The Impact of Sexual Violence on Student’s Academic and University Experiences: A Qualitative Study

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The impact of sexual violence on student’s academic and university experiences: A qualitative study.

By

Shelby Lacey

A Thesis
Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies through the Faculty of Nursing in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Science in Nursing at the University of Windsor

Windsor, Ontario, Canada

2023

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The impact of sexual violence on student’s academic and university experiences:

A qualitative study.

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DECLARATION OF ORIGINALITY

I hereby certify that I am the sole author of this thesis and that no part of this thesis has been published or submitted for publication.

I certify that, to the best of my knowledge, my thesis does not infringe upon anyone’s copyright nor violate any proprietary rights and that any ideas, techniques, quotations, or any other material from the work of other people included in my thesis, published or otherwise, are fully acknowledged in accordance with the standard referencing practices. Furthermore, to the extent that I have included copyrighted material that surpasses the bounds of fair dealing within the meaning of the Canada Copyright Act, I certify that I have obtained a written permission from the copyright owner(s) to include such material(s) in my thesis and have included copies of such copyright clearances to my appendix.

I declare that this is a true copy of my thesis, including any final revisions, as approved by my thesis committee and the Graduate Studies office, and that this thesis has not been submitted for a higher degree to any other University or Institution.
The prevalence of sexual violence is an ongoing public health concern within university communities. Students who experience sexual violence may be at risk for negative academic impacts including declines in grade point average (GPA), increased absenteeism, and withdrawal from school. Less information is known regarding if students who have experienced sexual violence report changes in their academic and university experiences, such as participation in class, social groups or clubs. Help-seeking through formal or informal sources may alleviate the negative consequences of sexual violence. Due to the unique environment of universities which may influence a student’s personal, social, and cultural life, a social ecological model was used to frame this study. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to explore student’s academic and university experiences after experiencing sexual violence. Students also shared their decisions and experiences disclosing to formal or informal resources. Data was analysed using a thematic analysis approach. Participants shared various ways sexual violence impacted their academics including decreased efficiently in studying, decline in GPA, and increased absenteeism. Participants did not report significant changes in their university experiences. Disclosing to informal and formal resources offered comfort, and validation for the participant. Addressing sexual violence with a public health approach may allow for implementation of interventions at each level of the ecological environment. Possible interventions may include revising policies, conducting community needs assessments and providing disclosure and bystander training to all students, staff, and faculty.
DEDICATION

This thesis is in dedication to my Papa, Jack MacDonald, who taught me the importance of sharing stories. Thank you for always making sure I knew how proud you were of me.
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Patton’s Triangulated Inquiry
INTRODUCTION

Gender-based violence is violence that is committed at an increased rate to groups of people on the basis of their gender identity, gender expression, or perceived gender (Cotter & Savage, 2019; United Rights Council, 2014). Analyzing violence from a gendered lens promotes the recognition of how socially constructed gender roles impact the likelihood of who is most likely perpetrating and becoming victim to violence (Benoit et al., 2015). Gender-based violence has been recognized globally as both a human rights and public health issue, which can contribute to further gender inequality (Cotter & Savage, 2019; Government of Canada, 2019; World Health Organization, 2020).

Sexual violence is a broad term that includes a range of unwanted sexual behaviours including, but not limited to, sexual harassment, coercion, stalking, unwanted touch or sexual activities, forced pregnancy or abortion, and forced penetration (United Rights Council, 2014). Sexual violence is often enacted by perpetrators to gain a sense of power and control over their victims through the means of humiliation and domination (Kalra & Bhugra, 2013). Sexual violence is undoubtedly a gender-based crime as an overwhelming 82-90% of survivors of sexual assault identify as a woman (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2000). Although men can and are victims of sexual violence, for the purpose of this research, the focus will be on survivors of unwanted sexual experiences who identify as women.

More than 11 million Canadians have been physically and or sexually assaulted since the age of 15 (Government of Canada, 2019; Green et al., 2020). This statistic includes 30% of Canadian women and 8% of Canadian men who have reported sexual assault since the age of 15 (Government of Canada, 2019). In addition to gender, other
risk factors that can individually and concurrently increase the risk of becoming a victim of sexual violence includes having Aboriginal status, being single or non-heterosexual, having a disability, experiencing poor mental health, and having unstable income or housing (Government of Canada, 2019).

When considering these risk factors and acknowledging the young and diverse population of students within post-secondary schools, it is not surprising that post-secondary schools are high risk communities for the perpetration of sexual violence. The 116,627 university students who participated in the Student’s Voices on Sexual Violence survey within Ontario, reported a high prevalence of sexual violence within post-secondary universities (CCI Research Inc, 2019). Of the university students who responded, 63.2% disclosed they had been sexually harassed, and 23% disclosed they had experienced a non-consensual sexual experience since the beginning of their academic year (CCI Research Inc, 2019).

The prevalence of sexual violence among university students is an ongoing problem that has multifaceted consequences including changes in student’s psychological wellbeing, social involvement, and physical health (Campbell et al., 2001; Mason & Lodrick, 2013; Rothman et al., 2019). Unique to students who are survivors of sexual violence is the impact the assault may have on their academics, such as, a decline in grade point average (GPA), postponed graduation, and or loss of engagement or withdrawal from their studies (Baker et al., 2016; Banyard et al., 2020; Jordan, 2014; Jordan et al., 2014; Kaufman et al., 2019; Mengo & Black, 2016; Potter et al., 2018; Stermac et al., 2020). A mediating effect on the negative consequences associated with experiencing sexual violence includes both formal and informal help-seeking behaviours
(DeLoveh & Cattaneo, 2017). However, several barriers exist for students who are survivors of sexual violence to seek help including: logistical issues, feelings of shame, and being unsure of the acceptableness of using supports (Holland & Cortina, 2017; Wood & Stichman, 2018). Interestingly, there is limited research on the experience of university student’s help-seeking behaviours, and their post-assault university experiences such as academic changes, and changes in how the students situate themselves within their university community.

The primary purpose of this research was to explore the lived experiences of university students who are survivors of sexual violence, and their academic and university experiences. The central research question guiding this project was, “How do unwanted sexual experiences impact female student’s academic and university experiences?” The sub-questions were:

1. How do students perceive their university experience after experiencing an unwanted sexual experience?
2. How are student’s academics impacted by an unwanted sexual experience?
3. How do students describe their experience of engaging with formal or informal resources within their university community following an unwanted sexual experience?

**Theoretical Framework: Sexual Violence as a Community Issue**

To understand how sexual violence prevails within high-risk communities, including universities, framing it within a socio-ecological model (SEM) may be useful. The university community is unique due to the multifaceted nature of how the student
interacts with the university environment. For the duration of a student’s academic career, a university campus may include the student’s school, work, housing, and social life.

The SEM was first used as a conceptual model to explore human development in the 1970s by Bronfenbrenner (1977), and later redefined as a theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1987). The SEM allows examination of how the ecological environment influences the health of the individual. The original model constructed by Bronfenbrenner (1977) portrayed the different structures of the environment as a nesting arrangement, each contained within the next (see Figure 1). This nesting arrangement illustrates how the different structures of the ecological environment impact an individual.

**Figure 1**

*Bronfenbrenner’s ecological framework for human development*

![Diagram of Bronfenbrenner's ecological framework for human development](image)

Bronfenbrenner’s (1977), SEM includes four components: the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, and macrosystem. The microsystem includes the intrinsic relations or roles an individual assumes based on their position in society such as daughter, sister, and student. The mesosystem involves the interrelations among the individual and others within the settings or environments in which they live. For example, the relationships between the individual and their family, friends, schoolmates, and teachers. The exosystem is an extension of the mesosystem which includes factors that do not directly interact with the individual, but affects them, nonetheless. These factors may include availability of social services and use of media within the community. The macrosystem establishes the overarching culture or subculture of the environment that influences the social norms, and values within the micro-, meso-, and exo-systems. The macrosystem includes the social, economic, legal, educational, and political systems that influence the living conditions of everyone within the community.

Since the development of the original theory, the SEM has been adapted to frame a multitude of research interests such as mental health, physical health, and health promotion (Cramer & Kapusta, 2017; Fleury & Lee, 2006; Kilanowski, 2017; Kolff et al., 2018). For this research project, one adaptation of particular interest was the Culturally Inclusive Ecological Model of Sexual Assault Recovery (CIEMSAR), (Neville & Heppner, 1999), (see Figure 2). Neville and Heppner (1999) help conceptualize a person’s recovery of sexual violence with emphasis on sociocultural factors by using an ecological framework.

Figure 2
Adapted version of Neville and Heppner’s culturally inclusive ecological model of sexual assault recovery

![Diagram of Neville and Heppner's CIEMSAR model]


Similar to Bronfenbrenner’s (1977) SEM, CIEMSAR (Neville & Heppner, 1999) is comprised of nested structures including Microsystem/Individual, Mesosystem, and Macrosystem. This nested organization of the different structures within the environment allows for the visualization of how factors may directly and indirectly influence the individual’s recovery process. Neville and Heppner’s (1999) CIEMSAR was used to frame this research study to explore how individual, social, and environmental factors within the university culture impacted student’s academic and university experiences following an unwanted sexual experience.

Culturally Inclusive Ecological Model of Sexual Assault Recovery
**Microsystem.** The microsystem that Neville and Heppner (1999) propose explores personal factors that may influence an individual’s experience with sexual violence and their recovery process. Neville and Heppner’s (1999) microsystem includes interpersonal variables such as age and gender, and individual experiences related to the sexual violence such as their relationship with the perpetrator. The major themes within Neville and Heppner’s (1999) microsystem include assault characteristics, personal variables, and attributions.

Assault characteristics includes factors such as the survivor’s relationship with the perpetrator, and the severity of the survivor’s injury. The perpetrator could be a total stranger to the survivor or could be someone they know such as a partner, friend, or family member (Neville & Heppner, 1999). Historically, research has consistently found that up to 90% of campus sexual assaults are committed by acquaintances (Campbell et al., 2017; Fisher et al., 2003; Krebs et al., 2007). Acquaintances include any person the survivor has familiarity with such as their partners, friends, classmates, or dorm mates.

Severity of the survivor’s injuries examines the physical injuries a survivor may experience and may also differentiate between completed sexual assaults and attempted sexual assaults (Neville & Heppner, 1999). Attempted sexual assaults include sexual assaults where the perpetrator was not successful at committing the degree of violation they intended (Neville & Heppner, 1999). Not all survivors of sexual violence will experience physical consequences (Shaw et al., 2021). The survivor may have minimal to no physical injuries if the perpetrator used verbal sexual coercion to commit sexual assault (Shaw et al., 2021). Verbal coercion is a common method of enacting sexual violence and may include the perpetrator continuously asking for a sexual act,
blackmailing, or using their relationship status to guilt another person into performing unwanted sexual acts (Katz et al., 2007).

Personal variables within the microsystem are intrinsic factors that may influence how a person responds to being sexually assaulted (Neville & Heppner, 1999). Personal variables include age, social class, race and ethnicity, previous experience with sexual violence, baseline psychological functioning, and coping behaviours (Neville & Heppner, 1999). These variables may help to distinguish how individuals experience post-assault recovery in different ways based on intersecting personal constructs such as experiences, opportunities, and oppressions. Crenshaw (1989), first theorized intersectionality to provide an explanation of how Black women are oppressed in legal cases in multiple ways, specifically based on gender and race. Without the analysis of both constructs, the entire experience of the individual cannot be fully understood. In regard to post-assault recovery from sexual violence, these personal variables may influence whether an individual decides to seek help (Bolstad, 2014; Roebuck & Murty, 2016).

Attributions relate to how survivors of sexual violence make sense of their experiences. This includes how survivors labels the violence, and whom they associate the blame on, if anyone (Neville & Heppner, 1999). The factors that impact how a survivor attributes the blame are complex. In a study of college survivors of sexual violence, Donde (2017) found that specific variables of the violence can influence the likelihood of survivors expressing self-blame, perpetrator blame, or situational blame. Donde (2017) found survivors had an increased risk of blaming themselves for the violence if they did not have a history of childhood abuse, had lower clarity of refusing sex, or had increased perceived intoxication of either themself or the perpetrator.
Meanwhile, survivors were more likely to blame the perpetrator if the violence involved an increased amount of physical harm or was completed when the survivor was unconscious or incapacitated (Donde, 2017; Katz et al., 2007). Survivors were also more likely to blame the perpetrator if they were younger in age and had no other recent experiences with sexual violence (Donde, 2017).

**Mesosystem.** Neville and Heppner’s *mesosystem* explores the importance of the individual’s relationships with others. The mesosystem is the structure where help-seeking is most prevalent. Neville and Heppner’s (1999) mesosystem includes possible resources for survivors of sexual violence, including both social supports and institutional interventions - otherwise known as informal or formal supports (Campbell et al., 2015; Dworkin et al., 2016; Fleming et al., 2018). Both informal and formal supports can provide important help to the survivor for their post-assault recovery.

Informal supports include non-professional people, such as friends or family, to whom the survivor can disclose. A majority of women disclose their experience of sexual violence to a friend or family member before anyone else, and this remains true for college-aged women (Ullman, 2010). Campbell et al., (2015) even credited peers of survivors of sexual violence as the “true first responders,” recognizing that peers often respond much earlier than nurses, police, or advocates (p. 843). If the survivor believes their friends will provide support and meaningful insights, survivors are more likely to disclose, and have a positive experience that may result in receiving additional formal resources for their recovery (Dworkin et al., 2016). Informal supports may offer survivors of sexual violence safe environments which may include listening, personal insights, validation, and support in the survivors’ decision making (Griswold et al., 2020).
Dworkin et al., (2016) found that survivors of sexual violence are mindful of various factors when they choose to disclose to informal supports to avoid possible negative reactions. Negative reactions from peers can further cause distress to the survivor and possibly impact their recovery process (Orchowski et al., 2013). From a SEM lens, if a person experiences a negative reaction to their disclosure(s) at the Mesosystem it may cause alter their personal beliefs within their Microsystem resulting in more harmful coping behaviours and self-blame (Holland & Cortina, 2017; Neville & Heppner, 1999).

Notably, belief in rape myths that support victim-blaming may increase the likelihood for peers to respond negatively. Rape myths are stereotypes that impact the accountability of sexual violence and may include beliefs such as that the victim “enjoyed,” “caused,” or “deserved” the assault (Rich et al., 2021). A study conducted by Rich et al. (2021), found that college students who have ‘high’ levels of rape myth beliefs are more likely to feel “shame and anger towards survivors” of sexual violence (p. 271). Similarly, a study conducted by Amar et al. (2012), explored 64 college-aged women’s attitudes and beliefs associated with survivors seeking help for interpersonal violence. The participants were divided into small focus groups and asked to provide insights about their experiences with helping peers who were survivors of sexual violence. The participants were cued with a semi-structured interview guide that included topics such as how the survivor was treated, what type of help was provided, and how the participant/bystander felt or responded. Overall, the study found that many participants held beliefs that could encourage victim-blaming especially when alcohol was involved in the assault or if the perpetrator was an intimate partner. Participants within this study
also did not feel confident responding to a disclosure in fear of causing discomfort for both them and the survivor.

Neville and Heppner (1999) describe institutional interventions as professional services the survivor could receive after an assault. In Neville and Heppner’s (1999) model they specifically include police interventions, as well as formal counselling. For the purpose of this project, institutional interventions will be expanded to include any type of professional or formal service provided by the university for a student survivor such as counselling services and academic accommodations, as well as medical interventions.

**Macrosystem.** Much like Bronfenbrenner’s SEM, Neville and Heppner’s (1999) *macrosystem* explores the overarching culture and norms that impact the entirety of the community or society. The CIEMSAR model focuses on both broad society norms and values, and personal ethno-cultural norms and values (Neville & Heppner, 1999). Of special interest are the norms and values that support the continuation of a rape prone culture. A rape prone culture is a culture wherein social contexts and dynamics make it more probable and acceptable for sexual violence to occur (Martin, 2016).

Martin (2016) suggests that the culture of campus sexual violence is influenced by two levels of social contexts - the external and internal environment. The external environment includes the institution’s political, and economical decisions, and agendas such as recruiting top student athletes, or securing federal grants. The decisions and priorities of the institution can be effective at both supporting and dismantling rape prone cultures. However, Martin argues that because universities must compete with the priorities and pressures of multiple stakeholders within the external environment such as
alumni, accreditation bodies, and the public, the outcome is often harmful to survivors of sexual violence. For example, universities may not act to their full capabilities to support a sexual misconduct case to prevent the situation from going public and furthermore tarnishing the school’s reputation.

The internal environment of the campus examines the relationships and social positions of people (Martin, 2016). Martin’s (2016) internal environment of campus’ focuses specifically on fraternity members and varsity athletes, as these group historically demonstrate rape prone cultures. Homogeneity in gender, age, race/ethnicity, and social class is a risk factor for sexual violence and is commonly found in both fraternity and athletic groups within campuses (Martin, 2016). The history of fraternities priding themselves on loyalty to each other, valuing masculinity through exhibiting power and control, and heavy use of alcohol, all contribute to supporting the development of a rape prone culture (Martin, 2016).

Although male student athletes share many of the same factors to fraternity brothers, they also have distinct values and norms that can further promote a rape prone culture within a university setting. Martin (2016) explains student athletes are normally mentored from a young age to accept scholarships, play college-level sports, and aspire to play professionally. If the student athlete has sponsors, or a high level of involvement within the school, they may be subjected to more university publicity and scrutiny. Martin (2016) argues this publicity may give athletes superior hero complexes where they believe they are above community rules and entitled to special treatment, including their personal sexual desires. Student athletes who have been culprits in university sexual misconduct cases are known to have media frame the situation with pity, in regard to how
the misconduct case affects their prospects to play professionally (e.g. Brock Turner) (Martin, 2016; Pica et al., 2020). The altered rules for affluent and varsity male students is an example of how university environments may help develop a patriarchal community which emphasizes victim-blaming rape myths throughout all levels of the CIEMSAR.

Specific social cultural contexts focus on personal ethno-cultural norms and values of the individual. This includes factors such as their race/ethnicity, religion, family, and cultural practices and beliefs (Neville and Heppner, 1999). When Neville and Heppner (1999) first conceptualized CIEMSAR, there was limited research on the perspectives and experiences of survivors of sexual violence who are from ethnic minority groups. Despite the limited research, they theorized that there are important factors to consider such as cultural beliefs regarding rape and rape myths, cultural defined gender roles, and how these cultural factors impact how survivors conceptualize their experience. Since Neville and Heppner’s (1999) work, research has continued to support their claims. Research has found that personal ethno-cultural variables can influence a person’s individual risk to become a victim of sexual violence (e.g., Indigenous status), how survivors define recovery, and what, if anything, survivors expect when seeking formal health services (Bolstad, 2014; Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network, 2021; Sinko et al., 2019). These variables are important to consider as individuals have their own ethno-cultural influences which may or may not be aligned with the broad social norms and values of society.
REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Consequences of Sexual Violence

The CIESMAR framework (Neville & Heppner, 1999), highlights how variables such as personal attributes or cultural factors can influence an individual’s recovery process. Similar to how the recovery from unwanted sexual experiences are unique to individuals, the repercussions of an unwanted sexual experience can also be unique and influenced by various factors (Lindquist et al., 2013). Frequent consequences experienced by survivors of sexual violence can be categorized into three domains: physical, psychological, and social.

Physical consequences of campus sexual assaults can include initial injuries such as bruising, genital laceration or swelling, bone fractures, pregnancy, and the acquisition of sexually transmitted infections (STIs) (Jina & Thomas, 2013; Logan et al., 2007). The characteristics of the sexual violence, and personal factors of the victims may predispose them to a greater risk of suffering from physical consequences (Zilkens et al., 2017). However, not all unwanted experiences of sexual violence will result in physical consequences, especially if the sexual violence was enacted through the use of verbal coercion (Shaw et al., 2021). The absence of physical injuries does not equate to the absence of sexual violence or other consequences (Shaw et al., 2021).

