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Training Interviewers for Research on Sexual Violence

A Qualitative Study of Rape Survivors' Recommendations for Interview Practice

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Face-to-face interviewing is a common data collection technique in violence against women research. To guide the development of interviewer training programs, the authors conducted an empirical study on adult rape survivors' recommendations for interview practice. They asked survivors what interviewers should know about rape and how they should interact with participants. Data from 92 survivors revealed that interviewer training needs to emphasize diversity so that researchers are capable of working effectively with individuals with different life circumstances. The survivors also emphasized that interviewers need to show warmth and compassion and allow them to exercise choice and control during the interview process.

Keywords: *interviewer training; interviewing; rape; sexual assault*

Interview methodology has been widely used in the field of violence against women research since its beginnings in the early 1980s. Several of the earliest influential studies on violence against women used face-to-face interviews to document survivors' stories of violence (e.g., Dobash & Dobash, 1979; Gordon & Riger, 1989; Kelly, 1988; Russell, 1974, 1982, 1984; for a review, see Bergen, Renzetti, & Edleson, 2004). Perhaps it is not a coincidence that these pioneering researchers turned to interview methodology. Many of these scholars explicitly noted the influence of the feminist and antirape movements on their work, which emphasize storytelling for consciousness raising and recovery. Although other methodological approaches such as surveys, telephone interviews, and automated telephonic data collection systems offer more speed and potentially more convenience (Reddy et al.,

2006; Rosenbaum, Rabenhorst, Reddy, Fleming, & Howells, 2006), one-on-one interviewing has remained a commonly used technique for its capacity to give voice to survivors (Reinharz & Chase, 2002).

Among interview studies, there are multiple exemplars of data collection by a single interviewer or ethnographer (e.g., Bergen, 1996; Frohmann, 1991; Matthews, 1994), but more typically, in both qualitative and quantitative studies, multiple interviewers are necessary. With large-scale, multisite (e.g., J. C. Campbell et al., 2003; Koss et al., 2003), and multinational (e.g., Ellsberg & Heise, 2005; Jansen, Watts, Ellsberg, Heise, & Garcia-Moreno, 2004) studies on violence against women becoming more common, it is increasingly important to examine how interviewers are trained for their work. A new literature is emerging on interviewing issues in victimology research that reflects the collective wisdom of multiple research teams. In this project, our goal is to add to this burgeoning literature by conducting an empirical study on what adult rape survivors need and expect from their interviewers. As part of a larger interview study on rape survivors' postassault help seeking experiences and health (R. Campbell et al., 1999; R. Campbell, Wasco, Ahrens, Sefl, & Barnes, 2001), we conducted a qualitative "metastudy" (Rosenbaum & Langhinrichsen-Rohling, 2006) on what the participants thought was important for interviewers to know about sexual violence. Survivors were asked to reflect on what they want in an interview experience, and their insights and recommendations can be a useful training resource for researchers.

How to Train Interviewers for Violence Against Women Research

The literature on victimology interviewing suggests that most researchers use a two-stage approach for preparing interviewers to work with survivors of violence. First, interviewers must learn about violence against women itself—a "101" introductory course of sorts. Many researchers have modeled such training after the programs created by rape crisis centers (RCCs) and domestic violence (DV) shelters to orient new volunteers (R. Campbell, 1996; Sullivan & Rumptz, 1997). These trainings of 40 or more hours typically include consciousness raising about violence against women, causes of violence, myths and facts, diversity and cultural sensitivity, crisis intervention skills, safety planning, and community resources and supports (Block, McFarlane, Walker, & Devitt, 1999; Bruzuzy, Ault, & Segal, 1997; R. Campbell, 1996, 2002; Ellsberg & Heise, 2005; Jansen et al., 2004; Sullivan & Rumptz, 1997; Sullivan, Tan, Basta, Rumptz, & Davidson, 1992). Although it may seem unnecessary for research interviewers to be familiar with all of these topics, Sullivan and Cain (2004) argued that anyone working with victims of violence must be truly knowledgeable because "women's lives are multifaceted, and project staff must have the knowledge and skills to handle unanticipated situations" (p. 607).

To cover these “violence against women 101” content areas, researchers have used a variety of training methods. Some have formalized cross-trainings with RCCs and DV shelters whereby agency staff are responsible for content instruction. For instance, Gordon and Riger (1989) had RCC staff specialists instruct their interviewers on how to recognize signs of emotional upset and postrape trauma. In addition, Sullivan and Cain (2004) noted that some RCCs and DV shelters have required that researchers send their interviewers to the agencies’ in-house training before entering into collaborative research projects. More typically, researchers conduct their own interviewer content training but use group discussion methods that were commonly developed in antiviolence organizations. Interviewers are assigned readings—often a mix of academic literature, popular press, and survivors’ stories—and then the research team discusses the material (e.g., R. Campbell, 1996; Sullivan & Rumptz, 1997). Similar to the process of consciousness raising, the discussions focus on critically examining existing beliefs within a broader sociopolitical context. To help interviewers transfer this knowledge to real-life situations, Ellsberg and Heise (2005) developed four innovative, step-by-step training activities that challenge interviewers to consider their “old” beliefs relative to “new” perspectives introduced in training.

