupek’s review provides substantial evidence that distress and benefits may go hand-in-hand.

Two studies using the *Response to Research Participation Questionnaire* were not reviewed by Newman and Kaloupek (2004) and are included here because of their relevance to female sexual trauma survivors. In the first study, Johnson and Benight (2003) used the *Response to Research Participation Questionnaire* for female survivors of domestic violence. They found that 45% reported benefits, 25% reported being more upset than anticipated, and 6% reported regretting participating. Johnson and Benight found that participants reporting regret were higher on self-report measures of depression, PTSD, and number of lifetime traumas than the other participants. The 6% of participants who regretted participating also scored lower on a self-report measure of coping self-efficacy. Based on these findings, Johnson and Benight suggested not only providing participants with more information about risks during the informed consent process, but also prioritizing the debriefing process, as 25% of participants were more upset than they had anticipated. Johnson and Benight’s findings are especially relevant as they have implications for informed consent and debriefing.

In another study on female childhood trauma survivors, Widom and Czaja (2005) assessed the relationship between certain “vulnerabilities” (including economic, social, psychological, physical health, and history of childhood trauma) and reactions to research participation. Participants’ responses to the in-depth interview were measured with the *Reactions to Research Participation Questionnaire* and included items related to emotional distress, perceiving the interview as too personal, perceiving the interview as meaningful, perceiving to be treated with dignity and respect, perceiving that their information would be kept private, and willingness to continue participating. Economic vulnerability was measured based on educational level, public assistance, employment status, and poverty level. Social vulnerability was measured by gender, race, prisoner status, and prior or current homelessness. Psychological vulnerability was based on posttraumatic stress disorder symptoms and/or diagnosis, anxiety symptoms, and depression symptoms and/or diagnsosis. Physical health was defined by self-perception of disability and governmental disability status. Widom and Czaja's results indicated that all five vulnerabilities were related to higher emotional distress in the interview. Participants with vulnerabilities were more likely to find the interview "meaningful." In relation to willingness to participate again, vulnerabilities were unrelated, except that participants with current distress because of adult trauma were more likely to indicate that they would continue to participate in the research. Individuals with childhood trauma were more likely to indicate that the interview was emotional, too personal, and meaningful. Overall, Widom and Czaja asserted that the benefits of participating outweighed the risks; this conclusion demonstrates how a diverse population with varying vulnerabilities may still perceive research participation as a positive experience.

<u>Studies on the effect of research participation for female survivors of trauma</u>. A few other studies have assessed research participation outcomes specifically for female survivors of trauma. Griffin, Resick, Waldrop, and Mechanic (2003) gathered data regarding participants' reactions to research participation. Participants were categorized as experiencing acute physical trauma, acute sexual trauma, or intimate partner violence. Participants who had experienced acute trauma (either physical or sexual) participated for 6 to 10 hours over the course of 2 days; their participation involved questionnaires,

structured interviews, and a psychophysiological assessment. Participants who had experienced intimate partner violence participated in 4 to 8 hours over the course of 2 days and completed questionnaires and interviews, but not a psychophysiological assessment. Griffin et al. assessed participants' distress, confusions, interest, difficulty, feelings, length, and willingness to participate again. They found that overall participants thought the study was interesting, not distressing, and that they would be willing to participate again. The only significant difference in participants' experiences was that those with posttraumatic stress disorder symptoms experienced more distress during the psychophysiological assessment. Similar to the research conducted by Widom and Czaja (2005), understanding differences among participants may be helpful in evaluating the effects of participation.

In a last example of sexual trauma, Campbell, Adams, Wasco, Ahrens, and Sefl (2009, 2010) reported findings related to interview-based studies conducted on rape survivors. Researchers asked participants about their experience of the interview as well as any recommendations for researchers conducting interviews with rape survivors. Campbell and colleagues (2010) found that participants, despite some painful moments, benefited from participating and appreciated being listened to and being asked questions that led to new insights. Participants also named ways in which the interviewers were effective at reducing hierarchy, providing information, and communicating nonjudgmental warmth. In the 2009 study, Campbell et al. reported on participants recommendations: interviewers can increase participants' comfort by (a) being aware of the diversity of experiences participants may have had, (b) listening to participants, and

(c) giving participants' choices about how to participate. The findings of Campbell et al. (2009) are especially helpful in that they tie positive outcomes to particular parts of the research process.

The prior studies emphasized immediate reactions to the interview, and an additional study assessed longer-term experiences of research participation. Martin, Perrott, Morris, and Romans (1999) conducted follow-up interviews 6 years later with participants from the original study on child sexual abuse. Participants were women who either had experienced childhood sexual abuse or had not. In general, most participants found it difficult to recall the interview process in its entirety. Martin and colleague found that survivors of child sexual abuse were less likely to endorse the interview as comfortable. Survivors were also more likely to indicate that the interview was positive, whereas participants without a child sexual abuse history were more likely to describe the interview as neutral. Those that experienced that interview as negative cited a variety of reasons, including the experience of recounting the sexual abuse, doubting the value and relevance of the research, and feeling uncomfortable with the interviewer. Those that experienced the interview as positive specified that they found it helpful to talk about the child sexual abuse, experienced changes in their feelings about the child sexual abuse, and felt that they contributed to the research. The findings of Martin et al. are unique in that they address some of the long-term outcomes of research participation for female trauma survivors.

These studies about the effects of research tend to be on highly personal and traumatic topics, such as grief and sexual violence. The results suggest that participants are satisfied and positively affected by their participation, even if they also experience distress. Although this research is promising, it fails to connect with the other body of research that addresses participants' motivation to participate. With the exception of Martin et al. (1999), research also tends to focus on shorter-term outcomes by collecting data on participants' reactions immediately after their participation. How does motivation to participate inform the short and long-term consequences of participation? This gap leaves us with little insight into the more comprehensive process of research participation. Even though participants' responses are somewhat accounted for in previous research, previous research does not address the whole of the research process from the participants' perspectives. When considering this gap in the research in terms of the ethical ramifications of research topics on personal trauma, further research becomes increasingly relevant.

In the case of sexual trauma, negative social responses to disclosures have been described as a "second rape" and are often as traumatizing as the actual sexual assault, substantially worsening and lengthening the recovery process and resulting in the decision not to disclose to anyone else (Ahrens, 2006). Despite Newman and Kaloupek's (2004) assertion that emotional distress is not related to retraumatization, research has yet to fully address the possibility of retraumatization during research interview disclosures. Do participants experience the interview as retraumatizing? If they do not experience the interview as traumatizing, why not? If participants do experience the interview as re-traumatizing, how is the research interview traumatic? Further, what does this suggest about the ethical protocol for trauma research?

Motivation for the Study

Understanding participants' experiences of qualitative research on personal trauma is relevant to the body of research on qualitative research methods. Participants' collective experience of research before, during, and after participation is an understudied area of qualitative methodological research. Participants' experiences should be valued, especially in informing researchers about methods. Feedback from participants is an excellent source of knowledge for rethinking methodological approaches and ethical assumptions. Researchers have reflected feelings of uncertainty and being unprepared as well as voicing concern about participants' well-being (Dickson-Swift, James, Kippen, & Liamputtong, 2007). Dickson-Swift et al. wrote a review of studies that synthesizes researchers' insights and reflections regarding researchers' ethical concerns in studying sensitive topics. To address these concerns, researchers may find it helpful to understand individuals' perceptions of their own research participation.

Qualitative research, as a methodological approach with increasing power and presence in the field of counseling psychology (Neimeyer & Diamond, 2001), is in need of this special attention. Qualitative methods need to be studied as they are at this malleable, formative time. Numerous counseling psychologists have called for the increased understanding and validation of qualitative methods (Haverkamp, Morrow, & Ponterotto, 2005; Ponterotto, 2005). For the continued use and improvement of this methodological approach, research needs to contribute to the field's understanding of the research process.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this grounded theory study was to develop a conceptual model about the experience of research participation. Of particular interest were participants' experiences of being interviewed on a personally traumatic experience. Based on follow-up interview data from a study about the disclosure of sexual trauma (Hoover, 2008), I constructed a conceptual model that captures the various factors involved in the participation process. This model is practice-oriented in its purpose so that it may better inform qualitative research methods.

Research Questions

The questions that guided this research were aimed at understanding more clearly the experiences of research participation from the perspective of individuals who have previously taken part in an interview-based study on sexual trauma. The overarching questions were the following:

1. How did research participants who participated in personal interviews on traumatic events experience the research process?
2. What motivated women who had been sexually assaulted to agree to participate in an interview-based study of their experiences of trauma?
3. How did these women experience their participation in the research from their first awareness of the study, throughout the study, and after the study ended?
4. What benefits or harms did these women identify as a result of participating in the study?

Rationale for Qualitative Research

Qualitative research methods are congruent with these questions. In order to capture an in-depth, holistic understanding of the unknown surrounding research participation, qualitative methods are most useful. The research aim was to understand the phenomenon from the vantage point of the participant, making qualitative methodologies even more fitting (Morrow & Smith, 2000). Given the fact that research participation is understudied, qualitative research is appropriate, and the resulting analysis evolved from participants' knowledge base, not a pre-existing theory (Morse, 2006). Emic-driven, inductive analysis is typical of qualitative methods (Marshall & Rossman, 2006) and is appropriate for developing conceptual models (Morse, 2002). Furthermore, the whole of the experience must be understood within its social context. Qualitative methods' aim is to shed light on that context by capturing the richness of the data and interpreting its meaning. This study did not have the pretense of broad generalizability. Instead, qualitative methods are helpful in amplifying a fragment of the human experience, in this case, the experience of research participation within the context of personal interviews on a traumatic topic.

CHAPTER II

METHOD

The purpose of this study was to understand research participation from the perspective of individuals who had previously taken part in an interview-based study on sexual trauma. The methods articulated in this chapter address the following questions: What motivated women who had been sexually assaulted to agree to participate in an interview-based study of their experiences of trauma? How did these women experience their participation in the research from their first awareness of the study, throughout the study, and after the study ended? What benefits or harms did these women identify as a result of participating in the study?

To answer these research questions, I specify certain approaches and practices in this chapter. First, I describe the feminist paradigm that guides my study. In keeping with this paradigm, I address my role as researcher-as-instrument and address the role of researcher subjectivity and reflexivity in the study. I describe the participants in this study and how they were recruited. I then lay out the research design using procedures of grounded theory, which involved the triangulation of multiple data sources. I explain my data collection and analysis procedures and conclude by justifying these methods as both being ethical and trustworthy.

The Research Paradigm

Feminist theory was the paradigm guiding this study. Feminism is a paradigm with multiple viewpoints that fundamentally are concerned with addressing power (Harrison, MacGibbon, & Morton, 2001; Morrow, 1992; Olesen, 2005; Valdivia, 2002). Amidst the varying viewpoints of feminism, I articulate my understanding of feminist research in regards to ontology, epistemology, axiology, and rhetorical structure as it related to this study.

From the standpoint of feminist research, the ontological assumption is that reality is subjective and that the research decision about with whom to speak is a power-laden decision (Harrison et al., 2001). I am interested in the subjective reality of those whose voices are otherwise unheard and, in the case of this study, those individuals who have had an unwanted sexual experience. When researching highly traumatic incidents, there is often a social stigma associated with disclosure, thus silencing the victim (Morrow, 2006). When individuals are silenced or responded to negatively, this may make it more difficult for them to disclose (Charmaz, 2006). Therefore, feminist researchers walk a fine line between realizing the power of silence as an effective survival/coping strategy and seeing the potential for disclosure as transformative and healing.

Feminism, like other critical/ideological paradigms, calls researchers to give voice to people who are silenced in our culture by bringing “marginalized perspectives to the center” (Morrow & Smith, 2000, p. 203). Being that the participants are survivor-victims of sexual trauma, they were particularly vulnerable to being silenced by a culture that normalizes coercive sexual experiences (Hoover, 2008). Their marginalized perspective calls into question cultural norms about heterosexuality and rape (Hoover, 2008).

Feminist epistemology critiques both the form of research and the process in which knowledge is produced by attending to issues of power (Banister et al., 1994). This feminist critique entails being attentive to individuals' multiplicity of statuses, not just gender (Olesen, 2007; Valdivia, 2002). Thus, it is important to recognize that the individuals in this study who experienced sexual trauma were also research participants. Being a research participant involves putting oneself under the microscope, and the researcher maintains a great amount of power (Fine, 1992). However, the intent of this study was to allow participants to be the experts on the research process. As researcher, I was the privileged student who did not claim to know more or better than participants (Harrison et al., 2001). I took seriously the knowledge of participants.

Like other qualitative research that positions itself within a critical/ideological paradigm, such as critical race theory, the explicit goal of this study was to not only work against oppressive forces, but also to empower (Morrow & Smith, 2000; Raymond, 1986). The feminist researcher is an activist (Fine, 1992). Part of this activism is not just the final written product, but also the actual process of doing research (Banister et al., 1994). Because the personal is political, the relationship between researcher and participants is a powerful opportunity for establishing equity, reciprocity, and mutuality (Morrow, 2006). Realizing my inherent power as researcher allowed me to analyze my privilege in relation to participants (Morrow, 1992).

Feminist epistemology establishes "collaborative and nonexploitative relationships" as the key to producing rich data (Creswell, 2007, p. 26). Morrow (2006) understood this aspect of feminist research as the “empowered relationship” with an aim to improve well-being and increase participants’ understandings of their experiences within their sociohistorical context (p. 147). Researchers increasing the distance between participants and themselves are considered oppressive practices (Harrison et al., 2001). As such, the distance between researcher and participants is lessened in feminist practice, yet the distance still exists (Connolly & Reilley, 2007; Fine, 1992). As researcher, I decreased the distance between myself and participants by engaging participants in the process of interpreting the data in that I asked clarifying questions and posed potential interpretations, especially in the follow-up interview and preliminary analysis feedback, as explained below. In this way, participants functioned collaboratively, and we collected and interpreted data for the purpose of producing empowering knowledge about the research topic. This collaborative method provided richer data and led to a more powerful understanding of the research topic (Harrison et al., 2001).

As a collaborative researcher, I utilized inclusive language throughout the thesis to emphasize the collaboration involved. As a feminist researcher, I viewed myself as primarily accountable to participants (Banister et al., 1994). Thus, inclusive language was an important reminder of my sense of accountability.

Feminist axiology means that this research was value-laden, and feminism supports transparency and clarity about these values (Banister et al., 1994; Harrison et al., 2001; Olesen, 2007). However, this does not mean that feminist research is sentimental. As Raymond (1986) claimed, feminist research is “passionate inquiry.” Banister and colleagues (1994) asserted:

> Feminist researchers see their work as accountable not only in terms of clarity or confession but also in relation to broader emancipatory and transformative goals, and current discussions are preoccupied with what this means in practice . . . committed to challenging and, where appropriate (in the sense that it may not be desirable to empower further interviewees from already dominant or oppressive groups), mitigating power relations within and outside research contexts. (p. 124)

The values I brought to this study influenced every aspect of the study, including the final analysis. Accordingly, I used the first person often to reinforce that this study was narrated from my particular worldview and value set (Creswell, 2007). As advocated by Fine (1992), my intention was to be "fully explicit about [my] original positions and where [my] research has taken [me]" (p. 212).

Researcher as Instrument

Reflexivity is an explicit aspect of feminist qualitative research design (Banister et al., 1994; Harrison et al., 2001; Morrow, 1992; Morton, 2001; Olesen, 2007). My biases influenced the entirety of the research process. By making my assumptions explicit, I was able to monitor the extent to which they guided my research.

My academic background is in sociology and anthropology with professors primarily practicing qualitative methods, so I am accustomed to and see the value in qualitative research as a tool for understanding human social processes. As I have transitioned to counseling psychology, I am still committed to qualitative methods. I value qualitative methods and wanted to use them to learn what insight participants had in regards to their participation. I believe it is important that ongoing research examines qualitative research methods and processes and addresses areas for improvement. To fulfill this aim, I looked to the insight of the participants themselves, and eliciting their interpretation and analytical perspective was crucial to examining their prior research experiences.

My professional background is in sexual violence, having interned at both a domestic violence shelter and a rape crisis center. I received formal training on hotline crisis counseling and hospital advocacy and worked many hours of direct service. My bias is to always believe the victim; therefore, I unquestioningly advocate for those who ask for that assistance. I am sensitive to issues of revictimization, or “second rape.”

My sensitivity to second rape is what brought me to consider studying the potential for revictimization within the context of research. I previously conducted research on the experiences of disclosure by women who had been sexually assaulted (Hoover, 2008). I grappled with the dual possibility of harm and benefit throughout the previous study. Furthermore, I was most concerned about misrepresenting the stories of the participants. I perceived that misrepresentation in the final written product would be the most detrimental to participants. In an effort to develop my competencies in qualitative research methods, I was personally invested in bringing light to the experience of these research participants.

Lastly, more recently, I participated in an in-depth interview as part of a qualitative research project. I found this experience to be personally validating. I saw the research topic and myself in new light after my participation. This experience led me to believe that participating in a research interview on traumatic events would produce some sort of change in the participant.

Although I acknowledge that subjectivity was driving my project, this awareness of my subjectivity was helpful throughout the research process. I maintained a self-reflective journal, which I found easier to maintain during the initial formulation of the research project than later. I wrote about my experience of conducting the interviews briefly after most interviews, but had increasing difficulty writing with regularity as I began the transcription, immersion, and analysis process. My reflections on the interviews were mostly about my excitement and surprise about the participants' perspectives. At other times, particularly in listening to the original interview recordings, I was saddened by the trauma I listened to, and I felt a rush of memories about the original interviews, especially the mood of the participants.

I had committed to periodically reviewing the journal myself, and I noticed that many journal entries during data analysis processes primarily included analytical hunches and task-oriented notes. To counteract this distancing from the research, I began to engage in body scans while analyzing the data. This way, I was able to pause and notice myself in the data and how I was interacting with and being affected by the data. Sometimes during the data analysis process, I noticed anxiety in my body and concluded that this was related to my uncertainty about how discrepant data fit together.