Psychological consequences can be extensive including depression, anxiety, flashbacks, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), substance abuse, body image dissatisfaction and sleeping disorders (Carey et al., 2018; Jaconis et al., 2020; Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network, 2021; Rothman et al., 2019). It is estimated that 94% of sexual assault survivors experience PTSD symptoms within the first two weeks post-
sexual assault (Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network, 2021). Psychological consequences are often not experienced independently from each other. For example, Jaconis et al. (2020), found that when a person experiences body image dissatisfaction, it is often experienced concurrently with anxiety, depression, and PTSD.

Social consequences include loss of friendships or relationships, loss of engagement in activities, and avoidance of social settings where the perpetrator may be present (Sabri et al., 2019). A university campus may include the student’s school and work occupation, and well as their housing. These should be safe spaces where the student feels welcomed. If the student is continuously reminded of, or in fear of their perpetrator’s presence, it can result in avoidance of these spaces and or feelings of isolation (Sabri et al., 2019).

In addition to physical, psychological, and social consequences of sexual violence, students may also experience academic consequences (Molstad et al., 2021). Academic achievement is a comprehensive term to acknowledge a student’s ability to accomplish academic goals such as, earning a specific grade on an assignment, completing courses, and engaging in academic opportunities such as leadership opportunities. Educational attainment is defined as the highest education level an individual has accomplished such as a high-school diploma, undergraduate degree, or graduate degree. Educational attainment requires students to demonstrate academic achievement to obtain satisfactory completion of their program requirements.

For the purpose of this project, literature was reviewed to seek knowledge regarding how sexual violence may impact student’s academic and university experiences. I began my literature review by first consulting with my faculty advisor, and
university librarian to review literature search strategies and goals. Multiple databases were used including CINAHL, PubMed, PsycINFO, and Google Scholar. Please see Appendix A for the literature inclusion criteria.

Previous researchers who have studied the relationship between sexual assault and education attainment have used grade point average (GPA) as a marker of academic achievement (Baker et al., 2016; Bonomi, 2019; Griffin & Read, 2012; Jordan et al., 2014; Kaufman et al., 2019; Mengo & Black, 2016; Stermac et al., 2020). Additionally, although limited, researchers have started to examine the relationship between campus sexual violence and education attainment using broader constructs including academic engagement, post-graduate degree use, and career attainment (Banyard et al., 2020; Potter et al., 2018; Stermac et al., 2020).

A brief overview of the current realities of sexual violence for students, and the use of resources was also explored as a part of the literature review. I also chose to include a section on formal resources to review how resources may be being used by survivors of sexual violence, and how they may influence their academic and university experiences. For the purpose of this project, formal resources at the university included resources such as campus police, student counseling services, and the Sexual Misconduct Office.

**Academic Experiences After Sexual Violence**

**Grade Point Average and Degree Completion**

GPA and degree completion are two consistent ways of measuring academic achievement and education attainment. GPA represents a numerical value that can gauge how the student met the expectations in all of their courses, while degree completion
accounts for whether the students did or did not complete the requirements of their degree.

Jordan et al., (2014) studied the relationship between first year university students who had been sexually assaulted and their corresponding GPA. In their study of 750 female participants recruited through emails, nearly 40% were sexually assaulted prior to entering university (from age 14 until the summer before university), 24% of participants were sexually assaulted during their first semester of school, and an additional 19.6% participants were sexually assaulted during their second semester of school. The researchers found that women who were sexually assaulted prior to entering school were over three times more likely to have a GPA below 2.5 at the end of their first semester compared to students who were not victims of sexual assault (10.6% and 3.0%, respectively). These survivors of sexual assault continued to be nearly twice as likely to continue to have a decline in GPA until the end of second semester (10.8% and 5.6%, respectively). Similarly, women who were sexually assaulted during their first semester of school, were also significantly more likely to have GPAs below 2.5 compared to those who were not sexually assaulted (7.4% and 4.7%, respectively). The trend of declining GPAs was particularly evident to women who experienced a forced rape during their first semester. All women who experienced a forced rape during their first semester finished with a GPA below 2.5. This research by Jordan et al. (2014), demonstrated that despite students having satisfactory GPAs for acceptance into post-secondary education, experiences with sexual violence may impact students’ ability to maintain and or improve their GPA at the post-secondary level. This is significant as an estimated 20% of women are sexually assaulted during their undergraduate education, and therefore could be at
greater risk of being negatively impacted academically due to experiencing sexual violence (Graham et al., 2021).

Baker et al., (2016) extended the known literature regarding the relationship between GPA and academic performance by examining whether sexual violence continued to predict lower GPA among female students enrolled in undergraduate degrees, when controlling for variables including, high school rank, standardized test scores, and conscientiousness. In two separate studies, Baker et al. (2016), examined GPA at the end of participants’ semesters, final college GPA, and whether students graduated from the university. The researchers found that regardless of high school rank, standardized test scores, and conscientiousness, exposure to sexual violence resulted in lower academic performance based on GPA. Similar to Jordan et al. (2014), Baker et al. (2016) noted that the effect of academic performance was more profound if the participant had been exposed to multiple types of sexual violence. Furthermore, of the women who reported two or more different types of sexual violence, such as adolescent and adult victimization, only 56% graduated within a four-year period. Conversely, 85% of students who reported no exposure to sexual violence successfully graduated within the same four-year time period. These findings are significant as they further validate that there are academic consequences secondary to sexual assaults. The inclusion of the multiple variables of high school rank, standardized test scores, and conscientiousness adds rigor to the examination of the influence sexual violence has on student academics. As sexual assault survivors are frequently subjected to victim blaming, the additional variables may alleviate biases that support ideals that educational consequences are caused by individual inability (Carney, 2018).
Mengo and Black (2016) sought to understand how different types of violence may impact students’ GPA and retention rates. They examined how sexual, physical, and verbal violence impact students’ GPA and their decisions to leave university earlier than anticipated which included transferring schools or completely withdrawing from their university education. Mengo and Black also wanted to compare if sociodemographic variables influenced post-assault academic changes. Data was obtained from 74 casefiles collected from 2008-2014 from a Relationship and Violence Sexual Assault Program at a large Southwestern University (USA). The researcher’s inclusion criteria required the casefiles to involve students who experienced sexual violence and had documentation of both pre-victimization GPA and post-victimization GPA. This resulted in the small sample size.

Mengo and Black (2016) analyzed the association between type of victimization (sexual, physical, or verbal), leaving or staying at the university, and sociodemographic variables. Mengo and Black (2016) identified that experiences of sexual, physical, and verbal violence all correlated to a significant decline in students’ mean GPA, and student retention. Sexual victimization rendered the strongest impact on academics when compared to physical and verbal victimization. Students who were sexually victimized were most likely to have a decline in GPA and leave school. When Mengo and Black (2016) compared the pre-victimization GPA and post-victimization GPA of students who experienced sexual violence statistical significance was found indicating that after a student experiences sexual violence they are at higher risk for a declining GPA compared to a student who was not victimized (pre-victimization GPA: N = 34, M = 2.72, SD = .81; post-victimization GPA: N = 34, M = 2.60, SD = .82).
Not only does the decline in GPA found by Mengo and Black (2016) support previous findings from Jordan et al. (2014), and Baker et al. (2016), but is it also important in relation to retention rates. Students who were survivors of sexual violence had a dropout rate of 34.1%, while the overall school dropout rate was 29.8%. In their study, sociodemographic variables were not related to either GPA decline or leaving school. The only variable related to leaving school was academic level. First year students who were victimized were the most likely to leave school before graduation than any other academic level. This is interesting when considering that first and second year students are also the most at-risk students for experiencing sexual violence (Cranney, 2015; Kimble et al., 2008). Decreased retention rates among survivors of sexual violence may indicate that current school resources and academic accommodations are not enough, and there is need for more effective student supports to support student engagement.

Similar to the findings of Mengo and Black (2016), Kaufman et al. (2019) conducted a study to explore health and academic consequences of sexual violence experienced by university students. Kaufman et al.’s (2019) study examined multiple types of victimization and their corresponding consequences for university students. Types of victimizations included stalking, abusive/controlling relationship, sexual assault, and sexual harassment. A total of 3,977 participants, including all genders, completed an online survey which asked questions related to their personal and university community attitudes regarding sexual violence, experiences, and knowledge regarding resources. Academic consequences were defined as “had to drop a class; was unable to do work or complete assignments; and grades dropped” (Kaufman et al., 2019, p. 59).
The researchers used bivariate regression models to study the relationship between type of victimization and corresponding consequence. Multivariate regression models were also used to control for demographic variables. Academic consequences were found to be strongly associated with sexual harassment (adjOR = 1.20, 95% CI = 1.06–1.36, p = .003) and sexual assault (adjOR = 1.94, 95% CI = 1.22–3.08, p = .005) (Kaufman et al., 2019, p. 63).

**Student Engagement and Long-Term Consequences**

Although a passing GPA and completion of degree requirements are necessities for education attainment, post-secondary education is multifaceted and encompasses more than just academic success. Stermac et al (2020), published a Canadian study that examined the relationship between types of sexual violence and academic performance, “beyond GPA,” which included both behavioural and attitudinal variables such as academic delay, failures, and non-attendance. Their research extended the known literature concerning the sequelae of declining GPAs and increased academic withdrawal rates among survivors of sexual assault.

Stermac et al. (2020) collected data from 934 female undergraduate participants through an online survey which included the topics of academic performance, academic attitudes, and experiences of sexual violence between 2016-2017. Description of the study and invitations to participate were distributed throughout Ontario universities. The sample included 731 students who reported experiences of sexual violence while attending university, and 182 students who did not report experiences of sexual violence. Groups showed homogeneity in terms of age, year of study, living arrangements (majority of students in both groups lived off campus), and faculty (majority of both
groups were enrolled in arts or sciences), allowing for a comparison group. Interestingly, Stermac et al. (2020), had a very demographically diverse sample including nearly 20% of participants self-identifying as belonging to a sexual minority group, 47% describing themselves as racialized, and almost 10% reporting having a disability.

Sexual violence was measured using the Sexual Experience Survey-Short Form Version (SES-SFV) (Koss et al., 2007). This resulted in 78.4% of participants reporting experiencing sexual violence. The researchers categorized sexual violence as (1) none, (2) touched, kissed, and attempted sex, and (3) completed sex. Stermac et al. (2020), hypothesized that all types of sexual violence would result in decreased academic performance.

Through Stermac et al.’s (2020) data analysis their proposed hypothesis was supported. Stermac et al. (2020) found that students who experienced any form of sexual violence were less likely to have a trend of improving grades, more likely to experience academic delay, and more likely to have higher non-attendance scores when compared to students without exposure to sexual violence. Academic delay included delays in completing courses and assignments, as well as missing or being late for lectures. Academic failure was an extension of academic delay where students reported failures in their courses, assignments, and exams. Finally, non-attendance scores observed the incidences where students made excuses not to attend class, thought of dropping out of school, or attended classes while intoxicated.

Similar to the work conducted by Jordan et al. (2014), and Baker et al. (2016), which found that participants with forced rapes, and multiple exposures to sexual violence experienced an increased number of negative academic consequences, Stermac
et al. (2020), found that the academic consequences were intensified for participants who experienced a sexual assault that resulted in completed penetration. Stermac et al. (2020), also identified that sexual violence impacts academic achievement in multiple ways, and the sequelae of GPA decline and withdrawing from studies occurs through a progression of factors such as academic delay, failure, and decreased classroom engagement.

Banyard et al. (2020) also conducted a research study that sought to understand how sexual violence may impact academics in ways other than GPA. Banyard et al. (2020) examined how stalking, IPV, unwanted sexual contact, and unwanted sexual intercourse could impact academics through college stress, scholarly conscientiousness, commitment to university, and feelings of efficacy as a student. Their participants included 6,482 undergraduate students enrolled in eight universities in New England. Participants completed surveys that questioned their academia and victimization experiences within the previous year. Since the survey was open to students regardless of whether they had experienced any victimization, multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was conducted to compare mean scores of academic experiences with individuals who had history of sexual violence, and those who did not. Additionally, the researchers conducted a second MANOVA to assess for the academic impacts for students who had experienced poly-victimization, which was defined as the occurrence of experiencing multiple forms of victimization. Banyard et al. (2020), found that all forms of victimization correlated with increased college stress, decreased feelings of efficacy, and lower scholarly conscientiousness and commitment to university. Furthermore, poly-victimization was associated with increased negative effects on academics.
Extending Stermac et al.’s (2020) and Banyard et al.’s (2020) research through qualitative methods may compliment their findings of how sexual violence may impact a student’s academic experience beyond GPA. This may provide an opportunity to explore how the experience of sexual violence impacts student engagement in leadership opportunities, extra curriculars, academic achievement, and overall educational satisfaction. It may also contribute to identifying other constructs that may otherwise have been unacknowledged through quantitative research thus far.

To my knowledge, Potter et al. (2018) is one of the only studies published which sought to better understand the loss of human capital resulting from post-secondary students’ experiences of sexual violence throughout the USA. In their study they explored long-term educational and financial impacts that survivors of sexual assault experience. Participants were asked to complete an online qualitative survey and/or phone interview. All participants identified themselves as women who had been sexually assaulted during college. Due to the retrospective nature of the study, there was no age limitation for participants, therefore, ages ranged from 18-63 years. Consistent with the campus sexual assault averages, 88% of participants reported that they were sexually assaulted by an acquaintance (CCI Research Inc, 2019; Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network, 2021). At the academic level, 67% of participants acknowledged negative impacts on their academics which included increased absentee time and GPA decline. Conversely, a minority of participants shared an improvement in GPA. Potter et al. (2018), speculated that the improvement could be the outcome of participants using studying as an avoidant strategy. One participant explained that she often used studying to prevent herself from having to think about her trauma, while other participants stated...
they used studying to avoid the risk of socializing with their rapist among their social circles (Potter et al., 2018).

In addition to change in GPA, 58% of participants experienced a disruption in their timeline for graduation which included taking a leave of absence, and/or transitioning to part-time status (Potter et al., 2018). A total of 24% of participants did not graduate, which did not include the 10% of participants who were still enrolled in college at the time of the study. The academic declines, and unsuccessful education attainment, appeared to contribute to long term career attainment and satisfaction goals (Potter et al, 2018).

Potter et al. (2018) found key constructs that related to long-term consequences which impacted career satisfaction including unresolved psychological, and academic consequences secondary to experiencing campus sexual assaults. Some participants reported that they directly associated their sexual assault with their unemployment status due to their post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), fears of safety, and failure to meet job expectations e.g., increased absentee time and tardiness, and fears of working alone and or at night. For women who were employed, a key theme identified was feeling like they were achieving less than what they anticipated post-graduation. One woman shared that she postponed her music career due to lasting feelings of low confidence and fear of being alone with men, while another woman shared that she spent years working for non-profit companies unrelated to her degree.

As the only known qualitative study to explore how sexual violence impacts academic achievement, Potter et al.’s (2018) findings offer valuable insights by providing voice to these participants. It is evident through their study that the impact sexual
violence has on education is important, can be complex, and can be long lasting. Their unique retrospective study did not limit age, which resulted in participants of various ages contributing to the research. This could have identified different and unique experiences in comparison to a study that only includes students who have more recently experienced sexual violence. However, without limiting age, the results may not be representative of how the phenomenon of educational consequences secondary to sexual violence is currently impacting students. Proposing an additional qualitative study situated in Canada with an inclusive criterion of only current students who have been sexually assaulted may help gather insights of sexual violence currently impacts students.

**Formal Resources**

Formal resources within post-secondary schools in Ontario have expanded since the initiation of Bill 132: “Sexual Violence and Harassment Action Plan Act,” in March 2016 (MacCharles, 2016). Under this bill, every college and university are required to have a sexual violence policy that addresses sexual violence affecting students, staff, and faculty (MacCharles, 2016). At minimum, colleges and universities must provide training to faculty, staff, and students about sexual violence policies, and provide accessible resources, supports and accommodations (MacCharles, 2016). The authorization of Bill 132 has mandated all colleges and universities implement both preventative and responsive interventions to address sexual violence on campus (MacCharles, 2016). To ensure adherence, all schools must submit an annual report reviewing the implementation and success of the policy to the Ministry of Education (MacCharles, 2016). The enactment of this policy and reporting requirement ensures that campus survivors of
sexual misconduct, at minimum, should have the mandated campus resources accessible and available to them, if they choose to use them.

Formal resources offered at post-secondary schools can be beneficial to survivors of sexual violence, as they may offer accommodations such as extensions of academic responsibilities, counselling, or safety planning services such as a step by step plan of leaving an abusive relationship (CCI Research Inc, 2019). These accommodations may help students feel safe and supported. In the most recent Ontario-based Student Voices on Sexual Violence Survey (2019), over 59% of the 20,956 university students were ‘very satisfied’ with the institutional response to sexual violence. Overall satisfaction was determined based on how students rated several factors including: faculty/staff believing them, having their academic accommodations met, and having autonomy in how their case was handled. The resources available to the students, and overall satisfaction with handling sexual misconduct cases is a positive sign that formal resources at the post-secondary level may be helping survivors in their recovery process.

Despite the possible benefits of formal services at the post-secondary level for survivors of sexual violence, barriers exist that prevent students from utilizing the services. Students who have experienced sexual violence, will most likely seek resources that they were familiar with prior to the assault (DeLoveh & Cattaneo, 2017). Unfortunately, nearly 60% of the 580,472 university students who participated in the Knowledge Index section of the Student Voices on Sexual Violence Survey (2019) strongly disagreed that they had sufficient knowledge regarding school-provided resources. The gap in knowledge about formal resources for survivors of sexual violence could be detrimental in students accessing services.
Students may also struggle with both logistical and psychological barriers (Holland & Cortina, 2017). Logistical barrier included lack time to utilize resources, and concerns about affordability and confidentiality. While psychological barriers included experiencing negative emotions like shame and blame, minimizing the experience of violence, and normalizing the violence behaviours (Holland and Cortina, 2017). These factors, alone or in combination, may contribute to the students’ personal beliefs about the appropriateness to use the services.

**Summary of Key Findings**

The experience of sexual violence can negatively impact a person psychologically, physically, and socially (Carey et al., 2018; Jaconis et al., 2020; Jina & Thomas, 2013; Logan et al., 2007; Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network, 2021; Rothman et al., 2019; Sabri et al., 2019). If the survivor of sexual violence is also a post-secondary student, the survivor may also experience negative impacts to their academic achievements and education attainment (Molstad et al., 2021). Students who have experienced sexual violence may experience lower grade point average (GPA), delayed or unsuccessful degree completion, disengagement from academics, and limited post-graduate degree use (Baker et al., 2016; Banyard et al., 2020; Jordan et al., 2014; Mengo & Black, 2016; Potter et al., 2018; Stermac et al., 2020).

In Ontario, universities are legally required to have accessible formal resources for students who are survivors of sexual violence, such as student counseling services (MacCharles, 2016). These resources may aid students by providing options such as exam accommodations, and safety planning (CCI Research Inc, 2019). However, formal resources are often not utilized by students due to lack of knowledge of resources, and

**Significance of the Current Study**

Research on campus sexual violence is not a new field of study (Warshaw, 1988). There are well documented studies on consequences following sexual violence that survivors may experience including physical, psychological, and social repercussions (Carey et al., 2018; Jaconis et al., 2020; Jina & Thomas, 2013; Logan et al., 2007; Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network, 2021; Rothman et al., 2019; Sabri et al., 2019; Shaw et al., 2021; Zilkens et al., 2017). For survivors of sexual violence who are also post-secondary students, they may additionally suffer from academic challenges such as lower GPA, delayed or unsuccessful degree completion, disengagement from academics, and limited post-graduate degree use (Baker et al., 2016; Banyard et al., 2020; Jordan et al., 2014; Mengo & Black, 2016; Neville & Heppner, 1999; Potter et al., 2018; Stermac et al., 2020). However, to my knowledge, there are no current qualitative studies that explore both academic and university experience changes following sexual violence, as well as the influence of the university as a community during the recovery process.

