Transcription and Analysis of Qualitative Data in a Study of Women Who Sexually Offended Against Children

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Research on sexual violence is often conducted within the qualitative paradigm. However, many writers have described the lack of specific detail provided with regard to decisions and processes involved in transcribing and analyzing this type of data. In this article, I will provide a description and discussion of the organization, categorization, and analysis of in-depth interviews in a recent study of women who sexually abused children. The study revealed common experiences of sexual and other abuse in the women's childhood and adult relationships. These experiences created vulnerabilities that appeared to play a significant role in the women's offenses. Although abused women rarely abuse others, the findings suggest that supporting and providing therapy to victims of abuse might minimize the potential for such outcomes. Keywords: Sexual Violence, Transcription, Data Analysis, Qualitative, Feminist

The majority of those who have sexually offended children were male, but a small percentage were female (Grubin, 1998; Snyder, 2000; Trocmé et al., 2001). Although it has been noted that most women sex offenders experienced childhood sexual abuse (Mathews et al., 1989; Saradjian, 1996), the vast majority of female victims never sexually abuse children. It seems clear, from reading the scant literature on women sex offenders, that these women have frequently experienced abuse in adult relationships as well as in childhood.

In addition to this, it appears that most often the women's abusers were male, and that the women offended mostly as the result of male coercion (Matthews, Mathews, & Speltz, 1989; Saradjian, 1996). Thus, the women were victims before they became offenders, and their offending, in many instances, could be viewed as another aspect of their victimization. In undertaking this research, I wanted to understand these women's life experiences, particularly in relation to gender differences and male violence. Furthermore, I wondered *if* and *how* the prior victimization of women sex offenders might be related to their offending.

My interest in studying women sexual offenders came primarily from my experiences as a social worker in a child welfare agency. The gendered nature of most sexual violence has been repeatedly pointed out by feminists (Kelly, 1988; Newton, 1996). Moreover, the feminist perspective fit well with my experiences of working with sexual violence, in that most perpetrators were male and most victims were female, and gender-power differences often created and maintained situations where abuse occurred (Kelly, 1988). Although most of the sexual abuse cases I worked with involved single male perpetrators, a small proportion involved more than one abuser, some of whom were women. The presence of a minority of female offenders provided a challenge to my feminist thinking, and made me wonder if, and how, feminist theory could explain this

phenomenon. These factors provided the rationale for choosing a feminist approach to my study. However, although the *topic* of my study provided the context for this article, it is the *process* of conducting my research, and specifically the transcription and analysis of the interviews, which is its focus.

In order to shed light on the *process* of becoming an abuser, I believed that I needed to have face-to-face interactions with the participants in my study. Others have found that this approach facilitates the discussion of sexual violence (Kelly, 1985, Newton, 1996). Thus, I chose a qualitative approach, involving in-depth interviews, as the most appropriate way to approach my study. This method would allow me to develop a level of trust with the women and provide an environment conducive to the discussion of the intimate and private details of their lives that I expected to hear (Newton, 1996; Oakley, 1981).

According to the literature on qualitative methods, the mechanics of research, including the transcription and analysis of data, are usually given little attention in research reports (Davidson, 2009). In order to respond to this criticism, I will focus on these aspects of my study in this article. A brief discussion of the methodology used in this research, and its rationale, will be followed by a description of the transcription and data analysis processes employed and the conclusions reached.

Method

The key question in this research is, "What is the relationship between women's sexual offending against children and male violence?" I wanted to understand the process by which women became offenders, as well as the social/personal context in which this occurred. As there is limited research on women who sexually offend against children, the method chosen for my doctoral research had to be suitable for an exploratory study.

A qualitative approach was chosen as most appropriate for gaining an understanding of the interactions between behavior, context, and interpretations of events that I believed might be important in the offending (Clarke, 2008; Silverman, 2000). Within the qualitative paradigm, I chose interviews as the primary data-collection tool, and case studies as the overall research model. I saw case studies as the best way to obtain information from multiple sources that might confirm or challenge the women's stories, and increase confidence in my findings (Stake, 2000; Yin, 2003), and I chose interviews as the best way to obtain the in-depth, intimate details of the women's lives I was seeking (Kelly, 1985; Maynard, 2004; Newton, 1996).

Qualitative research is based on the notion that the purpose of knowledge is the uncovering of experience and meaning (Morgan & Smircich, 1980), so it is suitable for exploratory research such as mine. It is indicated when "there is a need to explore interactions among ambiguous or unclear variables ... [and] there is a reason to suspect that the context contains important domains that must be explored" (Marshall & Rossman, 1989, p. 42). Further, it is more conducive to uncovering the complexities of women's lives than quantitative methods might be (Maynard, 2004; Reinharz, 1992). The existing research links women's sex offending and male violence, but the nature of this relationship, and the importance of context are not clear. I was interested in exploring the women's experiences as fully as possible in order to better understand how they

contributed to their offending. For these reasons a qualitative method appeared to be the best choice.