During the process of initially developing the study, I met weekly with a peer research team to offer my thoughts on the process, seek counsel, and discuss relevant concerns. "Peer debriefing" is a process outlined by Lincoln and Guba (1985), which was especially helpful with an emergent research design. During the data collection and analysis process, I met with a larger research team. Debriefing with colleagues helped me pull back from my subjective viewpoint and be open to various interpretations and understandings of the data. I also solicited colleagues' opinions about their expectations, thoughts, and feelings on research participants' experience in qualitative studies on personal topics. In the process of writing and continuing to analyze the data, their opinions served as a means of clarifying my interpretation and ultimately solidifying the final analysis.

Participants

I conducted follow-up research with participants from a previous study (Hoover, 2008) that examined unwanted sexual experiences. This previous study employed an open-ended interview format with 15 self-selected participants to understand their experience of disclosure (of telling others) of an unwanted sexual experience, sexual assault, and/or rape. The interview for each participant included information on their past experience of telling others about the incident, including who they chose to tell and not tell, how they chose to tell, and why they chose to tell and not tell. The average interview length was 101 minutes.

As researcher and interviewer, I had the dual relationship of having conducted the previous research and resoliciting their participation for this study. This dual relationship of re-interviewing posed some potential challenges if participants felt uncertain being critical about the previous study because I was responsible for it. I addressed this uncertainty by explicitly telling participants at the beginning of the interview that I was interested in any and every reaction, be it positive, negative, neutral, or mixed. I repeated this permission-giving statement at least one additional time in most interviews.

Ultimately, the fact that I conducted the previous interview functioned as an advantage. First, I had already established rapport with participants. Second, I had access to the original recordings from the prior interviews as well as my own memories of those interviews, which served to clarify any confusion in the recordings. However, in order to ease participants' uncertainty about whether or not I had a particular agenda or more recent recollection from the original study, I told them that I had not read the written thesis or listened to their interviews since 2008 because my intent in this study was to understand their experiences. As indicated later in this chapter, I listened to the interviews from the prior study after I completed both the first and the follow-up interviews.

The criterion sampling procedure involves a set of predetermined criteria (Patton, 1990), which, in this case was that the person participated in my previous study. This criterion "provide[d] substantial contributions to filling out the structure and character of the experience under investigation" (Polkinghorne, 2005, p.139). My intent was to understand this particular research experience. Given the diversity of approaches to qualitative studies on traumatic topics, soliciting individuals who had participated in the same qualitative study facilitated my understanding of the research process in this particular research context. For example, I used similar recruitment and informed consent procedures, conducted the interviews with the same interview protocol, and provided participants with the same written product. Additionally, as I was the primary researcher in the previous study, I was privy to my memory of that study, and I had access to the original interview recordings, which was a total of 21.9 hours. Selecting these particular participants allowed me to utilize this additional data source. I selected these individuals as potential participants in this study because I considered them “optimal” cases for achieving saturation of data (Morse, 2007).

Individuals who participated in the prior study were solicited from a small, private liberal arts college in the Midwest region of the US. Participants were full-time college students living on campus. There were 14 women and 1 man. I did not obtain demographic information during the initial study. Despite being from the same study, the participants were a diverse group in terms of several characteristics described below. In order to achieve redundancy of data, I increased the homogeneity of the sample (Morrow & Smith, 2000) by excluding the male individual from the study, because the previous study suggested that his experience of disclosure was vastly different than the female participants (Hoover, 2008).

In the prior study, participants identified a variety of incidents of sexual trauma. Even though recruitment materials did not explicitly solicit individuals who knew the perpetrator of the sexual trauma, the sample of 15 participants all specified that they knew the person who sexually assaulted them and that unwanted physical contact occurred (Hoover, 2008). The sample did not include any incidents of sexual trauma perpetrated by a stranger. In the IRB-mandated informed consent, participants were bound to not disclose sexual trauma that occurred when they were of minority age if the incident had not been previously reported to legal authorities. Two of the 15 participants disclosed that they were minors at the time of the sexual trauma, but their parents took legal actions (2008). The remaining 13 individuals did not make legal reports of the sexual trauma (2008). In the case of 2 participants who were sexually victimized on campus by another student, they chose to file neither legal nor institutional reports (2008).

Participants’ experiences of disclosure were highly varied (Hoover, 2008). Most participants had not disclosed the incident to a formal service provider. Three participants, 2 of whom were traumatized as children, had disclosed to parents (2008). Three participants disclosed the incident to teachers whom they trusted (2008). The majority of participants had chosen to disclose the incident to close female friends. Disclosures to friends served a number of purposes: to ascertain if the incident was or was not considered sexual assault, to deepen a friendship by sharing personal history, and to offer support to a friend who disclosed about a similar incident (2008). In addition to disclosing to close female friends, the majority of participants had disclosed the incident to romantic partners because they perceived the incident to be an important part of their personal and sexual history that needed to be shared as the relationship became increasingly intimate (2008). In the current study, participants did not name any significant shifts in disclosures to friends, family, or romantic partners. Two participants noted changes in their choice to disclose after participating in the prior study, and these changes are addressed in the third chapter of this thesis.

Eight of the 14 potential participants were willing to participate in the current study. At the time of the current study, the participants were 23-24 year old women. Six participants identified as Caucasian. One participant identified as being both Caucasian and Asian American. One participant identified her racial identity as Jewish. All of the participants reported that they completed their undergraduate degree, and 3 were currently working toward the completion of a master's degree. Seven participants identified as heterosexual; 1 participant identified as bisexual. Six participants reported to currently be involved in a romantic relationship. Two participants reported to be single and dating nonexclusively. Participants were raised in various regions of the United State of America. Four participants were raised in the Midwest, and 2 participants were raised on the East coast. One participant was raised in the South, and 1 participant was raised on the West coast. Currently, 5 of the 8 participants reported to live in different regions of the country than where they were raised. Three participants live in the Midwest, and 2 participants live in the Midatlantic region. One participant lives on the East coast, the South, and the West coast.

I contacted previous participants to solicit their research participation for this study via email correspondence. I viewed this form of contact as less intrusive than a phone call, and I did not want the participants to experience any coercion to participate. I wanted to respect that their participation in the previous study was completed and that they were not anticipating future contact from me as researcher. Email correspondence also brought to light the ethical concern of confidentiality, which I address fully in the Ethical Considerations section. Because email is potentially not confidential, I did not mention the topic of the previous study (see Appendix A for recruitment letter).

The participants who initially responded had questions about the research purpose and my motivation. I answered these questions to the best of my ability. Then, in my second solicitation contact with the remaining 10 people who had not responded, I included this additional information to better clarify the study (see Appendix B for additional information included in the second recruitment letter). The two rounds of recruitment resulted in a final response from 10 of 14 participants. Of the 10 participants, 2 ultimately did not participate. I attempted two additional contacts after weeks without receiving a response from the 2 participants. After those additional attempts, I chose not to initiate further contact.

I was intentional in ending the researcher and participant relationship given the extended contact and intimacy that developed over the course of the study (Bhattacharya, 2007; Ellis, 2007; Ellis et al., 2008). At each segment of the study, I clarified the research progress and what additional opportunities they would have to participate. When re-contacting participants for participating in follow-up interviews or the focus group, I offered the opportunity to participate and also reiterated that their participation was voluntary. As the study drew to a close, I informed participants of the research progress in an attempt to prepare them for the end of the project. At the close of the project, I wrote a letter of thanks and sent a copy of the research study to participants.

Research Design

Grounded theory was the research design that informed this study. First developed by sociologists Glaser and Strauss (1967), grounded theory is not a discipline-bounded approach to qualitative methods (Strauss & Corbin, 1990), and it has evolved to take on various forms (Charmaz, 2006). Grounded theory's historical roots are in symbolic interactionism, a theory that assumes that people construct their own realities through the use of shared symbols in social interactions (Fassinger, 2005). Thus, the data that a grounded theory design attempts to capture are data from participants who have a complex understanding of their lives and social context (2005).

Historically, grounded theory was founded on its opposition to traditional research methods that were based on deductive research (Charmaz, 2006). This basic underlying tenet of grounded theory is the inductive nature of research methods. Grounded theory uses "a systematic set of procedures to develop an inductively derived grounded theory about a phenomenon" (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 24). Thus, amidst the varying strands of grounded theory, the interaction between data and theory building remains an important principle (Charmaz, 2006). This perpetual interaction makes grounded theory a flexible and emergent design in that the researcher is simultaneously gathering and analyzing data (Haverkamp & Young, 2005). This constant integration allows the researcher to deepen analysis by refining preconceived research questions (Charmaz, 2006). My preconceptions and perspective on the research questions were considered as a point of departure for beginning to gather data, and rich data were essential to "following leads" and understanding the phenomenon under investigation (Charmaz, 2006, p. 17).

Because rich data are essential to understanding in depth the experiences of participants, grounded theory design provides the flexibility to return to participants to gather more data on new questions derived from preliminary analysis (Charmaz, 2006). Selecting participants for interview and other data sources is based on theoretical sampling (Fassinger, 2005). As such, I solicited and followed up with participants based on the analytical need to more fully understand ambiguous concepts and unanswered questions (2005).

This emergent analytical approach required “theoretical sensitivity,” meaning that I alternated between immersing myself in and withdrawing from the data in order to develop a trustworthy theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). In grounded theory, the researcher’s relationship to the data is defined by action, interaction, and interpretation (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007). According to Bryant and Charmaz (2007), the design is one that encourages “researchers’ persistent interaction with their data, while remaining constantly involved with their emerging analyses” (p. 1). This interaction involves looking for disconfirming evidence as well as engaging in constant comparison of different data sources (Charmaz, 2006).

The researcher acts on, interacts with, and interprets the data with the end goal of theory development (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Abstracting from the data allows the analysis to become increasingly conceptual and theoretical (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007). Although the current study did not take the analysis to a full theory development, the conceptual model I developed, which is articulated in the next chapter, is “grounded” in data and relevant to the specific reality of research participants (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007).

Grounded theory is fitting for research topics on transition, change, and process

(Charmaz, 2007; Morse, 2009). Charmaz (2007) defined process as the

> . . . unfolding temporal sequences that may have identifiable markers with clear beginnings and endings and benchmarks in between. The temporal sequences are linked in a process and lead to change. Thus, single events become linked as part of a larger whole. (p. 10)

Grounded theory was an appropriate design for this study because I brought the various aspects of research participation together as a whole process. In the Data Analysis section below, I outline more concretely the grounded theory analytical guidelines I followed.

Data Collection

Triangulation refers to the use of multiple sources of data, investigators, theoretical perspectives, and/or methods (Denzin, 1970). To triangulate the analysis, I used multiple sources of data as "different lines of action," which yielded a more cohesive theoretical base (Denzin, 1970, p. 298). I used semistructured individual interviews, follow-up interviews, recordings from the original interviews, analytical notes, written correspondence, and preliminary results feedback.

Individual Interviews

Interviews allow for and give voice to the complexity of specific human experiences by gleaning meaning from the language and narratives that interviewees use. Interviews are a process, a dynamic unfolding of meaning (Anderson & Jack, 1993). The interviews were semistructured in nature so that certain themes could be addressed in a directed, exploratory style, but the particular question wording and sequencing were flexible (Charmaz, 2006; Kvale, 1996).

Of the eight interviews, I conducted six interviews via phone. I conducted one interview via Skype and one via email. I would have preferred to interview participants face-to-face, but I needed to accommodate participants and myself living in different locations.

Interviews lasted an average of 76 minutes (55-116 minutes). This resulted in a total of 8.9 hours of interview, not including the time for the interview conducted via email. With informed consent (see Appendix C), I digitally recorded the interview. Because of technical difficulties, I lost 20 minutes of one interview recording as well as an entire interview, which was 55 minutes in length. I reconstructed the lost recordings and asked both participants to check my reconstruction. Those two participants made few changes to the reconstructed transcript. Because both participants participated in follow-up interviews, I was able to further clarify their perspective and obtain verbatim quotes.

During the interview, I took note of aspects that I wanted the participant to expand upon. These notes served as cues for me to ask additional questions during the interview. As this was a grounded theory research design, I made analytical notes about aspects of the interview that seemed to reflect a pattern or an anomaly. After the interview was concluded, I set aside time to record immediate impressions (Kvale, 1996). I referred to these notes as I immersed myself in the data and began analysis.

When I contacted a participant to interview, I set aside a period of becoming re-acquainted to establish a “professional caring relationship” (Campesino, 2007). Then, I established informed consent, and the formal interview began. I followed feminist interview guidelines outlined by Campbell, Adams, Wasco, Ahrens, and Sefl (2009). Based on their research with women survivors of sexual violence, they asserted that the primary concern of feminist interviewers is the emotional well-being of participants (2009). Interview practices that correspond to promoting the emotional well-being of participants are asking open-ended questions, affirming participants, encouraging participants to ask questions, and being warm, compassionate, patient, and understanding toward participants (2009). Further, Campbell and colleagues (2009) solicited feedback from women rape survivors about their preference for certain interview practices. Survivors emphasized the importance of interviewers' responding to survivors by being understanding, warm, and compassionate, yet recognizing the limits of understanding the survivors' unique experiences (2009).

In their work with women survivors of sexual trauma, Brzuzy et al. (1997) emphasized the importance of giving participants the opportunity to withdraw from the study. I was attentive to participants' discomfort and notified participants of their right to stop the interview and withdraw their consent to participate. However, I was careful to not persuade participants toward less participation or offer to discontinue because I realized that participants were capable of choosing their own level of participation (Lyons & Chipperfield, 2000). Further, participants could have perceived the offer to discontinue the interview as rejection, which could have resulted in harm to the participant (Morse et al., 2008).

In interviews, I was explicit with participants about wanting their perspective on research participation and that I was not wanting them to reinforce my own viewpoint. To better understand the participants' meaning, I listened attentively and was alert to leads and concepts that required further exploration (Charmaz, 2006). As advised by Tanggard (2008), I maximized the potential for objections and disagreement from participants by establishing an open conversational space, in which I was open to shifting away from my research agenda and focusing on the participants' perspectives. Additionally, when a participant articulated a viewpoint that contrasted with another participant's perspective or with an emerging analysis I was developing about the data, I probed the participant for additional information about their viewpoint.

The interview guide was open to change because qualitative research is an emergent design (Kvale, 1996). I gained preliminary information by asking the first open-ended broad question (see Interview Guide below). By starting the interviews in this way, I was able to stress the importance of the participants' experiences as opposed to prompting or leading the participant to comply with my expectations and agenda (Morse, 2008). The interview guide covered important themes but was not an exhaustive list of questions that were asked. Clarifying and interpretive questions were essential to the interview (Charmaz, 2006; Kvale, 1996).

Interview Guide

1. Would you please tell me about your experience of participating in the original research study?

2. Why were you interested in participating in the original research study?
3. What expectations did you have about the interview before we met?
4. In what ways were your expectations met and not met?
5. What reactions and responses did you have to the informed consent?
6. What reactions and responses did you have to the interview?
7. What emotions, feelings, and thoughts did you have about talking about a personal topic for research purposes?
8. What specifically was rewarding or challenging about the interview?
9. What short-term and long-term effects did/do you experience as a result of the interview?
10. If you read the previous study, what did you think? Can you tell where you are? Did you feel your confidentiality was threatened? Is there anything you would like to cross out?
11. How did participating in the study change you? For example, how did it change your view of yourself, the incident you talked about, and your decisions to disclose or not disclose to others?
12. Have you told anyone else about the incident since you participated in the prior study? What was that like? Did participating in the prior study influence your decision to disclose?
13. How did participating in the prior study affect your healing?
14. How did/do you feel about your level of involvement in the overall study?
15. What remains ambiguous or uncertain to you about your participation in the

original study?

16. What have I forgotten to ask about your experience of participating in a research interview?
17. What could have been different about the prior study that would have made it more comfortable for you? If you were to do a similar project, what changes would you make so that the experience was more comfortable for participants? (Asked during the follow-up interview.)
18. If you were to give a title or a name to your overall experience, what would it be? (Asked during the follow-up interview.)

Follow-up Interview

As this was a grounded theory design, following up with participants was crucial to enriching the data and integrating data collection with analysis. Thus, I followed up with participants to ask additional questions that emerged from data from other interviews (see Appendix D for initial contact to invite participants to participate in follow-up interview). For example, during her first interview, Lauren mentioned that she was okay to talk about her experience because she had “worked through it,” but other people at different points in their healing process may have found it easier to participate in writing as opposed to speaking in an interview format. Taking this insight, in follow-up interviews, I asked participants about any aspects of the research that could have been different (see question 17). Additionally, after some participants voluntarily remarked about their relationship to me, I also asked the rest of the participants explicitly about their relationship with me (as a friend, as someone unknown, or as someone known by reputation on campus) and how that affected their experience of the prior study. As a final example, many participants mentioned unsolicited that if a male researcher were conducting the study, they would be uncomfortable participating. Thus, I also added researcher's gender as a topic to address with participants who had not previously mentioned it. I was explicit with participants during the follow-up that I wanted to understand better how certain aspects of the study were important to some participants and they may not have been important to others. I did not want participants to feel that they needed to falsely endorse some aspect that may be have been important or true for other participants but was not important or true for them. This transparency resulted in a more complex understanding of the data.

In addition to following up on data from other participants, I also asked participants to clarify specific remarks they made as well as general themes from the previous interview that I wanted to understand more fully (Rosentahl, 2003). I also shared preliminary analytical hunches and asked for feedback. For example, some participants discussed an entirely political motivation for participating in the prior study as other participants focused on the personal aspects of participating. In order to better understand the dynamic of these two mutually influencing motivations, I told participants about the difference I was seeing in different participants and explicitly asked participants about their particular experience in terms of both motivating factors.

Six of the 8 participants chose to participate in follow-up interviews. The follow-up interviews lasted an average of 32 minutes (20-46 minutes). Five were conducted via phone, and one was conducted via Skype. Again, I digitally recorded the follow-up interviews. I took notes that helped with the interview process as well as data analysis. I took note of aspects about which I wanted more information to cue me to ask additional questions. I also noted aspects of the interview that seemed to reflect a pattern as well as anomalies.