Sexual violence continues to be an ongoing public health problem, and the rates at which it impacts women enrolled in post-secondary education is unjust (CCI Research Inc, 2019). A study that allows for the exploration of how the university community influences the experiences of survivors of sexual violence may provide insightful information regarding how students can be better supported to prevent lasting impacts. With the understanding that university is much more than just GPA, the proposed study will expand on the current literature by considering both academic and university
experiences such as the survivors’ fulfillment of academic responsibilities like
maintaining their GPA, meaningfully engaging in their learning, and participating in
extracurricular or leadership opportunities. The central question guiding this research
project was, “How do unwanted sexual experiences impact female student’s academic
and university experiences?”
METHODS

Methodology

First, as a novice researcher, it is imperative to explicitly state that the guiding philosophical worldview informing this research was concurrently social constructivist, and feminist theory. Although philosophical worldviews are often covertly embedded within research, worldviews impact researcher’s personal knowledge and beliefs, thus how “we” make meaning of research (Creswell & Creswell, 2018b). Social constructivists believe that individuals create meaning of their experiences and aim to rely on both their own and the participants’ views regarding the topic of interest (Creswell & Creswell, 2018b). An important element of social constructivism is the principle that the subjective meanings individuals develop are not simple notions, but complex impressionable beliefs influenced by others, as well as historical and cultural norms (Creswell & Creswell, 2018b).

The epistemological foundation of social constructivism supports the use of qualitative methods. Qualitative methods use words as data and aim to generate rich meanings (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Ethnography is one of the many research designs within the qualitative paradigm. Ethnography has origins in cultural anthropology where researchers would immerse themselves within a culture, and depend on participant observation, field notes, and collections of artifacts to develop perspective on a specific culture (Cruz & Higginbottom, 2013). A strength of ethnography is the process of learning about people by learning from them, in a collaborative process (Roper & Shapira, 2000). For the purpose of the current study, focused ethnography was used.
Focused ethnography is a branch of ethnography that is problem focused, yet still allows the emergence of the emic view of participants’ perspectives (Cruz & Higginbottom, 2013; Roper & Shapira, 2000). Unlike traditional ethnography, focused ethnography explores a specific problem within subcultures of people (Rashid et al., 2019). The specific problem for this study was how sexual violence within post-secondary education impacted education and university experiences, while the subculture of people included female university students who had been affected by sexual violence.

I selected focused ethnography as the research method because I believe that although sexual violence happens to individuals, it is not an individual problem, but rather a community problem. This view is aligned with Neville and Heppner's (1999) CIEMSAR model. This allowed for the exploration of individual, social, and cultural influences of the university that impacted the participant’s academic and university experiences post-sexual violence. This allowed for a richer understanding of the emic view of participants’ perspectives on how sexual violence impacted their university environment.

While focused ethnography does not require the researcher to completely immerse themselves within a culture over a long-time span, the narrow focus and shorter study duration does require researchers to have a greater amount of background knowledge regarding the topic (Rashid et al., 2019). I have been a student within the university setting for the previous six years and worked within the University of Windsor’s Sexual Misconduct Response and Prevention Office from 2018-2021. Through my work with the office, I facilitated workshops on the topic of sexual violence resistance for women completing their university education. This experience provided me an opportunity to
develop connections with advocates within the university community, and with survivors of sexual violence.

Another important criterion for conducting a focused ethnography project is to work with experts within the field (Crawley, 2010; LeCompte & Schensul, 1999). In partial fulfillment of my master’s degree, I have been advised by a committee who are experts with qualitative design, nursing science, as well as an expert in the field of psychology and gender studies. The external advisor holds a Canada Research Chair in Sexual Violence, and developed the previously noted workshop, Enhanced Assess Acknowledge, Act program (EAAA) (Senn et al., 2015)

**Participants & Recruitment**

Women undergraduate students were recruited to participate via purposive sampling. Purposive sampling was essential to ensure that the women participating in the study could share rich information for the study’s purpose, in this case, how sexual violence at the post-secondary level may impact their university experiences (Gray et al., 2017c). Data was collected until saturation was achieved, which resulted in interviewing nine participants (Creswell & Creswell, 2018b).

To be eligible to participate, participants needed to meet the following inclusion criteria: (1) identify as a woman, (2) be English-speaking, (3) be enrolled at the University of Windsor, and (4) have experienced at least one account of sexual violence based on the SES-SFV (Koss, 2007). The research only included women due to literature indicating the disproportionate rates women experience sexual violence compared to men, as well as differences in the lived experiences during their post-assault recovery
when compared to men (Young et al., 2018). I actively aimed to recruit diverse participants by utilizing multiple recruitment strategies to targeted campus groups.

Recruitment was dependent on electronic means, as the COVID-19 pandemic closed on-campus interaction throughout data collection. Recruitment occurred in two ways: email recruitment to selected groups of students, and social media. Each of the recruitment strategies included an URL which directed the individual to the online survey for phase one of the study. Phase one of the study was a screener including a demographic questionnaire. Phase two of the study included a virtual semi-structured interview to explore the impact sexual violence had on the student’s academic and university experiences.

**Data Collection**

**Phase One - Eligibility Screen**

Prior to beginning the online survey, participants were provided a consent form regarding disclosing personal information and participating in the research (see Appendix B). Once consent was obtained, the interested person became a participant. Participants were then directed to complete an eligibility screening survey (see Appendix C).

The questionnaire was completed on a secure online survey program, Qualtrics. When used properly, Qualtrics can safely store protected health information (Qualtrics, 2020). The participants were asked to answer demographic information first, and then questions specific to their unwanted sexual experiences.

The first purpose for the online questionnaire was to determine eligibility. To be eligible for the interview, participants needed to be a student at the University of Windsor, identify as a woman, be English speaking, and have experienced at least one
encounter of sexual violence based on the SES-SFV (Koss, 2007). Screening for sexual violence was completed with the use of Koss’ et al. (2007) Sexual Experiences Survey-Short Form Victimization (SES-SFV) (please see Appendix C).

The SES-SFV asks a set of questions that meet the legal definitions of various types of sexual assault without explicitly labelling the assaultive behaviour. This method of asking questions can help assess and identify incidents of unwanted sexual experiences, that may be unacknowledged by individuals. The SES-SFV describes four different unwanted sexual acts including unwanted touching or kissing, unwanted oral sex, unwanted vaginal penetration, and unwanted anal penetration, as well as perpetrator’s attempts at forcing these acts. The SES-SFV also provides an opportunity for participants to report if these unwanted acts have occurred more than once, the gender of the perpetrator, and whether or not they believe that they have been raped.

The SES-SFV is a revised version of Koss’ original Sexual Experiences Survey which includes more specific unwanted sexual acts, varied coercive behaviours, and the role of drugs and alcohol (Koss, 1985; Koss et al., 2007). The revised version has been found to uphold adequate psychometric properties, including two-week retest reliability (Johnson et al., 2017). Additionally, results of the SES-SFV have shown similar consistency when administered in person or online (Johnson et al., 2017).

The second purpose of the eligibility screen was to demographic information to describe those who participated and those who continued to Phase Two. This helped to contextualize the participants interview responses and provided insights into their academic and university experiences. Collecting demographic information also helped
identify which undergraduate students were interested in participating, and if there were any common patterns in who was being recruited and participating.

**Phase Two - Interviews**

The participants of Phase One who were eligible and consented to be contacted for an interview, were contacted via email by myself. The semi-structured interviews were arranged at a time that accommodated the participant’s preference. The interviews lasted between approximately 45-90 minutes. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, all interviews were conducted virtually via Microsoft Teams. The interviews were recorded for the purpose of transcription.

Prior to the interviews, participants were sent a second consent form to review before participating in the interview (see Appendix D). The interviews started with obtaining verbal consent, and brief introductions. The participants were informed that they could ask for clarification or take breaks whenever they needed. I followed an interview guide for each semi-structured interview (see Appendix E). I concluded all interviews by asking if the participant had any additional thoughts that they would like to share, or any information they would like to clarify. I also took time to review resources available for survivors of sexual violence with each participant (see Appendix F).

Immediately after the interview, I journaled observations noted during the interview. Journal entries included significant or interesting findings, and general feelings regarding how the interview went. This method of data collection is referred to as field notes which considers participant observations and can contribute to a richer data collection and rigorous data analysis (Rashid et al., 2019).
Data Analysis

Roper and Shapira’s (2000) process to data analysis was used throughout this research project. Through reviewing historical work of researchers and reflecting on their own experiences of analyzing data, Roper and Shapira (2000) developed strategies to inductively analyze ethnographic data. Roper and Shapira (2000) steps are basic enough to provide novice researchers tangible direction, while still promoting the use of techniques advocated by expert level researchers.

Roper and Shapira’s (2000), steps for data analysis include coding for descriptive labels, searching for patterns, developing generalizations, and creating memos. The steps of the process are not linear, rather the researcher should continuously move between the steps in an exploratory fashion to immerse themselves within the data and possibly expand their findings.

Prior to analyzing the data through codes, I transcribed each interview. Throughout the transcription process, I began memoing to record initial ideas, help recognize personal reflections and bias, and cognitively engage with the data (Roper & Shapira, 2000b). Memoing was a continuous practice throughout all steps of the data analysis. After all the interviews were transcribed to satisfaction, I began to formulate codes.

The goal of coding includes breaking the large set of data into smaller, workable sets of information (Roper & Shapira, 2000). Coding can include labelling words, or quotes that may represent an answer to a research question, or an important development of the data (Roper & Shapira, 2000). I continuously reviewed the proposed definitions of
my created codes to ensure that there was consistency between the codes. This was important for the rigor of the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Once patterns began to emerge through the codes, I attempted to find more abstract level concepts or themes to help explain the data. A goal of ethnographic studies is to be able construct theoretical understandings of events and activities of a culture while considering both the participants emic worldview and their own perspectives of the data (Roper & Shapira, 2000). A strategy to achieve this is by finding linkages between the codes, patterns, and emerging themes. I used ATLAS.ti version 4.7.2 to assist with data analysis. ATLAS.ti helped to sort codes into code groups based on patterns I identified, which helped in developing themes once linkages were illustrated. My co-advisors and I met regularly to continuously review the development of themes. Themes were only accepted once my advisors and I were confident that the themes were independent of each other, represented enough data to be considered a theme, and captured the stories of the participants sufficiently (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

**Ethical Considerations**

I understand that I was in a position of great privilege to have the opportunity to conduct research and did not take this opportunity lightly. I understood that I was responsible for protecting the rights and wellbeing of the research participants while they participated in the study. Ethical considerations were factored into all parts of the research and was guided by the University of Windsor’s Research Ethic Board (REB). Ethical clearance by REB was obtained prior to beginning data collection.

Self-determination was actively promoted throughout the research process. Right to self-determination is largely based on the principle of respect for person (Gray et al.,
Self-determination was promoted by ensuring participants were informed about the research and freely consented to participate. The purpose of the research study was included within the recruitment strategies, while the potential benefits and risks were included within the consent forms (see Appendix B and Appendix D). Participants were informed throughout the recruitment methods, consent forms, and initiation of data collection that it was solely their decision to participate, and that their consent to participate could be withdrawn at any time.

Participants were informed that the information they shared would be kept confidential between myself (the interviewer) and thesis committee (co-advisors). To ensure confidentiality of participants was upheld, participants were asked to choose a pseudonym that was used to protect their identity (Creswell & Creswell, 2018c). All identifying information was replaced with the pseudonym as soon as possible following the interview. No copies of the original data were saved without the pseudonyms. Any potentially identifying information shared throughout the interviews was generalized, i.e., instead of a specific sports team, I inputted “sports team.”

To promote respect for person, I used people-first language, respected the language the participant chose to use, and included a small thank you token for participation. People-first language always situates the person before any other labels. For example, survivor of sexual violence, rather than sexual violence survivor. While all participants had a history of sexual violence, not all the participants necessarily labeled themselves as a survivor, or victim. I transcribed interviews verbatim which respected the language used by participants. I asked for clarification regarding their language, when needed. If a person does label themselves in some way such as a “survivor” or “victim,”
it can carry powerful connotations regarding how the individual situates themselves in the world and their recovery process (Thompson, 2000). A small thank you token of a $20 gift card to Starbucks was given to each participant as a recognition of their time and contribution to research.

Research with survivors of sexual assault has been found to have positive benefits for the participants including feeling like their contribution to science helps others, gaining insights about their experiences, and feeling comfortable speaking about their experiences with someone else (Kirkner et al., 2019). However, these positive benefits may not have been felt by all participants, and it did not guarantee that there were not negative effects from the research participation. To mediate possible negative or stressful impacts felt from participating in a research study that requires sharing intimate experiences, a planned interview guide was established (see Appendix E). Participants were also given community and campus resources that could be used for help-seeking, immediate crisis intervention, and self-care practices (see Appendix F). My student email was provided to facilitate participants asking any questions or voicing any concerns about the research process or provided resources.

Rigor

Rigor within qualitative research is established through the efforts of the researchers to ensure congruency between their framework, and research methods to produce trustworthy findings (Gray et al., 2017b). Rigor was considered at all stages of the research process during this project. I used Lincoln and Guba’s (1985) criterion for establishing trustworthiness and Maxwell’s (2005) critiques on validity to promote the development of rigor.
**Trustworthiness and Validity**

Since the rise of qualitative research, there has been speculation in the proper terminology for defining the rigor of its methodology (Whittemore et al., 2001). Lincoln and Guba (1985) popularized the term trustworthiness which aimed at publishing findings that were “worth paying attention to” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Lincoln and Guba (1985) proposed a criterion for evaluating qualitative research that is widely used which assesses for credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

Meanwhile, Maxwell (2005) adheres to the term validity. Validity is defined as the correctness or credibility of research (Maxwell, 2005; Whittemore et al., 2001). Maxwell (2005) explained that for researchers to achieve validity, they must acknowledge the ways in which their research conclusions may be wrong, while implementing strategies to support validity.

For the purpose of this thesis project, I used strategies from both Lincoln and Guba’s (1985) trustworthiness and Maxwell’s (2005) validity. I made this decision with the understanding that both concepts can be applied to qualitative nursing science, and the attributes of the two concepts would contribute to the thoroughness of this project (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Maxwell, 2005; Whittemore et al., 2001).

Maxwell (2005) stresses the importance for researchers to think about plausible validity threats in relation to their research, rather than simply writing about validity in terms of broad strategies. Maxwell (2005) argues that too often researchers list the ways in which they could hypothetically protect against validity threats, without applying it to their research. Maxwell (2005) compared this approach to validity with magic, wherein researchers will list protective strategies and believe it will magically protect research.
from validity threats. This standpoint from Maxwell (2005) resonated with me. Therefore, I chose to acknowledge how two broad validity threats proposed by Maxwell (2005) could affect my research, followed by how I used strategies to protect against these threats. The strategies to protect against validity threats co-align with Lincoln and Guba’s (1995) criterion for achieving trustworthiness.

**Researcher Bias.** The first anticipated possible validity threat was researcher bias. Researcher bias includes what the researcher brings to the research, whether conscious and subconscious, that has the capability of skewing results (Lewis, 2009; Maxwell, 2005). This may include personal beliefs, worldviews, experiences, or preferences (Maxwell, 2005). Unacknowledged researcher bias can contribute to issues such as how the researcher determines the inclusion and interpretation of data (Lewis, 2009). Researchers conducting focused ethnographies may be at an even greater risk for bias if they are already familiar with the research area, as this could contribute to preconceptions (Cruz & Higginbottom, 2013). Prior to starting the project, I acknowledged that I have similar membership to the community that I would be working with, as I am a current young, female, post-secondary school student. I have been involved in sexual violence work for approximately four years, which resulted in starting the proposed study with familiarity and some preconceived notions.

To protect against research bias, I participated in continuous reflexivity throughout the research process. Reflexivity is the act of practicing deep self-reflection regarding big questions like how and why I as the researcher, and participants act, think, and believe (Rashid et al., 2019). Rather than attempting to eliminate or ignore the aspects of self that researchers bring into the research, reflexivity challenges researchers
to be transparent in how they may influence the research process (Creswell & Creswell, 2018a). To support reflexivity, I disclosed how I am connected to the research within the introduction of Methods. Practicing reflexivity also helped to achieve confirmability by addressing potential bias which helped establish integrity of the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

I also practiced reflexivity throughout the data collecting process through reflexive journals. I used Patton’s Triangulated Inquiry (see Figure 3) approach to reflexive questions to guide my reflexivity through journal entries. Patton’s Triangulated Inquiry approach examines the connectedness and experiences of the researcher, those who are being studied (participants), and those who receive the study (audience) (Patton, 2014; Rashid et al., 2019).

**Figure 3**

*Patton’s Triangulated Inquiry*
In addition to reflexivity, I searched the data for discrepant data. Discrepant data is data that does not appear to fit well with the rest of the patterns the researcher is generating (Maxwell, 2005). Discrepant data could indicate that the researcher is being influenced by bias.

The act of searching and acknowledging discrepant data could provide evidence to alternative conclusions, but it can be challenging (Maxwell, 2005). I used ATLAS.ti to help identify discrepant data, through organizing the data into groups and subgroups. This helped identify data that did not appear to fit (Altmann, 2013). Through data analysis, I sought assistance from my thesis advisors to review my data. This process of rechecking data is a form of peer debriefing and can promote credibility as another individual reviews the data for interpretations (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, Nowell et al., 2017).

Reactivity. The second possible validity threat is reactivity. Reactivity is the phenomenon of participants changing their behaviour because they are being observed (Maxwell, 2005). In the interview setting, reactivity in the way of changed behaviour may not be as evident, however, social desirability bias may be prominent. Social desirability is the tendency for participants to alter their intended responses to be more socially acceptable (Lavrakas, 2008). The act of sharing intimate experiences such as sexual violence, coupled with being in a possible unfamiliar position as a research participant, can contribute to feelings of anxiety, and discomfort that may result in wanting to conform to social norms. Minimization of sexual assault experiences to adhere
to social norms is a phenomenon found within literature, therefore minimization of sexual assault could have also been a possibility with this research as well (Holland & Cortina, 2017).

To protect against reactivity, I first acknowledged the power imbalances that are inherent to the research process. To avoid the participants feeling uncomfortable, I actively aimed to give control to the participants. I practiced mitigating power imbalances by accommodating the participants to the best of my abilities. For example, I ensured that the interview was conducted at a time and place that was convenient and comfortable for the participants, ensured that the participants knew that they had control over the use of video and reminded them that they had the right to withdraw consent at any time. I adhered to the interview guide, while also allowing participants to expand and add to their answers (Maxwell, 2005).

In addition to attempting to neutralize power imbalances, I also attempted to collect rich data. Rich data was achieved through the means of multiple data collection methods including transcripts verbatim, and interview notes of nuanced behaviours, and initial thoughts (Creswell & Creswell, 2018a; Maxwell, 2005). This allowed me to compare both what was said, to what was noticed, as well as what was felt through personal reflections. These multiple observations added to credibility (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). Data was collected until saturation was reached. The methods of data collection, and participants were described in detail which can aid in transferability (Lincoln and Guba, 1985).
RESULTS

Description of Participants

The online survey which included demographic information, and the SES-SFV (Koss et al., 2007) resulted in 151 surveys received (including partial surveys). Following the online survey, participants were invited to share their contact information to allow me to contact them through email to complete a virtual semi-structured interview. In total nine woman participated in the semi-structured interview.