The second stage of interviewer training involves teaching how to administer the interview protocol itself. It is worth noting that many researchers tackle this training component *after* the interviewers are firmly grounded in their understanding of violence against women, perhaps signifying that interviewing survivors of violence is more complicated than administering questions and recording answers in a prescribed way (J. C. Campbell & Dienemann, 2001; R. Campbell, 1996; Ellsberg & Heise, 2002; Ellsberg, Heise, Pena, Agurto, & Winkvist, 2001; Garcia-Moreno, 2001; Jansen et al., 2004; Jewkes, Watts, Abrahams, Penn-Kekana, & Garcia-Moreno, 2000; Sullivan & Rumptz, 1997). Interviewers may work through a successive series of practice exercises, including watching model interviews and conducting mock interviews with other team members (R. Campbell, 1996; R. Campbell et al., 2006; Sullivan & Rumptz, 1997). Once data collection is underway, many researchers hold weekly team meetings to review cases, discuss transcripts, correct coding mistakes, share interviewing techniques, and debrief about the emotionality of this work (Block et al., 1999; R. Campbell, 2002; Jansen et al., 2004; Sullivan et al., 1992; Yuan, Koss, Polacca, & Goldman, 2006).

Who to Train as Interviewers for Violence Against Women Research

In addition to the challenge of deciding *how* to prepare interviewers for their work, researchers have to decide *who* they will be entrusting with this responsibility. A key issue is whether interviewers should be professionals or whether they can be lay members of the community or students. To date, there has not been overwhelming endorsement of professional interviewers within the violence against women research

community. For example, in their multinational World Health Organization (WHO) study on DV, Jansen et al. (2004) invested considerable effort training local, lay community women to be interviewers. However, because of time constraints, they also brought in a group of professional interviewers to help complete data collection. When they compared information collected from these two groups of interviewers, Jansen et al. found that the carefully trained community interviewers obtained higher response rates and disclosure rates for physical and sexual abuse than did the professional interviewers. Similarly, Gondolf, Yllo, and Campbell (1997) argued for the utility of formerly battered women and/or community advocates as interviewers for their capacity to connect with women, which can facilitate disclosure. In their multi-site study of femicide (J. C. Campbell et al., 2003), Block et al. (1999) found that public health nurses were highly effective field trackers for finding and interviewing those who had been close to the murdered DV survivors. Indeed, they noted that field trackers need “the right attitude” and that “regardless of the person’s previous experience, a successful field project will require extensive training” (p. 363). The take-home lesson from these large, multisite projects might be that all kinds of interviewers will require extensive training about victimization.

Another choice would be training undergraduate and graduate students, though they likely have no prior interviewing skills and varied knowledge about violence against women. For academic researchers, students are a readily available resource for project staffing, and learning to interview can be a useful teaching and mentoring experience. Several research teams have trained undergraduate and graduate students for interviewing adult rape survivors (R. Campbell, 2002), survivors of DV (Adams, Sullivan, Bybee, & Greeson, 2008; Baker, Cook, & Norris, 2003; Bennett, Goodman, & Dutton, 2000; Sullivan et al., 1992; Sutherland, Sullivan, & Bybee, 2001), DV shelter residents with high levels of alcohol use (Ogle & Baer, 2003), children who have witnessed DV (Sullivan, Bybee, & Allen, 2002), and physically and sexually abusive incarcerated men (Cook, 2002). None of these researchers have described difficulties with the quality of student interviewers, but it is also important to note that they all emphasized the dual importance of substantive knowledge on violence against women as well as specific interviewing skills. Moreover, R. Campbell (2002) noted that students are a diverse population with respect to age, race/ethnicity, prior victimization histories, volunteer experiences, and “street smarts.” Academic researchers have a large pool of potential student candidates from which they can recruit specific individuals for training.

The Current Study

The literature on interviewing in violence against women research suggests that interviewer training requires substantial investment. Whether the interviewers are professionals, community members, and/or students, they need to be trained in both the substantive dynamics of violence against women as well as specific interviewing

strategies for working with victimized populations. This literature currently includes more examples from DV research than sexual assault or other forms of violence. Although there are overlapping concerns across multiple forms of violence, training resources specific to different types of violence are needed. Therefore, the focus of this study is adult rape survivors and what interviewers need to know to be able to work effectively with this population. Asking survivors about these issues fills an important gap in the victimology interview literature by providing empirical data to guide interviewer training. In this project, undergraduate and graduate students were trained to interview adult rape survivors about their postassault help-seeking experiences and health outcomes. At the end of the interview, we asked the participants what they felt was important for interviewers to understand about sexual assault, and their narratives provide the primary data source for this qualitative metastudy.

Method

Participants

To recruit a sample of adult rape survivors for this interview project, we used the techniques of adaptive sampling (Thompson & Seber, 1996; for more a more detailed description of recruitment, also see R. Campbell, Sefl, Wasco, & Ahrens, 2004). The city of Chicago and two contiguous suburbs were divided into regions based on zip codes; this sampling unit was selected because it is possible to obtain census information stratified by zip code. To ensure adequate breadth of coverage, zip codes representing women of varying races and socioeconomic statuses were targeted for recruitment efforts. In each zip code, requests for participation in this study were made via posters, fliers, and in-person presentations to groups of women. The type of settings targeted within each zip code varied but included places where women might be living, working, or passing through as part of their daily activities, including public transportation, grocery stores, currency exchanges, laundry mats, nail and beauty salons, libraries, and churches. As a result of our recruitment efforts, 186 women contacted the research team during an 8-month period to express interest in participating in the study. We were able to contact 157 of these women, of whom 112 women (71%) were eligible to participate in the study (i.e., 18 years old; assaulted by a stranger, acquaintance, dating partner, or husband). Completed interviews were conducted with 102 participants (91%); we were unable to reconnect with 10 women to finalize scheduling of an interview because of discontinued phones or changed numbers. In 82 cases (80%), it was possible to trace a woman's involvement in the study to a specific zip code location; the remaining 20% were obtained through snowball sampling. There were no significant differences in age, race, marital status, education level, and employment between these participants and the adult female residents of these zip codes, which

suggests that the sample in the study is representative of the regions of Chicago from which the participants were recruited.