Recordings from Original Interviews

After conducting the first and follow-up interviews, I listened to the original interview data of all of the original participants even if they did not participate in the current study (with the exception of the male participant and 1 participant who did not want to record the interview in the prior study but chose to participate in the current study). These 13 interviews lasted an average of 101 minutes and resulted in a total of 21.9 hours of original interview recordings. Listening to interview tapes helped me re-contextualize the prior interviews, which was the very experience under investigation in this study. The interview tapes reminded me of unique aspects about each interview and interviewee. The original interview data were analyzed for insights regarding participants' in-the-moment experience of the actual interview as well as motivation to participate. I made analytical notes and transcriptions of any moments in which the research itself was under discussion. These notes and transcriptions were incorporated into the analysis and will be discussed further in Chapter III.

Written Correspondence

If participants were interested in participation, but preferred to not interview over the phone, I asked if they would be interested in answering questions via email or letter. Two participants requested to participate via email. In these instances, after establishing informed consent, I asked the first interview question. After the first interview question was asked, 1 participant did not respond, and I initiated additional contact without receiving a response. The other participant completed the interview via email over the course of 5 weeks. After receiving the participant's initial response, I asked clarifying and interpretive questions as well as introduced new topics by asking questions outlined in the interview guide.

I anticipated that the written correspondence would require more clarifying questions, as this type of communication was asynchronic, with messages being sent sequentially (Murray & Sixsmith, 1998). However, I felt that the participant responded with full responses, which required normal, but not extensive, clarifying questions as compared to an in-person interview.

Even though emailing may allow for increased, richer correspondence, the back-and-forth potential may be burdensome for participants. Clarifying the extent and length of participation was crucial. The participant reported to me about her responding process. She said that she waited until she had time to respond and then she sat down to read and responded to my email in the same sitting. This way, she believed she was providing more spontaneous answers, which would better mimic the in vivo quality of in-person interviews. I affirmed that this process seemed appropriate. We agreed to attempt to respond within 48 hours to each other’s emails, and we notified each other when that would not occur.

Taking leave and ending face-to-face interviews allows for interactional cues that are more obvious to participants. A string of emails, on the other hand, was less clearly temporally bound. Thus, taking leave was dealt with explicitly and openly with the participant who corresponded via Internet (Murray & Sixsmith, 1998). I notified her when I anticipated only having two rounds of emails remaining. I notified her when I anticipated that I did not think I had any additional questions besides the questions in the current email. I notified her in the last email that it was the end of the interview, but she (like all other participants) was welcome to contact me with any additional information or questions at any time and that I anticipated contacting her for the follow-up interview in the near future.

A disadvantage of Internet communication is the lack of nonverbal communication (Beck, 2005; Murray & Sixsmith, 1998). Often, face-to-face interaction eases rapport building. In the case of this study, I had already established rapport with participants because I conducted interviews with them in the previous study. Thus, there were not any major drawbacks to Internet communication in terms of rapport. However, I was not able to monitor participants’ well-being through nonverbal cues. During one email, the participant reported that she felt shaky as she was typing. I responded to this email by asking her if she was okay, acknowledging the difficulty she was experiencing, and giving her permission to take a break from the interview and return when she felt comfortable. The participant responded that she was able to take the break she needed and returned to answer the questions when she felt comfortable.

Offering email correspondence as an alternative to phone or face-to-face interviews might lessen the burden of participation. Participants can elect to respond at a time that corresponds to their interests, needs, and desires (Murray & Sixsmith, 1998). This delay in communication may provide participants with the time to reflect on the questions (Lakeman, 1997; Murray & Sixsmith, 1998). Another logistical advantage is that the Internet decreases the distance between participants and researchers who live in different geographical locations and time zones (Beck, 2005). For the participant who chose to participate via email, this seemed to be the case. The participant attempted to correspond when it was both convenient and comfortable for her.

In the context of this study, I had some additional advantages to gathering data via email. I was concerned that, during face-to-face interview, participants would feel concerned about hurting my feelings if they were to disclose anything negative about the research process. However, using the Internet for data collection might have lessened concerns about social desirability (Beck, 2005). Thus, participants might have felt less inhibited to articulate feedback that might have been considered negative with Internet communication. Because only 1 woman chose to participate via email, I was not able to conduct an additional analysis comparing differences between phone interviews and email interviews. However, I speculate that the participant who completed the email interview did not disclose negative feedback any more or less than any other participant. Additional relevant ethical issues regarding data collection via the Internet are outlined in the Ethical Considerations section.

The freedom to honestly disclose via Internet might be extended to other areas of the research process. For example, Murray and Sixsmith (1998) argued that participants might be more inclined to ask questions regarding their participation and the research purpose when corresponding electronically. Three of the 4 participants who first responded to my initial recruitment letter asked questions about the study in an electronic format. The role of technology in mediating communication was potentially quite consequential, facilitating a more empowered participatory stance.

Written Documents

All participants were asked about any journal keeping, email correspondences, or other written documents in which their participation in the prior study was part of the content. During the first interview, I asked for a copy of these documents minus that which they wish to have excluded from the version I would receive. I anticipated that my role as researcher in the previous study would have affected the interview data collected for this study because participants would have felt concerned about making a positive impression. However, documents that were written without my presence would have possibly presented new information that the other data sources did not capture. Additionally, written documents could have served as data that were captured at a specified time after the prior study. Given my interest in the research process over time, written narratives would have been helpful in sequencing the process of the phenomenon (Denzin, 1970). However, none of the participants reported to have any written documents. Nonetheless, my inquiry may have caused participants to remember additional information about their experience of participating in the prior research study.

Preliminary Results Feedback

Once the grounded theory analytic process was underway, I also invited participants to work with me as co-analysts. I invited each participant to set up alias email accounts, so that all of the participants could communicate confidentially via group email (see Appendix E for initial contact with participants to recruit for results feedback online). I provided participants with preliminary results, including a visual conceptual model and sought feedback from participants.

I anticipated that the preliminary results feedback would serve the dual purpose of providing me new data as well as new analytical insight (Morse, 2007). In terms of new data, I anticipated that the participants would be in conversation with one another, which would provide me with greater insight into the meaning of participation for the group as a whole (Jordan et al., 2007; Stewart & Williams, 2005). However, of the 3 participants who provided feedback, 2 emailed me without including the other participants. The third participant called me with her feedback. Thus, the participants were not in communication with each other about my preliminary results. In regards to furthering my analysis, I brought the 3 participants’ feedback directly into my analytical process as I developed my understanding of the phenomenon. Based on feedback, I altered the visual conceptual model from a more process model to a more holistic model, and I clarified the presentation of quotations.

Data Analysis

With an analysis driven by grounded theory, I engaged with and collected data and at the same time analyzed those data. I identify important steps in the data analysis process in this section. However, as grounded theory requires the researcher to step back and forth from the data, the steps I discuss are better understood as fluid guidelines, not a chronological manual.

First, I initially immersed myself in the data by transcribing the interview data. Following the transcription and transcription check, I listened to each interview an estimated three times. The reflections and analytical notes I made during and after the interviews served as a source of analysis. Integrating these multiple sources added to the theoretical richness of my analysis.

I began the open coding process outlined by Strauss and Corbin (1990) and Charmaz (2006). Charmaz (2006) prioritized the importance of adhering closely to the data and coding with action-oriented language. I utilized ATLAS.ti (Muhr, 2009), a computer software package, to facilitate and document the open coding analysis process.

The process of creating levels of abstraction began simultaneously with data collection and analysis. I followed the grounded theory process by engaging in constant comparison so that the codes were named, merged, and realigned in relation to one another (Charmaz, 2006). I renamed codes as I reviewed my analysis, and I considered moving through the data in this way to be more fluid and process-oriented, which resulted in a better final analysis. During this process, I spent a week away from the data to allow for a less outcome-oriented processing of the data. I was able to reflect on the data without making alterations to the coding structure. I pulled back from the data and asked my research questions as well as the following questions outlined by Charmaz:

> From whose point of view is a given process fundamental? From whose view is it marginal? How do observed social processes emerge? How do participants' actions construct them? Who exerts control over these processes? Under what conditions? What meanings do different participants attribute to the process? How do they talk about it? What do they emphasize? What do they leave out? How and when do their meanings and actions concerning the process change? (p. 20)

As a next step, I pulled back from the data to analyze the codes that I had identified. This is a process called focus coding that involves looking at the most significant and most frequent initial codes (Charmaz, 2006). In this process, I grouped codes into families of codes that shared similar meaning. Shifting through the codes in this manner illuminated what was more important in the data. I used an output function on ATLAS.ti to display each code and family of codes with the number of codes in that family; I also looked at the variance and similarity between codes that were grouped in the same family. Again, I spent a week away from the data to allow for a less outcome-oriented processing of the data; instead of making changes to the data or moving on to axial coding, I allowed myself the time to consider the data without manipulating it.

Axial coding was the next step, in which I realigned codes and determined relationships between and among codes. Axial coding serves the function of bringing the data back together (Charmaz, 2006; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). I used a modeling function on ATLAS.ti to arrange and rearrange various coding structures. Then, I used note cards that represented each coding family to arrange and rearrange various coding structures and relationships among families, and from that structure, I developed larger families. I was attentive to the importance of including disconfirming evidence and anomalies within the coding structure so that the complexity of the data was not lost. As I engaged in the axial coding process, I conducted follow-up interviews, which further aided me in confirming and disconfirming analytical hunches.

The final coding process was selective coding, which is a process of pulling out key concepts and prioritizing certain codes as more theoretically relevant (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). I pursued selective coding by again working with the note cards to visualize a model. From this note card construction, I identified four major themes and five temporal moments that remained in the final analysis. These themes and temporal moments were developed into a visual conceptual model. At that time, I also began writing about the themes and temporal moments, which I considered to be part of the analysis process. I was able to see the data in new ways and develop an initial draft. After liberally using quotations from the interviews, I incorporated quotations from the follow-up interviews and original interview recordings. Then, in order to check the complexity and fullness of the analysis, I counted the number of quotes from each participant in order to ensure equal representation. After developing a full draft, I sought feedback from participants, which was then incorporated into the final analysis.

Trustworthiness

Authenticity criteria are most relevant to the trustworthiness of a feminist study. Authenticity criteria are fairness, ontological authenticity, educative authenticity, and catalytic authenticity (Guba & Lincoln, 1989; Lincoln, 1995). *Fairness* refers to soliciting and honoring different constructions. I met the criteria for fairness by seeking both positive and negative perspectives from participants, conducting follow-up interviews, seeking preliminary analysis feedback, and looking for disconfirming evidence. *Ontological authenticity* is the development of participants' constructions. I met this criterion in my attention to the adequacy of the data through follow-up interviews and my commitment to continuing analysis with participants in seeking their feedback.

The other two authenticity criteria are educative and catalytic. *Educative authenticity* means that participants take into consideration others' perspectives. I distributed the final thesis to participants, which provided participants with information about the other participants' perspective and experience. *Catalytic authenticity* refers to how the research stimulates action. I anticipate seeking publication in a scholarly journal that addresses qualitative research methods in order to inform other researchers about research participants' perspectives on their experience of participating in a research study on a sensitive topic.

Components that contribute to the rigor and trustworthiness of the study were the self-reflective journal, the research team, the multiple sources of data, my immersion in the data, and my explicit attention to disconfirming evidence. The self-reflective journal, research team, and follow-up with participants all functioned to monitor subjectivity. My immersion in the data, attention to disconfirming evidence, method of constant comparison, and the multiple sources of data (individual interviews, follow-up interviews, and recordings from the original study interviews) all increased the trustworthiness of the data and my subsequent analysis. Taken as a whole, these components were interdependent and interacted with each other in such as a way as to monitor my subjectivity and increase the trustworthiness of the study’s conclusions.

To track the evolution of the data collection and analysis process, I utilized an audit trail (see Appendix F). An audit trail is a detailed chronology of the entirety of the research process (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). Because I used a grounded theory analytical approach, I included emergent coding and changes in analytical hunches in the audit trail. I chronologically tracked the grounded theory process by maintaining dated analytical memos for the duration of the data collection and analysis. Any information in the audit trail records that threatened the confidentiality of the participants was abstracted from the abbreviated version of the audit trail included in Appendix F.

Ethical Considerations

In all activities regarding this study, I adhered to the APA ethical code (APA, 1992) and procedures of the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at the University of Utah. I began data collection once IRB approval was granted. I did not make any changes to data collection procedures and did not need to seek any additional amendment approval from the Institutional Review Board.

A general ethical concern that had special considerations in this study was the potential for coercion. Because individuals that I recruited had already participated in the previous study, they could have felt pressure to participate in this study. I addressed this in my recruitment materials by being explicit about the fact that this was a separate study and that they were in no way obligated to participate. Limiting the number of recruitment contact to two attempts also minimized the potential for coercion.

As the researcher, it was my responsibility to inform participants of confidentiality risks as well as my strategies for diminishing risks related to the Internet (Binik, Mah, & Kiesler, 1999). Participants' email traceability was extinguished to the greatest extent possible. I converted Internet data to password protected electronic files and then deleted the Internet-generated data (1999).

An additional ethical concern regarding the use of the Internet was the inability to monitor the distress of participants (Binik et al., 1999). Without the in vivo observation of the participant who participated via email, I could have had difficulty detecting distress. To address this concern, Binik and colleagues (1999) recommended making clinical and referral backup services explicitly accessible to participants. With varied geographical locations, I provided participants with nationalized referral services as well as specific services available locally as needed. Additionally, I could have had increased difficulty monitoring clues that the participant who participated via email could have wanted to withdraw from the study (Murray & Sixsmith, 1998). Murray and Sixsmith (1998) suggested that atypical behaviors, such as delayed correspondence, responding with relatively short answers, or increased questioning, be potential indicators of desire to withdraw. As explained above in Written Correspondence, I addressed the participant's discomfort appropriately when the participant disclosed that she was shaky when she was responding to my interview questions.

CHAPTER III

RESULTS

The purpose of this investigation was to learn how the women experienced being participants in an interview-based study on a sensitive topic, namely disclosure of sexual trauma. Based on the data analysis process specified in the prior chapter, two core themes emerged: (a) *Safety and (Dis)comfort*; and (b) *Relationships*. Safety and (Dis)comfort captures participants' perceptions of varying difficulty and discomfort in participating. The second theme of Relationships consists of three subthemes: (a) *Agency: I am Here by Choice*; (b) *Researcher-participant Relationship: I Trust You*; and (c) *Community of Women: We Are All Together*. First, Agency: I Am Here by Choice is a participant's relationship to herself as a research participant. Second, the Researcher-participant Relationship: I Trust You refers to a participant's perception of her relationship to me, the researcher. Third, the Community of Women: We Are All Together signifies a participant's relationship to both other participants and other woman who are affected by sexual trauma. These three relational subthemes continuously and simultaneously have an impact on participants' sense of safety and comfort.

In addition to the two core themes identified above, there was a *Temporal Process of Research Participation*, which consisted of five segments: (a) *Decision to Participate: I Need to Do This*; (b) *The Interview: An Experience In and Of Itself*; (c) *After the Interview: Bouncing Back*; (d) *The Write-up: I Want to Read It*; and (e) *Long-term Growth and Challenges: There Isn't Resolution*. Within each temporal process, a different theme is more or less relevant, either Safety and (Dis)comfort or one of the relational subthemes. The relative importance of a theme was determined by the density with which multiple participants' emphasized that theme at that particular temporal segment. Decision to Participate: I Need to Do This refers to participants' varying motivations to respond to the recruitment letter and participate in the study. The Interview: An Experience In and Of Itself refers to participants' unique experiences of participating in the individual interview with me. After the Interview: Bouncing Back entails the shorter-term consequences of participating in the interview. The Write-up: I Want to Read It explains participants' reactions to reading the final written product. Long-term Growth and Challenges: There Isn't Resolution refers to changes and consequences participants experienced after participating in the research study. Even though there are temporal markers that I utilize to explain the results, the theme of Safety and (Dis)comfort and the theme of Relationships are the overarching themes across time. As such, each of the five segments of the Temporal Process are explained in light of the theme Safety and (Dis)comfort and the three relationship subthemes (see Table 1).

However, the last temporal segment, Long-Term Growth and Challenges: There Isn't Resolution is not described vis a vis the same four themes. Because long-term

Table 1

Organization of Temporal Processes, Themes, and Subthemes

Temporal Processes	**Theme: Safety and (Dis)comfort**	**Theme: Relationships**		
		Agency: I Am Here by Choice	***Researcher-participant Relationship: I Trust You***	***Community of Women: We Are All Together***
Decision to Participate: I Need to Do This	No other safe places	*It's personal and political*	I knew I could trust you	I want to be part of something
The Interview: An Experience In and Of Itself	*It isn't easy*	I can offer my perspective	Telling you is different	We make the research successful
After the Interview: Bouncing Back	I protect myself	It affects me	*What do you think of me?*	I seek support
The Write-Up: I Want to Read It	I am protected	I am exposed to myself	It became my paper too	*I can hear them*
Long-Term Growth and Challenges: There Isn't Resolution		*Intrapersonal growth and challenges: It was a spark to my healing*	Interpersonal growth and challenges: My decisions to (not) tell	Social growth and challenges: My awareness and feminist action

Note. The left column represents the five segments of the Temporal Process. Each row corresponding to each temporal segment includes the subtitles associated with each theme. For example, "No other safe places" is the subtitle for the theme of Safety and (Dis)comfort that corresponds to the Decision to Participate. Italics indicate which theme is more relevant at that particular temporal segment, which is based on that theme being more emphasized by participants at that temporal segment than other themes. For example, "*It's personal and political*" indicates that the corresponding theme of Agency is most relevant to the Decision to Participate.

growth and challenges move beyond a discrete time period of research participation, the way subthemes were narrowly defined does not apply beyond this period (e.g., the researcher-participant relationship ends when the study ends, but other interpersonal relationships extend beyond the study). Thus, the subthemes of Long-term Growth and Challenges: There Isn't Resolution address intrapersonal, interpersonal, and social issues more broadly. Intrapersonal Growth and Challenges: A Spark to My Healing captures the changes participants experience within themselves related to themselves and incidents of sexual trauma. Interpersonal Growth and Challenges: My Decisions to (Not) Tell illuminates the varied choices participants have made to disclose experiences of sexual trauma to others. Social Growth and Challenges: My Awareness and Feminist Activism expresses some participants' experiences of seeing and acting in response to the social problem of sexual assault.

