

**WOMEN'S PERCEPTIONS OF HELPFUL AND HINDERING INCIDENTS
IN COPING WITH SEXUAL HARASSMENT**

by

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative study employed the Critical Incident Technique to examine women's perceptions of helpful and hindering incidents in experiences of coping with sexual harassment. Fifteen women completed individual interviews as participants for the study. Incidents were extracted from interview data and sorted into helpful and hindering incidents in the context of actions of participants versus actions of others. Fifteen major categories and nine subcategories were formed. Emotional support, seeking social support (i.e., protecting younger coworkers, banding together with other women, confiding in female coworker), and incidents which helped stop the harassment were described as significantly helpful. Incidents in which harassment did not stop or was perceived to get worse, or incidents in which the participant did not feel emotionally supported and even blamed for being in the situation were described as significantly hindering. Implications for counselling practice and employers are presented and recommendations for future research are discussed.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

It angered me that he was doing this... and it angered me that I had to be like that because I'm not... I'm not a confrontational person... at the time. I think I'm more confrontational now than I was then um, but I was not a confrontational person and so at the time it made me feel like crap that I actually had to say this to him and why wasn't I being... why weren't women being protected more (07).

Sexual harassment has become a pervasive issue in schools, the workplace, and the community. In 2008, the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission received over 13, 867 charges of work related sexual harassment alone, with 84.1 % of these charges being filed by women. In a study of Canadian universities, half of all women surveyed reported being the victim of some form of sexual harassment on campus (McDaniel & Van Roosmalen, 1991). As a response to this widespread phenomenon, there is an abundance of research that categorizes the behavioural reactions of women who have experienced harassment; however, it has been suggested that future research should use qualitative methodologies to create a more comprehensive understanding of coping behaviours (Magley, 2000).

Significance of the Topic

Sexual harassment is a widespread social issue and as a result, coping with sexual harassment is an important area of research. As reflected in the above quotation, women are often faced with the difficult task of dealing with experiences of sexual harassment at school, in the workplace, and in various other contexts. Research to date has examined the strategies that women have employed to cope with incidents of sexual harassment, and studies have categorized coping behaviours and described the frequency with which they have been used (Bingham & Scherer, 1993; Fitzgerald, Schullman, Bailey, & Richards, 1988; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Magley, 2002; Weiss & Lalonde, 2001). The participant in the above

quotation describes conflicting feelings regarding the means she chose to cope with her experience of harassment. I suspect that this discord is widely echoed among other women who have had similar experiences, which poses the question of what does and does not work for women coping with experiences of sexual harassment.

Purpose of Study and Research Question

The purpose of the present study was to examine women's perceptions of helpful and hindering experiences of coping with sexual harassment. A qualitative research method was used to not only identify the types of incidents that were significantly helpful and hindering, but also to describe how these incidents added to or took away from experiences of coping. The specific research question was, "what is helpful and what is hindering in experiences of coping with sexual harassment?"

Location of Self in the Research

Sexual harassment is something that I have always been aware of; it is safe to say that many of us know it exists but for a variety of reasons it does not get the attention and commitment to change that is deserved. During my undergraduate degree I volunteered with the sexual harassment advisor at my university, which was an eye opening experience for me. Until I spent some time in the harassment office, I had no idea just how prevalent sexual harassment was on campus; I knew some of the targets, and worse yet, I knew some of the perpetrators. I began to question why it was happening and why students were not hearing about it. Are students aware of university sexual harassment policies? Do students need to be educated on what sexual harassment actually is? Do the responses to reports of sexual harassment meet the targets' needs? However, the problem became very real to me when a close friend of mine was sexually harassed at a gathering hosted for a conference being held

by her academic department. The incident was blatant gender harassment and extremely derogatory and hurtful. She became anxious and reported feelings of both anger and sadness. She also described feeling misunderstood by her family and friends, who did not seem to understand how deeply the experience had affected her. Being so close to someone who had an experience like this led me to question the process of coping with sexual harassment — there seems to be a gap between what women need in order to cope effectively, and what actually happens. When I began reviewing literature for this topic, I noticed that there was an abundance of quantitative literature that provided descriptive statistics in terms of the percentages of women who are harassed, the frequency of the harassment, the demographics of women who are most vulnerable to sexual harassment, and so on. However, there were very few studies that provided a platform for women's voices to be heard or that presented them the opportunity to describe their experiences of sexual harassment and the aftermath. Looking back, I regret not asking my friend "what do you need, and how can I help you deal with this incident?" I am pleased that this study has provided me with a second chance to give my friend, and others like her a different forum through which they can tell their stories and say what was helpful and what was hindering in their specific experiences of coping with sexual harassment.