Of the 102 rape survivors we interviewed, 92 are included in this article's analyses. Seven women did not consent to have their interviews tape-recorded, and in three other cases the tape quality was too poor to allow for reliable transcription. For these 10 cases without tape recordings, we reviewed the interviewers' written records of the participants' answers to examine whether these women provided substantively different answers to the focal questions for this metastudy. The content of these notes was consistent with the full transcriptions, suggesting that these 10 women were not significantly different from the other 92.

The average age of this sample of 92 rape survivors was 34.79 ($SD = 9.43$) and the majority of participants were women of color: 50% were African American, 37% White, 5% Latina, 7% Multiracial, and 1% Asian American. Almost one third of the sample (30%) was currently married, and 51% had children. Most women (85%) had a high school education, and 61% were employed. Most were assaulted by someone they knew (acquaintance, date, partner; 67%), and most were raped by a single assailant (95%). Also, 38% were *not* physically injured in the attack. Most women did *not* have a weapon used against them (69%), and most were *not* under the influence of alcohol (70%). On average, the rape had occurred 8.77 years prior to participating in this interview ($SD = 8.65$; range = 1 month to 30 years).

Procedures

The interviews were conducted at a location of the participant's choosing and lasted on average 2.27 hr ($SD = 54.96$ min; range = 45 min to 5.5 hr). Each participant was paid \$30 and was given public transportation tokens to reimburse her for transportation expenses and an information packet on community resources. The interview team consisted of six White women, three African American women, and three Multiracial women (one White–African American, one White–Native American, one White–Latina); one was a faculty member and the principal investigator (PI), four were doctoral students in psychology or sociology, and seven were upper-level undergraduate psychology majors. All of the doctoral students had extensive prior experience working with survivors of violence and interviewing in community settings. The undergraduates had been high-performing students in the PI's research methods or community psychology classes in prior semesters. They were selected because they had had some previous instruction on violence against women in other classes and/or community volunteer experience and expressed interest in doing a research practicum on women's issues. None of the interviewers was asked by the PI if they were survivors of violence because it was our project's philosophy that it is a survivor's choice if and when to disclose. Therefore, interviewers were not selected or screened out because of their own victimization status. However, the issue of how to work with survivors if an interviewer is also a survivor was explicitly addressed in training (see below).

Interviewer training was co-conducted by the faculty PI and two graduate students over 16 weeks (an academic semester) for 4 to 8 hr per week. Each interviewer received a standardized training manual that included readings, written directions for administering the interview, the interview itself, and project protocols for conducting the interview. Four weeks were devoted to introducing the project and developing the interviewers' substantive knowledge about rape. A selection of readings was assigned that included both academic and popular press writings on sexual assault, which were discussed in both small and large groups. Two weeks were spent on general interviewing practice, standards, and techniques. Four weeks were spent teaching the interview by reviewing each question so that the interviewers understood its intent and could therefore answer any clarifying questions posed by the respondents. The PI then modeled how to administer the complete interview, and the interviewers conducted tape-recorded mock interviews with each other for 2 weeks and with volunteer rape survivors for 2 additional weeks. The PI listened to the practice tapes and gave feedback to the interviewers. Mock interviews were repeated until the PI felt that the practice interview reflected correct administration of the protocol. One week was devoted to reviewing interviewing procedures and safety considerations (for both the interviewers and survivors). In the final week, we discussed self-care strategies and stress-management techniques.

To provide guidance to the interviewers on how to interact with the survivors throughout the interview, our training program emphasized principles of feminist interviewing (Acker, Barry, & Esseveld, 1983; DeVault, 1996; Fonow & Cook, 1991; Oakley, 1988). Specifically, we outlined six key expectations for the interviewers. First, the emotional well-being of the survivors was always our paramount concern. If a survivor seemed particularly distressed, the interviewer needed to stop, offer comfort, and discuss with the participant whether she wanted to continue. Second, even though this was a structured interview, most questions were open ended, and women needed to be given time to tell their stories in their own words, for however long that may take. Third, the interviewer needed to show patience and respect while the women's stories unfolded. It was important to affirm that it was always the survivors' choice what they chose to disclose or not disclose. Fourth, interviewers needed to encourage the participants to ask questions and be prepared to answer their questions and engage in dialogue. Fifth, interviewers needed to provide information to women that might have helped them understand or normalize their experiences. And sixth, the emotional tenor of the interview needed to reflect warmth, compassion, and understanding. The mock interviews described above were evaluated for both their accuracy in implementing the protocol as well as their consistency with respect to these guiding principles.