One of the goals of the study was to have diversity within the study participants. Diversity was promoted through recruitment efforts by promoting and inviting students from various areas of the university including different groups, clubs, and faculties. For the eligibility screen, the majority of participants reported either being between 17-19 (n=50), or 20-22 years old (n=53). There were less participants between the ages of 22-25 (n=13), and 26+ years old (n=19). Additionally, a majority of the participants within the eligibility screen reported their sexual orientation as heterosexual (n=84) or bisexual (n=19). A minority of participants reported their orientation as asexual (n=4), unsure (n=6), or other (n=9). For the participants who chose other, some participants specified their orientation as pansexual (n=2), demisexual (n=1) and queer (n=1). No participants reported having a sexual orientation as lesbian or gay.

Participation for the eligibility screen was completed through various departments including Faculties of Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences (n=45), Science (n=43), Education (n=14), Human Kinetics (n=14), Engineering (n=5), and Graduate Studies (n=3). All participants in the eligibility screen had passing grade point averages (GPAs)
with variation within the grade ranges as follows: above 80% (n=80), between 70-79.9% (n=39), between 60-69.9% (n=9), and between 50-59.9% (n=7).

To continue with the study, participants needed to provide contact information through a secondary Qualtrics survey. I received 22 completed surveys with contact information of interested participants. After screening potential interview participants for eligibility, and confirming their interest, there was a total of nine participants who continued with interviews.

Similar demographics were seen within the nine interview participants, as the 151 participants who completed the eligibility screening. The majority of the participants were between the ages of 17 to 19 years (n=5), however there were participants within each age category. The majority of participants were heterosexual (n=7), except one participant who identified as bisexual, and one participant who was unsure of her orientation. Participation was seen across the following faculties Faculty of Science (n=3), Faculty of Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences (n=2), Faculty of Human Kinetics (n=1), Faculty of Education (n=1), Faculty of Engineering (n=1), and Faculty of Graduate Studies (n=1). Self-reported GPAs were also similar between the 151 participants, and the nine participants who completed the interviews. The majority of the interview participants reported GPAs of 80% and higher (n=5), while three participants reported having a GPA between 70-79.9%, and one participant reported having a GPA between 60-69.9%. Although not asked during the eligibility screening, two interview participants were women of colour, with one participant being an international student.

All participants who participated in the interview experienced at least one unwanted sexual experience. Through the SES-SFV, unwanted sexual experiences were
divided into different categories including unwanted touching such as fondling, kissing, or removal of clothing, oral sex, vaginal penetration, and anal penetration, as well as whether the perpetrator attempted these acts but was not successful at completing them (e.g., the participant could stop it before it happened, or a bystander walked in). The majority of participants (n=8) experienced sexual violence since starting university. These eight participants all reported that they had experienced at least three separate accounts of sexual violence since starting university. One participant disclosed experiencing sexual violence prior to starting university but was dealing with the ramifications of the violence including managing the outcome of her court trial at the time of the interview. All participants only experienced sexual violence from male perpetrators.

**Themes**

Four main themes were identified through analysing nine interviews. The themes included ‘Personal Changes’, ‘Social Connectedness’, ‘Acceptance of Rape Culture’, and ‘Student Experience’.

**Personal Changes**

For the participants in this study, personal changes included mental hardships, and how participants regained a sense of control that they felt was taken from them through the sexual violence. All nine participants spoke about personal changes that occurred following their experiences with sexual violence.

**Mental Hardships.** All participants shared perceived changes in their mental health and wellbeing following their experience with sexual violence. The changes in
their mental health and wellbeing affected their interactions with others, alcohol consumption, and physical health.

Four participants shared how the amount of trust they were willing to give when making new friends or interacting with men was altered following their experiences with sexual violence. Bunny explained how she does not easily trust people anymore which has affected her ease of making friends, "I have def obviously been a lot more wary of people and making friendships, I'm not as easily trusting as I was before.” Similarly, Irene’s explained that she developed trust issues following her experiences of sexual violence and she became fearful of anyone knocking on her door, "I had some trust issues, and even if someone is to knock at my door, I used to be feel scared." Pink Panther explained how she has become more conscious when interacting with men, "I've fully had like a wake up call and like a change in how I like even think about the interactions that I have with like men in general, and then engineering men especially.”

Emma shared that she also became fearful of men because she did not trust them not to hurt her, "I think I was probably scared of men for like a little while, because I just I didn't trust them to not hurt me.”

In addition to altered trust and new developed fears, four participants also shared changes in their overall demeanor which impacted their classroom participation, and their emotional wellbeing. Dakar explained feeling as if she did not want to “be anything” during her first year, "In first year, I did not. I didn’t wanna do anything with school. I didn’t wanna be anything in a way. I kind of just had no motivation.” Pink Daisy shared that her demeanor within classroom settings changed from being more of a class clown to being more reserved,
I definitely like used to be like I guess you would say like a class clown or like I would like, not like a class clown like the ones that the teachers hate, like ones that like a teacher would like laugh about you know. Uh, but definitely now I'm like more quiet

Similarly, Pink Panther explained how following her experiences with sexual violence her interactions with friends changed, "For a few months, I was just not the bubbly chatty ‘wanna go out and do things’ person that I usually am.” Dakar and Emma both shared that they became angrier following their experiences. Dakar explained, "I feel like ever since the unwanted sexual thing that happened, I kind of I've been, I've been getting mad more, and I've been losing patience. I would say 'cause I used to be really calm." Emma also explained, "I just held all this anger in that I didn't know how to express in a healthy way."

Participants’ changed emotional wellbeing also appeared to set a pattern of changed behaviours in relation to their intimate relationships with men, and their alcohol consumption. Orchid and Emma shared how they distanced themselves from situations where they may have to become intimate with men. Orchid explained how she avoids intimacy with men unless she has established a level of trust with them, "The whole like hookup culture. It’s like kind of hard for me now because I'm like I can't like do this now without like a certain level of trust.” Emma explained that following her sexual assault, she avoided going to bars, and no longer felt comfortable with her boyfriend touching her, “I like never wanted to go to the bar after that like I was super resistant like and when I went home to see my high school boyfriend and I was like I didn't want him to touch me." Meanwhile, Sunflower explained how her experiences of sexual violence
impacted her future interactions with other men as she explained that she became more likely to say yes to experiences that she was not enthusiastic about, "It almost kind of set like a pattern of me like saying yes to experiences like or not saying no to experiences, even if I didn't want them. 'Cause I thought like I had too."

Additionally, while Emma shared that she reduced her consumption of alcoholic beverages, and willingness to attend bars, Dakar explained that she started drinking alcohol for the first time following her sexual assault, despite consuming alcohol being against her religious beliefs.

I wasn’t OK 'cause I I started doing things I never did before and then started taking things I’ve never taken before and it had gotten so bad…It was terrible. I never, I never drank. It's not like in my religion, right?

For some participants (n=5) the emotional turmoil they experienced following their sexual violence impacted their health both mentally and physically. Pink Panther described herself as if she had shut down following her unwanted sexual experience, “Right before the second lock down, is when the like act occurred. And then when things start to shut down like I kind of shut down too." Emma shared that she felt increased anxiety going into second year following the sexual assault she experienced during her first year, "My anxiety going into second year after the first sexual assault were really high." Irene described experiencing extreme anxiety as well as physical consequences, "I had some trauma. I had some physical ailments like chronic migraine nausea, extreme anxiety, fear, then vertigo." Dakar shared that she began drinking alcohol following her court verdict, which subsequently impacted her mental wellbeing,
When the court stuff happened, my whole trial. That's when I started drinking and it was always like, at the end, like I would always like start crying and then it was like there was always a downfall. It wasn't like the happy drunk. It was like this sad drunk.

**Regaining Control.** The experience of feeling the need to redevelop a sense of control following their experience of sexual violence was described by five participants. Participants used strategies such as committing themselves to schoolwork, travelling, exercising, and therapy as a way to redevelop that sense of control.

Sunflower explained that she enjoys school because it is a factor that she can control more easily compared to other parts of her life,

I think that's why I kind of like school so much is because I feel like I can control that and it's a bit easier for me to control than obviously how I feel emotionally or like things that happened in my life.

Emma made the decision to travel internationally for a semester following her second unwanted sexual experience. Emma explained that she imagined travelling as an opportunity to ‘take on the world’ and ‘reinvent’ herself. Through doing so, she was also able to feel a sense of regaining the control and power the men who assaulted her took.

Emma explained,

I think traveling definitely had a big part of it [redeveloping her identity post-sexual assaults] and being like I get to go and meet new people. Who don't know me, who don't know my story and yeah, that was definitely a part of it. And knowing that, knowing that I was able to take that control. And like no one else
had the power. Whereas like I felt like, these other two men, like had this like power over me.

Irene also travelled following her experience of sexual violence; however, it was to return to her home country to be provided with support from “a very close knitted group” during a time where she felt “physically very weak and sick.” Irene explained that through therapy and medication, she has “overcome those ailments.” Irene shared that she now has the “energy to proceed in life: and that she now feels “in full control” of her life.

Rose and Dakar both shared how exercising has become a part of their routine to process their experiences and regulate their emotions which may also contribute to their sense of control over their emotional wellbeing. For Rose, working out is a way to help offset her feelings of anger or sadness. Dakar shared that working out for her is a way to “cooldown” and “not think much.” Dakar explained that if she cannot stop thinking while working out, exercising at least allows her to process her emotions in a calmer way. Dakar explained,

Or when I think, I think it through and then I figure out why I'm thinking what I'm thinking and it's just like a it's a thing where it's like I can solve it calmly right?

So, it wouldn’t be with anger and stuff.

Social Connectedness

Social connectedness included participants’ experiences of disclosing to both formal and informal resources as well as their motivation and challenges in doing so. Social connectedness also includes the subtheme social repercussions. Social
repercussions explores how participants’ relationships with others were impacted following their experiences.

**Experience of Disclosing.** At the time of the interviews, all participants (n=9) had disclosed their experience(s) of sexual violence to at least one person. In all cases (n=9), participants first disclosed to informal resources such as family or friends before disclosing to anyone else.

Not all participants disclosed intentionally. Both Pink Panther and Orchid realized that they had been sexually assaulted due to their questioning their experiences. In both circumstances, Pink Panther and Orchid felt comfortable disclosing. Irene shared that she did not want to tell her family, but they witnessed her husband physically assaulting her, which started the conversation. Irene explained, “I did not want to tell them in the beginning, but my husband just slapped me at my nephew’s birthday party in front of everyone, so that time it's just obvious to them.”

Participants shared different motivators to disclosing. Emma shared that she felt a need to tell someone, but she waited until she was travelling to tell someone about her experience because she felt more secure telling someone who was “not connected” to her life at home. Emma shared, "I just wanted to tell you because you're not connected to my life at home. You're not. I just needed someone to know." Emma explained that her experience of disclosing gave her confidence to speak freely about her experiences, "Once I was able just tell one person I just I felt like it was almost like the floodgates like I was like, ‘Oh, I can tell one person, I can just I can talk about it freely.’"

Three participants also shared their experience of disclosing to friends whom they knew had also been assaulted, or in reaction to receiving a disclosure from them. Rose
shared that she reached out to a friend who she knew, “has gone through the same thing.” Rose explained, "I told mostly pretty much all of it, she like, she knows what it's like. So, we just kind of talked about it and that was it." Similarly, Pink Daisy reached out to friends who she knew had similar experiences as she believed that they would be more understanding. Pink Daisy explained, “They were definitely like caring and that you know there was like a bunch of like, ‘I’m sorry’ and like ‘I'm here for you’, and like they definitely like were because they've had their own experiences.” Following her disclosure, Pink Daisy shared that she ‘felt a weight lifted off her shoulders’ knowing that she could go to them for support. Bunny also spoke of an experience of receiving a disclosure and in reaction disclosing her experience. Bunny shared, “I was mostly just like, she told me about something that happened to her. I was like, ‘Oh my God, like I've also been assaulted’ and that was the end of that.”

Informal supports provided an opportunity for participants to be connected to formal supports. Orchid shared how following her realization that she had been assaulted, her friend and former resident assistant (RA) provided her support in connecting with the Sexual Misconduct Office. Orchid shared, “I knocked on his door and I was like, ‘Hey? I think, I maybe need to like email someone.’ And he’s like, ‘Come on in.’” Dakar also shared how when she disclosed to a friend who attended another university, her friend encouraged her to reach out to the university’s counseling services. Dakar explained, “I was telling her [friend] I was so stressed with school and she's the one who told me, ‘Why you don’t apply for that [counseling], like why don’t you try to talk to them? Book an appointment.’”
**Formal Supports.** Formal supports were utilized by five of the participants. Formal services that were used by participants included both university and community provided resources. University of Windsor provided resources included the MySSP app, University of Windsor’s Sexual Misconduct office, and student counselling services. Community provided resources included community health center services, police, women’s shelters, and court services.

Participants shared how using formal services provided feelings of understanding, validation, and closure. Irene shared how she was already in counselling through the mySSP app prior to her acknowledging her unwanted sexual experiences as sexual and domestic violence. Irene explained that the therapy sessions helped her realize her marriage was “not a normal experience.” Pink Panther explained that reaching out to formal services eased the mental hardships she was experiencing. Pink Panther shared that she was still feeling the “numbness” she experienced post-sexual assault until she emailed University of Windsor’s counseling services. Pink Panther experienced a feeling of relief once she connected with her counselor, she explained, “We clicked very well, which is very fortunate for me because I just, after one session I was like, OK, I'll just keep chatting with you and then we're good.” Similarly, Orchid explained that the process of, “hearing like an actual professional breakdown everything you're feeling like things that you don't know you're feeling, and like talks through them,”was very helpful to her mental health. Even Dakar, who struggled mentally following her court hearing process, explained she experienced some benefits through the court process. Dakar shared, "It [court process] definitely opened my eyes in many ways, and it gave me a closure, because I did hear a lot of things, I wanted to hear."
Despite the overall positive responses reported by the five participants who utilized formal resources following their sexual violence, barriers were identified by four participants that delayed or prevented their use of formal resources. The fear of not being believed was shared by both Emma and Dakar. Emma explained, "At freshly 19 years old like, what are the chances someone’s gonna believe you?" Dakar shared that despite knowing that resources were available, she was hesitant to use them because she doubted that she would be believed. Dakar explained, "The resources were there, right? But I never, I never like reached out. I never. I don't know why I always thought like they wouldn't believe it anyway."

Pink Daisy explained that she would not want to “relive the situation” by having to explain her assault during counseling. Meanwhile, Sunflower felt like if she used resources, she could be taking them away from others who need them more, or that she was exaggerating her needs. Sunflower explained, "It's almost like I feel like there's a lot of people that would need that more, and I wouldn't. Like it would feel kind of like a little bit of like over exaggeration." Similarly, Emma believed her experience “was too far gone” for the resources to be useful. Emma explained, “Like, as we know, like it's, it's very challenging to prove, prove sexual assault, after that set what 72 hours?" This may also indicate that Emma believed that supports for survivors of sexual violence were primarily hospital or legal centered which can be more time sensitive.

**Social Repercussions.** The experience of sexual violence impacted the social relationships the participants had with others. Five participants spoke of how their relationships with others changed following their experience with sexual violence. Pink Panther described herself as “shutting down” following her second experience with
sexual violence. Pink Panther explained, “I had no desire to socialize. I wouldn’t even really like FaceTime with friends or like chat with friends.” Pink Daisy also shared, “I find myself distancing myself from other people,” and she contributed this to not being, “100% sure how to deal with it [sexual assault].”

Losing friends was also recognized as an experience four participants went through following their sexual violence. Dakar shared how she did not receive a positive reaction from any individual until almost three years after her sexual assault. In response to disclosing her sexual assault, Dakar explained, "I, I lost all my friends. Even family wise, I wasn't living at home for awhile.” Dakar shared that she continues to feel negative associations from people from high school who know about her assault. Dakar explained, “I still do [feel negative associations] because in Windsor at like everybody knows each other and stuff. So, if I were ever to see them in person it's like I get that hit [worry of judgement].”

Similarly, Irene shared that following her separation from her husband, she was concerned about the rumours he was spreading about her. Due to this, she chose to separate herself from society to avoid further issues. Irene explained,

What happens like my husband just tried to represent me as a, what can I say? As a characterless woman to my relatives to his family, and my family. For that reason, I felt it's better to just remain quiet and apart from the society for a few months so that it cools down. And I do not have to face any unwanted or unexpected comments or unexpected treatment from every, anyone.

Irene further explained that she still has doubts about how their “common friends” will “perceive” her as she feels that most of them were closer to her husband due to his
extroverted personality. Due to this, Irene continues to plan to focus on her career rather than be “anxious about pleasing people.”

Pink Panther explained that when she disclosed her second “major” sexual assault to her friends, their reaction was similar to “walking on eggshells” and awkward as if they, “didn't really know how to approach it and didn't know like what to say to me to make me feel OK.” Although she knew that her friends would be there to help her if she asked, she could tell that “everyone was a little uncomfortable.” In reflecting back, Pink Panther explains how, “their reaction didn't really faze me, 'cause I wasn't really feeling anything.”

For Pink Daisy and Bunny, their perpetrator was a friend, and after their sexual assault their friendships ended. Pink Daisy shared, "We used to like be like best friends and I kinda just like cut him off all ties after it happened." Bunny shared, "They [perpetrator] were my social circle. The entirety of it, yeah? He was my only friend at school."

**Acceptance of Campus Rape Culture**

Rape prone culture was previously defined as a culture wherein social contexts and dynamics make it more probable and acceptable for sexual violence to occur (Martin, 2016). Almost all participants (n=8) spoke of ways in which society promotes rape prone culture. Rape prone culture, or campus rape culture, was evident through the normalization of sexual violence and tolerance of toxic masculinity.

**Normalization of Sexual Violence.** Normalization of sexual violence was evident in how the survivors understood their experiences, and through the disclosures that they had received. Preconceived beliefs of what is expected for women who are
university students and or within relationships contributed to the normalization of sexual violence for five participants. Sunflower believed that her experience of sexual violence was something that everyone deals with, she shared, “I didn't really realize that a lot of that wasn't OK. I just thought it was something everybody kind of deals with or something that's expected.” Similarly, Pink Panther explained,

I find engineering is in a situation right now where like the men who do it, they do it. The men who don't do it, like let it happen. And the women who experience it just take it because that's what we're taught like, not taught to do, but that's what it's like, “Oh, whatever this is just what's supposed to happen.”

The normalization of sexual violence also impacted participant’s ability to recognize and label their experience as sexual violence. Pink Panther and Orchid both explained that they did not realize that they had experienced a sexual assault until discussing it with other people. Pink Panther shared that another woman who was assaulted called her and asked about her own experiences which made Pink Panther realize that she experienced an assault, “Well like for me when it happened, I didn't even really realize what happened and then after she said that I was like, ‘Oh well then maybe?’, I was like, ‘Is this bad?’” In Orchid’s situation she did not realize she had been assaulted until eight months after it had happened. Orchid explained that she was speaking with her resident advisor (RA) about the incident in an anecdotal way when he pointed out that it did not seem to be a situation where consent was obtained,

We were joking about bad experiences that we've made with boys in general. And I like kind of like passively mentioned it, and RA was like, ‘What are you talking about?’; and I told him, and he's like, ‘That doesn't sound like consent’.
When sexual violence occurred within relationships normalization was noted due to preconceived beliefs of what is expected between a couple in relationships. Sunflower and Emma both shared that it took them time to realize their experiences were assaultive due to preconceived beliefs of what is expected in intimate relationships. Sunflower believed that her experience was something that everyone deals with, she shared, “I didn't really realize that a lot of that wasn't OK. I just thought it was something everybody kind of deals with or something that's expected." Sunflower further explained that her early experiences of sexual violence “set like a pattern of me like saying yes to experiences like or not saying no to experiences, even if I didn't want them. 'Cause I thought like I had too." Similarly, Emma shared that because her second experience occurred within a relationship it was easier for her to cope with because it was in alignment with what she believes society expects,

My first sexual assault was definitely harder on me than the second one because again, in intimate partner relationships like people don't often see that as sexual assault because you're in a relationship. You should have sex all the time. You know, like all those things that aren't true. But unfortunately, society sees as OK.