Overview of the Thesis

Chapter 1 has provided an introduction to the topic of study and identified the research question that will be addressed, as well as my personal connection with the research. Chapter 2 will review the existing literature on sexual harassment, including a definition of the phenomenon and its introduction as a social problem, the prevalence of sexual harassment in our society, the context in which sexual harassment takes place, and the effects

of sexual harassment on targets. Chapter 3 will include a rationale for my choice of the Critical Incident Technique as the research method, a detailed description of the technique, a description of participant recruitment, data collection and analysis, ethical considerations, and results of trustworthiness checks. Chapter 4 will describe the findings of the research. Finally, Chapter 5 will discuss the original research question, interpret the results of the study, and demonstrate the manner in which findings from the present study were supported by existing literature. Implications for counselling practice and for employers will be discussed, importance of the research findings will be explored, and suggestions for future research and limitations of the study will be addressed.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This chapter will provide an overview of sexual harassment with a review of the existing literature. The literature review will include a definition of the phenomenon and its introduction as a social problem, the prevalence of sexual harassment in our society, the context in which sexual harassment takes place, the effects of sexual harassment, and definitions and clarification of terms.

Sexual Harassment

Definition

Sexual harassment is defined as “unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature” (U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, March 2009). The sexual harassment policy from the human resource department of the University of New Brunswick adds that behaviours are considered sexual harassment when submission to the conduct described above is made a condition of employment, academic status or academic accreditation; when there are implicit or explicit employment or academic consequences to rejection of such conduct; when such conduct interferes with an individual’s academic or working performance; and finally, when such conduct creates a tense or hostile working or academic environment (University of New Brunswick: Human Resources and Organizational Development, Policy Concerning Sexual Harassment, 1990). The sexual harassment policy for the University of Northern British Columbia (2003) effectively elaborates on this definition, adding that unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, or other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature can be considered sexual harassment when such behaviour may “reasonably be expected to cause embarrassment, insecurity, discomfort, offense or humiliation to another person or

group of persons” (p. 4). Finally, the Canadian Human Rights Commission concludes that sexual harassment is thought to have taken place if a reasonable person ought to have known that such behaviour was unwelcome (Canadian Human Rights Commission Research and Special Studies Branch, 1983, p. 4). In Canada, it is the legal responsibility of federal, provincial, and territorial courts to investigate and work to resolve complaints of sexual harassment (Canadian Advisory Council on the Status of Women, 1993, p. 3).

Dynamics of Sexual Harassment

Fitzgerald, Gelfand, and Drasgow have said that “sexual harassment research arose not as a matter of academic or theoretical interest, but in response to the need to solve a pressing social problem” (1995, p. 437). Despite previous attitudes, present day researchers and experts in the area of sexual harassment have come to the conclusion that sexual harassment is about power and not about sex, and while it would be inaccurate to say that sexual harassment is not an issue for men, it seems to be a much more prominent issue for women in our society (Canadian Advisory Council on the Status of Women; Hitlan, Schneider, & Walsh, 2006; Huerta, Cortina, Pang, Torges, & Magley, 2006; Pryor, 1995; Rederstorff, Buchanan, & Settles, 2007; Salisbury, Stringer, Ginorio, & Remick, 1986; Valente & Bullough, 2004; Welsh & Gruber, 1999). The Canadian Advisory Council on the Status of Women argues that sexual harassment serves as a means for men to degrade women by treating them as sexual objects in non-sexual contexts, which hinders women’s ability to effectively work, learn, and function as equal and respected members of society. McDaniel and Van Roosmalen (1991) agreed with this theory of sexual harassment, arguing that it serves as a means to undermine women’s authority and to reinforce their traditionally subordinate role in society. In their study of sexual harassment in the lives of young women