The methods I chose also had to be congruent with my feminist perspective, and with the feminist critique of gender-blind research (Cosgrove & McHugh, 2000; Morawski, 1997). Feminists have challenged the traditional scientific research paradigm and its particular ways of knowing as androcentric and disempowering to women (Stanley, 1990a, 1990b; Stanley & Wise, 1983; Tong, 2002). In contrast to the positivist approach, feminists have seen the involvement of the researcher in the research as improving the complexity and completeness of research, and have pointed out the impossibility of objectivity (Britkreuz, 2005; Oakley, 1981). Women's experiences are viewed as the main focus of enquiry from the feminist standpoint, and as a means of obtaining more complete and accurate accounts of women's perceived realities (Harding, 1986; Maynard, 2004; Oakley, 1981; Smith, 1987).

The researcher is an important element in feminist research, in that the impact of her experiences and values on the research must be considered. Therefore, an open acknowledgement of perspective is required (Cosgrove, & McHugh, 2000; Davis, 1994; Lather, 2004; Maynard, 2004; Morawski, 1997). I have located myself within the "standpoint" perspective as a "critical feminist," which implies an orientation to social action, and to exploring the material, social, and cultural aspects of women's lives as well as their differences. This stance reflects a merging of modernist theories that emphasize commonality with postmodern, multicultural, and global perspectives on women's diverse experiences.

Feminist and qualitative researchers share the belief that reality and knowledge are constructed between, and co-created by, the researcher and the researched (Chatman, 1984; Oakley, 1981; Sutton, 1993; Westbrook, 1994) and are "situated" in particular historical, cultural and social contexts (Haraway, 1988; Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2007). From these perspectives, theory develops from the findings of the study and the hypothesis is at the end, although prior research informs the process to some extent. Furthermore, respondents and researchers might propose alternative, but equally valid theories based on their own experiences, their specific contexts, and their understandings of the data (Clarke, 2008; Mellon, 1990).

In order to appreciate the complexity of women's lives, feminist researchers argue that it is necessary to listen to women's voices and to their interpretations of their realities (Finch, 1993). In-depth interviews are commonly used in qualitative research (Clarke, 2008; Fidel, 1993; Silverman, 2000) and allow women to communicate their experiences directly with the researcher. I chose semi-structured interviews as I believed that this would allow for some standardization of questions, provide enough flexibility and rapport to gather the intimate details of women's lives (Kelly, 1988; Oakley, 1981), and allow for unexpected information to emerge (Grix, 2001).

In response to the more general questioning of "objectivity," a number of feminists have questioned whether *interviewing* can or should be objective (Cosgrove & McHugh, 2000; Hanmer & Saunders, 1984; Kelly, 1985; Lather, 2004; Luxton, 1980; Morawski, 1997; Oakley, 1981; Rubin, 1979). For example, Oakley (1981) argued that the traditional, "objective" approach to interviewing would yield only limited information, especially when dealing with intimate, personal issues. This argument has much support (Cosgrove & McHugh, 2000; Holstein & Gubrium, 1997; Jarvinen, 2000;

Lather, 2004). Nonetheless, the questioning of objectivity does not preclude efforts to produce honest and accurate research (Berg, 2004; Kelly, 1988; Richards & Morse, 2007). Acknowledging the impossibility of "objectivity" allows for the researcher's perspective and influence to be considered in relation to the findings, rather than ignoring these as in the past. In addition, a more humane way of interacting with research participants, especially when dealing with sensitive issues, may result in participants being more comfortable and more forthcoming (Berg, 2004; Cosgrove & McHugh, 2000; Morawski, 1997; Oakley, 1981).

Sexual abuse, like rape, and violence in intimate relationships, often results in a lack of trust (Finkelhor, 1984; Kelly, 1988). Gaining trust and developing rapport is essential to a successful interview process in such cases (Fontana & Frey, 2000; Martin Anderson, Romans, Mullen & O'Shea, 1993; Oakley, 1981; Richards & Morse, 2007). Face-to-face interviews allow the participant to assess the interviewer and make decisions about their trustworthiness and motives prior to the decision to participate (Kelly, 1988).