Similarly, Pink Daisy shared that when she disclosed her experience to her stepmom, she normalized the assault due to Pink Daisy’s previous friendship with the perpetrator. Pink Daisy explained, "I had told my stepmom, like I was really close to this person before it had happened, and my stepmom just said like, ‘Oh, I knew he had still liked you.'"

**Toxic Masculinity.** Toxic masculinity is a term that was originally defined as "the constellation of socially regressive male traits that serve to foster domination, the
devaluation of women, homophobia, and wanton violence" (Kupers, 2005). For the purpose of this project, toxic masculinity was used to describe exaggerated and harmful aspects of traditional masculine traits such as strength and dominance, which can contribute to the harm of others.

Three participants spoke about how they have learned to recognize and expect certain behaviours in male students including sexism, and defensiveness of other men. Pink Panther shared that she has become accustomed to recognizing sexism while speaking to men. Pink Panther explained,

It's gotten to a point where I just can snap on like, all of a sudden I'm like, oh, you're just like being subconsciously sexist to me. Like if someone is like interacting with me differently, I could. I pick up on it. Uhm, which is not. It's not great. Like it's not something men have to do. It's not something women have to do when talking to other women. So why should women have to do it when talking to men?

Sunflower and Orchid both identified how male classmates become defensive for other males. Sunflower shared that in response to a class discussion about a woman being sexually assaulted, she witnessed “a bunch of the guys in the class were commenting some like very disrespectful stuff, and were also saying things like the whole, ‘Oh well, like not all men are bad.’” In Orchid’s situation, she was part of a conversation regarding a male student who had sexually harassed a teaching assistant and people wanted to know who it was due to safety concerns. In response, the male classmate of Orchid’s explained, “Yeah like this is what happened but like it's like not really my place to say like I don't want to like ruin his name.”
Toxic masculinity was further exacerbated in environments where there was increased male presence, and traditional masculine traits were encouraged. Three participants spoke of concerns relating to the engineering faculty, and varsity athletic teams. Participants shared witnessing and experiencing violence, as well as lack of consequences for the perpetrators.

Pink Panther shared that she does not believe that “the energy in the classroom and like the environment that engineering produces” is a “good environment for women.” Pink Panther explained that within her engineering classes she witnessed sexism even towards the women professors. Pink Panther shared, "For my [name of engineering] class, the perfect female professor walked in and one of the male students said, ‘Oh my God, a woman teaching this class’.

Orchid described student residence as a “bunch of university guys and a lot of them play sports and it’s kind of a breeding ground for men who make bad decisions.” Orchid shared that she recognizes that varsity students within student residences ignoring standard rules that other students must follow is sometimes tolerated to avoid conflict. She explained,

I mean, they're [varsity students] told to wear mask. They'll like verbally abuse whatever staff member is doing their job... And it's just one of those things. Like there's a precedent that's being set, like the precedent that is said is that the rules don't apply. If the one rule doesn't apply

Emma voiced concern about the affluent status of varsity students as well, which prevented her from disclosing her first sexual assault after it occurred. Emma explained, "I didn't want to go to the athletic director because the [varsity sport] teams the fucking
pride and joy of the university like no ones gonna believe me, you know, and that's such a horrible thing to say."

Even while Emma was also a varsity athlete, she explained that she witnessed sexually harassment from a male coach within her team’s locker room. She shared,

He should have taught boys [sports team] or like coach men's [sports team] like he just was very, like, we had one girl on the team who identified as lesbian or was a lesbian and he came in and like called her a dyke in the dressing room.

Emma explained that at this time, she “already wasn’t playing much” because she was hurt, but after witnessing this altercation she “never really wanted to fully recover.”

**Student Experience**

Finally, all the participants (n=9) shared their experiences as students which included both their academic and university experiences, as well as future ambitions. Academic experiences included academic satisfaction, routines, and challenges. University experiences included their participation in groups, and leadership opportunities. Future ambitions included goals participants have regarding their remaining degree achievements, and post-graduation life.

**Academic Experiences.** Based on the self-reported online surveys, most participants (n=5) had a GPA over or equal to 80% at the time of the study. Orchid, Emma, Pink Panther, Rose, Sunflower, and Bunny all shared that they were satisfied with their academic work, and the grades they had received so far in their programs. Participants shared how they have achieved academic milestones such as Bunny overloading her courses to successfully switch majors, and Sunflower writing a
professional school entrance exam a year earlier than she had originally planned to and doing ‘really well’ on it.

Eight participants shared aspects of their academic routines that they rely on to achieve academic success. Bunny, Sunflower, and Rose stressed the importance of reviewing the syllabi and transferring the important dates into their personal calendar to be prepared.

Bunny and Rose both shared that organization of their classes had become an important part of their academic experience to manage their anxiety. Rose shared that her fear of falling behind in classes due to unforeseen circumstances is mediated by looking ahead, “I feel like at any given moment like something bad can happen and then it's really easy to fall behind, so, I like to look ahead.” For Bunny, class organization is important to her to mediate her anxiety and help her with her ‘focus issues’. Bunny shared, “I get really anxious, and organization keeps me like on task 'cause of my focus issues.”

Similarly, Dakar explained that prior to class, she needs to clean her desk area to help keep her focused on the class and not on the mess around her, ”The way I prepare honestly for class, my desk has to be clean. If my desk is not cleaned, then I will not focus 'cause I'm going to be focusing on everything that's messy.”

Participants also shared studying routines for classes that they have developed for their academic goals. Dakar, Orchid, Irene, and Pink Daisy shared how they take and review notes, watch videos from the lectures, and complete readings to help them understand the class material and succeed on exams. Pink Panther shared that she alters her studying methods to be more “applicable to the specific professor.” This includes
finding online resources, or previous lab questions rather than only practicing textbook questions.

Despite all participants achieving academic success in the form of passing GPAs, and establishing academic routines, eight participants shared how their experience of sexual violence negatively impacted their academics. Five participants shared that they had difficulties focusing on studying following their experience with sexual violence. Sunflower shared that when she is struggling with conflicts in her relationship, “it makes it a lot harder to study, to focus on my schoolwork.” Pink Panther, and Pink Daisy also shared how despite trying to study, their attempts were not productive due to their struggles to stay focused. Pink Panther shared, “It's like not productive. Uhm, where it's just kind of like I'm distracted thinking,” while Pink Daisy shared, “I’ll like open my textbook, but like I won't actually read it.” Dakar shared that her studying was hindered due to needing to focus on her court process, “‘I didn't study properly, like I couldn't study because I was focused on that [court].”

Orchid and Bunny shared how following their unwanted sexual experiences, they struggled to have energy to study. Orchid shared, “I definitely like didn't study 'cause like I just like had no like energy to do anything. It's kind of like, like get done what like needs to get done.” Similar to Sunflower, Bunny shared that she found it difficult to care about school while having conflict in her relationship following her unwanted sexual experience. Bunny shared that once she disclosed to her boyfriend she had been sexually assaulted by a peer, the conflicts within her relationship with her boyfriend also worsened,
My boyfriend would be upset like he would be like, ‘Well, I wanted to talk to you today whatever, whatever, like, I don't understand what's going on’. So, it's very tiring like emotionally draining. So, it became really hard to care about school basically.

Academic consequences following participants experiences with sexual violence was shared by seven participants. Negative academic consequences following experiences with sexual violence included receiving lower grades, decreased quality of work, missing classes, withdrawing from courses, and loss of academic opportunities. Sunflower, Emma, and Orchid shared how during the time following their sexual violence experience their grades were impacted negatively. Orchid shared, “I definitely like did not do as well as I did before on the first couple labs I did, like ahh. They were definitely like statistically lower than like what the rest of like the semester’s marks were.” Sunflower shared how a fight with her partner, who was also her perpetrator, impacted her exam grade and overall course,

Right before one of my final exams basically I thought we were gonna break up and so obviously I was like really upset going into like a three hour exam. I did not do well on the exam … The one class that I didn't do well on the final exam. That's like my worst class of all the university.

Similarly, Emma also shared how her relationship during her early undergraduate years which included sexual violence, increased the number of classes she was missing, and reduced her GPA by 10-15%.

Yeah, my grades were like probably 65 was like my average like it was signif-like it was like probably 10% lower than my average grade. Probably 15%
actually. Yeah, so it, it definitely impacted that because I like I wasn't going to class. I was trying to deal with him. I was always fighting with him. I just I didn't have the time and he was always in my face. He wouldn't leave like it was. Yeah, it was really toxic.

Irene, Pink Daisy, and Dakar also reported difficulties in attending class which affected their overall marks. Irene shared that she saw that her attendance mark was low and informed her professor about her ongoing domestic violence challenges but was told that she should have informed the professor earlier. Pink Daisy shared that immediately following her experience she struggled with studying and attending class. Pink Daisy explained, “I found myself like at the beginning, like not studying for anything, I kind of just stopped going to classes for like a couple weeks.” Dakar shared how hearing the verdict of her court case that was announced during her second year of school impacted her studies. Dakar explained, “I didn't think that would take a lot on me, but it did.” Dakar shared that despite trying to balance herself mentally and physically with studying she struggled, “sometimes I couldn't even get out of bed, and I was trying to deal with myself, as well as focusing.” Dakar ended up withdrawing from courses first semester of the second year which she felt was “stepping back again.”

Following her experience with sexual violence, Bunny’s invitation to participate in an academic extracurricular program for her second year was withheld. Bunny explained, “I was a candidate for [academic extracurricular program] my first year and then I didn't have a high enough GPA so they didn't email me inviting me back to the program.” Bunny shared that when she realized she was not being invited back to the program, she immediately emailed the coordinator and advocated for herself. Bunny
explained, “I was like I did not go through all of this to not get in this program. I was so mad. [Leader] let me apply it like re-apply to the program, so that was good.” As a part of the application process, Bunny needed to share an experience that impacted her GPA, and she disclosed her experience of sexual violence, “So, for one of my responses, it was, ‘what has positively or negatively affected your GPA’. And I was like this [sexual assault] heavily, negatively affected my GPA.”

**University Experiences.** Outside of the classroom, participants were also immersed in university experiences. Eight of the nine participants shared that they are involved in activities including societies, student politics, research groups, residence programs, international studying programs, and varsity athletics.

Six participants shared that they had current leadership roles in the groups they participate within including vice president (VP) of a student club, VP of student politic groups, and mentoring other students. Pink Daisy who has not had a formal leadership role, shared how she participated in a workshop aimed at developing leadership skills, “I decided to join the [workshop], which basically, gives you like training to be like a proper leader and stuff, and I thought it was a great opportunity.”

Every participant (n=9) spoke about seeking opportunities to participate in groups as they were a source of enjoyment, and social connectedness. Pink Panther shared, that even if she cannot commit to many activities, she still actively seeks out opportunities within her faculty, “But I do, I like to be involved. I will like, if there are events going on in the engineering like, that the engineering society puts on, I will go to those.” Sunflower shared how participating in activities helped mitigate the isolating effects of COVID-19, “I like the things that I am involved in, and it makes me feel more like,
especially during COVID, it was kind of nice to get involved in things because otherwise, like I felt super disconnected from everything." Dakar was the only participant who was not currently involved in university activities outside the classroom, but joining groups or activities was a goal of hers, "That was one of my goals for 2022. I really wanted to include myself in like university things, and like outside of the school itself."

Three participants shared how the university environment and opportunities have helped with their personal growth such as developing social relationships and learning more about themselves. Dakar shared that the change of environment from high school contributed to better social relationships, "It's way better than high school because it's like a change of face, right? It's not the same environment and stuff, so it's kind of a relief. So yeah, it [social life], it changed in a good way." Sunflower explained that the opportunities provided in university helped encourage her to challenge herself, “I kind of tried to start getting out of my comfort zone a bit and just trying more things. So now I do enjoy it a lot more than I did before.” Emma shared that her decision to come to the University of Windsor was because she was recruited to play on a varsity team, “I only chose UWindsor because that's where I got recruited to play [sport] and that was the best thing, the best worst thing that could have happened to me.” Emma elaborated that while she was a student athlete, she started to struggle with the thought of missing opportunities, and not really knowing who she was.

Once Emma left the varsity team, she continued to become involved in opportunities she felt she had missed, such as courses she would not have been able to take, international experiences, and different social clubs. She finished her undergraduate degree with the feelings of satisfaction for the University of Windsor,
I've been very fortunate to have all the experiences that I had, good and bad because they've led to, like they've led to different things, right? … It led me to so many other amazing things which I'm so thankful for because I went to the University of Windsor.

**Future Ambitions.** Seven participants shared ambitions that they had for the remainder of their degree and or for their post-degree life. Participants shared their hopes of switching majors to achieve specialized degrees and plans to apply to graduate school. Rose shared how she is planning to change degree pathways to graduate with an advanced degree, while Dakar is hoping to switch majors to “participate in a research project with a prof [professor].” Sunflower, Orchid, and Irene all aspire to continue their education in graduate studies. Sunflower shared how since deciding to apply to medical school she has been, “more focused on school and more motivated.” Irene shared that she would continue school based on her career goals, she explained, “I will try to gain more degrees and educational qualifications, if it is required. I like I am happy that I can now aspire to have more degrees.” Irene further elaborated that she is planning to focus on her career to be “self-sufficient” rather than to depend on “romantic promises” that “people often deviate from.” Similarly, Dakar shared after her experiences with sexual violence, she is focusing on what is “waiting for her.” Dakar explained, “So yeah, it happened but there's so much waiting for me like I wanna get that degree. I wanna graduate.”

**Unexpected Findings**

Two additional topics of discussion were shared by participants that were considered to be unexpected. These topics included the discussion of neurodevelopment
disorders including attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) or attention deficit disorder (ADD), and survivorship responsibilities.

**Neurodevelopment Disorders.** Three participants shared that they had been recently diagnosed or in the process of being diagnosed with either ADHD or ADD. In all three cases participants shared that their diagnosis or process of being diagnosed occurred after experiencing sexual violence. Rose shared how since being diagnosed with ADD she believes her academics have improved as she was able to learn new studying strategies to support her needs. Orchid also shared that she is actively attempting to be diagnosed with ADHD due to her studying habits and ability to focus compared to her friends.

**Survivorship Responsibility.** Four participants shared ways in which they developed a sense of responsibility to protect other women after experiencing their own sexual violence. Rose shared how after her experience with sexual violence she is more aware of other women while she is at bars and clubs. Rose explained that she will watch out for other women and will intervene by notifying security if she sees groups of men being problematic.

Pink Panther also shared how she thinks “it’s really important to be open about these kinds of experiences” referring to her own experiences with sexual violence. Pink Panther explained that she was able to acknowledge her own experience as assaultive only because another woman was open with her. Pink Panther shared, “one of the girls that was assaulted, she called me and said, ‘Oh you were talking to this guy like I just wanted to give you a heads up.’” Similarly, Bunny explained that when she learned that the perpetrator who assaulted her was dating another girl, she began warning other
women about him, despite getting reprimanded by campus police for calling him a rapist. Bunny shared that she warned others because she “felt a huge sense of responsibility for protecting any and every girl ever at that time.”

Emma shared how following her experiences with sexual violence she developed an interest in learning more about violence against women and continues to share the things she learns with others. Emma explained, “even if one person knows how to intervene in a situation that may prevent a sexual assault and like that makes me feel so good.”
DISCUSSION

This was the first qualitative study to my knowledge that explored topics such as academic impacts, university experiences, as well as survivors’ experiences of disclosing their sexual assault to both formal and informal resources. This study aimed to explore the lived experiences of university students who are survivors of sexual violence regarding their academic and university experiences. The central research question of this project was, “How do unwanted sexual experiences during university years impact female student’s academic and university experiences?” This central question was divided into the following three sub-questions:

1. How do students perceive their university experience after experiencing an unwanted sexual experience?
2. How are students’ academic achievements impacted by an unwanted sexual experience?
3. How do students describe their experience of engaging with formal or informal resources within their university community following an unwanted sexual experience?

Participation in university experiences did not appear to be negatively impacted by their experiences of sexual violence. Participants within this study appeared to be very involved in groups and clubs. The reasons the participants’ university experience may not appear to be affected by their experience with sexual violence could be because most events occurred virtually throughout the COVID-19 pandemic and thus participants did not have to worry about avoiding their perpetrator, their groups/clubs did not include the perpetrator, and/or, participants did not feel the need to avoid university experiences.
following their experience with sexual violence. Further studies will need to be conducted to gather more information on how sexual violence may impact student’s university experiences such as involvement in groups, and leadership opportunities.

Participants experienced academic impacts in the form of receiving lower grades, decreased quality of work, missing classes, withdrawing from courses, and loss of academic opportunities. These academic impacts appeared to be the consequences of impaired ability to focus while studying due to mental hardships and challenges in their ability to balance school responsibilities while dealing with ongoing intimate partner stressors and or court trials. These consequences still occurred despite participants’ sharing that they had established studying routines that supported their academic success. These are important findings as it demonstrates the struggle students may have following their experience(s) of sexual violence, despite their best efforts to be academically successful. Interestingly, when participants shared that they had future ambitions related to academics, such as graduating, it did appear to provide a positive influence. When the participants set academic goals, it appeared to develop hope that they could achieve difficult accomplishments, and that there is a future waiting for them beyond being a survivor of sexual violence.

This study also found that participants had various experiences engaging with formal or informal resources within their university community following their unwanted sexual experience(s). Although all participants had disclosed to an informal support prior to participating in the study, their reasons for disclosing were varied. Some participants chose to disclose to a peer because they felt the need to or they knew that their peer had similar experiences, while other participants disclosed unintentionally as they had still not
acknowledged they had been sexual assaulted. Positive experiences with disclosing to informal resources, such as friends, supported survivors in their recovery and assisted some of the participants in connecting with formal resources. The participants who chose to use formal resources provided by the university reported having positive experiences. Participants’ willingness to use university-provided resources appeared to be influenced by their knowledge of available resources, their personal beliefs about how the sexual violence impacted them, and their ability to manage the aftermath of sexual violence independently.

The research questions were answered with the support of framing this study with Neville and Heppner’s (1999) Culturally Inclusive Ecological Model of Sexual Assault Recovery (CIEM SAR). The foundation of the framework was identified throughout the development of the themes. For example, the theme “Personal Changes” highlighted changes within participants’ microsystem such as their mental hardships; “Social Connectedness” discussed subthemes that resonated with the mesosystem such as their experience disclosing to supports; and “Acceptance of Rape Culture” spoke of the overall culture of the university, including normalization of sexual violence.

Although some themes focused more directly on the proposed research questions, such as “Social Connectedness”, and “Student Experience” which explored help seeking behaviours, academic experiences, and student experiences, the inclusions of all themes helped to describe the lived experiences of these students. This was important for providing context of how the individual or survivor of sexual violence was impacted by the sexual violence in a multitude of ways including interpersonally, socially, and throughout their community thus impacting their academics and help-seeking behaviours.
The following discussion expands on and compares the findings of this study to existing literature. The discussion concludes with this study’s implication to nursing practice, and limitations and future research recommendations.