In our training program, we also discussed options for how interviewers could respond if they were asked about their own victimization histories. The PI emphasized that it is always the survivor's choice if and when to disclose, and this applies to interviewers as well. The PI recommended that interviewers answer simply and directly without detail or discussion if they did choose to disclose their own victimizations

(and, similarly, if they were not survivors to be succinct in their replies as well). Our goal was to keep the focus on the interviewee's experiences and well-being. To respect the privacy of the interviewees, the PI met privately with team members to discuss their plans for how they would respond to such questions if asked. It was extremely rare that the interviewees were asked this question, and in those limited cases the interviewees answered directly and honestly without difficulty.

Once data collection had begun, the interview team met weekly to debrief about the interviews. Each interviewer provided an oral summary of the case and then had time to vent about any aspects that were emotionally upsetting to them. Team members provided support to each other both in and out of the weekly team meetings. To ensure that the interviews were being implemented as intended, the PI listened to tapes and checked the written records for accuracy and quality. The PI and senior graduate students met with interviewers individually to provide specific corrective feedback and discussed general problems and common mistakes at the team meeting. In addition, the PI and interview coordinator met weekly to discuss how the interviewees were handling the stress of this work and regularly rotated interviewees to give them breaks from interviewing. The PI continued to meet privately with interviewees to discuss any specific concerns or problems they were encountering.

Measures

The interview included both open-ended qualitative questions as well as standardized quantitative assessments to learn about women's assault experiences, post-assault help seeking, and health outcomes (see R. Campbell et al., 1999). For this study on recommendations for interviewer training, we analyzed the narrative data from the closing of the interview, which focused on soliciting feedback from participants about how our study and other projects on violence against women could be improved to be more attentive to survivors' needs. Specifically, all participants were asked, "*What do you think is most important for interviewers like me to understand about sexual assault?*" Interviewers used follow-up probes to clarify participants' answers and to try to elicit discussion about why participants were making such recommendations. The verbatim transcriptions from these questions were the primary data sources for analysis. Supplemental data sources were also consulted, including the audiotapes of the interview, the full transcripts, and the PI's field notes from the entire project (see R. Campbell, 2002).

Data Analysis

We used a three-phase process for data analysis. First, consistent with Strauss and Corbin's (1990) method of "open coding" and Miles and Huberman's (1994) concept of "data reduction," two coders (the first and second authors of this article) independently identified initial themes in the participants' answers. This task was

approached from a grounded theory perspective such that we wanted to capture what the participants stated, not a priori conceptual categories (Charmaz, 2006). We independently coded the first 10 cases and then compared analyses, identified discrepant coding, and negotiated final coding decisions. This process was then repeated with the next 10 cases, and by this point there was substantial agreement between both coders. Of the cases, 30% were double coded with 98% interrater agreement.

The second phase of analysis focused on organizing comparisons and contrasts of the data (akin to Strauss and Corbin's [1990] "axial coding" and Miles and Huberman's [1994] "data display" phase). We constructed micro-level tables that were organized by the individual themes and then combined those tables into macro-level tables based on two overarching emerging themes in the participants' answers: recommendations for what interviewers needed to know about rape and what interviewees needed and wanted from the interview experience. From this process, we emerged with multiple organizations of the data that allowed us to focus at the level of an individual case, a thematic code, and/or an overarching theme.

The third phase of analysis involved constructing interpretations and evaluating our primary research question (see Miles and Huberman's [1994] "conclusion drawing" phase). For this phase, the two coders worked sequentially. Using the data tables described above, the first coder developed a summary of key findings, selected illustrative quotes, and drafted interpretative statements for each overarching theme. Quotes were selected for their verbal content as well as style and tone (Sandelowski, 1994). The first coder assembled multiple quotes that expressed the same sentiment and selected ones for inclusion in the article that were clearest in conveying content and/or emotion. This coder also checked to make sure that women of different ages, races/ethnicities, assault experiences, and recovery experiences were equivalently represented in the quotations. Each quote is from a unique case or survivor (i.e., no duplication of speakers in the article). The second coder then independently reviewed these materials and cross-checked them against the data to ensure their accuracy and interpretative validity (see Erickson, 1986). In the presentation of the results, it is important to note that the interpretive voice reflects the survivors' recommendations, not our own views. So when we write "interviewers should . . ." or "interviewers must be able to . . ." or similar statements, this reflects our summary and synthesis of the *participants'* views regarding what is important for researchers to know about sexual assault, not our opinions and judgments.

Results

The overarching theme in the participants' narratives was that interviewers need to be knowledgeable about rape and its impact on victims. The more informed, practiced, and patient the interviewer can be, the more helpful the interview experience can be to survivors. The women we interviewed discussed four main issues that

interviewers need to know to prepare for interviewing rape survivors. First, they wanted interviewers to know that rape happens to all kinds of women and that survivors show their emotions in different ways; therefore, interviewers should not be surprised by who and what they see in their interviews. Second, rape has a devastating impact on multiple facets of women's lives, so interviewers need to understand that recovery is a long journey and they will be talking with women at very different stages of that process. Third, there are limits to what interviewers can truly understand if they have not "walked in these shoes" themselves. Interviewers need to be respectful of the differences between personal knowledge and learned knowledge, but both can help researchers appreciate survivors' lived experiences. Finally, survivors wanted interviewers to use all of this knowledge to help women feel comfortable in the interview, so they could talk freely about the assault and have someone bear witness to that telling with patience and compassion.