My thesis involved interviews with five women offenders. Two were Canadian and three were English. I was living in Canada some of the time and studying in England at other times during the course of this research, and it was difficult to gain access to cases. Thus, my study used a convenience sample of the cases I was able to gain access to in both locations. The criteria for inclusion in the study was that the women had offended against children 14 years of age and younger. I chose this age to avoid situations where children were physically mature and thus might have been targets of abuse due to their maturity, rather than their immaturity.

Consents were signed by the women after the study was described, and participants were told that their involvement was voluntary and that they could withdraw from the study at any time. In the interests of confidentiality, anonymity and safety, the women's identifying information was altered and their exact geographic locations were obscured. The ethical dimensions of the study were approved and monitored by my thesis committee at the University of Bradford, England, as there was no Ethics Review Board in place at the time of approval. My study was, however, approved by the West Yorkshire Probation Service Research Ethics Review Committee and by Saskatchewan Social Services Ethics Committee as a precursor to them agreeing to refer participants, as well as by my thesis supervisor at the University of Bradford.

The organization of the thesis involved the introduction, literature review and methods sections, followed by five separate chapters, each of which presented an individual woman's story. Each chapter/story was analyzed around a different concept/theme that emerged from the interviews and seemed especially pertinent to that particular case. Therefore each chapter presented both a specific case and a specific theme. The final chapter provided an overview and summary of the findings as well as recommendations for research and practice.

I kept a journal during the course of the research in which I chronicled my thoughts on the existing research and literature, and outlined what I saw as key topics to consider. I made notes on the different research approaches, their suitability for my study, and what might be the key questions. I also made notes on my meetings with my supervisor and the discussions and decisions that ensued. The notes provided a framework for the ideas that I fleshed out while writing drafts of the thesis. During the interviews I made notes in my journal about the interview setting and a brief description

of each woman. I made observations about the emotions elicited during the interviews, my own feelings about what I heard, and the personal effects on me as a researcher. The effects of this study on me and my reflections on my influence on the research will be discussed later in the "Research Trauma" section.

The Interviews

The interviews lasted between two and four hours and were conducted at a location of the woman's choosing. One woman was interviewed in prison, one at her daughter's home, one in a women's shelter, and the two others were interviewed in their own homes. As a practicing social worker, I am used to putting people at ease in interviews, so this was relatively easy for me. I was able to put aside any revulsion I had with regard to the offense in order to relate to the participants as women first. I have found it necessary to do this in my social work practice in order to be able to work effectively with clients, and I believe it was this ability that allowed the women to talk freely to me about their lives.

I gathered the demographic data first, as Yeandle (1984) suggests, though others prefer this information to be gathered last. The women became more relaxed during the gathering of these details, and that helped to build a certain comfort level before talking about the more painful aspects of their lives. I decided to ask the questions about the women's sex offending before those about their own victimization. I was concerned that discussing the women's own abuse experiences first might unduly influence the answers to the "offending" questions. Professionals who work primarily with sex offenders say that if the issue of victimization is raised too early, sex offenders often use this to justify their offense (K. Paisley, personal communication, May 23, 2006).

The first question in the "offender" interview guides asked women to discuss their sex offending. It was this question that produced most of the data, with the other questions in the guide often answered as part of the first question. Therefore, subsequent questions were only asked if they had not been answered previously or if clarification was necessary. The second part of the interview was designed to gather information about the women's experiences of childhood abuse, its context, and the coercive tactics that were used by the offenders. The questions were asked in a similar way to the first set of questions, with the first question expected to provide the answers to many other questions, followed by unanswered questions and clarifications. The semi-structured, open-ended nature of the questions allowed for the conversations to develop in the direction participants wanted, so the interviews often did not proceed in a linear fashion. However, there was very little deviation from the topic at hand, though some repetition occurred. The few extraneous details and repetition were transcribed but not presented in the final report.

Initially I had no problems with the tape recorder. I had learned during a previous study to check that the machine was recording, to use good quality tapes, and to do a sound check before the interviews. However, one woman was interviewed in a women's shelter and during the course of the interview a train passed behind the house. After listening to the tape, I decided to do the interview again as parts of the conversation were not clearly audible. The second interview was difficult, though the woman was quite willing to participate. I had to ask questions more directly than I did during the first

interview. I believe she volunteered less information because she had already told me her story.   In light of this, I used both tapes to ensure I did not lose any information. Interviews were often complicated by interruptions and the priorities of those interviewed, as Kelly (1985) and Reinharz (1992) experienced. My first interview was conducted in the respondent's kitchen and was interrupted by her husband coming into the room a number of times before going to work. The phone rang and was answered several times, and this delayed the process so much that the children came home for lunch before we finished the interview. While all this was distracting, the interview as a whole went well and the respondent seemed very open and committed to participating.