**Personal Changes**

**Mental Hardships.** Mental hardships after experiencing a sexual assault are a well-documented finding in sexual violence research (Carey et al., 2018; Jaconis et al., 2020; Rothman et al., 2019). Previous findings indicate that mental hardships may lead to the development of depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder, eating disorders and substance abuse (Dilip & Bates, 2021). Consistent with previous findings, participants of this study shared perceived changes in their mental health and wellbeing; which impacted their demeanor, willingness to trust, and alcohol consumption.

Participants reported feelings of decreased motivation and increased anxiety while also explaining that their overall demeanor changed from calmness to anger. This demonstrates the emotional turmoil survivors of sexual violence can experience in the months following their assault. Furthermore, participants’ decreased level of trust impacted their ability to make new friends, and how they interacted with men.

Participants shared how their experiences with sexual violence impacted their future sexual relationships with men. While some participants reported avoiding intimacy in both established and casual relationships, one participant shared how her decisions in sexual relationships became more complacent. Their complacence in sexual decisions may be a form of self-silencing. Self-silencing includes the use of dismissing one’s own needs or concerns to avoid conflict with others (Jack, 2011). Previous research has indicated that women may self-silence in response to experiencing intimate partner
violence, or to adhere to the normative femininity roles within intimate heterosexual relationships (Samardzic, 2019; Samardzic et al., 2022). By being complacent in their decisions, the participant may avoid revictimization by not providing a firm decision that could possibly be disregarded by a future perpetrator.

Similarly, while alcohol consumption decreased for some participants, one participant explained that her consumption of alcohol increased. For participants who decreased drinking behaviours, it was in response to avoiding areas where alcohol was encouraged such as at parties and bars, to protect themselves from further victimization. For the one individual who reported increased alcohol consumption, alcohol was used as a coping mechanism to avoid thinking of her sexual assault and her subsequent court trial. The participants’ experience with alcohol consumption following their sexual violence illustrates how substance use behaviours can be both protective and destructive for the individual. These complexities of substance use behaviours are in alignment of the current literature (Rothman et al., 2019).

**Regaining Control.** Sexual violence has been described as an act of power and control throughout feminist theory literature where the perpetrator uses sexual violence to gain a sense of control over someone (McPhail, 2016). This definition appeared to resonate with the participants of the study who described their perpetrators as having control over them. Previous studies have found that a survivor’s feelings of regaining control may be an indicator of recovery post sexual violence, but there is very limited research regarding how survivors use controllable variables to redevelop this sense of control and lead to positive outcomes (Ranjbar & Speer, 2013). The participants of this study described how, in their recovery process, they regained their sense of control by
adapting to controllable variables; that is, those aspects of their lives that they have power over. For example, participants used schoolwork, travelling, exercising, and engaging in therapy to redevelop that sense of control. It appeared that when participants could make choices for themselves and their choices were respected, it promoted the redevelopment of their sense of control. Interestingly, all the controllable variables that promoted this sense of control appeared to be healthy and contributed to participants’ personal and or academic growth. This contrasts with published literature regarding eating disorder development, wherein individuals with eating disorders, often use eating as a controllable variable to develop a sense of control over themselves and bodies which led to poor health outcomes (Froreich et al., 2016).

**Social Connectedness**

**Experience of Disclosing.** At the time of the interviews, all nine participants had disclosed their experience of sexual violence to at least one person. In all experiences, participants first disclosed to an informal support before disclosing to a formal support, if they chose too. These findings were very similar to the findings of Campbell et al. (2015), who described peers as the “true first responders,” acknowledging the substantial frequency in which peers receive disclosures of sexual violence before any other person (p. 834). Previous literature has identified several factors that survivors consider prior to disclosing their sexual violence to peers which included how often the survivor spoke to the peer, the likelihood of the peer sharing the information to mutual friends, the gender of the peer, and their relationship status with the peer (Dworkin et al., 2016). It may be beneficial for universities to provide disclosure training to students during their orientation weeks to support them in situations where they may receive an unanticipated
disclosure from a peer. This may result in students feeling more prepared to respond in a way that would be supportive to the survivor who is disclosing to them. In this study, three participants shared how their decision to disclose their experience of sexual violence to a peer was encouraged by knowing their peer had similar experience(s), or in response to receiving a sexual violence disclosure from their peer. Participants shared that they expected these peers would react to their disclosure with empathy and support, which was true for all three participants. This was an unexpected finding that may suggest that shared connections of sexual violence with their peers might encourage survivors to disclose and may help to form supportive communities within the mesosystem environment for survivors.

When peers offered supportive and caring reactions in response to receiving a disclosure from a participant, the participants described feelings of comfort and reduced stress. Supportive reactions from peers also provided a pathway for participants to connect with formal resources. Participants reported their peers encouraged or assisted them in connecting with formal supports such as their university’s Sexual Misconduct Office. This is important in recognizing how other students, regardless of their own personal experiences with sexual violence, can assist in the recovery process of survivors of sexual violence within university environments. DeLoveh and Cattaneo (2017) found that survivors who were already familiar with resources prior to their assault were more likely to utilize them. These current findings may suggest that peers could fill the knowledge gap for survivors who were not familiar with resources prior to their assault and therefore, less likely to access formal resources. This emphasizes the importance for all students to be aware of resources available for survivors. To facilitate resource
awareness to large groups of students, universities may want to incorporate disclosure and or bystander training for students within the school’s annual orientation week, courses, or as part of training requirements for varsity athletes.

**Formal Resources.** The majority of participants (n=5) in this study disclosed to a formal resource. This is inconsistent with previous literature which found that a minority of participants disclosed to campus resources (Amar et al., 2012; Campbell et al., 2015; Fleming et al., 2018; Graham et al., 2021; Wood & Stichman, 2018). Graham et al. (2021), found that campus resource use was associated with factors such as the sexual assault occurring prior to university, sexual violence being enacted through violence, and the victim experiencing psychological distress. Interestingly, these factors were experienced among the participants in this study who both used and refrained from using formal resources. Participants willing to interview may have already been comfortable speaking about their experiences due to their previous experience of using formal supports. Additionally, survivors who have already disclosed their experiences to an informal resource, such as a friend, may be more comfortable and willing to disclose their experiences to a formal resource for the purpose of receiving resources such as academic accommodations or safety planning. In this study, all participants had disclosed to a peer prior to using formal resources.

Consistent with previous studies, barriers for using formal resources were identified by participants who either delayed their use or never used formal resources (Amar et al., 2012; Carney, 2018; Fleming et al., 2018; Wood & Stichman, 2018). Multiple barriers were shared including fear of not being believed, personal belief that their experience was not significant enough to warrant resource use, and not wanting to
“relive” their experience by retelling their experiences, despite being willing to participant in the interview which required talking about their sexual violence experiences. These barriers are not new findings, but their identification within this study may allow for speculation on how different factors within the participant’s ecological environment may contribute to such barriers (Holland & Cortina, 2017). For example, the experience of living in a patriarchal society where men are prioritized may contribute to the fear of not being believed due to their gender and young age. Similarly, the minimization of their experiences, such as, believing that it may be an “over exaggeration” to use resources may indicate some internalized misogyny that they, as a victim of sexual violence, are not deserving or important enough for support. It is beyond the scope of this study to conclude these findings but may warrant future investigation.

**Social Repercussions.** Participants shared how they experienced social repercussions following their experiences with sexual violence. The experience of social repercussions following a sexual assault is not a new finding, and prior literature has found that strained relationships can be a consequence of campus sexual violence (Rich et al., 2021). Prior research has found that strained relationships or social repercussions are more evident when the survivor discloses their experiences to friends who believe in rape myths or are also friends with the perpetrator which can result in poor disclosure experiences for the survivor (Rich et al., 2021). Poor disclosure experiences can further contribute to increased psychological harm to the survivor in the form of post-traumatic stress, or being blamed for the assault (Morris & Quevillon, 2021; Relyea & Ullman, 2015). This was found again within this study, as a participant shared that a mutual friend had assaulted her, and she received an awkward and uncomfortable reaction from their
shared friends. Another participant shared how her experiences of receiving negative reactions from disclosures impacted her dynamics with friends and family and three years of stress before finally receiving a positive reaction (Relyea & Ullman, 2015).

In addition to these previous findings, the participants of this study shared how both personal and social factors contributed to the development of social repercussions. For example, personal factors included self-inflicted isolation due to survivors experiencing mental hardships which manifested as distancing themselves or pushing away friends during the aftermath of their sexual assault. Social factors that contributed to the development of social repercussions included participants becoming worrisome of rumors spreading within their social networks. Additionally, social factors may include loss of relationships for the survivor, especially when the perpetrator was someone of significance to the survivor such as a friend or an intimate partner prior to their assault. These findings are important as they highlight how complex the consequences of sexual violence are for survivors, while also emphasizing how sexual violence is not just an individual issue, but a community one.

**Acceptance of Rape Culture**

**Normalization of Sexual Violence.** The normalization of sexual violence impacted participants’ tolerance for sexual violence, and their ability to label their experiences as assaultive. Participants shared how they believed their experiences with sexual violence was a normal or expected part of university, and life as a woman. This parallels the findings of Holland and Cortina (2017) who found that survivors of campus sexual assault minimized their assault by interpreting the behaviours as a “normal part of being a woman in college” (p. 56). Although these are not new findings, it is important
consider how, five years since Holland and Cortina’s study was published, students continue to feel that experiencing sexual violence is an expected part of university and their lives as women.

The normalization of sexual violence also impacted participants’ understanding and labelling of their sexual violent experiences. Participants shared that they had not considered that their experiences constituted sexual violence until other students had questioned them. These findings were similar to Sinko et al. (2019) who found that internalized normalization of sexual violence often contributed to survivors not labeling their experiences as violent due to fears of it not “being bad enough” until they disclosed their experience to friends (p. 573). This is significant because the inability to acknowledge and label sexual violence as violence, can - and did - delay accessing resources for survivors of sexual assault.

Normalization of sexual violence was also voiced by participants when they spoke of sexual violence that occurred within their relationships. When the perpetrator was a friend or intimate partner, the sexual violence was noted to be minimized due to the belief that sexual relations are an expectation within relationships. This normalization of sexual violence within relationships may be setting a precedent that men’s needs, and desires are valued above women’s, and it is therefore acceptable for men to act without consent. This can further contribute to women not recognizing that they have been assaulted, encourage them to stay in relationships with men who have harmed them, increase their tolerance to violence in future intimate relationships, and prevent them from seeking help.
**Toxic Masculinity.** Toxic masculinity is a term that was originally defined as "the constellation of socially regressive male traits that serve to foster domination, the devaluation of women, homophobia, and wanton violence" (Kupers, 2005, p. 714). For the purpose of this project, toxic masculinity was used to describe exaggerated and harmful aspects of traditional masculine traits such as strength and dominance, which can contribute to the harm of others. Throughout the study, toxic masculinity was incorporated into the university culture for participants, affecting their daily lives, particularly for those in male dominated faculties and programs. Participants shared how they had become accustomed to both receiving and witnessing sexism, as well as observing the effort male students will put into defending other male students for harmful behaviours.

Previous literature has found that homogeneity in gender, age, race/ethnicity, and social class can increase the risk for sexual violence, while behaviours in student groups such as loyalty, and valuing masculinity can contribute to the development of a rape prone culture (Martin, 2016). Interestingly, without prompting, participants shared groups of students who they identified as demonstrating increased toxic masculinity, including male-dominated departments and student groups such as the faculty of engineering, and varsity athletes. Participants shared how they had witnessed harassment, violence, and a disregard for rules from men in these groups. This is congruent with previous studies which found that fraternities and men’s athletic teams often have superiority complexes, exhibit power and control, and are provided special treatment from their university and legal system (Martin, 2016; Pica et al., 2020). These findings are important in considering how students who are survivors of sexual violence may not only feel like
they must defend themselves against their perpetrator(s) but also the intuition and community who protect these elite students.

**Student Experiences**

**Academic Experiences.** This study sought to explore how students’ academic achievements may be impacted by an unwanted sexual experience. Participants discussed their academic experiences, as well as how their experiences changed following sexual violence. Most participants disclosed that at the time of the interviews, their GPA was 80% or higher, and that they were satisfied with their academic performance. Despite this, similar to previous literature, most participants experienced academic impacts following their experience with sexual violence, which resulted in receiving lower grades, decreased quality of work, missing classes, withdrawing from courses, and loss of academic opportunities (Baker et al., 2016; Banyard et al., 2020; Jordan et al., 2014; Mengo & Black, 2016; Potter et al., 2018; Stermac et al., 2020).

The qualitative nature of this study provided participants an opportunity to share what factors led to negative academic impacts. Through this discourse, participants shared that they experienced negative academic impacts due to having difficulties studying because of their lack of energy and inability to focus. A main factor contributing to the lack of energy and inability to focus was due to competing priorities of schoolwork and responsibilities related to their experience with sexual violence. For example, participants spoke about needing to manage their court trial related to their assault, and conflict resolution within their ongoing relationships with their perpetrators. The difficulties in focusing on schoolwork and feeling of less efficacy as a student complement the findings of Banyard et al. (2020). This is interesting as having difficulty
studying, or having conflict within relationships may be thought of as a normal part of being a university student or young adult. The participant’s ability to acknowledge that they felt these difficulties were directly related to their experience with sexual violence may provide an example of how sexual violence can impact a survivor at both their microsystem and mesosystem of Neville and Heppner’s CIEMSAR model (1999) and result in poor outcomes such as academic performance.

This study supports the findings from Baker et al. (2016) who found that regardless of high school performance, standardized test scores, and conscientiousness, exposure to sexual violence resulted in lower GPAs. Although this study was qualitative in nature and did not examine quantitative measures for high school performance, test scores, or conscientiousness, participants shared their meticulous studying routines and habits which have helped them achieve academic success. These routines included reviewing their syllabi, time management for the semester and preparing for classes and exams. Unfortunately, similar to Baker et al. (2016), despite these diligent efforts, when sexual violence was experienced, participants still felt negative academic impacts. This is important when considering how the stress of sexual violence impacts female students; and further contributes to the multitude of stress students already experience at the post-secondary education level. This may further emphasize the importance of ensuring that academic environments protect all students from sexual violence and develop and make available accessible formal supports to prevent it and mitigate its impacts.

Additionally, it was interesting to note that participants explained that a motivator to prepare and organize their schoolwork early in the semester was to manage their anxiety and plan for the unexpected. Although, it was beyond this study’s scope, it would
be interesting to explore if students experienced this anxiety related to school preparedness prior to experiencing sexual violence or if this was a new phenomenon following their sexual violence experience.

University Experiences. This study sought to explore how university experiences such as participating in extracurricular, or leadership opportunities may be impacted after experiencing sexual violence for university students. Previous studies have found that survivors of sexual violence may avoid areas where the perpetrator may be present and thus may miss opportunities for socialization or student engagement and feel isolated (Sabri et al., 2019). Interestingly, the participants of this study were very active in university experiences including societies, student politics, research groups, residence programs, international studying programs, and varsity athletics.

Participation in university activities such as clubs and groups appeared to be positive for the participants’ mental wellbeing and social connectedness. Participants spoke of university experiences providing opportunities for them to meet new people and challenge themselves to get out of their comfort zone. This may suggest that involvement in formal university experiences could protect survivors of sexual violence from the effects of social isolation, and social repercussions they had shared throughout the study.

Future Ambitions. The majority of participants spoke of their future ambitions throughout their interviews which included their goals such as completing research under professors or applying to graduate school. Some participants spoke of their future ambitions in relation to their sexual violence, acknowledging that, although they had experienced an assault that may have impacted them personally, socially, and or
academically, they still view their future ambitions as achievable. This was important to note, as it highlights the resiliency of the participants as they managed both the stressors of being a university student, and a victim of sexual violence. To the best of my knowledge, this was a finding that had not been reported in the literature regarding the academic impacts of sexual violence amongst university students. This may have been emphasized within this study due to the qualitative nature that encouraged participants to share their lived experiences (Baker et al., 2016; Banyard et al., 2020; Jordan et al., 2014; Mengo & Black, 2016; Neville & Heppner, 1999; Potter et al., 2018; Stermac et al., 2020). Additionally, for some participants, achieving their academic or post-graduation goals may provide them with validation that they were not defeated by their experiences with sexual violence. For example, one participant acknowledged that despite her struggle following her experience with sexual violence, she was committed to graduating, as it provided her with new opportunities, while another participant shared how setting career goals will allow her to become more self-sufficient and less dependent on romantic partners. This was an interesting finding that may suggest that setting academic goals may help survivors of sexual violence by providing them with affirmation that they can still facilitate change in their lives and are not defined by their experience with sexual violence. Although this was not within the scope of the current study, it may be an important area for future research as it emphasizes the importance of supporting students who are survivors of sexual violence in achieving their academic goals.

Summary

In summary, this project sought to explore the lived experiences of university students who are survivors of sexual violence regarding their academic and university
experiences including their use of university supports. Participants shared changes in each level of the CIEMSAR ecological model (Neville & Heppner, 1999), including their personal, social, and cultural environment. The changes at each level of the ecological model concurrently impacted the participants’ academics and use of resources. Participants did not identify changes with their university experiences as a result of their sexual violence.

**Implications for Nursing Practice**

The findings from this study can have important implications for nursing practice. The versatile skills of nurses can offer multiple opportunities for them to facilitate change regarding sexual violence within university communities to prevent sexual violence and improve the accessibility of formal resources for students who are survivors of sexual violence. This may aid in the reduction of students who experience sexual violence and lessen the negative impacts following sexual violence including academic consequences.

Facilitating change regarding sexual violence within university communities may be supported by viewing sexual violence as a community issue. As demonstrated within this study, sexual violence impacted students at each level of Neville and Heppner’s (1999) CIEMSAR framework. This was evident when reviewing how the macrosystem had influence on the mesosystem and microsystem of participants. For example, the macrosystem which represents the community of the university including the overarching societal norms, and values such as the normalization of rape, and perpetuation of toxic masculinity, affected participant’s sense of safety within university spaces, and their perceived ability to report their sexual violence. The issues identified within the macrosystem further contributed to consequences within the mesosystem and
microsystem such as social repercussions, and mental hardships. This is important to acknowledge, as it emphasizes that although sexual violence occurs to individuals, it is a community issue, and interventions should be implemented accordingly. Nurses may benefit from implementing a public health approach through nursing leadership, and nursing practice (Carney, 2018).

**Nursing Leadership**

The College of Nurses of Ontario (CNO) mandates that all nurses in Ontario fulfil the standard of leadership which requires “providing, facilitating and promoting the best possible care/service to the public” (*Professional standards, revised 2002*, p. 10). This standard may be demonstrated by advocating for sexual violence prevention, sharing knowledge, and collaborating with other community partners to help prevent sexual violence and mitigating lasting effects of violence for students (College of Nurses of Ontario, 2002).

Nurses can demonstrate advocacy for sexual violence prevention by urging the need to create systemic change while amplifying the voiced needs of students. Participants of this study shared a number of concerns regarding current sexual violence prevention practices at the university including the need to increase focus on preventative measures and addressing change in specific groups on campus. In particular, issues were identified by participants related to men within varsity sports, and the Faculty of Engineering. Examples of issues identified included the perpetration of toxic masculinity and sexual violence, and coaches demonstrating sexual harassment within locker rooms. This aligns with previous studies that identified when groups of men pride themselves on loyalty to each other, they are more likely to contribute to the development of a rape-
prone culture (Martin, 2016). Previous studies also found that schools may be more lenient to student athletes committing sexual violence due to not wanting to tarnish the athlete’s or school’s reputation (Martin, 2016; Pica et al., 2020).