Both a written explanation and a visual model of the results are provided in this chapter. An additional component of the results are included at the end of the chapter that articulates participants' suggestions for enhancing the research participation process. Grounded theory's representations of the analysis "usually include extensive 'voice' of participants through the selection of representative quotations" (Ponterotto, 2005, p. 134). In that my conceptual model is grounded in the data, I maximize the use of interview data to articulate the research participation process. The quotations serve to illuminate the specificity and complexity of the research participation process. However, in order to increase readability, certain alterations have been made to quotations, including brackets and ellipses. From the interview data, the themes are illuminated to grasp a more comprehensive, global perspective on the research participation process. However, there is a tension in conveying the global meaning as well as being mindful of the uniqueness of each participant's experience. To illuminate that uniqueness, I asked participants in the follow-up interview to give a title to their experience of participating in the original study. Participants' titles were *Femme Talk, Multibeneficial Self-Exploration, Revealing Shadows and Hurt,* and *Contradicting Feelings.* The distinctiveness of these titles demonstrates the idiosyncratic aspect of the research participation process.

Safety and (Dis)comfort

Safety and (Dis)comfort refers to the participants' perceptions of their own safety and comfort as they made decisions about the way in which they participated (agency), as they interacted with me (researcher-participant relationship), and as they were connected to a larger community of women (both other research participants and other women affected by issues of sexual trauma). Feeling safe was both related to and different than feeling comfortable. For example, participants denied any fear that their information would not be kept confidential, but that safety of information did not imply that the participant felt comfortable disclosing information to the researcher. As an additional example, participants may have felt safe in the interview and that no one would intrude in the space, but this did not mean that the interview space was emotionally comfortable. Safety and comfort were interconnected perceptions.

Expectations about the research process significantly contributed to participants' sense of safety and comfort. Participants explained that they felt research was a way for others to learn and the interview was a place to share information so others might learn. For example, Bridgette explained how the academic context contributed to her comfort:

> Because I’m maybe used to the academic environment, and it was my senior year in college, so I’d grown to trust and love the world of academia, for me personally, it made it a safe space. And knowing that it was within the women’s studies department, which for me has always been a place where my thoughts and views and vo - like I’ve never felt more important than the day when I first learned what feminism was. . . . I read my first thing, and thought, “Oh my gosh, I don’t have to live my life this other way. Like, I can think about things in these terms.” Like, that for me . . . made it a place I could trust.

Bridgette’s perspective demonstrates that not only a comfort with academia but also a personal connection to feminism in academia increased her sense of comfort.

Participants’ orientations toward academia globally, not necessarily the specific research processes, added to their comfort. For example, Alice expected that she could speak in a more professional, objective way about the incident during the interview. This expectation created a sense of comfort for her. However, this did not imply that she had a full working knowledge of the research participation process; in fact, she was surprised by the informed consent and the debriefing form. Participants’ expectations did not necessarily signify specific knowledge, but instead, a general comfort with research and the purpose of research. However, Lauren did mention some specific aspects about her familiarity with the research project. She mentioned that she knew it would be kept in the school library and that it would be confidential.

For the participants who were research-savvy, their familiarity with confidentiality contributed to their sense of safety. The majority of participants mentioned confidentiality as part of the research process. Additionally, I asked participants about their experience of the informed consent process. Even though researchers may anticipate that the informed consent was a meaningful document that greatly contributed to participants' sense of safety and comfort, some participants had little recollection of the informed consent process. However, Joanne and Bridgette both remembered the process and commented on its importance. Bridgette explained:

> I was glad that I knew that it wasn't going to . . . feel exposed. I think that was really important, when you've already been in a situation where you were so vulnerable. And then, you know, like having that extra step, like this is important, but it's also going to be on your own terms. It's going to be private.

Similarly, Joanne mentioned that the informed consent was "reassuring" and informative about both her role and my role. While maybe not a memorable part of the research process for all participants, the informed consent did provide a framework of safety.

With this framework of safety, participants' sense of comfort changed especially throughout the interview itself. As such, it will be most emphasized in <u>The Interview: An Experience In and Of Itself</u>.

<u>Relationships</u>

The safety and comfort that participants felt was influenced by three relationships: their relationship to themselves (agency), their relationship to me (researcher-participant relationship), and their relationship to other participants and other women affected by sexual trauma (community of women). Each of these three relationships is further discussed below.

Agency: I Am Here by Choice

In the context of research participation, agency refers to the participant's own sense of self, her purpose in the study, and her choices. For a potential participant, their first agentive act was even considering participating. Based on prior experiences of disclosure as well as expectations about the research process, women who decided to participate initially felt anywhere from hesitant to completely confident. Candice, Bridgette, and Riley remembered being hesitant about whether or not their participation would be worthwhile. Candice initially felt uncertain for a variety of reasons, but ultimately decided to participate:

> I remember being very hesitant to come forward. Not because it was hard for me to talk about - I'd never really talked about it with anyone but my boyfriend, so I didn't know if it would be hard or not - but because I felt like there were other experiences that were much worse than my own. . . . I remember being really nervous to talk to you, because I was afraid that I would realize that this event had a bigger impact on my life than I was willing to admit. I was afraid of the questions you would ask, probably because I was afraid of the answers I would give - afraid of what those answers then implied for the rest of my life. Would I have to change things after talking with you? Would I have to tell other people? Would I feel worse, even worse than right after it happened, because I had kept it in for so long?

Despite uncertainty, Candice decided that she felt it was worth the risk to participate. This uncertainty demonstrates that participants' initial decision to participate was a major choice that they had to make.

Researchers might expect that participants felt as though they had little power throughout the research process, as they were the participants and I was the researcher. The power distribution inherently lies in my favor. However, participants consistently reported their own sense of self and ability to make choices about their level and kind of participation. For example, Joanne stated, "At the beginning I . . . just wanted to talk, so . . . I didn't feel uncomfortable because I volunteered to do it."

Agency is a theme that influences the entirety of the research process. However, it is most dominant in Decision to Participate: I Need to Do This. Agency will be most thoroughly emphasized in that section.

Researcher-participant Relationship: I Trust You

The Researcher-participant Relationship: I Trust You refers to the participant's sense of her relationship to the researcher, including her perceptions of the researcher. Participants made assumptions about me as the researcher, especially as a female researcher. Most participants said that they would not participate if the researcher were a male; of the 6 participants who commented on the possibility of a male researcher, only 2 participants said that they would consider participating in a research study on this topic being conducted by a male researcher. Bridgette commented:

> I felt like a man couldn't listen and truly understand what I was going through. Even though you didn't offer any of your own experiences, I still felt like in some way you kind of knew, not exactly what I was going through, but you could understand because you are also a woman. I think that made it a safe place for me as well.

Telling me as a woman felt fitting to participants, as they could assume that I would understand what they were sharing with me. However, in the interview, speaking with me represented speaking with another woman in a way that was distinguished from other women in their lives. This concept will be further illustrated in The Interview: An Experience In and Of Itself.

In addition to feeling more comfortable with a female researcher, participants' perceptions of me varied greatly depending on how well the participant knew or did not know me. For example, Bridgette, Natalie, and Riley affirmed that knowing me from being students at the same, small college made them feel more comfortable during the interview. Some participants did not know me or only knew of me because we were students at the same college. In this case, they made assumptions about me as someone doing a study on this topic. They assumed that I cared about the topic and had some experience in the area. Summer, who knew of me, made assumptions about me as being nonjudgmental and informed:

> Just a feeling that you might have, not a similar viewpoint, but a nonjudgmental viewpoint, which I think is a fear when you talk about these things is being judged. . . . Just that, obviously in order to interview people about it, you will have had to research it, and, you know, at least know something about the topic, or have looked at previous research that other people have done. I don't know if you, I mean what your extent was, if you worked in a women's shelter, but in my head, that was what I kind of thought.

The researcher-participant relationship is a theme that influences the entirety of the research process because the participant's trust in the researcher is monumental. Especially in the period of time between the interview and the write-up, the participants were not as actively involved in the research process. In this time, the researcher's role was accentuated in that I was writing the analysis, and the participants reported some uncertainty with how they would be represented in the analysis, which will be discussed in After the Interview: Bouncing Back.

Community of Women: We Are All Together

Community of Women: We Are All Together refers to participants' sense that they are part of a group of research participants as well as being part of a larger community of women that are affected by sexual trauma and would be helped by the research. Despite not meeting the other participants, participants all felt connected to participants in their initial decision to participate, during the interview, and especially when reading the write-up. Alice emphasized the connection with other participants:

> Everyone's looking for shared experiences. . . . Even though I didn't know who you'd be interviewing, I would know that there would be other people. And they would know that I was there, too. . . . Especially with, you know, sexual harassment, which is so alienating, invasive, and you want to connect with people who feel as - or who were as vulnerable and confused and silenced as you were. And to be given a voice to talk about it is a really excellent way to build that shared experience, even though there wasn't a focus group where you meet everybody else. But knowing that your study wouldn't have been successful if there weren't other people like us there.

Because participants' sense of larger significance and contribution to the greater community is most evident when they read the write-up, this relational subtheme will be more thoroughly addressed in The Write-Up: I Want to Read It.

The relational themes of Community of Women, Researcher-participant Relationship, and Agency influenced participants' sense of safety and (dis)comfort. The theme of Safety and (Dis)comfort as well as the three relational subthemes that were briefly defined will now be explored further vis a vis the Temporal Process of Research Participation: Decision to Participate: I Need To Do This, The Interview: An Experience In and Of Itself, After the Interview: Bouncing Back, The Write-Up: I Want to Read It, and Long-Term Growth and Challenges: There Isn't Resolution. Each of these five temporal steps will be discussed in sequence from the viewpoint of Safety and (Dis)comfort and the three relational subthemes (Agency, Researcher-participant Relationship, and Community of Women).

Decision to Participate: I Need to Do This

A participant’s decision to participate was the first temporal step in the research process. This decision, as indicated above, involved participants deciding to take an opportunity to participate, which is partially based on assumptions about what research participation is. These assumptions, particularly about the importance of research for social change, motivated potential participants to become involved in the research.

Safety and (Dis)comfort: No Other Safe Places

Participants reported that there are few safe spaces to talk about sexual trauma, including their own experiences. Bridgette explained that this is a societal problem: “There really aren’t any safe places for women to talk about these kinds of things in our society without being, you know, judged, or it being turned around to kind of blame the victim.” This made the opportunity to participate unique. For Natalie, the specific topic of trying to understand her perspective on disclosure was rare: “I've never been able to talk about that aspect of my experience with sexual violence. . . . No one asks you about that.” Summer also felt that the opportunity to participate was unique, because “it was a situation where [she] could talk about it, and the topic wouldn’t be really off base or creepy.”

In relation to these limited outlets to talk, some participants struggled to know if talking about their experiences would help them personally or not. Other participants were uncertain about whether or not their experience would be a worthwhile contribution to others. Yet, some were certain that they needed to participate. For an example of certainty, Theresa explained in the original interview that, after seeing the recruitment letter, she immediately responded, “I need to do this. I just, I don’t know why. I don’t talk about it. I need to do this. . . . I’m not going to continue to sit here and be silent and feel guilty and let this knowingly happen to other women unless they - I speak. So I need to speak, and I need to say something.” In contrast to Theresa’s immediate reaction, Leslie remarked that part of deciding to participate meant grappling with her own identity and perspective on the incident. In the original interview, Leslie explained:

> And the reason why I sent that email back to you the first time was [be]cause I didn’t even know if this was really what, what - I don’t even know if what happened to me counts as rape or whatever, even though it does. I don’t want to have to be someone who’s been subject to something like that.

For some participants, their decision to participate was immediate; however, others had to discern what it would mean to them.

Researcher-participant Relationship: I Knew I Could Trust You

For those participants who already knew me, established trust made it easier for them to participate. Marie, who did not participate in this study, explained her perspective about me as researcher: “I don’t care about strangers, but I wanted to help you.” Marie was the only person who knew me who said that she would not have participated with a stranger. Other participants would have still considered participating even if they had not known me beforehand. Besides the initial interest in participating, Candice emphasized how establishing trust with me was essential:

> I think it basically came down to the fact that I participated in the study because I trusted you, so I wasn't as concerned about the informed consent. I knew you would do the right thing with what I was telling you; and if someone else found out about it from you, it would be for a good reason. That puts a lot of pressure on you, but that's what I was feeling at the time.

Candice acknowledged the weight of the researcher-participant relationship. The weight of this relationship helped establish trust in the initial decision to participate.

Agency: It’s Personal and Political

Participants’ decision to participate was a choice based on motivations that were both self-oriented and other-oriented. Participants felt it was a personal opportunity for growth as well as an opportunity to contribute to social change and help others. For Summer, interviewing was an opportunity to challenge herself to talk about the incident for herself and her decision was also based on societal limitations on sexual assault disclosure:

> So I thought it would be, not like a test, but I was at a point that I could talk about it. . . . It was kind of almost like a personal thing, a personal stepping stone to be able to say, “I can talk about these things without it causing . . . a breakdown.” . . . It sounded interesting to me, in that I think it is an issue on this campus that is not discussed. . . . Obviously you wouldn’t be doing the research if a lot of stuff already existed on the topic. It’s something that people don’t really discuss, but it’s something that’s played a major part in my life.

Summer’s motivation illustrates not only her ability to contribute, but also her social analysis that these topics are not usually discussed and her assumption that the research needs to be done. Similarly, Natalie emphasized how she could contribute to changing our culture by participating in the study: “I was contributing to this dialogue about this issue that's really hard to talk about. And if I can contribute to that, then maybe I can help affect this culture of silence.” Most participants articulated a mix of personal motivation to participate and motivation to contribute to future social change. Their choice to participate in the study was based on these complex motivations.

Community of Women: I Want to Be Part of Something

Directly tied to participants’ motivation to help others was their desire to connect to others and “be part of something.” This longing for community influenced their decision to participate. In the original interview, Candice explained that one aspect of her motivation to participate was related to the fact that I was interviewing other women. In the original interview, Candice said: “You’re talking to other women about this because you want to know, not because it’s like something horrible that happened to Candice, but because it’s something horrible that happens to women, and it has to stop.” In addition to Candice’s emphasis on other participants, Lauren discussed how others who read the study could benefit:

> It does make you feel like you aren’t alone, you know. When you’re . . . going through reporting what’s been done to you, you feel like a victim. You’re singled out, and you always think, you know, “Why did this happen to me?” But in the end, this happened to many women. . . . They always say - you know statistics - they say so many women out of so many women are raped every single minute. . . . You’re like, “Ok, I don’t know anybody personally who’s gone through it.” But . . . if you talk about it, then people understand that it is something that people go through, and there are links to people. Like you might not know somebody in your family, but you might know a friend of a friend, or a friend, or a distant relative. So it becomes more personal to you. When it becomes more personal, you are more likely to stand behind research for it and try to fight against it.

Lauren’s motivation was about helping others with similar experiences who might read the research. Also, it was about personalizing the topic for others.

In summary, some participants were hesitant to participate, and others readily contacted me to become involved; knowing me helped some participants feel more comfortable participating. Participants considered the research to be a unique opportunity to talk about a topic, sexual trauma, which is often silenced in American society. Most importantly, in addition to perceiving the study as a personal opportunity, participants were motivated to contribute to the research to foster social change and help others.

The Interview: An Experience In and Of Itself

Participants considered the research interview a unique experience of disclosure. The interview was a different experience than disclosing in the context of legal systems, friendships, and family. Lauren and Natalie were the only participants who had been involved with legal cases, and they found it much easier to disclose to me because they did not have to defend themselves. Natalie compared how different her experience was compared to the legal system:

> So you're on the defense [in the legal system], whereas participating in the research study, I wasn't on the defense. I was able to more narrate my own story. . . . I don't have to prove to you that this happened to me or not, or I really was affected in this way or not. That, in a sense, that's empowering. It's like you're telling your story and someone is just listening. I don't have to defend it. . . . Never before had I really been able to do that [tell my story without having to defend myself]. Even in talking to, I think, those family and friends, on some level, there is a defense about it because . . . you want them to believe you. . . . There was always something, I guess, keeping me from telling the whole situation from my point of view.

Natalie's experience with defending herself to lawyers and family stood in stark contrast to her experience of disclosure in the interview, where she was able to narrate her experience and choose what she wanted to disclose entirely from her viewpoint.

Researcher-participant Relationship: Telling You is Different

To better understand the differences between the interview and other disclosures, it was important to understand participants' perspectives on the dynamic between researcher and participant in the interview. Participants commented on how telling me for research purposes was different than telling people they knew, even if they knew me, because I was in the position of being a neutral researcher. By telling someone whom they knew less intimately, the participants were able to talk from their own perspective without having to worry about others' reactions. When telling friends, participants were concerned about being believed, having to reassure their friends that they were okay, and having to listen to their other friends share their own experiences. Bridgette emphasized how different it was to tell me because I did not share my own experience:

> It was a place for me to kind of go through all my . . . different emotions about it, and just how I was trying to make sense of it in my mind. Whereas, I think that when I talked to friends about it, they would just automatically chime in with their own experiences with it or what they thought about him or me. But you were there just to kind of listen to me, and take it in, and let me sort of figure it out in my own head while asking me questions.

Because of the one-sidedness of the interview, participants were immersed in their own perspectives. Only 1 participant, Summer, said that the one-sidedness made the interview more difficult because her friends' reactions and responses felt validating to her.

Not knowing me had an impact on 1 participant's experience of the interview. Of the 8 participants who participated in this study, only 1, Alice, did not know who I was at the time of the original study. In thinking about the interview, Alice commented on her level of comfort:

> I thought it was kind of weird since I, we, you know, weren't friends. I didn't know you, and why was I so comfortable . . . sharing that with you? . . . So, I think feeling like what I had to say was important, I mean worthwhile for your study, made me more comfortable and more open because anything could help, right?

For Alice, the interview was a time for her to share her contribution and a time for me to hear her contribution to the research. The uniqueness and importance of that opportunity as compared to ordinary life made her participation more comfortable despite not knowing me.