Although the women all became upset at certain points in the process, they said that the interview itself was not upsetting, but remembering the abuse caused them some distress. Significantly, none of the women wanted to terminate the interview. They indicated that they needed to talk about the upsetting parts in order to understand what happened more fully, and to be able to move on with their lives. As much as an extra hour was spent with the respondents after the interviews, providing a transition phase between the end of the interview and a return to more casual conversation. I believed it was necessary to spend time to ensure that the women were not distressed after the interview, and that they knew that they would have a chance to respond to what had been recorded, to correct any misinterpretations or mistakes, and to add any information that they thought was important. I gave my phone number to women so they could contact me if they needed to debrief or talk more, though all of them had other professionals that they could consult if needed. Two women phoned a few times and one woman wrote me a few letters from prison. These conversations were mostly to do with their current lives or future plans.

Transcription

An ethical imperative in conducting research is to ensure that it accurately reflects experience (Berg, 2004; Kelly, 1988; Richards & Morse, 2007). Jones (1985) and Kelly (1985) suggest that researchers should listen to taped interviews at least twice. The first "hearing" provides an overview of the entire interview: its tone, mood, and dynamics. A second "hearing" allows for the data to be scrutinized in more detail. Attention to non-verbal communication as well as to as to the recorded interview is important for a more thorough understanding of research content and process (Fontana & Frey, 2000; James, 1986; Jones, 1985; Kelly, 1985; Reinharz, 1992).

The interviews took eight to twelve hours to transcribe. Occasionally it was difficult to make out words in the interview tapes. I found that the best way to minimize this problem was to transcribe the tape at the earliest possible opportunity after the interview. This way I generally remembered the content of the conversation and was able to fill in the odd gap just from memory. When this did not make the meaning clear I found that replaying the word or phrase several times resulted in me being able to hear it clearly. In order to ensure that I accurately portrayed the women's accounts I took care to transcribe in a way that was reflective of the emotional and contextual elements of the interview, as well as the interview text. Following a pattern analogous to that used in similar research (Kelly, 1988; Newton, 1996), I used three dots to indicate missing dialogue, two dashes to indicate a pause, underlining to indicate emphasis on words or

phrases and brackets to record significant shows of emotion, such as anger, humor, sadness, and tears. Shouting was signalled by using capital letters. For example, one woman became so angry when telling me about a pornographic picture her father took of her that she was shouting for several seconds.

> ...HE CAME AND POSED MY LEGS TWICE BEFORE HE GOT IT JUST RIGHT! MY GOD! DOESN'T THAT TELL YOU SOMETHING? LOOK AT THE LITTLE FAKE SMILE ON MY FACE! I'M SUPPOSED TO STICK IT OUT, SPREAD IT OUT AND HAVE ALL SMILES.... I HATE HIS GUTS FOR THAT....

The interview transcripts were sent to the women along with a request to contact me by phone or mail if I had misunderstood or misinterpreted anything. One respondent said she was not interested in seeing this material, so there was no further contact. Another did not want her husband to know she had spoken to me about the abuse, so she suggested that I could give the transcripts to her daughter, and that the daughter would read it to her over the phone. The daughter was also a study participant, and she had previously been aware of all the details of her mother's story. I subsequently heard from the daughter that her mother had no concerns with the transcript. One of the other women told me that the transcripts was "fine" and that no changes were necessary, while another indicated that the work was an accurate reflection of the interview.

One woman phoned me with a minor clarification with regard to one abuse incident, which she noted was at the hands of her ex-husband rather than her husband, and the rest indicated that they were satisfied that the transcripts were an accurate depiction of their stories. This approach helped to ensure that what I transcribed was what was actually said, provided the women some control over the process, and helped to balance the power in the research process. I also recorded my own impressions and the non-verbal content immediately after the interview so that I would not forget important aspects of the discussion (Jones, 1985).

Data Analysis

As some have pointed out (Clarke, 2008; Maynard, 2004; Neuman, 2000), data analysis in qualitative research occurs from the data-gathering phase to the interpretation and analysis of the data. Interpretations are based on reasoning, judgement, empirical evidence, theory, and an understanding of the social setting in which the phenomenon occurs in order to develop explanations that are plausible (Maynard, 2004; Neuman, 2000). Explanations should be congruent with the respondents' descriptions and perceptions of events, so the analyses should be reviewed by them if possible (Janesick, 2000). I was able to mail the initial analysis sections to three of the women, along with a request to contact me by phone or mail if I had misunderstood or misinterpreted anything. As one woman wanted no further contact I did not mail the analysis to her. One of the transcript analyses was dropped off at the home of the woman's daughter so that she could see it without her husband knowing, as was the case with the interview transcript. I subsequently heard from the daughter that her mother had no concerns with the interpretations. One of the other women told me that analysis was "fine" and that no

changes were necessary, while another indicated that the work was an accurate reflection of her story.