in Canadian universities, the authors hypothesized that young female students would be more vulnerable to sexual harassment because they are youthful, unsure of who they are, economically dependent, and because they have a number of opportunities both academically and casually to interact with men who are in positions of power over them. In support of this prediction, results from the study found that the women's academic superiors were more likely to be perpetrators of the harassment than were the women's peers, and that most of the sexual harassment happened on campus. Interestingly enough, contrary to the hypothesis, no significant differences were found between women of various ages and economic status.

Sexual harassment is a widespread social problem that permeates various institutions and takes place in everyday situations. However, regardless of how rife the phenomenon seems to be, studies have continuously found that when women are the targets of inappropriate sexual behaviour they are hesitant to independently label the behaviour as "sexual harassment", even though they will agree that the behaviours constitute sexual harassment when explicitly asked (Weiss & Lalonde, 2001). However, studies have also found that women are more likely to label behaviours as sexual harassment when the perpetrators' actions are blatant and unambiguous than they are when the perpetrator engages in more ambiguous behaviours (Galesic & Tourangeau, 2007; Sigal, Braden-Maguire, Patt, Goodrich, & Perrino, 2003; Weiss & Lalonde, 2001). For example, a study by Weiss and Lalonde (2001) compared female students' reactions to hypothetical scenarios between a professor and a female student. In the first and more unambiguous scenario, the professor places his hand on a female student's knee and suggests that if she were to "hold back less" during their one-on-one meetings together then she would be able to obtain a better grade in the class. A second and more ambiguous scenario describes the professor as joking with the

student and mentioning that she seems to hold back in the personal interactions the same way she holds back in her writing. Results from this study showed that female students were more likely to label the unambiguous scenario as sexual harassment as compared to the more ambiguous scenario. Similarly, a study by Galesic and Tourangeau (2007) found that female employees were more likely to label obvious behaviours such as receiving an email of a nude woman as sexual harassment as compared to more subtle behaviours such as a manager setting “impossible” deadlines for a female employee.

Because we know that women are often unwilling to label harassing behaviours as such, research is exploring the question of what sexual harassment actually is, and why women are hesitant to use those words. Wear, Aultman, and Borges (2007) conducted a qualitative study of women at five American medical schools to investigate the prevalence of sexually harassing behaviours and women’s interpretations of them. The authors found that the female participants were exposed to a range of sexually inappropriate behaviours by male superiors and colleagues, including sexual innuendo, explicit sexual banter, and crude language about women and the female anatomy in general; however, they often made no attempt to stop the behaviour and sometimes ignored it completely. As an explanation for this response, one female medical student said “there is an attitude among women in medicine that ‘boys will be boys’ and that they will say what they want to when they want to”(Wear et al., 2007, p. 22). This suggests that inappropriate and sexually harassing behaviour has become so commonplace in society that it has become normalized, leading women to believe it to be part of the culture and that there is little that can be done about it. Wear and colleagues (2007) also note that there are other explanations as to why women may be unlikely to label inappropriate behaviours as sexual harassment; they may fear alienation

from the very institution or group they are speaking out against, or the social, economic or academic consequences of speaking out against a boss, supervisor, or academic superior. For example, one female medical student reported that the reason that she did not speak out against the inappropriate behaviours of her male colleagues was that there is the unspoken mentality that women in medical school need to “suck it up”, and that she did not want to be “labeled as someone who is not a team player” (p. 26).