First, survivors felt it was important for interviewers to know that rape can happen to anybody. This is more than a simple fact about rape to commit to memory; it means that anybody could be sitting in the interview chair. There is no profile rape survivor, and so interviewers should not have expectations about the kinds of women they may be interviewing. For instance, as a 42-year-old African American woman who survived stranger rape 20 years ago told her interviewer, "It can happen to anybody. You can't really predict when it will be. You don't necessarily have to do anything to provoke it." The same sentiment was expressed by survivors of acquaintance, date, and marital rape. For example, a 25-year-old Caucasian woman who was raped by her boyfriend 5 years prior said, "Rape happens to anyone. No matter what race you are, color you are. It happens to us [women]." Although all women are at risk for sexual assault, interviewers need to appreciate the uniqueness of every survivor and approach each interview as a new experience. A 38-year-old African American woman who was raped by a close friend 8 years earlier stressed that no two women, no two stories are the same:

I am not like the person you talked to 2 days ago. Just understand that. It's better for that to register in your mind because you can take information and see people everyday but it's a different person who has had different experiences. Yes, some will have similar emotions, but it is a different person.

Survivors also emphasized that women vary tremendously in how they show what they are feeling and thinking, so interviewers must check their assumptions about how survivors *should* be reacting. Depending on multiple factors, such as how long ago the assault occurred, comfort with the interviewer, and just how a survivor is feeling that day or moment, interviewers will see markedly different emotional reactions. For example, one participant was a 49-year-old Caucasian woman who had survived stranger rape 15 years ago. At the time of the interview, she characterized herself as being "in a good place" and ready to reflect about her recovery. From that vantage point, she summed up a sentiment expressed by many women:

I guess that it's different for everyone and that you cannot come into the interview situation with any preconceptions about. One woman might be devastated and another woman might have integrated into her life very well, and the reaction you get might not be what you expect. That doesn't mean that she's wrong. But that everyone is completely different and every woman processes it completely differently.

The women who mentioned that survivors differ in their emotional response were more likely to have been assaulted some time ago, 10 years or more. Perhaps because of that passage of time, they had witnessed their own highs and lows and wanted to teach interviewers that there is considerable range in how women react over time.

Second, to be able to engage with women, no matter who they are or where they are in their recovery, survivors felt it was necessary for interviewers to understand how far, wide, and deeply their lives were affected by the rape. Many participants spoke of how they were not the same person anymore and that this was a life-changing experience. As a 24-year-old Caucasian woman who was raped 1.5 years prior by a friend stated, "There's the restriction of knowing that your life will never be the same, that you will never be the person you were before." Similarly, a 48-year-old Caucasian woman who had been raped by her boyfriend nearly 24 years ago wanted interviewers to know that rape is a demoralizing act of power and control that strips human dignity: "The whole thing is demeaning. I don't care how it's done or who does it, it's a very demeaning experience." Other survivors discussed the ripple effect this trauma created in their lives—their physical health, sexual relationships, and general life functioning were all adversely affected. For example, one of our participants was a 23-year-old African American woman who was raped by her boyfriend when she was 18 years old. In those 5 years, she had struggled with depression and health problems and as a result had been in and out college, unable to finish her degree. However, at the time of the interview, she noted that she was "turning a corner" but aware that for her and other survivors, it's a long recovery process:

I think it's important to understand the complexity of how it affects someone. And how many different areas of your life. And really, at the same time, not to make any assumptions about that. I feel like at times people expect you to be completely over it, or completely a mess, you know, just completely fucked up and every part of your life is just fucked up. And how do you function, and how do you have sex with anybody again and it's just like, things are much more layered and complex than that and people go through a lot of different periods and process. I think just being really aware of that and also being really aware that you're talking to this person in a specific place in time in their healing process. They could be, could have been in a very different place a year ago and could be in a different place in another year.

Survivors wanted interviewers to be prepared to hear about more than "just" psychological trauma. Rape is a crime that hurts mind, body, and soul, so interviewers need to comprehend its impact at this deeper level.

Third, survivors wanted interviewers to recognize the limits of what they can and cannot understand about rape, particularly if this is not something they have experienced personally. Survivors described feeling wary or angry at people who say “I know” or “I understand” if they have not been sexually assaulted. For example, as a 40-year-old African American woman who survived stranger rape 22 years ago stated, “I know a lot of people can tell a woman they know how she feels, but they don’t know. You don’t really know that pain until you experience it.” A 30-year-old Latina survivor of acquaintance rape was even more direct: “Don’t say ‘I know’ or ‘I know how you feel’ unless you do.” Interviewers need to appreciate the difference between knowledge they have gained about sexual assault from training and talking with other women and knowledge from firsthand experience. Many participants in our project felt that both can be useful sources to draw on when working with survivors, and indeed no participant stated or implied that interviewers must be survivors to do this work. For instance, a 35-year-old Caucasian woman who had been sexually assaulted by a friend 2 years prior noted that she needed to feel she could trust someone before telling them and that trust was based on experience:

I feel like I can talk to somebody who’s experienced this and they understand and that’s why a group would be so helpful. But unless you don’t have any one-on-one experience with someone who’s experienced it or you’ve experienced yourself it’s just, it’s kind of a trust issue. You’re not going to trust anybody with this part of your life that doesn’t get it, you know.