Conclusions derived from the same data may differ depending on the perspectives and interpretations of researchers and respondents (Clarke, 2008; Mellon, 1990), so possible disagreements about the interpretation and analysis may occur. In such an instance, compromises would be necessary, or conversely, ways of incorporating both versions of the women's experiences would need to be found in order to ensure that respondents' power is not usurped while maintaining the integrity of the data. Differences of opinion regarding interpretation and analysis, if they occurred, would need to be reported in the final document for the same reasons. There were, however, no disagreements.

Identification of Themes/Concepts

Feminist theory on male violence was the global framework for the thesis. The significant role of coercion by males in most female offending has been pointed out in the limited research on women sex offenders (Mathews et al., 1989; Saradjian, 1996). Therefore, as I wanted to produce interpretations based on a gendered understanding of sexual violence and its impact, the data were analyzed from this perspective.

In order to organize the data I first identified what I believed were the important themes that emerged from the data. I discussed the themes with my supervisor and my fellow doctoral students throughout the research, so their input also played a part in my interpretations, and the analyses were shared with the participants, unless they did not want to see them. Thus the case studies were constructed from the women's descriptions of their experiences, my interpretation of the stories, feedback from participants and colleagues, and the relevant literature. At the end of each chapter a cross-case analysis of all the women's stories in relation to the specific concept explored in that chapter was provided in order to reveal similarities.

The "Illustrative Method" of qualitative analysis is closest to the technique I used to interpret my data (Neuman, 2000). This involved analysing both single and multiple cases in relation to a theory to see if it could be applied to the information obtained. The interview data suggested the centrality of male violence, which I believed was implicated as a trigger even when the women offended without male coercion. Both women who offended alone had been raped and beaten just prior to their offense. Emily said:

> ....I was black and blue, I was hemorrhaging--I'd just suffered a miscarriage a couple of days before that--because he was beating me and--forcing me to have sex when I didn't want to, and--I miscarried on the living room floor, and—*[my partner]* made me clean it up, and--told me not to get myself <u>knocked up</u> again....he described in vivid detail that--ah--he was gonna take a--I guess it would be a <u>boning</u> knife that's used in hunting--and slicing me from the vagina all the way up to my throat, and pull my intestines out and leave me in the middle of nowhere, for the animals to eat me....

In addition to locating a general theme for the thesis, I looked for similarities and differences in the cases, which Neuman (2000) describes as "Methods of Agreement" and "Methods of Difference," so that I could explore the ways in which unique, as well as common, circumstances shaped the offending. The women's stories seemed to suggest unique pathways to their offending. For example, Sarah's case study focussed on "intra-family child sexual abuse," since the abuse in her family of origin appeared to be the predominant theme. What struck me most about Frances' story was the extent to which she subscribed to the patriarchal notion of the husband as head of the household and the wife as obligated to cater to his every whim. Thus, her case was analyzed in relation to "institutional heterosexuality." The extreme level of coercion that Chris experienced in her marriage resulted in me identifying "Coercion" as the key concept in her case. Emily's experience of being beaten and raped shortly before her offense was described above. As a result of these events, Emily ran to another province with her child. The day after, her mother phoned her and blamed her for the death of her father and her brother, and told her she was "useless." Emily was very upset and crying, and, when her three-year-old son put his arm around her to comfort her she began to molest him. She says she does not know why she did that, but an earlier disclosure gave me a clue. She had stated that she had been forced by her mother to have sex with her brother when they were both small children:

> ...a lot of times he was the one that gave me the nurturing that I needed...there was a lot of times after I'd been--sexually abused and beaten--I'd sit in a--dark corner and crying the same way that *[my son]* did *[when I abused him]*.... I'd curl up in a little--ball beside *[my brother]* on the bed--just lay there and cry and he would hold me--he'd tell me "it didn't happen, just try to remember it didn't happen."

As a result of this prior disclosure I began to suspect that Emily had initially offended during a "flashback" as a result of traumatic stress related to historical abuse and recent sexual violence. I therefore analyzed her story in relation to Complex Post Traumatic Stress (C-PTSD). Research suggests that the levels of violence and fear this woman experienced would almost inevitably result in post-traumatic stress symptoms (Burgess & Holmstrom, 1979). Moreover, Emily had been diagnosed with post-traumatic stress shortly after her offending became known. Jenny was forced to abuse children by a group of men who were powerful in their community due to wealth, influence and access to resources. The victims of this group, including Jenny, were extremely vulnerable and unable to protect themselves. The extreme imbalance in power between these victims and perpetrators led me to choose "Power" as the key concept in this case.