Nurses with experience in research and policy development may address this area of concern by reviewing current practices and identifying areas for improvement. Preventative approaches may be supported through the promotion of sexual prevention workshops such as Bystander or Flip the Script with EAAA. It may also be beneficial to dedicate time during student’s orientation to review the school’s sexual misconduct policy to ensure students are aware of definition of sexual misconduct, and aware of the current process of reporting misconduct. It may also be of benefit for nurses to conduct a community needs assessment for specific groups, such as athletics or Engineering, which can develop more applicable interventions that address specific issues within the group, such as their culture’s dynamics (Todahl et al., 2009).

Nurses sharing knowledge through the implementation or promotion of programs to prevent sexual violence and support sexual violence disclosure may be beneficial to promote effective sexual violence prevention and response. In this study, participants shared the importance of their experiences of disclosures. At the time of the interviews, every participant had disclosed informally to a friend, prior to disclosing to anyone else. Peers who received disclosures offered important support for the participants. When the peer responded positively to the disclosure, the participants were more likely to disclose again and be connected to formal resources. This study also revealed that when participants disclosed to formally trained faculty members of the university, they had positive responses; however, when they disclosed to professors who may not have been
trained to receive disclosures, they received responses that could be considered dismissive. Disclosure training provided to students, faculty and staff may help support those who receive an unanticipated disclosure and address the barriers to resource use by providing an opportunity for the recipient to share resources with the survivor (Zinzow et al., 2022). Additionally, bystander workshops have been effective at reducing rape myth acceptance and supporting bystanders to intervene in potentially assaultive situations (Kettrey et al., 2019). By reducing rape myth acceptance, university community members may become more understanding of the reality of sexual violence and may be equipped to offer supports to the survivor. Nurses should be encouraged to advocate for the funding, and or lead the implementation of these programs.

Nurses should also lead in collaboration with the current services being offered within university campuses. Since the mandate of Bill 132: “Sexual Violence and Harassment Action Plan Act,” in March 2016, university and colleges in Ontario are required to have a sexual violence policy that addresses sexual violence affecting students, staff, and faculty. Through this sexual violence policy, universities are required to provide accessible resources, supports, and accommodations. Nurses should acknowledge the work that is currently being done and offer partnerships to maximize the effectiveness of these resources. This may also support consistency in messaging throughout different services which may aid in supporting positive culture shifts at the macrosystem level of the university (Halstead et al., 2018). For example, having consistent messaging of what sexual violence includes.
Nursing Practice

Nurses have the privilege of working directly with clients throughout all stages of their life and are frequently the first member of a health care team survivors of sexual abuse will meet (Registered Nurses’ Association of Ontario, 2012). Nurses have a professional responsibility set by the CNO to develop and maintain therapeutic nurse-client relationships founded on trust, respect, and empathy. Additionally, through this relationship, nurses are responsible for recognizing, responding, and preventing abuse of their clients. To support the recognition and response of sexual violence of clients, Registered Nurses Association of Ontario (RNAO) (2012), recommend the best practice guideline of “universal screening for woman abuse in all health care settings” (Woman abuse: Screening, identification and initial response, p. 22). Universal screening for abuse may facilitate increased opportunities for students to disclose, increase nurses’ understanding of how the student’s current health needs may be impacted by a history of violence, reduce sense of isolation, and allow for proper referrals for accommodations (Registered Nurses’ Association of Ontario, 2012). As some individuals do not recognize that they are or have been victims of sexual violence, it would be imperative to use a screening tool that describes the actions, rather than naming the violence, similar to Koss’ SES-SFV (2007). In order for the screening to be safe and effective, the screening should be done in a secure environment where confidentiality can be maintained, and nurses must be trained in how to ask and respond to questions (Long, 2014). It may be beneficial for nurses working within university student wellness centers to collaborate with their university sexual misconduct offices to develop partnerships to facilitate education on universal screening, and prompt referrals.
Study Limitations and Future Research

This project explored the lived experiences of nine university students in Southwestern Ontario who experienced sexual violence. Although these participants offered rich data in sharing their experiences for the purpose of this study, these findings should not be generalized due to the small sample size and the selection biases.

Limitations in data collection in the final sample also exist due to the study design. Data collection was designed in a two-step procedure. First, participants were asked to complete an online demographic and eligibility questionnaire online using Qualtrics. The last question asked if participants were interested in completing the follow up interview, and if they selected “Yes” they were prompted to follow a link to provide their contact information. Unfortunately, while 58 individuals who completed the questionnaire selected that they were interested in participating in the follow up interview, only 21 contact information surveys were completed (one participant completed the contact survey twice). This may indicate that participants decided that they did not want to participate in the follow-up interview after indicating that they wanted to, or it could indicate that the instructions to follow the link to provide contact information were unclear. It is my assumption that participants likely anticipated that the contact information survey would be automatically prompted similar to the previous questions in the questionnaire. Although the qualitative nature of this study would not have needed 58 participants to be interviewed, I recognize the missed opportunity for potential participants potentially due to this unforeseen circumstance.

The timing of data collection also contributed to limitations of the study. The primary research question was, “How do unwanted sexual experiences impact female
student’s academic and university experiences?” Although participants did share the ways in which they believe sexual violence affected their academic and university experiences through changes in their mental wellness, social connections, and university environments, the COVID-19 pandemic was also occurring following the unwanted sexual violence experiences for eight of the nine participants. The COVID-19 pandemic changed the traditional experiences of some participants in ways such as stay at home orders, online learning, and limited ability to join in-person groups and clubs at the university. In the future, it could be beneficial to further explore the impacts of sexual violence on academic and university experiences outside of a global pandemic, to develop a greater understanding of how participants may be impacted by sexual violence when they are more involved and connected to the university campus and community.

The broad research question and the semi-structured format of the interview allowed for participants to share various aspects of their academic and university experiences and aided in developing numerous themes. Two additional topics of discussion were shared by a few participants that did not constitute enough data for a theme but may be beneficial to further explore in future research projects.

First, three participants had shared that they were in the process of, or recently diagnosed with attention deficit disorder (ADD) or attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). The three participants shared that their diagnosis, or suspect diagnosis occurred following their experience of sexual violence. Although it may be coincidental, it may be worth exploring whether there is a relationship between experiencing sexual violence and recognizing the signs and symptoms of ADD/ADHD. Future research in exploring the impact on academics for female students who are experiencing both sexual violence and
ADD/ADHD may also contribute to supporting academic success for these individuals by expanding the literature on how formal resources may assist their unique needs.

Secondly, three participants spoke of feeling the need to share their personal experiences and knowledge obtained after experiencing sexual violence to protect other women from becoming victims. For example, participants shared that following their experience(s) of sexual violence they became more open to having conversations to assist other women in their own disclosure experiences, completed sexual assault prevention workshops, and started working in fields focused on helping survivors of violence against women. This potential phenomenon of survivorship advocacy may be an interest for future studies to explore perceived burdens or desire for change after experiencing sexual violence, and the relationships of survivors of sexual violence and other women.

Conclusions

This study allowed for the exploration of the lived experiences of university students who are survivors of sexual violence regarding their academic and university experiences including their use of university supports. Participants graciously shared the different ways in which sexual violence impacted them within their personal, social, and cultural environments which led to changes in their academic performance. Informal resources were important for participant’s experiences of disclosing, and aided participants in connecting with formal supports. When formal resources were used, participants benefited from feelings of validation and accommodations.

The findings of this study have various implications for nursing practice. It would be beneficial for sexual violence within university campus’ to be addressed using a public health approach, acknowledging that sexual violence is not just an individual issue. A
public health approach may promote effective interventions at each level of the ecological system of the campus community. Potential implications may include advocating for the needs of current university students which can be accomplished through revising policies, and conducting community needs assessments. Nurses may also have a role in the implementation or promotion of programs to prevent sexual violence and support sexual violence disclosure. These programs should be delivered to students, staff, and faculty, acknowledging that all community members of a university can have a role in the prevention of sexual violence, and may receive a disclosure of sexual violence at any time. Additionally, nurses should collaborate with current resources within universities to develop partnerships and maximize effectiveness. At the individual level, RNAO recommends the implementation of universal screening for abuse for all women clients. Universal screening for abuse within a therapeutic nurse-client relationship may promote increased disclosures, reduce feelings of isolation for individuals, and allow for referrals to formal resources. It may be beneficial for future research to explore how sexual violence may impact university experiences when the COVID-19 pandemic does not require students to complete full-time online learning.
REFERENCES


https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvddzq1d.12


https://journals-sagepub-com.ledproxy2.uwindsor.ca/doi/10.1111/j.1471-6402.2007.00385.x


APPENDICES

Appendix A

_Literature Inclusion Criteria_

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Selection Criteria</th>
<th>Inclusion Criteria</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participants</td>
<td>Participants needed to be adolescent aged or speaking from experiences from when they were adolescents. Participants were preferably post-secondary school students or speaking from experiences from when they were enrolled within post-secondary school. There were no criteria on participants gender, ethnicity, religion, or income level. Participants needed to identify as survivors of sexual violence or have experience with survivors of sexual violence i.e. counsellors, sexual assault nurse examiners.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Location</td>
<td>Preference was given to studies conducted within North America, Europe, or Australia. This decision was made because the current study will be conducted in Canada. The primary researcher wanted to be informed by studies that would resemble similar experiences, factors, and policies that may be experienced within the proposed study.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme / Purpose of the Study</td>
<td>The purpose of the study needed to involve how sexual violence (of any manner) did or did not impact education (positively or negatively).</td>
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<tr>
<td>Language</td>
<td>The language of reviewed studies needed to be in English. The primary researcher is limited to being literate in only English.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix B

Consent to Online Survey

The impact of sexual violence on student’s academic and university experiences: A qualitative study.

You are asked to participate in a research study conducted by Shelby Lacey for partial fulfilment of her Master of Science in Nursing degree.

If you have any questions or concerns about the research, please feel to contact either

a. Shelby Lacey, MScN Student, University of Windsor at lacey112@uwindsor.ca or

b. Dr. Edward Cruz, Faculty of Nursing, University of Windsor at edward.cruz@uwindsor.ca

c. Dr. Debbie Kane, Associate Dean of Graduate Studies, University of Windsor at dkane@uwindsor.ca

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The primary purpose of this research is to explore the lived experiences of university students who are survivors of sexual violence, and their academic and university experiences. Academic experiences will include academic measures such as GPA and course completion, while university experiences will explore students’ perception of belongingness to the university community, and out-of-classroom experiences such as clinical placements. Closely aligned with university experiences includes the use of resources within the university. Therefore, the study will also explore the experience of student’s decision to use or not to use university provided formal resources in response to their experience with sexual violence.

To participate in this study, you should be a currently enrolled student in an undergraduate program at the University of Windsor. You should identify as a woman. If you are unsure if you have had an unwanted sexual experience, it is still okay to participate.

PROCEDURES

If you volunteer to participate in this study, you will be asked to complete a two-part online survey. The survey will start with demographical information such as your age, gender identity, relationship status, sexual orientation, background, and academic information such as your program, year of study and program (full-time or part-time). The second half of the survey will help assess whether you have encountered an unwanted sexual experience or sexual violence.

If you volunteer to participate, you will be asked to complete 50 questions in total. It will take you approximately 20 to 25 minutes to complete the survey. You will be entered into a raffle for a $20 gift certificate to Starbucks for your participation in the survey.
The survey may be done from anywhere with internet access; therefore, you may complete this survey in a location of your choice, including at home. It is suggested that you complete this survey in a safe and private spot, due to the sensitivity of the questions asked. You will have the option of refraining from answering any question you do not wish to answer without penalty. You may withdraw your consent to participate at any time without penalty by simply closing your web browser and not submitting your survey responses.

POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS
There is low risk to you completing the survey package or participating in this study. You will not be asked any personally identifying information, however, the nature of the questions found in the survey questionnaire may pose some psychological risk (low). If you experience any psychological or emotional distress while completing or as a result of completing the survey questionnaire, please immediately contact one of the following support services:

• University of Windsor Sexual Misconduct Office, Contact Form | Sexual Assault and Sexual Misconduct (uwindsor.ca)
• Telehealth Ontario: 1.866.797.0000
• ConnexOntario: 1.866.531.2600

If you feel uncomfortable answering any survey questions, please leave them blank. If you are unsure of what the questions are asking, you may contact Shelby Lacey using the contact information above.

Your information will remain confidential between the primary investigator and her faculty supervisor. Your name or other personally identifying information will not be on the survey, therefore, once you submit your survey responses, there will be no way an outsider to this project could link your responses to you as a participant. You will be asked to choose a pseudonym at the beginning of the survey to replace your name and other personally identifying information. This will ensure that your information will remain confidential but that the researcher will be able to identify you to ensure you meeting the eligibility requirements if you choose to participate in the second step of the survey. There is low risk of the survey packages being exposed to anyone outside of the research team.

POTENTIAL BENEFITS TO PARTICIPANTS AND/OR TO SOCIETY
A previous report indicated that individuals who have experienced trauma and yet participated in research involving speaking about their personal trauma experienced positive experiences including feeling like they could help others, that they contributed to science, and felt more prepared to seek formal help (Kirkner et al., 2019). The information you provide may offer new insights and knowledge in how students within university environments could be better supported following an unwanted sexual experience. This may help students experience less adverse academic consequences of university experience impacts.
COMPENSATION FOR PARTICIPATION
You will be entered in a draw to win a $20 Starbucks gift card.

CONFIDENTIALITY
Any information that is obtained in connection with this study will remain confidential. Personal identities will be removed and replaced to anonymous pseudonyms. All data collected from the survey responses will be stored on a password protected computer and on a secure University of Windsor server. All paper documentation will be shredded within five years after study completion.

PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL
If you volunteer to be in this study, you may withdraw at any time without consequences of any kind by closing your web browser and/or not submitting your survey responses. After you have submitted your survey, there will be no way to identify which data belongs to you. You may refuse to answer any questions that you do not wish to answer, and the remainder of your answers will be included.

FEEDBACK OF THE RESULTS OF THIS STUDY TO THE PARTICIPANTS
Results of the study will be made available on the on the University of Windsor’s Scholarship website.
Web address: https://scholar.uwindsor.ca/
Date when results are available: Following completion of the research project.

SUBSEQUENT USE OF DATA
These data may be used in subsequent studies, in publications and in presentations.

RIGHTS OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS
If you have questions regarding your rights as a research participant, contact: Research Ethics Coordinator, University of Windsor, Windsor, Ontario, N9B 3P4; Telephone: 519.253.3000 ext. 3948; Email: ethics@uwindsor.ca

SIGNATURE OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANT
I understand the information provided for the study The impact of sexual violence on student’s academic and university experiences: A qualitative study as described herein.

My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I agree to participate in this study. I have been given the option for a printable version of this information below.

If you wish to receive a copy of this consent information or a downloadable version, please email: lacey112@uwindsor.ca

By proceeding to the survey, you are consenting to participate in this research study. Your responses will not be collected until you click submit at the end of the survey.

Do you agree to participate in this study?
Appendix C

Qualtrics Survey

Online Survey for Participants: Prior to Virtual Interview
To access in Qualtrics: https://uwindsor.ca1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_cYDgIufcbOyZ6Ga

Please choose a pseudonym (a fake name, that has no connection to you): ______

Demographical Questions

1. Do you identify as a woman?
   Yes
   No

2. Are you currently enrolled in an undergraduate program at the University of Windsor?
   Yes
   No

3. What year of study are you in?
   First year undergrad
   Second year undergrad
   Third year undergrad
   Fourth year undergrad
   Other, please specify ______

4. Are you considered a part-time or full-time student?
   Part-time student
   Full-time student

5. What is your major?

6. Has your major ever changed since starting university?
7. Approximately what is your grade point average?

8. Do you plan to complete a graduate degree after your undergraduate degree?
   Yes
   No
   Undecided

9. What age range are you in?
   17-19 years old
   20-22 years old
   23-25 years old
   26+ years old

10. What label best describes your sexual identity?
    Heterosexual (straight)
    Lesbian or gay
    Bisexual
    Asexual
    Another sexual identity not listed here. Please specify:
    Unsure

**Sexual Experiences Survey Questions**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sexual Experience</th>
<th>How many times in the past 12 months</th>
<th>How many times since starting university?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Someone fondled, kissed, or rubbed up against my private areas of my body (lips, chest/breasts, crotch, or butt) or removed some of my clothes without consent (but did not attempt sexual penetration) by:</td>
<td>0 1 2 3+</td>
<td>0 1 2 3+</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>a.</strong> Telling lies, threatening to end the relationship, threatening to spread rumors about me, making promises I knew were untrue, or continually verbally pressuring me after I said I didn’t want to.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>b.</strong> Showing displeasure, criticizing my sexuality or attractiveness, getting angry but not using physical force, after I said I didn’t want to.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>c.</strong> Taking advantage of me when I was too drunk or out of it to stop what was happening.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>d.</strong> Threatening to physically harm me or someone close to me.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>e.</strong> Using force, for example, holding me down with their body weight, pinning my arms, or having a weapon.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>f.</strong> This has never happened to me.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>2. Someone had oral sex with me or made me have oral sex with them without my consent by:</strong></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>a.</strong> Telling lies, threatening to end the relationship, threatening to spread rumors about me, making promises I knew were untrue, or continually verbally pressuring me after I said I didn’t want to.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Showing displeasure, criticizing my sexuality or attractiveness, getting angry but not using physical force, after I said I didn’t want to.</td>
<td>0 1 2 3+</td>
<td>0 1 2 3+</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. Taking advantage of me when I was too drunk or out of it to stop what was happening.</td>
<td>0 1 2 3+</td>
<td>0 1 2 3+</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. Threatening to physically harm me or someone close to me.</td>
<td>0 1 2 3+</td>
<td>0 1 2 3+</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e. Using force, for example, holding me down with their body weight, pinning my arms, or having a weapon.</td>
<td>0 1 2 3+</td>
<td>0 1 2 3+</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f. This has never happened to me</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<p>| 3. A man put his penis into my vagina, or someone inserted fingers or objects without my consent by: | 0 1 2 3+ | 0 1 2 3+ |
| a. Telling lies, threatening to end the relationship, threatening to spread rumors about me, making promises I knew were untrue, or continually verbally pressuring me after I said I didn’t want to | 0 1 2 3+ | 0 1 2 3+ |
| b. Showing displeasure, criticizing my sexuality or attractiveness, getting angry but not using physical force, after I said I didn’t want to. | 0 1 2 3+ | 0 1 2 3+ |
| c. Taking advantage of me when I was too drunk or out of it to | 0 1 2 3+ | 0 1 2 3+ |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Stop what was happening.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>d.</td>
<td>Threatening to physically harm me or someone close to me.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e.</td>
<td>Using force, for example, holding me down with their body weight, pinning my arms, or having a weapon.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f.</td>
<td>This has never happened to me.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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<tr>
<th>4.</th>
<th>A man put his penis into my butt, or someone inserted fingers or objects without my consent by:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a.</td>
<td>Telling lies, threatening to end the relationship, threatening to spread rumors about me, making promises I knew were untrue, or continually verbally pressuring me after I said I didn’t want to</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b.</td>
<td>Showing displeasure, criticizing my sexuality or attractiveness, getting angry but not using physical force, after I said I didn’t want to</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c.</td>
<td>Taking advantage of me when I was too drunk or out of it to stop what was happening.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d.</td>
<td>Threatening to physically harm me or someone close to me.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e.</td>
<td>Using force, for example, holding me down with their</td>
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<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Even though it did not happen, someone TRIED to have oral sex with me, or make me have oral sex with them without my consent by:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a.</td>
<td>Telling lies, threatening to end the relationship, threatening to spread rumors about me, making promises I knew were untrue, or continually verbally pressuring me after I said I didn’t want to</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b.</td>
<td>Showing displeasure, criticizing my sexuality or attractiveness, getting angry but not using physical force, after I said I didn’t want to</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c.</td>
<td>Taking advantage of me when I was too drunk or out of it to stop what was happening.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d.</td>
<td>Threatening to physically harm me or someone close to me.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e.</td>
<td>Using force, for example, holding me down with their body weight, pinning my arms, or having a weapon.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f.</td>
<td>This has never happened to me.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Even though it didn’t happen, a man TRIED to put his penis in my vagina, or someone tried to stick in fingers or objects without my consent by:

| a. Telling lies, threatening to end the relationship, threatening to spread rumors about me, making promises I knew were untrue, or continually verbally pressuring me after I said I didn’t want to | 0 1 2 3+ | 0 1 2 3+ |
| b. Showing displeasure, criticizing my sexuality or attractiveness, getting angry but not using physical force, after I said I didn’t want to | 0 1 2 3+ | 0 1 2 3+ |
| c. Taking advantage of me when I was too drunk or out of it to stop what was happening. | 0 1 2 3+ | 0 1 2 3+ |
| d. Threatening to physically harm me or someone close to me. | 0 1 2 3+ | 0 1 2 3+ |
| e. Using force, for example, holding me down with their body weight, pinning my arms, or having a weapon. | 0 1 2 3+ | 0 1 2 3+ |
| f. This has never happened to me. | | |

6. Even though it did not happen, a man TRIED to put his penis into my butt, or someone tried to | 0 1 2 3+ | 0 1 2 3+ |
stick in objects or fingers without my consent by:

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<th>3+</th>
<th></th>
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<th></th>
<th>3+</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. Telling lies, threatening to end the relationship, threatening to spread rumors about me, making promises I knew were untrue, or continually verbally pressuring me after I said I didn’t want to</td>
<td>0 1 2 3+</td>
<td>0 1 2 3+</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Showing displeasure, criticizing my sexuality or attractiveness, getting angry but not using physical force, after I said I didn’t want to</td>
<td>0 1 2 3+</td>
<td>0 1 2 3+</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. Taking advantage of me when I was too drunk or out of it to stop what was happening.</td>
<td>0 1 2 3+</td>
<td>0 1 2 3+</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>d. Threatening to physically harm me or someone close to me.</td>
<td>0 1 2 3+</td>
<td>0 1 2 3+</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>e. Using force, for example, holding me down with their body weight, pinning my arms, or having a weapon.</td>
<td>0 1 2 3+</td>
<td>0 1 2 3+</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>f. This has never happened to me.</td>
<td>0 1 2 3+</td>
<td>0 1 2 3+</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

7. Did any of these experiences described in this survey happen to you more than once?

Yes

No
What was the sex of the person or persons who did them to you?