In our project, it was very rare that a survivor directly asked her interviewer if she was also a survivor. Indeed, it seemed more important to the women in our study that they could talk with someone who understood them, and whether that understanding came from shared personal experience or not did not seem to matter to the survivors.

Fourth, survivors wanted interviewers to take their knowledge about rape and its impact—whether learned through personal experience or through training and practice—and use it for one key, fundamental purpose: to help put women at ease during the interview so they could talk freely and the interviewer could listen, *really listen*, to their stories. To help survivors feel comfortable, interviewers need to remember that it can be scary to talk about painful, traumatic events with a total stranger. For example, as a 38-year-old African American survivor of stranger rape explained, “We may be embarrassed. We may not feel comfortable about this and then if we trust in you we feel comfortable.” To establish trust, survivors highlighted the importance of showing patience by letting women talk at their own pace and giving them control over what they choose to discuss. One of our participants was a 48-year-old African American woman who survived a gang rape instigated by a former boyfriend 24 years ago. She had not discussed the rape with family, friends, or anyone else before the research interview. Although it was somewhat unusual that she had never disclosed before talking with us, 11% of women in our sample were also first-time disclosers.

However, what this survivor said about patience and control was echoed by many women, regardless of their disclosure history or assault experiences:

You [the interviewer] were very good to me in that you said I didn't have to answer [any questions] if I didn't want to. I felt comfortable. That was good to hear. Because not everybody can talk about everything. You've given me time just to babble. Which I need with a heavy subject like this.

Having an opportunity to talk through the assault was fundamentally important to so many survivors in this study. Several women noted that there are so few situations in their lives where they can talk openly about the assault and just have someone *listen*. With family, friends, and even professionals such as the police or a therapist, listening is often tangled up with other roles and agendas: to fix, to give advice, to ask questions, to evaluate truthfulness, to manage what happens next, or to soothe their own distress. Interviewers must also ask questions, but how they listen may be somewhat unique—and particularly valued by survivors. Interviewers listen to document someone's story, and if this can be with engagement and empathy, then survivors might receive something very useful from the experience. For example, a 22-year-old African American woman who had been raped by a friend when she was 18 emphasized the importance of “just” listening. She had lots of social support in her life but characterized this support as mixed because people kept trying to tell her what to do: “People just need other people to listen and not so much give advice and ask questions. It's when you can talk to somebody that's willing to listen, that helps.” Similarly, a 48-year-old Caucasian woman who was raped by her boyfriend 1 year prior to the interview explained how and why listening supports survivors:

Sit here and listen to me, just listening and trying to understand, and hearing me, that's the best thing of all for interviewers to do. . . . That helps a lot to know that someone is really understanding you and really listening. Listening. And they really did hear that you are feeling bad and sad, and things that are scaring you. Someone is hearing what you are saying and not trying to block out what they don't want to deal with or don't want to hear anymore because they can't handle it. To know that they can just say anything and get it out of your system.

In addition to the frustration of listeners becoming too engrossed in their own emotions, other survivors described how people in their lives became very judgmental when they disclosed. Almost all of the survivors we interviewed recounted unsupportive, victim-blaming reactions from family, friends, doctors, nurses, and/or mental health providers when they disclosed the assault. As a 30-year-old African American survivor of acquaintance rape summarized, “People are always judging us.” To remedy that, a 34-year-old Caucasian survivor of acquaintance rape highlighted what interviewers should do differently: “I think sexual assault victims have so much shame around them, just listen to them without judging them.” Many

women noted that they very much needed and wanted their interviewers to listen to them without judgment. For instance, a 45-year-old African American survivor of marital rape told her interviewer,

Well, I think it's been good for me to talk to you about it because you're very friendly, and I never saw a look of judgment come across your face, which I look for those things. I look for people judging me, and you didn't, and I like that.

Interviewers can help survivors by bearing witness to their stories, no matter how troubling they may be. Interviewers need to be well prepared so that they can stay engaged with survivors as their stories unfold, reflecting warmth, patience, and support. Many other people in survivors' lives cannot do that; their own issues, emotions, or judgments often get in the way of being able to listen freely and fully. Interviewers have the opportunity to address that need for rape survivors.

Discussion

Interview methodology can be a useful approach in violence against women research as it provides an opportunity for survivors to share their stories of abuse and recovery. The act of telling can be helpful to survivors (Newman & Kaloupek, 2004; Newman, Risch, & Kassam-Adams, 2006), and the act of listening and bearing witness can be personally and professionally meaningful to interviewers (R. Campbell, 2002; Stein & Mankowski, 2004). However, preparing interviewers for this work is labor-intensive. We concur with other researchers and practitioners who have argued that it is not ethically responsible, to either the survivor or the interviewer, for this exchange to take place without adequate preparation (J. C. Campbell & Dienemann, 2001; Sullivan & Cain, 2004). For survivors, telling their stories means revisiting what is likely one of the worst experiences of their lives; it is not simply a series of questions and answers. Yet an interview *is* a series of questions designed to elicit answers. That is the challenge of interviewing rape survivors and other victims of violence: The needs of the survivors may be different, but not necessarily incompatible with those of researchers, and so the task is to create an interview experience that is mutually informative and useful. To do so requires that we as researchers understand what survivors need and want from the interview experience.