In order to separate each interview into sub-themes for the case-study chapters, I used a technique from my previous study of the experiences of survivors of child sexual abuse, since the data and method were similar, and the strategy had worked well in my previous study (Newton, 1996). This involved photocopying the transcripts and identifying the key themes that emerged as important in the women's offending. The appropriate sections were then manually cut out and arranged into the themes. Some of the pieces of transcript were moved around a few times before being placed in what I considered the most appropriate placement. Similar strategies have been recognized as

useful by others (Jones, 1985; Kelly, 1988; Richards & Morse, 2007). For example, in the chapter on intra-family child sexual abuse I identified "sibling sexual abuse," "sexually intrusive children," "sexualized family environment," and "learning difficulties" (the respondent had been diagnosed with this condition) as distinct topics that fit within the key concepts/themes identified from reading the transcripts. I did not find any other concepts that I thought were significant, though there may well have been more if the sample had been larger. Afterwards I found the parts of the women's interviews that fit into these categories, which emerged from the women's stories, and which I categorized based on how they fit into the relevant literature.   I then collated them so that they could be used to illustrate my arguments. I found it useful to have three copies as well as the original transcript, as parts of the interviews were applicable to more than one sub-theme.

Frequently, I placed copies of the same piece of text into two or three category-groupings at once before deciding where they fit best. As I began to write my analysis, I moved these pieces of the interviews around between the sub-themes until I was able to slot each part of the interview into the category that I felt fit best.   The key concepts/themes were difficult to separate from each other, and they were often interwoven in the women's stories, so it is possible that other researchers would have placed the pieces in a different way. However, the analyses were shared with the three women who agreed that they wanted to see and give feedback on the analysis section, and they stated that they were satisfied with my analysis, as did my supervisor and two of my fellow students.

I was able to do a cross-case analysis at the end of each case-chapter by summarizing each woman's story/chapter, and integrating it with the other stories. A cross-case analysis was repeated for all five of the case-studies/chapters. Computer programs such as Atlas-ti could have been used to organize the material, but I found my technique to be satisfactory. In presenting the interviews, I placed the material related to the women's offending early in the chapter, so that the circumstances of the offense could be understood, and the rest of the interviews were used to illustrate the analysis. Although this might be criticized as interfering with the flow of the women's stories, I think it improved it. The women often went back and forth in telling their stories, and it would have been difficult to follow them without the removal of repetition and the clarification of some of their comments.

Research Trauma

The women's recounted experiences affected me profoundly, both personally and in relation to the study. While conducting rape studies, Campbell (2002) found that the experience of "feeling" the violence increased the researchers' understanding of the range of possible effects on the victims, on their supporters, and on themselves. My experience in undertaking this thesis was similar.   Two of the concepts I had not originally considered in setting up the interviews--C-PTSD and institutional heterosexuality--emerged during the data-gathering phase due to my increased sensitivity to the long-term effects of exposure to violence.

Researching male violence can be emotionally upsetting due to the content of the interviews (Campbell, 2002; Kelly, 1988; Maitse, 1997). Discussions with other students

in my doctoral program revealed that they were often distraught after hearing disclosures of abuse. For example, one of my peers had to receive therapy after she interviewed raped and beaten women and children during her field-work. As a practising social worker I expected to be immune from this effect, since I had worked with child and adult survivors of abuse for years. But I found researching this topic extremely upsetting, both emotionally and psychologically, and I actually believe I experience delayed reactions to these effects. I developed a number of health problems that I believe were due to the stress of being immersed in violence during the research process. I experienced overwhelming fatigue and concentration problems, to the extent that completing my thesis on time was impossible. On one or two occasions while driving I was unable to decipher the meaning of traffic lights, which made me quite dangerous on the roads, though I was not fully aware of this until much later. I have twice had to take extended sick leaves during the course of writing this thesis in order to recover from these effects.

When I did the first interview I had difficulty staying focused on the dialogue. This struggle had nothing to do with lack of interest or boredom. After reflection, I realized that I was inadvertently trying to insulate myself from hearing the stories. Once I recognized this I was able to control my mind's wanderings and concentrate on the interview. On another occasion I became worried that, in spite of being very careful to keep the audiotapes of my interviews safe, I would lose them somewhere and whomever found them would think I was creating pornography. I also worried that someone would tap my phone line and discover the identities of my informants. I tossed and turned one night worrying about this, but in the morning I realized that I was being overly dramatic. Kelly (1988) and Campbell (2002) report similar reactions to researching male violence.