- I reported no experiences
- Female only
- Male only
- Both males and females

8. Have you ever been raped?
   - Yes
   - No

Thank you for your participation. Your responses have been recorded.

Are you interested in participating in a follow up interview?

- Yes
- No

Attention: KEEP YOUR INFORMATION CONFIDENTIAL!

Before you close your web browser, please keep your information confidential by selecting the tool button in the top right corner of your browser, Click 'Delete...' under Browsing History. Select 'cookies and website data' and click 'Delete' to complete. If you are using Google Chrome, clear your browsing history by selecting the three vertical dots in the right had corner, click history, and then select 'clear browsing data' to complete.
Appendix D

Consent to Interview

Title of Study: The impact of sexual violence on student’s academic and university experiences: A qualitative study.

You are asked to participate in the second part of a research study conducted by Shelby Lacey for partial fulfilment of her Master of Science in Nursing degree.

If you have any questions or concerns about the research, please feel to contact either a. Shelby Lacey, MScN Student, University of Windsor at lacey112@uwindsor.ca or b. Dr. Debbie Kane, Faculty of Nursing, University of Windsor at dkane@uwindsor.ca or c. Dr. Edward Cruz, Faculty of Nursing, University of Windsor at edward.cruz@uwindsor.ca

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The primary purpose of this research is to explore the lived experiences of university students who are survivors of sexual violence, and their academic and university experiences. Academic experiences will include academic measures such as GPA and course completion, while university experiences will explore students’ perception of belongingness to the university community, and out-of-classroom experiences such as clinical placements. University experiences also includes the use of resources within the university. Therefore, the study will also explore the experience of student’s decision to use or not to use university provided formal resources in response to their experience with sexual violence.

This is the second half of this research project. You should have already completed the online survey named, “The Impact of Sexual Violence on Student’s Academic and University Experiences,” hosted on Qualtrics. This part of the research will allow you to expand on your experiences and offer your insights. Questions will be focused on your academic and university experiences following an unwanted sexual experience. The interview will not focus on or include any intrusive questions about your unwanted sexual experience.

To participate in this study, you need to have completed the online survey, “The Impact of Sexual Violence on Student’s Academic and University Experiences”. You should be a currently enrolled student in an undergraduate program at the University of Windsor. You should identify as a woman. If you are unsure if you have had an unwanted sexual experience, it is still okay to participate.

PROCEDURES
If you volunteer to participate in the second half of this study, you will be asked to complete an online interview with the primary researcher, Shelby Lacey. The online interview will be completed on MS Teams. The interview will be audio and video recorded. Alternatively, if you do not wish to complete the interview online, it can be completed via phone call.

The interview will be semi-structured in nature. Therefore, the researcher will be following an interview guide, but there may be deviations, additional questions or prompts according to how the interview is developing. You may choose not to answer any question you do not wish to answer. The interview will not take longer than an hour in length.

The interview may be done from anywhere with internet access; therefore, you may complete this interview in a location of your choice, including at home. It is suggested that you complete this survey in a safe and private spot, due to the sensitivity of the questions asked. You will have the option of refraining from answering any question you do not wish to answer without penalty. You may withdraw your consent to participate without penalty by simply letting Shelby Lacey know that you would like to end the interview.

POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS

There is low risk to you in participating in this study. You will not be asked to recount any unwanted sexual experience in depth; however, the nature of the questions may pose some psychological risks (medium). Some individuals may feel uncomfortable talking to another person about their experiences, especially if they have never sought formal or informal help regarding their experience with sexual violence. Discussing about the impacts that an unwanted sexual experience(s) may lead to some feelings of sadness, or even grief, which may cause some emotional distress. This may lead to temporary psychological distress in response to the interview. As a participant, you have the right to skip any questions that you do not wish to answer. If you experience any psychological or emotional distress while completing or as a result of completing the survey questionnaire or interview, please immediately contact one of the following support services:

- University of Windsor Sexual Misconduct Office, Contact Form | Sexual Assault and Sexual Misconduct (uwindsor.ca)
- Telehealth Ontario: 1-866-797-0000
- ConnexOntario: 1-866-531-2600

If you feel uncomfortable answering any question(s), please pass on the question(s). If you are unsure of what the questions are asking, please ask the researcher, Shelby Lacey, for further clarification.

Your information will remain confidential between the primary investigator and her faculty supervisors. Your information will not be shared beyond the research team. Your name or other identifying information will be immediately removed from the data during
transcription. As soon as the interview is transcribed, it will be deleted. Personal identifiers will be replaced with pseudonyms. There is low risk of the data being exposed to anyone outside of the research team.

POTENTIAL BENEFITS TO PARTICIPANTS AND/OR TO SOCIETY
It is unlikely that students who volunteer to participate in the online survey and/or semi-structured interview will experience any direct benefit from their involvement. A previous report indicated that individuals who have experienced trauma and yet participated in research involving speaking about their personal trauma experienced positive experiences including feeling like they could help others, that they contributed to science, and felt more prepared to seek formal help (Kirkner et al., 2019). The information you provide may offer new insights and knowledge in how students within university environments could be better supported following an unwanted sexual experience. This may help students experience less adverse academic consequences of university experience impacts.

COMPENSATION FOR PARTICIPATION
You will be provided a $20 Starbucks gift card.

CONFIDENTIALITY
Any information that is obtained in connection with this study will remain confidential. Personal identities will be removed and replaced to anonymous pseudonyms. All data collected from the survey responses will be stored on a password protected computer and on a secure University of Windsor server. All paper documentation will be shredded within five years after study completion.

PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL
If you volunteer to be in this study, you may withdraw without consequences of any kind by exiting the interview. You may refuse to answer any questions that you do not wish to answer, and the remainder of your answers will be included. You may withdraw from this study within one week of participating, after which time the data will be transcribed.

FEEDBACK OF THE RESULTS OF THIS STUDY TO THE PARTICIPANTS
Results of the study will be made available on the on the University of Windsor’s Scholarship website.

Web address: https://scholar.uwindsor.ca/
Date when results are available: Following completion of the research project.
SUBSEQUENT USE OF DATA

These data may be used in subsequent studies, in publications and in presentations.

RIGHTS OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

If you have questions regarding your rights as a research participant, contact: Research Ethics Coordinator, University of Windsor, Windsor, Ontario, N9B 3P4; Telephone: 519.253.3000 ext. 3948; Email: ethics@uwindsor.ca

SIGNATURE OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANT

I understand the information provided for the study The impact of unwanted sexual experiences on student’s academic and university experiences: A qualitative study as described herein. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I agree to participate in this study.
Appendix E

Interview Guide

Introduction and Verbal Consent:
Introduction Script and Caregiver Interview Guide

Introduction (to be read by researcher):

- Hello and thank you again for speaking with me. I need to begin by asking you some important preliminary questions.
- Can you please confirm for me that you have read the Consent Form that we provided to you by email.
- Do you understand the information provided for the study, “The impact of sexual violence on student’s academic and university experiences: A qualitative study,” as described in the Consent Form?
- Are there any questions I can answer for you on these matters?
- Just as a reminder, you have the right to refuse to answer any question, to seek clarification, and/or to withdraw your participation without penalty or consequences until one week from today and your data from the interview will be deleted. In all cases, the interview will be audio-recorded. All interviews will be transcribed by an independent transcriber, with all identifying information (e.g., age, gender, workplace) removed. Data analysis will be conducted on deidentified transcripts. You may withdraw your consent to participate at any time until one week after the interview.
- We would also like to remind you, as we tell all of our participants, that there are support services listed in the consent document we emailed to you should you experience any psychological or emotional distress during the interview, as a result of the interview, or during these difficult times.
- Finally, I need to ask for your formal consent again to be interviewed today given this information provided in the Consent Form.
  - Can I please ask you to say “I consent” specifically for recording purposes?
- [if consent is given] As I proceed, do feel absolutely free to ask for any clarifications you require. I will occasionally be seeking clarifications from you as you proceed with your answers.
- [if consent is not given] Thank you for your time.
### Interview Guide Questions:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Primary Research Question</th>
<th>Secondary Research Questions</th>
<th>Core Interview Questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How do unwanted sexual experiences during university years impact female student’s academic and university experiences?</td>
<td>How do students perceive their university experience after experiencing an unwanted sexual experience?</td>
<td>1. Before we get into the main questions for the interview, could you tell me a bit about what you are studying at university and how your university experience has been overall?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>2. How was the adjustment from high school to university? Is it what you expected?</td>
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<td>3. Do you enjoy participating in clubs or groups outside of the classroom? What type of social activities have you been a part of? Have you been in any leadership roles?</td>
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<td>4. Can you describe how your social life was impacted by your unwanted sexual experience?</td>
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<td>5. What are the biggest challenges of university? Do you think your challenges differ from other students?</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>6. Are you satisfied with your university experiences so far? Is</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| How are student’s academic goals impacted by an unwanted sexual experience? | 1. How would you describe yourself as a student? Has this description changed since your unwanted sexual experience?
2. Can you describe how you prepare for classes and your studying habits? Have these changed since your unwanted sexual experience?
3. How do you feel about your classroom environments? Do you feel comfortable asking for help from your professors or peers?
4. How would you describe your academic achievements? |
|---|---|
| How do students describe their experience of seeking formal or informal resources following an unwanted sexual experience within the university environment? | 1. Did you come to university alone or with friends you knew from high school or your community? Would you say you have a close group of friends who you can rely on or trust?
2. Have you told any of your university friends about your unwanted sexual experience? How did this go?
3. How would you describe your relationship with your professors? Would you ever or have you
ever disclosed your unwanted sexual experience to them? Why or why not?

4. Do you know about university resources available for students who have had unwanted sexual experiences? Have you ever used them or considered using them? Why or why not?

5. If you knew for certain, that the university system could have helped you following your unwanted sexual experience, how do you think your academic and university experiences would be impacted?

6. How could the university better support students who have had unwanted sexual experiences?

Closing Questions:
1. Is there anything else you would like to share?
Appendix F

List of Campus and Community Resources

Some services may be altered due to the COVID-19 Pandemic

University of Windsor Campus Resources

Student Counselling Centre [on-campus]
Free, confidential counselling provided by professional therapists.
CAW Student Centre Room 293
Monday-Friday: 8:30 am-4:30 pm (closed 12:00-1:00 pm).
519-253-3000 ext. 4616
scc@uwindsor.ca
http://www1.uwindsor.ca/scc/
By appointment

Student Health Services [on-campus]
Confidential healthcare for University of Windsor students provided by physicians and nurses.
CAW Student Centre Room 242
Monday-Friday: 9:00 am-5:00 pm (Friday closed 1:00-2:00 pm)
519-973-7002
http://www1.uwindsor.ca/health/
By appointment.

Peer Support Centre [September – April only] [on-campus]
A safe, inclusive space that provides free, confidential peer counselling by trained University of Windsor student volunteers. [on-campus resource]
CAW Student Centre Room 291
Monday-Friday: 10:00 am-8:00 pm.
http://www.uwsa.ca/uwsa-services/peer-support-centre/
Drop-in service - no appointment necessary.

Sexual Misconduct Response & Prevention Officer [on-campus]
Free, confidential support and advocacy for members of the University community who have experienced sexual violence or who are looking to help someone who has.
http://www.uwindsor.ca/sexual-assault/
Instagram: wecareatuw
Flip the Script with EAAA

Free 12-hour sexual assault resistance education workshop for university aged women. It includes topics such as identifying risk cues for sexual assault, acknowledging that you are at risk for sexual violence, defending your right to personal safety, and relationships and sexuality. The curriculum was developed by Dr. Charlene Senn and is delivered by peer facilitators.

Flip the script is currently paused during the pandemic, but when activities are allowed to resume, registration can be found at: https://www.uwindsor.ca/sexual-assault/FlipTheScript

Facebook: Flip the Script UWindsor

Bystander Initiative

Free three-hour workshop for all students at the University of Windsor. It equips you to learn about the importance of dismantling harmful social norms, skills to intervene on situations that could lead to sexual violence, and how to support survivors of sexual violence.

In person workshops are currently on hold during the COVID-19 pandemic, but more information about registration can be found at: https://www.uwindsor.ca/bystander-firstyear/

Facebook: UWindsor Bystander Initiative
Instagram: bystander_uwindsor

Good2Talk

A free, confidential 24/7 provincial helpline for post-secondary students (University/College) staffed by professional counsellors. 1-866-925-5454
https://good2talk.ca

keep.meSAFE

If you are an international student at the University of Windsor or an exchange student from the University of Windsor, you can also reach out to keep.meSAFE via phone, app, or online chat to receive free, confidential support from professionals in the language that is most comfortable to you.
https://keepmesafe.myissp.com

For more information on how keep.meSAFE works, please see: http://www.uwindsor.ca/dailynews/2017-11-27/advising-and-counselling-service-speaks-language-international-students

Community Resources – Windsor-Essex County
Community Crisis Centre
Free, confidential crisis intervention provided by professional crisis workers.
24/7 Crisis Line:
519-973-4435
http://www.hdgh.org/crisis

Distress Centre of Windsor-Essex County
Free, anonymous, confidential helpline that provides emotional support by trained volunteers 365 days/year via phone, text, and online chat. Hours vary by service.
https://www.downtownmission.com/distress/

Sexual Assault Crisis Centre
Free, confidential support and crisis intervention for survivors of sexual violence provided by specialized professional counsellors.
24/7 Crisis Line:
519-253-9667
https://saccwindsor.net

Transitional Stability Centre
Provides support and care coordination for those experiencing mental health or substance abuse challenges that are not an emergency. For more information please see: https://www.hdgh.org/transitionalstabilitycentre

Canadian Mental Health Association
Offers a wide range of services and programs to support individuals experiencing mental health challenges.
General Phone Line (not crisis): 519-255-7440
https://windsoressex.cmha.ca/services

Teen Health Centre
Confidential healthcare, nutrition counselling, and individual/group therapy provided by a community healthcare team for youth between the ages of 12 to 24.
General Phone Line: (519) 253-8481
http://www.wechc.org/teenhealth_home

Bulimia and Anorexia Nervosa Association (BANA)
Provides individual and group counselling for individuals of all ages struggling with an eating disorder.
General Phone Line: 519-969-2112
In-take Phone Line: 1-855-969-5530
http://www.bana.ca/clinical-services/clinical-intakenew-clients

Hiatus House
Hiatus House is a social service agency offering confidential intervention for families experiencing domestic violence.
www.hiatushouse.com
Hope for Wellness Help Line
Offers immediate help to all Indigenous peoples across Canada. It is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week to offer counselling and crisis intervention.
Call the toll-free Help Line at 1-855-242-3310 or connect to the online chat at hopeforwellness.ca.

Welcome Centre for Women & Families
Welcome Centre Shelter for Women help women and families end the cycle of poverty and violence in their lives.
**Address:** 263 Bridge Ave, Windsor, ON N9B 2M1
**Phone:** (519) 971-7595
www.welcomecentreshelter.com

The Windsor Youth Centre
The Windsor Youth Centre provides safe refuge for homeless and at-risk youth.
1247 Wyandotte Street East
226-674-0006
www.thewindsoryouthcentre.org

Self Care Resources

**Bullet Journal**
Coursera | Online Courses & Credentials From Top Educators. Join for Free
Coursera offers free online courses of various topics. They offer two courses that may help in learning about mindfulness and wellbeing including, “The Science of Wellbeing”, and “Mindfulness and Wellbeing: Living with Balance and Ease”. You will need to make an account to access resources.
Free mediation app for any person from beginner to expert in mediation. Has over 60,000 guided meditations to chose from. Focuses on helping individuals in practice mindfulness.
**Insight Timer - #1 Free Meditation App for Sleep, Relax & More**

**InsightTimer**
Learn - Bullet Journal

**Liberate – Mediation App**
Liberate: Black Mediation App on the App Store (apple.com)
Mediation app developed and for Black communities. Library consists of 260+ titles that is led by teachers of colour covering topics such as anxiety and stress, depression, microaggressions, internalized racism, ancestral healing, and sleep. It does have a fee.

**Online Courses on Wellbeing**
Online resource that teaches bullet journaling. Bullet journaling is a method of journaling that can help individuals organize their thoughts. You do not need to buy a fancy journal for this method of journaling – just need a journal and your preferred writing tool!

**PopSugar Fitness**
POPSUGAR Fitness
Resource that offers various free at home workouts. The site offers workouts that are led by different instructors, fitness levels, and workout types. Each workout offers modification tips to adjust the movements for different skill or fitness level. Overall focus on movement and health, rather than body image.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NAME:</th>
<th>Shelby Lacey</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PLACE OF BIRTH:</td>
<td>Sarnia, ON</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YEAR OF BIRTH:</td>
<td>1996</td>
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<tr>
<td>EDUCATION:</td>
<td>St. Clair Secondary School, Sarnia, ON, 2014</td>
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<td></td>
<td>University of Windsor, BScN., Windsor, ON, 2018</td>
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<td></td>
<td>University of Windsor, MScN., Windsor, ON, 2023</td>
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