Research has also shown that the female victim’s interpretation of inappropriate behaviours can be equally as important as the behaviours themselves when it comes to the labeling of sexual harassment. Some studies have found that the likelihood of a woman defining unwanted sexual attention as sexual harassment can be influenced by the woman’s “personal network”, defined as “others with whom the target individual communicates with on a regular basis” (Itaru, 2003, p. 202). In particular, women who have strong views of sexual harassment as a societal issue are more likely to label sexual harassment as such and are less likely to be influenced by their personal network, as they are more likely to carefully consider all the factors involved in and the consequences of this behaviour. However, women who do not have strong views of sexual harassment are less likely to label inappropriate behaviour as sexual harassment, and are more likely to be influenced by the opinions of the personal network without taking into consideration the personal and political factors involved (Itaru, 2003). Similarly, a study of both men and women found that women experience sexual harassment more than men, not necessarily because they experience inappropriate behaviours more often but because they evaluated the behaviours more negatively than male counterparts would (Berdahl, 2007). Fitzgerald, Shullman, Bailey, and Richards (1988) found that a “large number of women who have experienced relatively

blatant instances” (p.171) of sexual harassment fail to recognize and label the experience as such, but that the likelihood of labeling inappropriate behaviours as sexual harassment will increase with the severity and frequency of harassing incidents.

Finally, one study indicated that incidents of unwanted sexual behaviour in the workplace were consistently associated with negative psychological, work, and health consequences, regardless of whether or not the target labeled the unwanted behaviour as sexual harassment. This suggests that it is the experience of the unwanted behaviour and not the label of “sexual harassment” itself that leads to negative outcomes for those who experience it (Magley, Hulin, Fitzgerald, & DeNardo, 1999).

Prevalence

The Canadian Human Rights Commission deals with complaints of sexual harassment and cases of discrimination on the grounds of sex, and in 1983 they surveyed Canadian men and women and asked them of their experiences with unwanted sexual attention. Results from this survey were startling to the public, as it identified how pervasive sexually harassing behaviours have become in society. The study found that 49% of women and 33% of men reported experiencing at least one type of unwanted sexual behaviour in the past year and as previously discussed, women were more likely than men to label the unwanted sexual attention as harassment. In a study of women in the U.S. military, Pryor (1995) found that 64% of the female respondents had experienced at least one form of uninvited sexual attention by military peers in the past year with the perpetrators of the uninvited attention being almost always reported as men; less than 1% of those who were harassed named a single woman as the perpetrator. In a more recent study of sexual

harassment of women in the military, 61% of female participants reported experiencing at least one form of inappropriate sexual behaviour within a one month period (Vijayasiri, 2008). A study by Hitlan, Schneider, and Walsh (2006) used questionnaires to examine employed females' personal experiences with sexual harassment, as well as their experiences with the sexual harassment of others. Results of this study found that 78% of the women had experienced at least one "potentially" sexually harassing behaviour in the past year, and that 69.2% of the participants had witnessed another female being sexually harassed within their organization by a male supervisor or co-worker within the past year. Finally, along these same lines, one study found that 56.6% of college women had been the target of inappropriate sexual behaviours in the past year, and that the majority of the unwanted behaviours happened on campus (Huerta, Cortina, Pang, Torges, & Magley, 2006). Regardless of the actual percentages, these studies consistently indicate that a significant number of women experience and/or witness sexual harassment in their school or place of work.

Over the past few decades sexual harassment has been researched at length, and many authors have attempted to divide behaviours into categories that describe various types of behaviours and levels of severity. In the review of the literature, the most commonly used categories were those proposed by Gelfand, Fitzgerald, and Drasgow (1995), who argue that the three categories of gender harassment, unwanted sexual attention, and sexual coercion are "necessary and sufficient to classify any particular incident of harassment" (p. 167). Gender harassment is defined as "a range of verbal and nonverbal behaviours generally not aimed at sexual cooperation; rather, they convey insulting, hostile, and degrading attitudes about women" (p. 168). Examples of gender harassment include nicknames, slurs, taunts, and

gestures; the display or distribution of obscene or pornographic materials; gender based hazing; and threatening, intimidating or hostile acts. Unwanted sexual attention is just what the title implies; it can be displayed with both verbal and nonverbal behaviours and can take the form of unreciprocated requests for dates or repeated and non-reciprocated attempts to contact the target and any grabbing, touching or sexual imposition of the target. This category is separate from the category of sexual coercion in the way that noncompliance with the unwanted attention is not associated with job loss or benefits to the target. Finally, sexual coercion refers to behaviours in the form of bribes or threats to the target of the harassment that can be either explicit or implicit in nature and that imply that maintenance of the target's position or benefits to the target are conditional of sexual compliance.