On a different level, while conducting my case study with one participant, I was the recipient of a great deal of potentially damaging information about people in the public eye. I was worried about my own physical safety and began checking my environment carefully, fearful that I was being watched and that somehow the men involved knew I had information about them. I also experienced a great deal of fatigue after conducting the interviews, which was similar to that which I experienced as a new social worker working with traumatized children. Effects of this kind are known as "vicarious trauma" and they frequently affect people in the helping professions who hear and experience disclosures of extreme violence (Pearlman & Maclan, 1995; Richardson, 2001).

Another way in which my reactions affected the writing of the thesis was that I began to feel reluctant to re-visit the women's stories during the analysis and writing-up stage. I became very creative in finding ways to avoid the stories, but I think some of my breaks in writing were necessary in order to be able to continue with the study. In retrospect, I think that dealing with severe abuse and secrecy over a long period of time disturbed my usual thinking processes. Anticipation of such reactions, and support in dealing with the aftermath, should be given more attention by those supervising feminist research on male violence, since the dismantling of power relations in the research process, and the subsequent collaboration between the researcher and the researched, might be expected to create the empathy that results in such effects.

"Reflexivity" refers to the recognition that the researcher's personal characteristics, experiences, perspectives, feelings, and assumptions should be considered in a critical manner in relation to their effects on the relationship with research

participants (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2007) as well as on the research more generally. I believe that my personal experiences as a social worker helped me to understand how women's fear of the violent men in their lives can become disabling and, thus, render them vulnerable to further abuse. This opened my mind to the possibility that violence could influence women's thinking and behavior for some time after critical events, even when the men were not present. I think my social work training and skill also helped enormously in setting a context for the interviews in which participants could feel comfortable to expose their victimization and their offending without judgement. In addition, my feminist perspective provided an awareness of the gender dynamics in interpersonal relationships that have not been fully considered in the existing work on female sex offenders. Furthermore, I believe my working class English background and my middle-class Canadian professional status helped me to connect with women from various backgrounds easily.

Conclusion

Analyzing qualitative data "is a process of making sense, of finding and making a structure in the data and giving this meaning and significance for ourselves, and for any relevant audiences" (Jones, 1985, p. 57). Jones adds that the way we do this depends on the purposes of the research and the reasons for using qualitative methodologies. The central concern must be that the analysis allows for an understanding of the participants' reality as they perceive it (Jones, 1985; Richards, & Morse, 2007). Selection and interpretation of what is significant depends on the perceptions of the researcher as well as those of the respondents (Fontana & Frey, 2000; Holstein & Gubrium, 1997; Maynard, 2004; Reinharz, 1992; Richards & Morse, 2007; Stake, 2000), and in this way, it is a collaborative process of making meaning.

Knowledge and theory development have been increasingly recognized by feminists as interactional/co-creational processes between the researcher and the researched, and as "situated" in particular historical, cultural, and social contexts (Haraway, 1988; Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2007). Women's voices have to be heard in order for this more egalitarian process to occur (Finch, 1993; Oakley, 1981; Newton 1996). These "private" voices of women reflect women's perspectives, values, relationships, emotions, social networks, and identity (Edwards & Ribbens, 1998). I felt that it was important to "tap" these private voices in order to discover how the women in my study came to sexually offend against children. I wanted to understand what the relationships were between their abuse of children, their own childhood abuse, male violence, and the women's gendered realities. Moreover, I wanted to understand whether and if so, how, this related to feminist perspectives on sexual violence.

My choice of research methods was designed to address this issue in a way that was respectful, that did not disempower the respondents, and that allowed me to develop the trust necessary to gain a more holistic understanding of the topic I was studying. The transcription and analysis of the data was conducted with these overarching principles in mind. In this article, I attempt to illustrate the way in which I managed the unwieldy volume of material that often results from qualitative research in a way which allowed me to make sense of the women's experiences from a feminist perspective.

The literature on women who sexually offend against children is sparse. A clearly feminist analysis is absent, in spite of the enormous body of feminist literature on the victimization of women and children. As a social worker that worked on cases involving women who sexually abused children, I wanted to understand why this rare phenomenon occurred. I also wanted to know if, and how, this fit with feminist perspectives on sexual violence. I felt that feminists had failed to address this issue, and that this was a gap that needed to be addressed. Thus, I think my research provides an alternative perspective on female sex offending than is otherwise available, and may provide a different approach to treating women offenders as well as their victims.