In addition to Alice, 2 participants from the original study who did not choose to participate in this study commented on what it was like to interview with me, someone they did not know. For Theresa and Katherine, not knowing me made the interview more straightforward and easier than explaining to friends. Theresa said:

> I feel like it's easier for me to tell you just because I don't know you. I don't, I mean, you don't have any preconceived notions about me. You don't know me like that. My friends know me a certain way. And yeah, the fact that I was raped, it doesn't match up with how I've pretended to be or how I've talked. . . . Maybe you'll use my stuff, maybe you won't. Um, I mean, I'm here.

Theresa's attitude about my use of the interview is similar to that which Katherine expressed. Both Katherine and Theresa had a "take it or leave it" attitude.

For participants who knew me (the majority of whom participated in this study), my dual role as researcher and as friend made the interview more comfortable. For

Joanne, knowing me meant she could trust that I actually cared about her and her story, but not just in the context of research: “The fact that you do, you really do care what I have to say inside, inside of you - that part is stronger than you hav[ing] to [listen and care] so you can type this [research].” Because Joanne trusted that my interest in her was personal, not merely research, that allowed her to talk without being concerned about potentially exploitative aspects of the interview.

Safety and (Dis)comfort: It Isn’t Easy

The interview caused some emotional discomfort. Many participants expected that the interview would not be emotionally easy because it would remind them of painful memories. For example, Natalie explained that she expected the interview would be a painful reminder of the social problem and personal hardship:

> It's just always painful to think about, like, that's the society we live in. And, yes, I had this terrible experience, and I would largely say that I don't think there is . . . any good support or way to talk about it right now in our society. . . . I think it's always hard just to have that reminder and to know too that your life has been jacked up, too, because of this experience. It's like a little reminder, but that's something that happens . . . so much.

Participants’ expectation of discomfort led some participants to find ways to make the interview more comfortable, especially in choosing the interview location. I gave participants the option to meet in their rooms on campus, in my room, in a conference room that could be reserved in a more remote area of the student union, in a meditation room also in a more remote area of the student union, or at a public library off campus. Two participants who chose to conduct the interview in their rooms were more comfortable in their own spaces. Katherine commented in the original interview that it was important to meet in her room because she could lock the door, have no one hear, and be in a more personal space with her pictures around. Alice felt particularly comfortable because the interview took place in her room; she was sitting where she normally sat as Head Resident, and I was sitting where the Resident Assistants that she supervised normally sat. Alice explained, “Even though I wasn’t leading the interview, and I was answering questions, . . . that’s when I’m in control, when I’m sitting in that chair.” Considering Alice’s earlier comment about feeling comfortable with me as a stranger, it is clear how complex a participant’s sense of comfort is.

Summer had difficulty interviewing in the conference room in the student union because she felt as though she needed to explain to others where she was going and that this made the interview space feel “strange.” No other participants commented on being concerned about running into other people in the conference room. Bridgette’s concern about running into other people was alleviated for a few reasons. She chose to interview in the meditation room, which she found “comforting and calm,” and she also mentioned that the union was less populated at the time of her interview because of final exam period. Summer did not have this experience.

Despite participants’ expectations and the possibility of choosing a comfortable interview space, the interview also had unanticipated consequences. In particular, questions I asked affected participants. Answering my questions prompted Joanne to experience unexpected emotions:

> I think that just like, so just like those emotions, you know, came out of me just talking about it. So it made me think deeper about what happened, and . . . afterwards, how I dealt with it. . . . But I think it was just like, there was other, just other things I hadn't thought about before because you asked me specific

> questions. Those brought different emotions.

The limitation of words to express her experience also made the interview uncomfortable. Joanne commented, “Personally, there are some things that are really hard to explain with words. And I'm not a talking person, I kind of go all around so I think that sometimes that's kind of hard.” Being asked to think, feel, and speak about things she had never articulated before was challenging. During the interviews, I provided intentional silences so that participants had time to develop the words to provide answers.

Participants’ emotions throughout the interview varied. However, by the end of the interview, participants’ emotional reactions stabilized. For example, Candice was shaky during the interview because of her shame; then, at the end of the interview, she said, “I actually feel better about it than I have. I figured this would happen. I feel better about it than I have in a long time.” Similar to Candice’s changing emotions, Riley shifted from feeling uncertain to certain during the interview process. Riley explained:

> It was . . . hard having to talk about it, and not being . . . sure about what had happened. I just remember thinking, “I don’t even know if this can even be used in the research because I don’t even know what it is.” I remember thinking, “I’m probably wasting her time and wasting my time because this has nothing to do with it.” . . . Over the course of the interview, it became more clear, you know, it wasn’t a waste of time.

In this way, the interview can be understood as a dynamic event in which participants’ comfort changed. For this reason, I offered participants breaks during the interview.

Agency: I Can Offer My Perspective

Participants’ sense of safety and (dis)comfort was especially related to their sense of agency. In the prior section, choosing an interview location, as well as choosing the answers and words in the interview, were all agentive choices. Answering questions was an essential aspect of participants' agency. Participants were able to choose what they wanted to share and how they answered questions. In the original interview, participants' level of detail in disclosing the unwanted sexual experience varied. One participant gave no details about the incident, and others were readily interested in disclosing. For example, Katherine offered, "I can tell you exactly what happened."

Some participants were careful to convey their perspectives in a way that I could understand. During the original interview, participants made comments to check in with me about my understanding and if the information they were providing was relevant to the research. Participants' sense of agency during the interview was not just about maintaining their sense of comfort, but also about providing helpful information to me.

Sometimes participants' interest in providing helpful information created a feeling of pressure to answer questions well. However, Alice felt that pressure but also felt that the interview honored her perspective: "I was the expert too, right? I was the only one who knew what happened, and I had to communicate that to you." Alice's stance on being the expert during the interview supports the idea that participants maintained a strong sense of agency. As in the initial decision to participate, participants felt as though they had the power to disclose what they wanted to.

Community of Women: We Make the Research Successful

In the original interview, when I asked participants what questions they had for me, 7 of 13 participants asked me about other participants and if I had enough participants. In particular, when I told Lauren that she was the ninth participant, she replied, “Good, well not good, but I’m glad people are stepping up and supporting.” Lauren’s response demonstrates that she was not only curious about the other participants, but she also was curious about the progress of the study. Their own participation and the participation of the other people made the research a success.

In two separate instances, a participant questioned the validity of her story as compared to someone else. Bridgette also questioned the validity of her story, but also expressed comfort in knowing that others, even if they are different, were participating:

> Knowing that even though it was only physically sitting there, you and me, there was this other community of women . . . also expressing their concerns, their experiences and trying to figure out what was going on. . . . And I think that like, I was sort of in a community . . . just kind of the fact that knowing that they, that they were also participating was comforting as well. They didn’t have to be there for me to be like, “Ok, this isn’t just . . . the interview of me.”

In summary, the experience of participating in the interview varied for each person. For each participant, the interview was unique from the prior experiences of disclosure. As researcher, telling me was different than telling lawyers, telling friends, and telling family. Depending on how participants knew me or did not know me, this also affected their experience of the interview. For some participants, the interview was emotionally difficult in different ways, such as being reminded of painful experiences and being uncertain about how to talk about the incident in the interview. In addition to the emotional content of the interviews, the interview space itself had an impact on participants’ comfort level. Despite the one-on-one nature of the interviews, participants were aware of the other people who were volunteering and often asked about the other participants that were helping to make the study a success.

After the Interview: Bouncing Back

After participating in the interview, the research process did not end for participants. Rather, they experienced effects and consequences for participating. During this step of the research participation process, my power as researcher was more apparent as I was in the process of writing the analysis. This will be discussed in the Researcher-participant Relationship: What Do You Think of Me? section below.

Agency: It Affects Me

In terms of agency, participants had varied expectations about how their involvement would affect them personally. As already discussed, many participants expected the interview would be upsetting or uncomfortable. Some of those expectations became realities that they dealt with after the interview ended. Many participants were tired after sharing so much in the interview and others were content because of their sense of contributing. Even though Joanne was tired, she felt positive after the interview because she was able to contribute: “It felt good because it felt like you weren't doing anything to me. I was giving something to you, you know. It was me being active, not you being, like pounding, you know.” Joanne’s perspective demonstrates here how her sense of agency contributed to her positive feelings.

However, for some participants, the experience was difficult; they felt the emotional effects after the interview. Candice explained how she began to feel tired:

> I felt really light when I was done talking with you, like I didn't have something weighing on me. I don't feel like my experience weighs on me on a regular basis, but once I had set up the interview with you, I thought about it a lot more in the days leading up to our conversation. I wanted to remember everything so I could

> tell you everything honestly. And to have it all said and in the open made me feel lighter, like I wasn't worried about it anymore. That's usually when I call my mom or dad, or talk to my sister, or fill in my friends on this great feeling, so it was strange to not turn around and do that. But that light-ness faded into that quiet feeling very quickly. I went to bed when I got back to my room and slept for a long time, like I was physically tired.

In addition to the significant positive and negative impacts participants experienced, Lauren’s experience was unique because participating in research was purely something she needed to do, and she said that she just returned to her regular day after completing the interview.

Safety and (Dis)comfort: I Protect Myself

Participants reported a different sense of discomfort following the interview, especially in terms of disclosing to others. Participants were uncertain about sharing with others and often chose to not disclose about their experience of participating in the study. For example, Summer found comfort in talking with others about her experience, but also found herself withdrawing:

> Like I said, it took me a couple of days to deal with sort of some of the things that came up during the interview. And, um, just to kind of put feelers out to my friends, “Hey, I’m having a weird couple of days dealing with these things.” So I kind of want people to know somewhat what’s going on, so it’s not just that I’m acting really weird.” Just, you know, to tell them and say, like, “Oh, well, this happened, but I’m kind of upset. And I’m dealing with it, but I think it was a good decision.” Just to be able to work through some of that stuff, again with someone that might know something about the situation, that might help me be able to deal with it further. . . . So I probably spent, you know, some time to myself for a couple of days. I probably was not that into sex for a week or so, just kind of pulling into myself. I mean, you’re opening up a situation in which you were vulnerable. And it makes it that much harder to open up again after you’ve rehashed these different experiences.

Participants were especially protective of themselves and from whom they chose to seek support after the interview. Summer's experience of seeking support from particular people was similar to that of Candice and Joanna.

Community of Women: I Seek Support

Although participants did not meet each other and did not have a shared experience of the interview, some participants decided to tell others that they had participated in the research. This was the case for Bridgette, Joanne, and Summer. In this way, they crafted a community of people who may not have had an unwanted sexual experience or participated in an interview-based study, yet they attempted to connect and create that community with trusted friends. However, this disclosure was not always comfortable. Summer explained:

> You're sitting around talking to people about what you did. You're like, "I participated in this research study." And they say, "What was it about?" And you say, "Oh, it was about, you know, like, sexual experiences and relationships." . . . You aren't really revealing anything too personal, but it's like sort of a door to open to see how someone reacts to that topic and whether or not you can have that discussion with someone.

Similarly, Joanne said that she would sometimes mention that she participated and then felt awkward. However, Joanne also explained that she disclosed to someone who had also participated that she herself had participated. Joanne said that they spent time talking about their experience as participants and developed a meaningful friendship.

Researcher-participant Relationship: What Do You Think of Me?

Even though the researcher-participant relationship was perhaps most obvious during the interview, the relationship continued beyond the interview. During the original interviews, 7 of the 13 participants asked about how I would be using the interviews to write my results. Participants were aware of and concerned about how I would interpret and represent them in the written product. When I asked Joanne about why she believes that participants are brave, she responded:

> Because you don't really know what they're [the researchers are] going to do with it, with what you say. All you know is that you're anonymous and so basically . . . the researcher, can take what you say and do what they want with it. And so I think that in that way, it's being brave . . . I think for me, when you're given all this time, I just go off and talk and talk and talk. And I'll say whatever, and [then I remembered], “Oh, shit, it's getting recorded.”

Joanne illustrated that the interview may not be the only emotionally difficult part of the research process.

An additional difficulty was that the participants did not know what the researcher would “do” with that information. Natalie was concerned about being identified in the write-up and therefore “wouldn’t have disclosed anything that [she] didn’t want written up possibly.” Natalie’s sense of agency was able to mitigate that loss of control about what the researcher would write about her. This was a part of the research process that involved a great deal of power as researcher to interpret the interviews. I was concerned about how participants would perceive what I wrote about them. This made the analysis and writing process heavy for me.

In addition to the formal interpretation I was formulating, 2 participants were aware of the more informal aspects of our relationships. Specifically, 2 participants were uncertain about greeting me on campus, which was affected by the small, residential atmosphere. Alice disclosed that, in addition to wondering about saying hello, she wondered what I thought about her as a participant:

> I thought it was really interesting that you mentioned at the beginning or the end of the interview, that I didn't have to feel obligated to say *hi* to you on the quad, or even recognize you if I didn't want people to know that I was part of the study, that I didn't have to do any of that, and you wouldn't take offense. I thought that was really, really considerate. And just a really generous thing to offer to your participants, but I never forgot it. So when I would see you on the quad, I really did not know what to do with myself. I wanted to say *hi*. I thought you were really nice, and I liked the study you were doing, and I liked participating. But you offered that I didn't have to do that if I didn't feel comfortable with it. I was like, "Well, should I say hi? Is she gonna think that I want people to know that I participate, or is she [going to] think, "Oh, Alice must be okay with this interaction?" Like, I was thinking about it way too much. I was thinking about it every time I saw you on the quad, in a good way, not like, "Shit, what am I going to do now?" I always, I always remembered that and thought it was really cool.

In the researcher-participant relationship, participants were curious about both informal and formal aspects of our relationships.

In terms of the short-term effects of interviewing, participants experienced different sorts of impacts. Some participants felt pleased about contributing, and others felt more exhausted and experienced an effect on their mood. As participants dealt with their reactions, some participants withdrew from others, and some reached out to others. After the interview, there was uncertainty in the researcher-participant relationship; most participants were uncertain about how I would handle their information as I wrote the analysis.

The Write-up: I Want to Read It

In the original interviews, 6 of 13 participants asked me to send them a copy of the final written analysis to read, and I provided every participant with an electronic copy. During the interview for this study, 5 of the 8 participants said they had read the write-up. Alice said she was scared to see herself in writing, and Candice said that she wanted her interview to be the conclusion of her participation as she was trying to “look forward” at the end of the school year. For all but one of the five participants who read the write-up, the experience was positive; Riley’s experience, which was mixed, is explained below.

Safety and (Dis)comfort: I Am Protected

All participants felt their confidentiality was protected, and they would not have wanted anything removed from the write-up. Even though confidentiality was protected, Riley had the concern that anyone could read and arrive at their own conclusions: “And that was something that I really only shared with you, and then having it public for anybody to come up with their own conclusions or be like influenced or guided by the conclusions that were drawn in the research.” Riley did not like the possibility of other readers developing their own interpretations.

Agency: I Am Exposed to Myself

Despite being protected from others, a few participants emphasized that they felt exposed to themselves. For example, Bridgette said that she was shocked to see my interpretation of her, in which I emphasized that she distanced herself in telling her story by using the word “you” instead of “I.” Despite the initial shock of reading my interpretation, Bridgette appreciated reading about herself and considered it a learning experience. When I asked her about her experience of recognizing herself, she responded:

> I felt exposed to myself. It was like a little, when I realized that thing about the defense mechanism that I did, and why I was doing that, and why like specifically I was ashamed. I knew no one else was judging, and like no one else, I think I’m always way harder on myself than everyone else around me. But I think it came out of that, and I just felt like I was more vulnerable to myself.

As Bridgette explained, even though she felt positive about her experience overall, it was difficult for her to see herself in the write-up.

Researcher-participant Relationship: It Became My Paper Too

All of the participants said that they agreed with the interpretation provided in the written thesis. This went a step further in that Joanne felt proud of the written thesis:

> I guess being part of your research, . . . even though I haven't read it in a long time, like it kind of became like my project, too, like my paper, too, even though, you know, like I didn't really obviously . . . help you, you know, . . . sit and . . . write with you, you know what I mean? It's . . . your baby, you know. I was part of it. And all these other people were part of it, too. So afterwards I felt . . . really proud and excited. So it became my paper, too.

Joanne’s sense of pride and joint ownership demonstrates that she experienced a great deal of connection, not power difference, in the researcher-participant relationship, when she read the analysis that I wrote.

Despite agreeing with my interpretation, Riley found it difficult to read my interpretation:

> It was almost like you knew before me what was I was saying and made the conclusions that it took me a little while to get to. Like you knew before I did, and that made me feel a little weird. . . . It's easier for someone outside the situation to see what something is rather than the person that's in it. . . . I felt, like, angry and maybe just really, like, hard on myself. . . . You come up with these conclusions about what happened. And other people are going to read about it and come up with their conclusions. And it's, like, I haven't even come up with what I totally think about what happened yet. I felt like all these people are going to have their mind made up about what happened to me, and I don't even have that figured out yet. . . . Who's to say that your interpretation isn't what I eventually got to? We could have the same conclusion, but you just got to it quicker.

My interpretation of Riley, as portrayed in the write-up, was demonstrative of my power and position as an outsider. According to Riley, from my outsider perspective, I drew conclusions more easily than she did. This difference was difficult for her. An additional factor contributing to her difficulty was related to the prior relationship between Riley and me as friends; changes in that friendship, including less contact, made reading the write-up more difficult.

Community of Women: I Can Hear Them

In the prior sections about participants' responses to the write-up, there is great variety; however, in considering participants' relationships to other participants, their experiences are vastly similar. Reading the write-up, participants were connected to the other participants in that their interviews were represented collectively. In this collective representation, participants could read about the other women who had similar and different experiences. Joanne remarked that it was the write-up itself that connected her to the other participants:

> Because everyone was anonymous, I still felt like part of this . . . discourse and with all these other women talking about their experiences and me being part of

> that. It was kind of like talking together, but not really because we weren’t all together. . . . I don’t think it was until I actually read the research that . . . I realized, “Oh my, I’m actually part of this, and I can hear them.”