In this study, we asked a racially diverse sample of rape survivors about these issues to help inform interviewer training. Survivors wanted interviewers to be very knowledgeable about sexual assault and to reflect that expertise by being sensitive to victims' needs. Table 1 summarizes the survivors' recommendations and presents ideas for interviewer training exercises linked to each empirical finding. Our results highlight that content training needs to pay particular attention to *diversity* among survivors, which is perhaps an expected finding given that 63% of our sample were

Table 1
Training Activities for Preparing
Interviewers to Work With Adult Rape Survivors

Empirical Findings From Survivors Regarding What Interviewers Need to Know	Training Activity Goal	Suggested Training Activities	Intended Training Outcome
Rape can happen to anyone.	To think of rape survivors as women from many different walks of life.	Explore dimensions of difference among rape survivors, such as age, race, ethnicity, substance use, previous abuse experience, sexual orientation, occupation, geographic location, income, physical appearance, ability or disability, etc. Ellsberg and Heise's (2005) training exercises could be modified to reflect the substantive topic of sexual assault. Trainers could work through these exercises and specifically prompt the interviewers to consider if and how their answers might change with different frames of reference regarding women's demographics and life experiences.	Interviewer is prepared for <i>anybody</i> to sit down across from them in the interview chair.
Survivors will have a range of reactions during the interview.	To identify and challenge assumptions about how survivors should react in the interview.	Have interviewers work together to develop list of potential survivor reactions. Discuss the reasons <i>why</i> survivors may have diverse reactions to the interview. Consider cross-train with rape crisis center staff to have advocates describe how they see survivors react to the trauma of rape.	Interviewer does not show surprise or judgment in response to survivor's reactions during the interview.
Rape has a far-reaching impact on survivors' lives.	To understand the multitude of ways rape can affect women's lives and that each woman's experience is valid.	Read women's stories (e.g., published accounts, prior transcripts) and research studies describing impact. Have interviewers work together to draw a conceptual map that depicts the ways rape could affect survivors' lives, attending to physical, psychological, interpersonal, and behavioral domains. Role-play scenarios to provide trainees with opportunities to practice normalizing survivors' experiences.	Interviewer is aware of and sensitive to the range and depth of rape's impact. The interviewer knows when and how to normalize the survivor's experience.

(continued)

Table 1 (continued)

Empirical Findings From Survivors Regarding What Interviewers Need to Know	Training Activity Goal	Suggested Training Activities	Intended Training Outcome
Some knowledge only comes through personal experience.	To recognize the limits of what the interviewer can and cannot understand about rape.	<p>Engage in personal reflection writing exercise addressing the questions, what do I know about rape, and where does this knowledge come from?</p> <p>Role-play scenarios in which the interviewer uses “I know” and “I understand” language. Discuss as a group how this language might affect survivors. Brainstorm alternative techniques that can be used to reflect interviewers’ understanding.</p> <p>Discuss research project’s policy and practice regarding interviewers’ disclosure of their own victimization history and how they should respond to questions from interviewees regarding their victimization histories.</p>	Interviewer appreciates the difference between knowledge she has gained about sexual assault from her training and talking with other women and knowledge from first-hand experience.
Listen, listen, listen.	To ask questions and record answers while at the same time listening with engagement and empathy.	Review active listening and empathy skills. Extensive role-play practice to develop these skills.	Interviewer has a set of active listening and empathy skills to draw on during the interview.
Be warm and personable.	To understand that talking about rape is hard and requires interviewer to show warmth and compassion.	Read and discuss survivors’ accounts of what it is like to participate in interviews.	Interviewer is not mechanical and allows the conversation to naturally evolve at the survivor’s pace.

(continued)

Table 1 (continued)

Empirical Findings From Survivors Regarding What Interviewers Need to Know	Training Activity Goal	Suggested Training Activities	Intended Training Outcome
Give survivor control over interview process.	To learn how to give survivors choice and control over what they choose to discuss.	<p data-bbox="462 409 839 725">Extensive role-play practice to increase familiarity with interview questions so that interviewers can develop conversational style.</p> <p data-bbox="462 517 839 725">Have trainees pair off and each take turns disclosing something personal (but not traumatic or especially painful) while the other does <i>not</i> show warmth and compassion. Reflect and discuss how disclosure of personal information felt in the absence of support and empathic engagement.</p> <p data-bbox="462 730 839 887">Discuss the importance of control and choice as fundamental to the recovery process; reflect on how the interview context can support that process. Have trainees practice the consent process for the interview in pairs.</p> <p data-bbox="462 1130 839 1234">If available, review transcripts from prior interviews to show examples of how and when interviewers did or did not probe survivors' answers.</p>	Interviewer is explicit about and respects survivors' rights to speak as little or as much as they want in response to questions. Interviewer attends to these rights during consent process and throughout the interview.

women of color. A primary message was that there is so much diversity among survivors that there are no “types” of victims. Rape can, and does, happen to all kinds of women. Therefore, interviewers need to be trained to think of rape survivors as women diverse in age, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, ability or disability, substance use, previous abuse experiences, and so on. Interviewers must be prepared to see *anyone* in the interview chair. Interviewers need training opportunities to examine issues such as prevalence, incidence, psychological impact, and recovery from a diversity perspective. What does the experience of rape mean for women engaged in prostitution? For middle-class women in college? For poor women with

disabilities? The training exercises created by Ellsberg and Heise (2005) were developed for a multinational, multirace/ethnicity project, so they may be particularly well suited for sparking dialogue about diversity. When working through these exercises, it might be useful for trainers to specifically prompt interviewers to consider if and how their answers might change with different frames of reference regarding women's demographics and life experiences.