The qualitative methods I chose were influenced by feminist thinking about research processes, especially in relation to power issues. My experience as a feminist social worker convinced me that people participate more fully in processes where they maintain some control over the outcome and feel respected. The women in this study had all been sexually victimized, and thus had been robbed of their power. I wanted their participation in the research to be empowering and for them to feel that they were increasing the knowledge about sexual offending through their participation. I believed that the only way to obtain the detailed, in-depth information I sought was to use a process that was empowering, respectful, and non-judgemental where I was able to create a degree of intimacy and trust with the participants, and where they had some control over the process. These issues are especially important when dealing with topics as sensitive and personal as sexual violence, and the feminist approach to qualitative research helped me to achieve these ends.

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Appendix

Interview Guides

This research seeks to answer the following questions:
Which factors led to female sex offending?
Which coercion tactics were employed by abusers?
Which resistance and survival tactics were employed?
What were the effects/costs of using these tactics?
What increases/decreases the chances of being abused or of escaping abuse?
How does all this relate to social policy?
The variables to be considered are:
Location: urban, rural, reserve, isolated, Canada or England.
Social class: poor, middle-class or well off.
Occupation: education, training, skills; employment.
Experiences of abuse and/or offending: were respondents the victims, the abusers or both? Who were the abusers/offenders? Were they acting independently or in concert with other/others?
Coercive tactics used: What were they? Who used them?
Experiences of successful resistance: What worked and what did not?
Survival tactics: What helped respondent to get through abuse?
Effects of using resistance and survival tactics: both positive and negative.

Questions for Offenders: Bibliographic Information

Name
Age
Race/ethnicity
Religion
Education
Socio-economic status
Occupation
Marital Status
Location

Questions for Offenders: Experiences

Questions for offenders are designed to explore respondents' perspectives on what factors were involved in the development of their sex offending, how victims were controlled so that abuse could occur, how those abused resisted and survived, and with what effects. Questions 1- 7 explore the actual abuse and the context. Questions 8 - 21 deal with power relations and coercive tactics. Question 23 deals with the offender's possible prior victimization.

Could you tell me about your offenses?
Who did you offend against? Were there other people you offended against?
For how long were you offending?
Were you abusing with others or alone? Were you abusing with males, with females or with both?
Have you been charged? What offense were you charged with?
Are you still abusing children?
Did you use physical abuse? Was there psychological abuse? Was there emotional abuse?
Were photographs taken as part of the abuse?
How did you get access to victims?
How did you coerce your victims?
How did you maintain secrecy?
Did the victim resist? How? How did you overcome the resistance?
How do you think your victim coped with being abused?
What factors do you think led to you abusing?
If you are no longer abusing what stopped you?
What would have stopped you sooner?
What, if anything, could your victim have done to stop or avoid the abuse?
What factors, if any, outside of the victims actions, would have made abusing the victim impossible?
Did the victim have support of any kind from anyone?
Did anyone ever intervene to stop the abuse? How and in what circumstances?

Did the victim sometimes get her own way? How and in what circumstances?
Did you have support from anyone?
Have you been a victim of sexual abuse? (If yes go to the survivor questions after question 23).
Are there other questions you would like to ask or think I should ask? Any comments you would like to make?

Questions for Survivors: Biographical information.

Name
Age
Race/ethnicity
Religion
Education
Socio-economic status
Occupation
Marital status
Location

Questions for Survivors: Experiences

These questions are meant to provide guidelines as to the information I need to gather about experiences of victimization. It is expected that much of the information will be forthcoming as part of the first question. The other questions will be asked if not covered in the first question, and may not be asked in the order shown. Questions 1-9 are asked to get information about the abuse and the context. Questions 10-16 are expected to produce information about the respondents' actual or perceived power, and of the support or lack of support available to them. Question 15 asks about the specific coercive tactics used. The first set of questions were designed for victims, and will focus on their experiences of abuse, the second set of questions will be asked of abusers about their offending. If it emerges that offenders are also victims, then the questions for survivors will be asked after the questions for offenders.

Please tell me about your experiences of sexual abuse.
Who abused you? Was the offender(s) female, male or both?
Were you abused by more than one person at a time?
For how long were you being abused?
How often did the abuse occur?
Did the abuse always take the same form?
Did you experience physical abuse? Was there emotional abuse? Was there psychological abuse? Were photographs taken as part of the abuse?
Did you have any particular fears? If so, what were they?
Did you ever feel that you could stop the abuse, minimise it or escape?
Were you able to get out of the abusive situation? How?
What do you think made it difficult or impossible to leave the situation or stop the abuse?
Did anyone support you in any way? Explain.

Were you able to get your own way sometimes? How did you manage to do this? Did anyone help you to do this? Under what circumstances would this person or people help you?

How did the offenders get you to do what they wanted? Did they make threats, use physical, emotional, psychological abuse or manipulation or rewards? Other ways: please explain.

Are there questions you would like to ask or think I should be asking? Any comments you would like to make?

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