Similarly, Bridgette discussed how connected she felt with the other participants, despite having different experiences:

> And so I think that that was the first time I saw those other women’s stories. Even though I didn’t necessarily know who they were, it was still their words. It was still experiences while not like directly equal to mine, . . . it was still in their own right. Just having them all together finally, um, I thought was a really positive thing. . . . Instead of them being these phantoms - I wonder what their stories are, I wonder who they are. Even though they were still anonymous, you had their words there, and you had their stories. It paired up. And in the same paper was my story and my words, so I felt like, I wasn’t just this one individual person. But I was in the community now, and we were all kind of dealing with it together.

The write-up brought together a community of similar and dissimilar women. Participants found this gathering to be validating for them personally. For example, Natalie emphasized how validating it was to read about the different women:

> No, it was validating [be]cause it makes you realize, and I knew this before, but it is a larger social problem. . . . Even like the one girl who was confused about what happened to her. Even her experience, though kind of unclear, it still resonated with me. . . . So many girls have things that happen to them and then later are like, “You know, that wasn't really right.” . . . [Even] experiences that I couldn't personally relate to, there was always an aspect that I was like, “Yeah, that, I can relate to that. That resonates with me.”

Connecting with other women and understanding their experiences was meaningful for the majority of participants. As an additional example, even Riley, who had difficulty with the write-up because of changes in our friendship and my quicker interpretation as an outsider, still found the write-up positive in some aspects because she “found similarities with other people’s stories that [she] may not have necessarily shared in the interview or even thought about, but [she] could identify with them.”

In summary, most participants chose to read the write-up from the prior study. One participant felt exposed to herself, and another participant felt vulnerable to my interpretation as well as readers' interpretations. Overall, all the participants felt that reading the write-up was a meaningful experience, especially in being connected to other participants.

Long-term Growth and Challenges: There Isn't Resolution

Even after reading the write-up, participants' involvement with the study did not end. They continued to be affected by their participation in terms of intrapersonal, interpersonal, and social growth and challenges. Naming the subthemes as intrapersonal, interpersonal, and social mimics the relational subthemes. Agency can be considered intrapersonal; researcher-participation relationship is the interpersonal level, and community of women is the social level.

Intrapersonal Growth and Challenges: It Was a Spark to My Healing

As discussed in Decision to Participate, participants expected various outcomes from participating in the study. Some expectations were related to participants' own healing, such as the expectation that contributing to research would transform a negative experience into a positive. In this way, most participants expected that talking would have an impact on their healing process. For some participants, the experience of interviewing was therapeutic in and of itself, and that primary event of interviewing led to further processing.

Two participants found their participation important in realizing that the incident was serious. For example, in her interview, Riley first spoke about the incident as unwanted. She explained that the interview had an impact on how she viewed and processed the incident:

> I’m glad that I took it seriously with myself and realizing . . . what happened was not a light, little thing that happened. It was a big deal. And I think . . . that was part of the reason it was unsettling, too. . . . I think the experience [of participating in the study] was the first time I had ever verbalized or even thought of it as an unwanted sexual experience really. . . . The questions kind of prompted me to start to process it and think about it in that way. . . . Well, I definitely think that whole interview was kind of the spark that, you know, led to . . . [me] attempting to heal. Obviously the interview didn’t heal me or anything, but it helped that process along.

Riley shared that the interview prompted her to tell a therapist about the incident.

For others who were more certain about the incident, participating in the study increased their clarity about themselves and their own sense of comfort. Candice stated:

> I think it did give me some new insights about myself, and it definitely helped me better define my self-awareness. . . . I feel that by talking about it and thinking about my experience, I learned more about what decisions I need to think carefully about, and I better established my comfort zone and my personal boundaries. It's sometimes easier to ignore something uncomfortable, but I feel more in touch with myself, even if I'm still not positive about the unwanted experience [that I talked about in the interview].

Candice’s participation was more significant in terms of her relationship with herself and having a sense of her level of comfort. This kind of learning is related to the theme of safety and (dis)comfort in that increased awareness of the self enables participants to better act toward their own sense of safety and comfort.

For 2 other participants, the interview questions stuck with them when they were processing future incidents. When asked about her own healing, Bridgette shared that the interview provided “discourse and language in my mind that I could draw back on.” As another example, Joanne said she “kept thinking about our interview” and the questions I would have asked her when processing a later unwanted sexual experience. The long-term impact of research participation can be significant.

Other participants described the interview as validating. Natalie explained how she was able to think about her experience of disclosure in a new way:

> And even though that [negative experiences of disclosure] was hard to think about and realize, in many ways, it has been a negative experience of self-disclosure. It did help me think about what happened to me differently, in the sense that . . . I saw a larger impact, which is hard to see, but it made me aware of something that I wasn't necessarily aware of.

Natalie explained that the interview was validating because she was able to explain how negatively people reacted to her disclosure of sexual trauma. She also said that the interview and her later processing helped alleviate the shame and guilt that she used to feel about her experience of sexual trauma.

Interpersonal Growth and Challenges: My Decisions to (Not) Tell

The interpersonal effects were quite diverse, especially in terms of decisions to disclose. Some participants felt more comfortable talking to others about unwanted and wanted sexual experiences, but not necessarily the particular incident they spoke about in interview. On the other hand, a few participants made the choice to maintain the privacy of the incident.

Some participants anticipated that they would be more open to disclosing to others because of their participation in the original study. In the original study, Candice anticipated that she would not disclose more to others. That continues to be the case for her. In the interview for this study, Candice said that she still “wants it to be private” because of how she may be perceived by others.

In contrast to Candice’s experience of not telling others, 2 participants reported increased comfort talking about sex and unwanted sexual experiences. Joanne commented on more readily talking with people she could trust about sexuality and positive and negative sexual experiences. Joanne said, “I think it's just that I never had a chance to talk about all that stuff, and to have time to myself to talk about that, it just opened this place.” On the other hand, Alice felt more comfortable talking specifically about unwanted sexual experiences. She said:

> After that, if I could talk about it with somebody that I didn’t really know, I should probably talk about it with my friends and my teachers and see what else can come of it. Because if that was a productive conversation about my experience, it should probably happen again. So I talked about it all the time.

Some participants took the research study as an opportunity to share with others in general.

Two participants experienced a significant impact on their decision to tell particular people. Riley said the interview made it easier to tell her romantic partner and less “afraid of his reaction.” In a different way, Bridgette felt more confidence to speak to the man that she felt had manipulated her during a sexual experience. Bridgette explained:

> “You need to tell him” was kind of the message that I got out of it [the interview]. So, I don’t know if I necessarily would have talked to him if I hadn’t gone through the interview thing. . . . For those four months, even after I’d done the interview, the way he was treating me, I just felt very, like, vulnerable and stupid and small and, you know, like I was just this insignificant thing. Then . . . I

> would kind of draw back to that interview and think, “No, that was a time I got to talk about it, and that was the time another woman, you know, was listening to my story on its own terms without judging or saying or giving advice, but just listening to me” And I was, like, “You know, I do matter. This story and what happened does matter. . . . This is going to be really hard, but this is something I need to do to feel true to myself and to stand up for who I am.” And so I think that it [the interview] did give me sort of the confidence, but in a sort of indirect way.

As a result of the interview, Bridgette felt more confident to confront that person and stand up for herself.

As a final example of decisions to disclose, Natalie felt more confident in her choices to not tell others. As discussed in the prior section, participating in the interview helped Natalie see the harmful consequences of many of her disclosures. Out of that insight, Natalie said that the interview “sort of solidified that for me. It was my choice to disclose or not to disclose.” Natalie’s clarity about her decisions to not disclose enabled her to feel more confident in protecting the story as her own. The variance in interpersonal changes amongst participants is indicative of the great differences among individuals in terms of their own needs.

In addition to the growth participants experienced in disclosure, participants remarked about continual challenges regarding romantic relationships, particularly in evaluating their own sense of safety and comfort. Additionally, participants still felt it was important to disclose to romantic partners, but still were not interested in telling certain people, such as parents. These continued challenges revolved around issues of safety and comfort and participants’ awareness of their own interpersonal limits.

Social Growth and Challenges: My Awareness and Feminist Activism

At a more societal level, participants noted changes both in their awareness and in their feminist action. Some participants felt a greater sense of awareness about the societal aspect of disclosure as well as sexual assault. For example, Summer explained her increased awareness:

> People don't talk about it, and they're not [going to talk about it]. It's not a fun subject. It's not something you're [going to] want to talk about. And [I am also more aware] that it is possible to get past that and deal with it. And once that happens [someone gets past it], people aren't really quite as willing to talk about it. . . . For me and my experience, it's only people who are really struggling with it [the unwanted sexual experience] will open up to someone and talk about it if they really need help.

Participating in the study helped participants see their own experiences in a larger framework that explicitly defined difficulties in disclosure as a social problem.

A few participants focused on increased activism. Research was valued both as catalyst for activism and a means of activism that promotes social change. For example, Theresa mentioned that, in the original study, she anticipated that participating in the study would increase her activism:

> I don't talk about this, but I see the importance of research. . . . I need to start talking because regardless if people know it's me or don't know it's me, I've said something, and that's at least one step in the right direction. So maybe this year when the Women's Resource Center starts painting t-shirts about their story and what happened, I can maybe paint my own this year.

Theresa's perspective illustrates a specific action that she may be more willing to take because of her participation. Because Theresa did not participate in the interview for the current study, it is unknown whether or not this expectation came to fruition or in what other ways her sense of activism altered.

Primarily, some participants' perceptions of research *as* activism increased. Natalie compared her experience participating in research to her involvement with the legal system. She had not experienced the legal system as just, so she looked to research as a better alternative for social change:

> Having been through the legal process, you see this whole other side of it that's totally messed up. So I think that actually heightens your awareness for the importance of other avenues of change because it's not happening in the legal system. . . . So for me, thinking about it, this research gives me an outlet to talk about it. . . . [Legal suits are] not an empowering process. If anything, it's just defeating. . . . I think a lot more research needs to be done.

Similarly, Alice also felt an increased commitment to research after participating in the study. She said that she "ended up being really invested in the subject" and chose to conduct her own undergraduate thesis on sexual harassment. Alice began to see research in a new light, as a potentially transformative experience. Alice attributed her participation in the original study as influential in helping her develop her research methods for helping the participants be comfortable: "Being able to go through that with you and reflect on it later was really helpful." Participating in the original study was a catalyst for Alice's activism in conducting sexual harassment research.

Considering the longer-term consequences of research participation, participants noted many growths and challenges. Intrapersonally, their participation led to insights about themselves and a greater sense of confidence. Participants who were less certain about the incident began to consider the incident to be more serious. From these intrapersonal changes, participants made different choices to disclose to others. One participant felt validated not telling others, and another participant felt confident to confront the man who had taken advantage of her. On a more societal level, some participants had increased awareness about sexual assault disclosure as a social issue, and some participants began to see the importance of research as an avenue for activism.

Conceptual Model of Women's Participation in an Interview-based Study on Sexual Assault Disclosures

Participants' experience of the research process was varied. The processes and outcomes of research participation were influenced by participants' expectations and ongoing choices about their own sense of safety and (dis)comfort. They navigated this process with three primary relationships: their relationship to themselves, their relationship to me, and their relationship to the other participants. Despite differences in expectations, choices, and perceptions, participants experienced a similar process that was most shaped by their own sense of safety and comfort. Safety and (dis)comfort evolved throughout the process and at various points was more directly influenced by participants' relationships.

The conceptual model (see Figure 1) represents the two primary themes: (a) Safety and (Dis)comfort, (b) Relationships. Safety and (Dis)comfort is represented as the outer ring because it is conceptualized as more important to the participants. The theme of Relationships is represented as the inner ring, and each of the three relationships are named: Agency, Researcher-participant Relationship, and Community of Women. These two rings contain the Temporal Process, which is held in the inner circle. The temporal segments are arranged in sequence clockwise: (a) Decision to Participate, (b) The Interview, (c) After the Interview, (d) The Write-up, and (e) Long-term Growth and

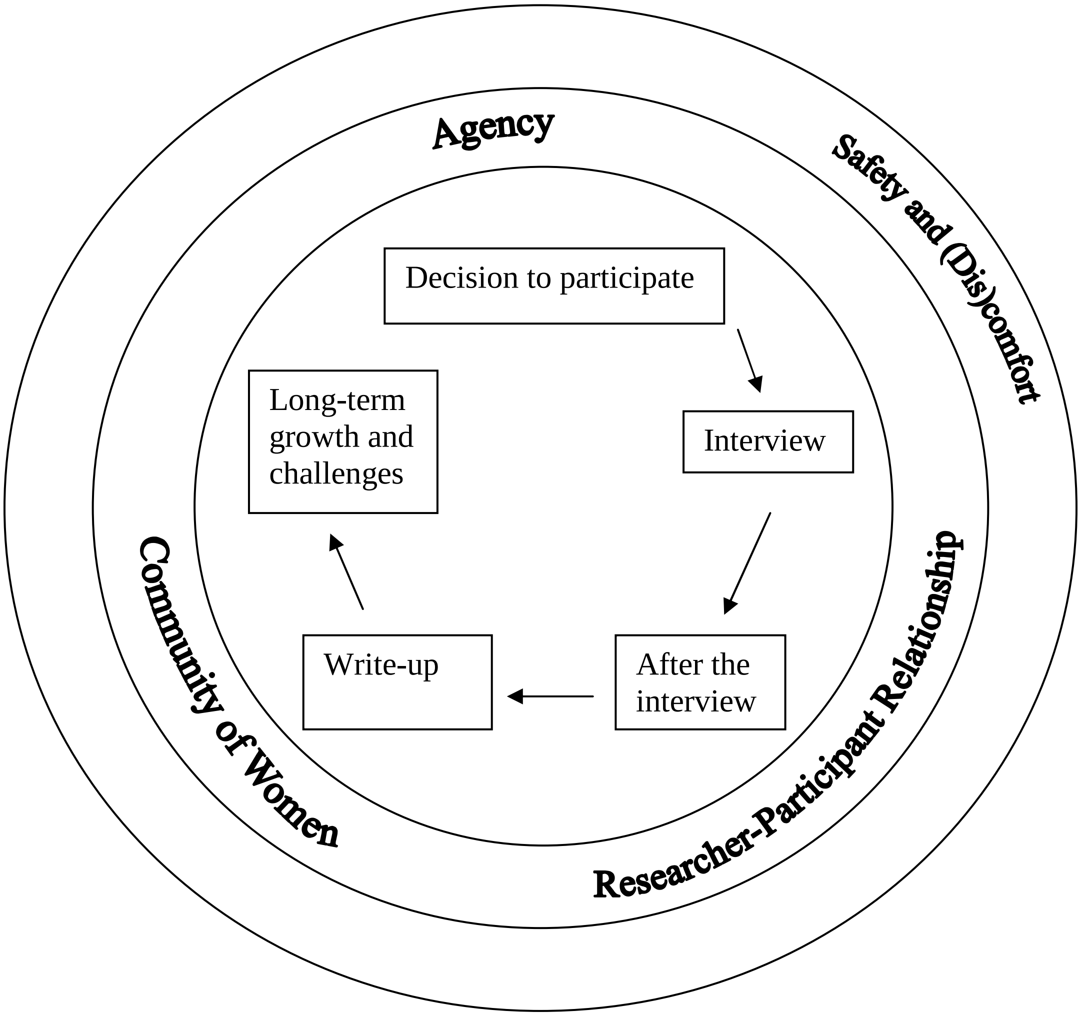

Figure 1

Conceptual Model of Women's Participation in an Interview-based Study on Sexual Assault Disclosures

Note. A visual representation of the conceptual model has two outer rings, the first representing the core theme of safety and (dis)comfort and the second ring representing the core theme of relationships. The inner circle contains the temporal sequence.

Challenges. Safety and Comfort and each of three relational subthemes are positioned closer to the temporal segments that are most relevant to that particular moment in time. For example, Agency is most influential in the decision to participate and is therefore positioned closer. The theme of Safety and Comfort is most influential in the interview. Researcher-participant Relationship is most influential after the interview. Lastly, the Community of Women is most influential in the write-up. This positioning of themes to temporal segments mimics the relative importance of that theme at that particular time. Out of this overall experience emerged participants' suggestions for altering or changing the methods that were used to conduct the research.

Suggestions for Altering Research Methods

Based on their prior experiences, participants offered (both unsolicited and at my probing) changes that could have been made to the original study or a similar study that they would make in order for research participants to feel more comfortable or safe. Participants focused on decreasing pressure and clarifying expectations about the interview, providing multiple ways to express themselves, and clarifying the use of interview for the written interpretation.

Participants provided specific ways that would help decrease pressure during the interview. Alice, who later conducted her own research, suggested sharing the research questions with participants in advance and increasing self-disclosures, especially if participants seem nervous or uncertain about what would be helpful to say. Alice felt these strategies would increase the connection between researcher and participant and decrease uncertainty about the research process. Joanne commented on how having the opportunity for follow-up interviews may be helpful to take the pressure off of the participant to provide answers in the initial interview. Riley offered that it might be helpful to give participants a summary of the initial interview prior to conducting a follow-up interview so that they may be better prepared.

Additionally, Alice made a suggestion about having focus groups. Alice thought that a focus group would have helped participants continue to "engag[e] in a new path in exploring their own experiences." Because participants noted the variety of personal effects of participating, additional avenues that would foster participant growth could potentially be added.

Participants mentioned ways to diversify the ways they could express themselves. Some participants conceived of using art and writing as additional means of expression. In terms of the use of art, Joanne expressed that she had difficulty explaining her perspective in the interview because of the subject matter as well as being less accustomed to personal disclosures. She offered art as an additional medium that could be used to help people better express themselves:

> Speaking is just one, you know, way of expressing something. . . . I said this before, I have a hard time, like, you know, speaking. Sometimes art, even though it can be a more abstract thing, sometimes it's easier.

Artistic expression, for those who are comfortable with the artistic process, may be an easier alternative that takes the pressure off of providing "good" answers in a research interview. Joanne said, "Making art is something that is really active and something that I feel like you own . . . So I feel like you're owning your story and owning this thing [the art].” Joanne’s suggestion is valuable in that she foresees a greater sense of agency in creating art. As discussed previously, participants’ sense of agency greatly influences their safety and comfort throughout the process. Any additional measures, such as artistic expression, that would expand the possibility for agency should be considered.