Similarly, survivors wanted interviewers to understand the diverse impact that rape has on their lives. For example, it is typical in both interviewer and RCC volunteer training to provide information about rape trauma syndrome and posttraumatic stress disorder (R. Campbell, 1996), usually with the caveat that these trauma impact profiles do not fit all women. The survivors in this study reiterated how important it is to include such qualifications because women may not show these "typical" reactions. Interviewers need a broad appreciation of how varied women may be in their expressed emotion. Moreover, our data highlight the importance of covering more than just the psychological impact of rape in training. Survivors wanted interviewers to be aware of the physical health effects of rape and how it can negatively affect their sexuality, interpersonal relationships, and life functioning. Therefore, it may be useful to incorporate readings and discussions that explore how sexual assault affects multiple facets of women's lives.

The survivors we interviewed wanted researchers to be very well informed about the complexities and diversities of rape, but not because they wanted interviewers to lecture back to them about these issues during the interview. Quite the contrary, the survivors wanted interviewers to know this information so that they could listen without showing surprise or judgment. Survivors wanted interviewers to be able to take what they hear in stride—they may be moved by the survivors' stories, and they can show that emotional connection, but surprise might be interpreted as something abnormal about the victim. Some survivors might look to interviewers for help gauging what's "normal," and interviewers can help communicate the diverse experiences of survivors. During training, it might be useful for researchers to give examples of how and when interviewers can contextualize and normalize women's experiences.

During the interview, survivors mentioned that they also wanted interviewers to give them a chance to talk, "really talk," about their experiences. They wanted interviewers to reflect warmth and patience and give them the opportunity to talk in as much or little detail as they need. Survivors wanted control over what they reveal and wanted interviewers to respect their choices of what they would and would not discuss. These recommendations from the survivors raise complex issues for both interviewer training specifically and interview design more generally. If and how is an interviewer supposed to probe? Is probing inconsistent with respecting survivors' choices about what to disclose? If survivors want to be able to talk freely in interviews, is there a place for that in the administration of standardized measures? Are closed-ended questions inconsistent with respecting survivors' desire to talk about their experiences? Researchers will likely vary in how they address these questions,

and indeed we do not advocate for particular answers. However, it might be helpful to examine these issues in interviewer training so that the project's philosophy is clear among team members.

As a key limitation of this study, it is important to note that we cannot disentangle the impact that our interviewing approach had on the participants' recommendations for interviewer training. Indeed, the majority of the survivors interviewed for this project stated that they liked how the interviewers worked with them (for empirical data on this issue, see R. Campbell, Adams, Wasco, Ahrens, & Sefl, in press). This metastudy was not intended to evaluate our interviewer training program; rather, it was framed as an exploratory study on what survivors need and want from a research interview experience. But because all participants were asked the questions about interviewer training after they had already completed an interview that reflected a distinct training philosophy, we do not know how their answers were affected by their interview experiences. Because there is strong consistency between their recommendations and our training approach, our data may reflect social desirability bias. Perhaps these data regarding survivors' recommendations should have been collected by someone other than their interviewers, but it is important to consider the practicality of such an idea. After 2 or more hours of intense conversation in which the interviewer worked very hard to establish a connection with the survivor and earn her trust, it may be quite odd for the survivor to have someone new step in at the end for a few more questions. In our project, this solution did not seem reasonable in light of the potential negative impact it would have had on the overall emotionality of the interview. Another option would have been a phone follow-up with participants a few days or weeks later (conducted by a different staff member), but this was not practical in our project as many of our participants did not have reliable phone access. Therefore, the extent to which our data reflect social desirability bias cannot be assessed, and this limitation must be evaluated within the context of the overall goals of our project.

To promote the continued study of victimology interviewing, we offer the following recommendations for future research. First, we encourage research teams to share their training approaches in scientific publication to increase the number and variety of resources on which others can draw for interviewer training. It would be particularly helpful to have examples of training materials for both open-ended, qualitative interviewing and highly structured, closed-ended quantitative interviewing to explore how interview administration consistency is addressed within each of these methodological paradigms. Second, collecting "metadata" from participants regarding their perceptions of the interview experience could easily be included in most interview protocols. As noted previously, it is methodologically preferable for these data to be collected by someone other than the focal interviewer. It would be useful to ask survivors about the degree to which the interview experience was consistent with their needs and expectations and how that varies by interview methodology. For example, for those who participated in semistructured qualitative interviewing with more probing, did the interview or parts of the interview feel too

intrusive, and why? For those who were interviewed in a more structured, quantitative style, how did they feel about answering closed-ended questions? Did they want more opportunities to talk with less structure? Finally, although it would be very resource-intensive, it would be highly informative to systematically vary interviewer type (e.g., student, community member, or professional) and/or training approach with the same interview protocol to compare disclosure and data quality that resulted from each approach. In the multinational WHO study, Jansen et al. (2004) had to use both community and professional interviewers by necessity and found differences in the resulting data quality. Future research could build on this finding by testing for such differences so that when other research teams are faced with this dilemma, they can be aware of potential trade-offs and adjust training accordingly. These issues should be explored in future studies on iatrogenic processes in interviewing survivors of violence so that we can understand how different methodologies and training philosophies affect participants and how, in turn, that influences what we learn about violence against women.

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