In addition to art, participants mainly focused on the possibility of writing. Lauren, who reported that the interview was not difficult for her because she has told her story so many times and wanted to contribute to research on the topic, also mentioned alternative methods of expression that might be easier for participants:

> I think that writing helps people. It gets to the heart of what they are really trying to say when you look at bullet points, when you look at outlines, when you look at their thoughts. It’s just thoughts down on paper, but it’s organized, I guess. So I mean, I think research would definitely benefit from, not just interviews, but looking at different facets of how people express themselves about the situation.

Along with Lauren, Bridgette supported the idea of writing. However, Bridgette suggested that the writing be dual in purpose: both to help the participant and be used as research data. In regard to writing, Alice expressed a view on the importance of balancing writing with interview:

> There are two sides of the spectrum. Not having that relationship could help them [research participants] [be]cause they don’t know who they are sharing with, and it doesn’t matter because they are completely anonymous. But having that relationship can also help bring out things that they didn’t think about before.

Many participants felt that writing could be helpful for the research process. Riley, however, felt that writing would not contribute to the process for her because her journaling is personal and “not necessarily something [she would want] to share.” Because of the variety of perspectives on writing, it might be helpful to give participants the opportunity to participate with writing, and then participants would elect how additional modes of expression could be helpful.

In addition to the interview itself, Riley offered suggestions about preparing participants for the write-up. She suggested that knowing her pseudonym would have helped in “getting [her] ready to confront the final write-up, knowing that [she] would see [her] story in it.”

Participants named various alternative research methods that could increase participants’ sense of comfort. These research-savvy participants were able to develop multiple means that would work for themselves, but that may not be suited for all participants. As the research participation experience was greatly influenced by participants’ perceptions (of their own agency, of the researcher, of their connection to others, of their safety and comfort), considering the uniqueness of every participant is essential to understanding what research participation means to each person, especially with a personal research topic soliciting high levels of self-disclosure.

CHAPTER IV

DISCUSSION

Overview

The purpose of this study was to develop a conceptual model of the experience of participating in qualitative research on a traumatic topic. From this conceptual model, the aim was to enhance researchers' understanding of qualitative methods from the vantage point of research participants so that qualitative research practices could be improved. This purpose led to the following research questions: (a) How did research participants who have participated in personal interviews on traumatic events experience the research process? (b) What motivated women who had been sexually assaulted to agree to participate in an interview-based study of their experiences of trauma? (c) How did these women experience their participation in the research from their first awareness, throughout the study, and after the study ended? (d) What benefits or harms did these women identify as a result of participating in the study?

In this chapter, a review of the results is provided in relation to prior research. Next, the limitations of the study will be addressed. Then, the study will conclude with an emphasis on the implications for conducting qualitative research, clinical practice, and social justice.

Results as Related to the Literature

The results indicated the importance of two themes: (a) Safety and (Dis)comfort; (b) Relationships. Participants' experience of the research process was influenced by their sense of safety and comfort, which varied based on expectations about the study and their perception of certain relationships throughout the study, including their relationship to themselves, to me as researcher, and to the community of women affected by sexual trauma and/or participating in the study. The results demonstrated that at different segments of the process, participants' experiences of those relationships and their safety and comfort changed. Those different temporal segments of the process were the following: (a) The Decision to Participate, (b) The Interview, (c) After the Interview, (d) The Write-up, and (e) Long-term Growth and Challenges. The fit of these results as compared to prior research will be organized by these five temporal segments.

Decision to Participate

The decision to participate is one temporal segment that is addressed in the literature. Researchers (Beck, 2006; Brzuzy et al., 1997; Corbin & Morse, 1993; Lowes & Gill, 2006) asserted that individuals decide to participate with the intent of benefiting personally, assisting the researcher and researcher's goals, and helping others also affected by the research topic. The results of this study, framed as the participants' agency, the researcher-participant relationship, and the community of women as motivational aspects of the decision to participate, are congruent with the prior research. This study adds to the literature by clarifying that various motivations are interrelated and influence the final decision to participate. In addition, because the topic of the original interviews was sexual trauma, the current findings indicate that, even with a sensitive topic, participants were motivated by many of the same reasons that participants in general identify for their participation.

This study also emphasizes the role of safety and comfort in that initial decision to participate. As students at a small, private college where many students participated in research projects and some students conducted their own, participants felt safe because of their familiarity with research. Their familiarity included knowing that the norms around confidentiality would protect their identity and perceiving research as an avenue for others to learn. As Phoenix's (1994) study indicated, some participants' decision to participate was influenced by their concern about the exploitative potential of participating. The potential participants in Phoenix's study were research-savvy in that they recognized the potential for exploitation in their decision-making. The participants in this study were research-savvy in the sense that they trusted the intent of the research, which led them to feel safe participating. This study provides an additional contribution to the literature in that it highlights how individuals feel hesitant about participating and how knowing me as researcher facilitated their involvement in the study.

The Interview

In the second temporal segment, participants' experience of the interview itself, the interview was perceived as a one-sided conversation that gave participants the unique opportunity to speak about their experiences. Previous researchers theorized that the interview experience can be empowering for participants who have experienced trauma in that participants maintain control of their story (Dyregrov, 2004; Tillmann-Healy & Kiesinger, 2001). This study ultimately arrived at the same conclusion. The results also highlight another important aspect of the interview, the difficulty of trying to provide information and answer interview questions. Participants sometimes had difficulty during the interview despite maintaining control over what they disclosed. This study emphasizes the one-sided interview with the researcher as an outsider asking questions. The emphasis on the one-sidedness of the interview fits with Wahab's (2003) study, in which participants rejected Wahab's use of the word "dialogue" to describe the interview. Additionally, her emphasis on the researcher's role in interview is congruent with Lowes and Gill's study (2006). The current study complicated the researchers' role, because many participants knew who the researcher was prior to participating in the study, which contributed to their trust; however, in the interview, participants who knew me said that they still perceived me to be a neutral researcher. Finally, Newman and Kaloupek (2004) suggested that participants' distress may be tied to benefits of participating. The current study confirmed the duality of participants experiencing both distress and benefits.

The theme of community of women was relevant to participants' interview experiences in that these women believed they were making the study successful. Prior research indicated that participants asked questions about other participants (Hiller & DiLuzio, 2003; Kearney & Hyle, 2004; Stuhlmiller, 2001). Wahab (2005) reported that the sex workers who participated in her study wanted to meet each other, and this was arranged. Similarly, this study indicated that, even in individual interviews, participants were curious about other participants.

Lastly, in this study, participants reported various ways in which comfort fluctuated throughout the interview process; prior research had not addressed the complexity of the research process in this way. For example, some participants felt uncomfortable with the initial idea of interviewing, and others felt determined and certain about their participation. In the interview, some questions were more uncomfortable and difficult to answer. The role of the interview location in affecting comfort was also important. After the interview, some participants were satisfied, but others still felt uncertain and emotionally affected. Further research should continue to unwrap participants' changing sense of comfort.

The Write-up

Reading the write-up is the fourth temporal segment. For this study, participants emphasized the importance of connecting to other participants in reading the write-up. Only one prior study discussed the impact of the write-up, and the results were similar. Grinyer (2004) found that participants appreciated feeling less isolated and getting to read other participants' stories. Many researchers have speculated about the importance of connecting to other participants, especially when participants are disclosing about sensitive topics. Despite never having met other participants, participants with traumatic birth experiences also reported a sense of belonging, which helped them feel less isolated (Beck, 2005). Research participation may be understood as an opportunity to connect with other people with similar experiences. In this study, the connection to other women in reading the write-up was endorsed by all participants. Further research should continue to address the community of participants and participants' experiences of reading written representations of the study. In addition, future research, especially on traumatic issues, should create opportunities for participants to communicate directly with one another, either by Internet (Beck, 2005) or in focus groups.

After the Interview

After the interview, participants felt a mixture of emotions; some were tired and withdrawn, and others were content and satisfied. The majority of prior research on participants' responses was conducted immediately following their participation (Campbell et al., 2010; Carlson et al., 2003; Johnson & Benight, 2003; Newman & Kaloupek, 2004; Widom & Czaja, 2005). The most prevalent finding amongst these studies was the perceptions of benefits despite being somewhat distressed. Like this study, the prior studies focused on issues of trauma. Thus, despite telling stories of trauma, participants were not retraumatized and did not experience a "second rape." Participants were not harmed by participating in studies about their experiences of trauma. However, participants may experience distress. As indicated by Newman and Kaloupek (2004), it may be that preexisting distress, multiple traumas, greater severity of a physical injury, and social vulnerability are related to higher distress. Thus, further research could continue to assess issues related to distress and benefits of participating to better understand how participants with a history of trauma are not retraumatized in their experience of research study participation.

Long-term Growth and Challenges

Prior research addressed the balance between long-term benefits and harm. Overall, research indicated that participants benefited (Beck, 2005; Corbin & Morse, 1993; Dyregrov, 2004; Hess, 2006; Lowes & Gill, 2006). In particular, researchers emphasized that participating helped participants heal (Grinyer, 2004; Newman & Kaloupek, 2004; Newman, Risch, & Kassam-Addams, 2006). This study found that participants did benefit overall, despite some difficulty. For those at particular points in their healing, the research participation was situated within that context of helping participants move toward healing.

One study by Martin and colleagues (1999) addressed the longer-term consequences of participating in a study on female survivors of child sexual abuse. Participants perceived their participation both positively and negatively. The positive outcomes were similar to those found in this study, for example, finding it helpful to talk about the trauma, gaining insights about the trauma, and contributing to the research.

This study made an additional contribution to the literature in that it articulated some of the interpersonal and social outcomes of participating, including changes in disclosures to others and changes in activism related to sexual assault. In terms of overall long-term outcomes, this study honored the various challenges that participants continued to face and not just their retrospective perspective of the prior study. In this way, it can be understood that participants were not harmed by research participation, but their involvement did not help participants overcome all the harm they had experienced and may continue to experience as they heal from their experiences of trauma. In other words, even as the research participation was part of their personal growth, that growth continued, and the study was just one piece of that growth experience.

Limitations and Implications for Research

The limitations of this study were related to the highly contextualized nature of the research participation experience being studied, including the participants, the researcher, and the research topic. The prior study was conducted with participants at a residential, private, liberal arts college in the Midwest. At this campus, research participation and investigation was common, which influenced participants' understanding of research and willingness to participate. Also, this campus was small, which meant that most participants knew me or knew of me. This intimate environment had an impact on the importance of the researcher-participant relationship. As such, this study spoke to their specific experiences of research being conducted in a small community. The demographic information indicated that these participants were mostly White, educated, straight, partnered women. This research should not be considered transferable to other populations until other studies have been conducted with those populations.

Even though I identify as a feminist qualitative researcher, my articulation and manifestation of that identity is different from other feminist qualitative researchers. I attempted to be transparent in the study about my idiosyncratic approach to feminist qualitative research; however, care should be taken in how these results may vary depending on researcher because participants were reacting to the research process as I conducted it.

The topic of the prior research study is specific to the disclosure of unwanted sexual experiences. Sexual trauma is not necessarily applicable to other “sensitive topics” that may change participants’ experiences of the study. For example, prior literature addresses research topics such as grief and other types of trauma; with these topics, the participants may experience the research process differently. However, prior literature indicated that there are similarities across different sensitive topics.

The participants, the researcher, and the specificity of the topic limited the degree to which these findings are transferable to other circumstances. This study was highly contextualized, and researchers should be cautious in applying results to other situations. Further studies on research participation on sensitive topics may consider the conceptual model offered in this study and seek ways to clarify, expand, and alter the model. Additional studies on research participation may consider the role of comfort as well as relationships, such as the participants’ relationships with themselves and interaction with the researcher, the researcher-participant relationship, and the community of people affected by the sensitive topic being studied. Additional studies on research participation may also consider the temporal sequencing of participation as perceived by research participants.

Implications for Conducting Research

The primary implication from this research for conducting research on sensitive topics is the need to shift researchers’ focus to participants’ expectations and experiences.

Typically, researchers consider research participation as consisting of four parts: (a) recruitment, (b) informed consent, (c) data collection, and (d) debriefing. From the vantage point of participants, the experience involves many other aspects that researchers may neglect, such as reading the written product and long-term consequences. Researchers may also neglect to consider the ways in which their relationship to the participant and the participants' connection to other participants is an important part of participants' experiences. This section will suggest ways that researchers can conduct qualitative studies that are congruent with participants' experiences and expectations.

Decision to Participate

Many participants had different expectations about how the research would affect them and how they felt about the research topic. Participants may be able to better formulate expectations the more familiar they are with research processes in general. In making the initial decision to participate, some participants may not be as familiar with research processes. As such, providing participants with a general framework about research may increase their familiarity. Their increased familiarity may help them generate additional questions. Those questions may assist the potential participant in making a more informed decision.

This study indicated the importance of participants' relationship to the researcher. As such, during the initial decision to participate, researchers can play a role in helping participants explore their own expectations. This may provide the researcher with important information about that particular participant. The researcher can also play a role in helping participants name their own ideas about how to make their participation more comfortable. For example, researchers can discuss with participants the potential advantages and disadvantages for particular interview locations, and then allow the participant to make a choice about what they expect will be a better location for them.

The Interview

In accordance with participants’ expectations about their own level of comfort, participants chose to participate in varying ways, in terms of what they disclosed and where they chose to interview. As such, participants’ own self-awareness about how they might experience the research process can be helpful in making their participation more comfortable. Researchers are responsible for helping participants identify what level of participation feels comfortable for them.

Researchers need to be mindful of the difficulty that some participants may have in verbalizing their experiences. Allowing time for empathic silence may help participants feel less pressure to respond to questions quickly. Researchers could also offer options for helping participants express themselves. For example, researchers could offer participants the opportunity to write or make art during the data collection or as a means of data collection. As participants indicated in the current study, individuals may feel more comfortable having an extra means of expressing themselves beyond the verbal interview.

Participants’ clarity about their own expectations is important; however, many participants were still surprised about how they experienced the research process. As such, researchers need to be explicit with participants that the participants themselves know best about their experiences, but participants still may be surprised by the way their involvement affects them. Researchers could support participants experiencing unexpected distress by offering a break from the formal interview.

The suggestions that researchers make for participant comfort could also be based on researchers' experiences of other participants in the study. To be able to make these suggestions, researchers must seek participants' reactions and responses; then researchers can share information about other participants' prior experiences with the caveat that participants may have similar or different experiences. This strategy may provide participants with a connection to other participants, which this study demonstrated is an important part of the process.

Because participants feel connected to other participants, researchers may want to provide opportunities for participants to ask questions about the other participants with the caveat that the researcher may be able to share limited information because of confidentiality issues. The participants may also benefit from the opportunity to interact with each other in a setting to generate additional data, participate in the analysis of the data, or socialize. A researcher may want to take care in ensuring that participants are aware that interacting with others is voluntary, as is any other way in which they do or do not choose to be involved in the study.

After the Interview

The possibility of unexpected distress provides an implication for the informed consent process. Because participants may be surprised by a reaction, they may wish to stop participating or participate in a different way. Researchers need to be open to participants' fluctuating experience and consider informed consent a continuous process. As applied psychologists, Haverkamp (2005) argued that researchers have a special responsibility to be aware of and respond to signs of distress, which may require reestablishing informed consent. Researchers also need to attend to unexpected distress by immediately providing participants with a variety of referral information.

After the interview is complete, researcher should address confidentiality issues, especially in a small community setting. As some participants in this study indicated, they were uncertain about how to interact with me when later seeing me on campus, even though this was addressed during the informed consent period before the interview. Thus, at the end of the interview, participants may benefit from further clarification about their choice to acknowledge or not acknowledge the researcher, as well as the researcher's responsibility to maintain confidentiality after the interview has ended.

Additionally, researchers need to provide participants with information about how the interview data will be used. It is researchers' responsibility to be transparent about the intent of the study and be explicit about how they will utilize quotes and/or synthesize information. In the original study, the majority of participants asked questions about the use of the interview information and how it would be presented in the written product.

Even if this information is shared in the informed consent process, this information should be revisited at the end of the data collection procedures.

After participants have shared information in the interview, they may feel more vulnerable about what will be done with their information and curious about what the researcher thinks of them and the information they have shared. At that time, the researcher should be careful to thoroughly explain the use of the data and answer participants’ questions about the next steps in the research process. If participants voice any concerns, the researcher should address these in a way that the participant finds suitable. For example, a participant may wish to see how they are represented in the written analysis before it is shared in the public domain for presentations or publication, and the researcher should provide the participant that information. As another example, a participant may wish to read the transcript of the interview and specify certain sections that they do not want to be used for direct quotes. A participant may also wish to provide information about how to be de-identified, to which the researcher should adhere.

Long-term Growth and Challenges

Researchers may want to follow up with participants at a period of time after the interview as a secondary debriefing that attends to issues of distress. Haverkamp (2005) argued that follow-up with participants should encompass an ethics of care and not just data collection issues, such as a transcription check. At this time, a participant may benefit from being provided with referral information. As the results indicated, participants’ reactions change over a longer period of time. This secondary debriefing could also provide participants with additional information about the progress of the study and allow participants to ask questions or provide additional information. At another time, researchers may want to provide participants with a copy of the written product, tell them their code name, and thank them for their participation. Because of the importance of the researcher-participant relationship, researchers should be mindful of the importance of additional contact after the interview and of the importance of taking leave and ending the relationship with sensitivity.

Based on the results of this study, qualitative research practices could improve with researchers' increased mindfulness of participants' differing perspectives of the experience. The research process is unique for each participant. As such, allowing participants to generate ideas and offering ideas about increasing their comfort with the process may benefit participants. Options related to expressing oneself artistically and/or in writing may increase participants' comfort. Participating in a study may result in participants reacting in ways that they did not even expect, so researchers should be prepared to help participants anticipate and cope with the unexpected effects. Participants may also benefit from researchers providing additional information about research in general as well as the potential and probable uses and representations of participant information in the study's end product. Because of the importance of participants' relationship to the researcher, researchers need to honor that connection by taking a supportive role in helping the participant feel comfortable participating and in ending the relationship with care. Haverkamp (2005) suggested that as applied psychologists, counseling psychologists conducting research should consider the relationship with participants as primary in importance and that the researcher, as the person with greater power, is responsible for conducting research in a way that is attentive to both increasing benefits and avoiding harm to research participants. Haverkamp argued that ethical research can be “a thoughtful, and sometimes courageous, commitment to creating trustworthy human relationship within our research enterprise” (p. 146). Indeed, this study suggested the ways in which the researcher can engage in a research process that creates a trustworthy human relationship with research participants.

Considerable research has been conducted that emphasize the importance of the client-counselor relationship in clinical practice (see Lambert & Barley, 2001). This investigation suggested that the relationship is one of the core foundations for effective research as well. As such, the concept of researcher-as-instrument needs to be given greater consideration. Research would benefit from ongoing processing on the part of the researcher. Rager (2005) argued that similar considerations as those deemed essential for clinicians doing trauma work should be considered for researchers engaging in similarly difficult work. For “emotionally-laden” research, Rager (2005) suggested personal therapy, journaling, peer debriefing, and maintaining balance with social support.

Implications for Clinical Practice

This study addressed issues relevant to the healing of sexual trauma. As a clinician working with a survivor, it is important to consider how to support a client in light of this information, because a client may seek counsel about whether or not to participate in a study or seek support after participating in a study.

Survivors of sexual trauma may consider participating in a research study on the topic. A clinician may work with a client to consider the issues of comfort involved in the research process and help the client to identify what comfort feels like to the client. A clinician could support a client in generating ideas about how she may feel comfortable throughout the process. The therapeutic relationship may be used as a parallel for discussing the importance of comfort and the role of the researcher. Trusting the researcher and considering the use of private information may be important for a client to consider. A clinician could work with a client to clarify her own expectations about the research and support the client in developing questions for the researcher. A clinician with a feminist theoretical orientation may help the client discuss and consider the research participation as a form of activism, which may contribute to her healing. More broadly, a clinician may discuss potential long-term consequences with the client, and the importance of processing the short- and long-term impact on the client.

If a client has participated in a research study, the clinician should be mindful of the various impacts that experience may have had on the client. The client's involvement in a study may be therapeutically relevant to the client in her growth and healing. The client may benefit from processing the interview experience extensively. This may cause the client to question her choices around disclosure, especially if she felt positive about disclosing to the researcher. The clinician may want to help the client explore the meaning of her participation in the broader context of her life and her healing.

If a client felt harmed in the research process, a clinician could validate the client's experience and help the client name exactly what was harmful about her experience. The clinician could also provide information about the regulatory board that oversees the research study and support the client in contacting relevant regulatory bodies to report a grievance.

Implications for Social Justice

The research and clinical practice implications described above are tied to conducting more just research that is congruent with participants' experiences and to taking traditional methods a step forward in providing comfort and to considering the importance of relationship in the research process. Beyond these implications for individual studies and for individual clients, there are socio-political implications. Regulatory bodies, such as Institutional Review Boards (IRB), would benefit from increased understanding of the experience of research participation from the vantage point of "vulnerable populations." Regulatory bodies categorize some potential participants as vulnerable and then specify extra precautions for conducting this work. These precautions should be congruent with the growing literature on research participation. Participants are not endorsing any long-term harm, so regulatory bodies could appropriately continue to permit research to be done with vulnerable populations. However, regulatory bodies would benefit from being better informed about what safeguards may benefit participants. Safeguards include a continuous informed consent process with multiple opportunities for participants to ask questions, an additional debriefing/follow-up contact, and providing the participant with a copy of the written representation of the findings.

Conclusion

This study offered a new perspective and framework for understanding feminist qualitative research, that of the participants themselves. In light of their experiences, qualitative research practices could be altered to better help participants feel safe and comfortable and to intentionally address the relationship participants develop with the researcher and with the other participants. Ultimately, with growing research, these practices could be enforced by regulatory bodies, and policy changes could be addressed and advocated for where appropriate.

APPENDIX A

PRIMARY RECRUITMENT LETTER

Hello, *Participant's name,*

Last year at *University name*, I was very grateful for your participation in my senior research project. After interviewing you in the fall, I completed the project in April, but I am actually interested in talking with you again for another research project.

I am working on a master's thesis about the research participation from participants' (your) perspective. I hope to learn about your experience of participating in that study.

I would like to interview you, either in-person or via phone or email. I hope that we can determine a time and place to meet for an interview, which will probably last up to 1.5 hour.

If you choose to participate, I would want to be in contact with you again (a shorter follow-up phone interview) to make sure I understand your perspective. Later on, I will invite you to participate an anonymous group email correspondence with the other participants.

Of course, if you choose to participate, you would decide how involved you would like to be.

If this sounds like something you are interested in, please email me back with any questions or thoughts you have, and we'll go from there. If I don't hear from you in the next few weeks, I will try to contact you, just to make sure you received this.

Thanks for your consideration,
Stephanie Hoover, *email, phone, address*

APPENDIX B

SECONDARY RECRUITMENT LETTER

Hi, *Participant's name,*

I just wanted to make sure you got my previous invitation to participate in this new research study. I have had a few other participants contact me, and they have had some good questions. I want to make sure other people that haven't responded to me have this information too.

The interview can take place at any time in the next few months. If you are busy now, but available later, that's fine. If you feel more comfortable with email as opposed to phone, that's fine too. I want to make it most comfortable for you.

I anticipate that the follow-up interview would just be to ask questions about something you said in the first interview (that I realized after listening to the interview tape that I didn't understand) or to ask you something based on something another participant brought up.

Also, the group email correspondence is completely optional. This is just if you are interested. I anticipate throwing out some ideas to you all and potential findings and getting your feedback. You don't need to commit to that now or anything. Everyone who chooses to participate would set up their own new email just for the purposes for this study, so there are no concerns with confidentiality.

This study is not about the previous content that we covered in the first interview. It's actually about what you thought about the whole idea of participating in a research project. The research is to understand the qualitative research process, most specifically the personal interview, from the vantage point of people who have participated in a research topic about something personal and sensitive. Researchers tend to theorize about ethics, but have yet to really research this area and understand how participants feel about the whole thing. The topics we would cover in this interview will not really be the same as the previous interview. It will more so be about the previous interview and what you thought about disclosing personal information in qualitative research interview, what it meant to you, what you thought about the process and the outcome, etc. More of a retrospective reflections sort of thing. Does that make sense? I'm hoping that the information I get from people will help inform better research practices because it is important that participants feel positive about the experience. If that still seems vague, I'm more than happy to email you the list of potential topics or some potential questions.

If you contact me, that is not committing to participate in the study. You are never obligated to participate. If you have questions please let me know.

Thanks for your consideration,
Stephanie Hoover, *email, phone, address*

APPENDIX C

INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENT

Interviewees' Experience of Participating in a Research Study on a Sensitive Topic

Consent Document

BACKGROUND

You are being asked to take part in a research study on your experience of participating in the previous research study I conducted on the disclosure of coercive sexual experiences. The purpose of this research study is to understand how you experienced discussing a personal, sensitive topic The purpose of this study is to learn from individuals from the previous study about their views and perspectives on the process of research participation. I hope to use this information to inform better qualitative research interview practices.

Before you decide to take part, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully, and ask us if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether you want to volunteer to take part in this study.

STUDY PROCEDURE

Your participation in this study will take from 1 ½ to 3 hours, and if you decide you want to take part in the online discussion group described below, it will involve an additional 2 or more hours of your time depending on how many group sessions you participate in, for a total of at least 5 hours. You will be asked to:

- ➢ Take part in an individual interview in which you will be asked about your perspective about participating in the previous study, ~ 1 - 2 hours. The interview will be audiotaped and transcribed by the researcher.
- ➢ Be available for a follow-up interview ½ to 1 hour, which will also be audiotaped and transcribed by the researcher.

- Optional: Take part in an online discussion group with the other participants. This will take place via email correspondence at an agreed upon time. You will be asked to choose a new email address that will ensure anonymity between research participants. The online group may last up to two hours. Multiple sessions may be held as long as participants are interested. The purpose of the online discussion group is to discuss and provide feedback on the initial findings of the research interviews. Provide any writings (journal entries or emails) that relate to your perspective on the previous study.

RISKS

The risks of taking part in this study are considered minimal. It is possible that you may feel upset thinking about or talking about your personal experience of participating in the previous study. These risks are similar to those you experience when discussing personal information with others. It is also possible that you may feel upset because the interview reminds you of the previous unwanted sexual experience. If you feel upset or discomfort from this experience, you can tell me, and I will provide you with a list of resources available to help. Additionally, if I am concerned that your participation in the research has been upsetting, I will provide you with contact information for crisis mental health services. If you participate in the online focus group, there is no way for the researchers to guarantee that the information you share will be kept private by other members.

BENEFITS

I cannot promise any direct benefit for taking part in this study. However, I hope the information from this study will increase understanding of the research process from the perspective of participants.

CONFIDENTIALITY

The information you share will be kept confidential by the researcher. Tapes, transcripts, and written documents provided by participants will be stored in a locked filing cabinet or on a password protected computer located in the researcher’s work space. Only the researcher will have access to this information. The audiotapes will not be altered through a voice distortion system; however, any individual names that are said in the audiotape will be transcribed with a code name. Your information will be assigned a code name (which you may choose if you wish), which will be kept with your interview audiotapes, transcriptions, written documents, and discussion group information. In the storage and publication of information, only your code name will be used, and every effort will be made to protect your identity by removing identifying information from quotes, etc., that are used in publication. The data will be destroyed when no longer needed for research (not exclusive to this study).

Although as researcher, I can guarantee that I will keep all information you share with me confidential, it is possible that participants in the optional discussion group might share information about you to others. I cannot guarantee that the other participants will keep any information you share with them private. I will discuss the importance of privacy with all participants in the effort to possibly prevent breaches of confidentiality. The only other exception to the guarantee of confidentiality is if you share actual or suspected abuse, neglect, or exploitation of a child or a disabled person or an elderly adult. In this case, the researcher must report this to Child or Adult Protective Services or the most appropriate agency in your state.

PERSON TO CONTACT
If you have questions, complaints, or concerns about this study, or if you feel you have been harmed by taking part in the research, you can contact me, Stephanie Hoover at 317-460-7692. I can normally be reached during normal working hours; however, if Iam unavailable when you call, you may leave a message on my confidential voice mail. I will return your call as soon as possible. You may also contact me by e-mail at stephanie.m.hoover@gmail.com; however, you should be aware that e-mail is not a confidential form of communication. If, for any reason, you wish to discuss this research with Stephanie's research advisor, you may contact Dr. Sue Morrow at 801-581-3400 or by e-mail at sue.morrow@utah.edu.

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD
Contact the Institutional Review Board (IRB) if you have questions regarding your rights as a research participant. Also, contact the IRB if you have questions, complaints or concerns which you do not feel you can discuss with the investigator. The University of Utah IRB may be reached by phone at (801) 581-3655 or by e-mail at irb@hsc.utah.edu.

VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION
It is entirely up to you to decide whether to take part in this study. If you decide not to take part, or if you withdraw from the study after starting, there will be no penalty or loss of benefits of any kind, nor will it affect your relationship with the researcher. If you decide to stop after you have agreed to participate, just inform the researcher. I will destroy your interview tape and any transcripts I have made.

COSTS AND COMPENSATION TO PARTICIPANTS
There should typically not be any costs to you for participating in this study. If you incur any costs (such as transportation, long-distance phone calls, etc.), you will be reimbursed. You must provide me, the researcher, with documentation of the expense (e.g., a receipt or stub from the public transportation ticket, the bill for a phone call, or a record of car mileage). I will reimburse public transportation costs and long-distance phone calls at full cost. I will reimburse personal car

driving at $0.32 per mile. There will not be any payment for your participation in this study.

CONSENT

By signing this consent form, I confirm I have read the information in this consent form and have had the opportunity to ask questions. I will be given a signed copy of this consent form. I voluntarily agree to take part in this study.

____
Printed Name of Participant

____________________________________ ______________________
Signature of Participant Date

____
Printed Name of Researcher

____________________________________ ______________________
Signature of Researcher Date

APPENDIX D

FOLLOW-UP INTERVIEW CONTACT

Hi, *Participant's* Name,

I wanted to update you on where we are at with the research project about how participants experience the research process. I have been analyzing the interviews and hope to talk with you for a follow-up interview some time in the near future. I hope to be ready to do the interviews starting mid-December, and I anticipate doing interview through mid-January. If you are interested in doing a follow-up interview, please let me know if there is a time during that time period that would work best for you. I know this is pretty far in advance, but I figure it might be best to plan ahead during the holidays.

Thanks,
Stephanie Hoover, *email, phone*

APPENDIX E

RESULTS FEEDBACK INITIAL CONTACT

Hi, *Participant's Name*,

I've been working on my study about participants' experiences of participating in a research study on a sensitive topic. Thank you for your prior participation in the interviews. I would like your feedback on my interpretation and results so far. I am hoping to do this in a group format. I would like to email everyone my interpretation and results. To do so in a confidential way, I would appreciate it if you were to create a new email account that does not include any identifying information. That way, I can email everyone, and everyone's anonymity will be protected as you "reply all" with your feedback. I would like to email everyone the results next week. If you are interested in participating in this part of the project, please email me back with a new email address. If you have any questions, please let me know.

Thanks,
Stephanie Hoover, *email, phone*

APPENDIX F

ABBREVIATED AUDIT TRAIL

Individual Interviews (July 3, 2009 – November 14, 2009)
Recruited potential participants. Conducted and transcribed individual interview with 8 participants; completed open coding process.

Open Coding Process (October 22, 2009)
Developed 1,089 total codes for 7 individual interviews. As I looked at codes, there was a difference in initial codes from simple descriptive nouns for smaller lengths of quotations and then later codes, which were more elaborate phrases that better mimicked or quoted participants and encompassed larger quotation lengths. I began to categorize into families: emotions, questions during the interview, listen/voice talk, hard, realize serious, realize insight, feminism, empower, researcher, academia, participating is brave, society, women relating, sex, questions/uncertainty, friends, purpose, still concerned, past, engage, safe/vulnerable.

Axial Coding Continued (October 26, 2009 – December 14, 2009)
Renamed initial codes that were simple and less meaning-oriented. Merged codes that represented the same meaning. 548 codes in total at the end of this process. Began to develop families with sub-families: academic (comfort with research, research is important, uncertainty about research, what is research), after effects (interpersonal, intrapersonal), emotions (incident, initial expectations, interview, write-up) empower (confidence, do own research or participate in others, talk - themes and incident), engage (initial, overall, write-up), hard (interview emotions, interview words, write-up), insight (disclosure, event, process, self), interview/different, listen voice talk, questioning (compare, incident, participation), questions in interview (questions, answer), realize serious, researcher role as interviewer, researcher (friend, role), safe (general, interview, write-up), short-term (interpersonal, intrapersonal), society (disclosure, sexual assault), still concerned (interpersonal, intrapersonal), women (connect, not men, other participants).

Follow-up Interviews (November 27, 2009 – January 10, 2010)
Recruited, conducted, transcribed follow-up interviews. Incorporated into codes and families.

Selective Coding Process, (December 21, 2009)
Used note cards to organize relationship between families. Altered prior families and sub-families to develop a more process-oriented analysis. The four families were: interview experience; safety increases engagement, especially as related to people; uncertainty that results in insight; feminist consciousness.

Each family is listed with the sub-families that were assigned, as well as the number of codes assigned to each sub-family:

(a) interview experience: interview different than other disclosures (20), researcher as interviewer (15), listen, voice, talk (14), answering questions (7), questions in interview (9), emotions during interview (12), difficulty with interview emotions (12), hard to find words in interview (9), short-term intrapersonal (14), short-term interpersonal (13), after effect, interpersonal (10), after effect, intrapersonal (5);

(b) safety increases engagement, especially as related to people: general safety (4), feel safe in interview (7), feel safe in write-up (7), engage overall (13), initial engagement (18), emotions from initial expectations (9), comfort with research (3), what is research (10), importance of research (5), uncertainty about research (13), researcher's role (8), engage in the write-up (24), difficulty with the write-up (5), emotions in write-up (5), other participants (9), connect with other women (3), researcher as friend (20), not men (10).

(c) uncertainty that results in insight: questioning incident (3), questioning participation (4), questioning by comparing (7), emotions about the incident (4), validated to participate (12), empower confidence (5), empowering to talk (11), insight about disclosure (7), insights about self (3), insights about processing (11), insights about the event (14), interpersonal ongoing concerns (17), intrapersonal ongoing concerns (2).

(d) feminist consciousness: empowered to do own research or participate (6), how society shapes disclosure (20), society's shaping of sexual assault (5).

Original Interview Recordings (December 29, 2009 – January 10, 2010)
Listened to, made analytical notes and brief transcriptions of original interview recordings.

Drafted Results (January 10-17, 2010)
Completed first draft of results with four primary themes: safety and comfort, agency, researcher-participant relationship, and community of women. The four themes were discussed in relation to five temporal steps in the research participation process: decision to participate, the interview, bouncing back from the interview, reading the write-up, and growths and challenges.

Preliminary Results Feedback (January 17-31, 2010)
Contacted and received feedback from participants on initial draft. Challenged to make the model more holistic, less discrete. Revised draft based on feedback from participants, my own critique, as well as information that I solicited from research team members about their expectation, assumptions, thoughts, and feelings about the research participation process from the vantage point of research participants.

Revising Results (February 1-February 22, 2010)
Presented study at conference. Received feedback related to theoretical model. Clarified model to make safety and comfort the outer ring and relationships the inner ring. Safety and comfort and relationships are considered the two primary themes; relationships has the subthemes of agency, researcher-participant relationship, and community of women. Altered names of some of the temporal steps, i.e. growth and challenges changed to long-term growth and challenges. Sub-titles added to the temporal steps and the relationship subthemes; table added to analysis to organize the results.

Revising Results (February 23-April 15)
Received feedback from peer and advisor.

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