Gender harassment is the most common harassment reported by targets and many studies have claimed that gender harassment accounts for at least 50 % of all sexual harassment reported (Canadian Human Rights Commission, 1983; Fitzgerald et al., 1988; Galesic & Tourangeau, 2007; Gelfand et al., 1995; Pryor, 1995; Slotten, 2002). Unwanted sexual attention is estimated to account for 20% to 25 % of all reported harassment, and sexual coercion is the least frequently reported, falling into the 5% to 10 % range. One possible explanation for this is that sexual coercion involves the potential for targets to face loss of job or benefits if they do not comply with the perpetrator's requests; therefore it is reasonable to assume that participants would be more hesitant to report behaviours in this category than they would be to report other types of sexual harassment (Gelfand et al., 1995). Another possible explanation is that the more recognizable and aggressive acts of sexual harassment are easier to name, and so have now become socially unacceptable and easier to

report. Gender harassment is harder to name and, as a result, more difficult to distinguish and report.

Context

Women's perceptions of what constitutes sexual harassment, and the likelihood to label and report sexual harassment, have been found to vary depending on the context that the woman is in at the time the inappropriate behaviours take place. One factor that has been shown to influence the way women experience sexual harassment is the perception women have of how tolerant various organizations are of inappropriate and harassing behaviours (Bingham & Scherer, 1993; Fitzgerald et al., 1995; Handy, 2006). In a study of three diverse workplaces in rural New Zealand, Handy (2006) concluded that "the boundaries which women draw between acceptable and unacceptable male behaviours are highly context specific and vary between different settings" (p. 21). For example, one of the organizations in this study was a meat-processing plant, that was a male dominated environment known for its misogynist attitude toward female employees in the form of overt sexual harassment, intimidation, and the implied feeling that management and the union are not only aware of but actually supportive of the harassment. Some research has found that when women perceive their workplace to be more encouraging of sexual harassment they will respond more aggressively to the situation and report the behaviour to a family member or friend—perhaps because they feel that the institution will not act on her behalf. For example, in the study by Handy, one woman was the target of requests for sexual favors by a male co-worker. In response to the inappropriate requests, the participant confided in her father, who then spoke to the plant manager on her behalf in an attempt to resolve the situation and stop the harassment.

Studies have also shown that the norms, culture, and standards of a particular workplace will play a role in the way that sexual harassment is expressed by employees, and in turn, will influence the way targets choose to respond. As previously discussed, when an organization is perceived by the target as being tolerant of harassment, the target sometimes chooses to respond by confiding in a friend or family member about the harassment, perhaps as a way to find the support that they do not think they would obtain if they were to disclose to someone within the organization. However, in a study of women's responses to sexual harassment in the United States military, Malamut and Offermann (2001) found that the more tolerant of harassment the women perceived the military to be, the more likely they were to deny that there was a problem and avoid the subject of the harassment altogether. This was consistent with a study of women in medical schools who felt that because of the traditional, male dominated culture of their medical school environment, they had to take on a "boys will be boys" attitude in order to cope with the blatant prevalence of sexual harassment within the institution (Wear et al., 2007). In addition to gathering data from a meat processing plant, Handy (2006) interviewed employees of a retail store about their experiences with sexual harassment. The retail store was a female dominated environment, and most of the harassment was perpetrated by male customers. In this context, because the organizational tolerance for sexual harassment was perceived to be low, management was trusted by the employees, who believed they would be supported if they complained of harassment by colleagues or customers. In this situation, women found the harassment "irritating", but it was not as pervasive as compared to those organizations in which women perceived institutional attitudes toward sexual harassment to be high. On the other hand, female employees in this business also had to deal with male colleagues from other organizations,

such as security guards, and sexual harassment perpetrated by these individuals was often described as “normal” and was for the most part overlooked by female employees.

Organizational responses to complaints of sexual harassment will also influence targets’ perceptions of the workplace and the investigative process (Elkins, Phillips, & Ward, 2008; Elkins & Velez-Castrillon, 2008; Nelson, Halpert, & Cellar, 2007); however, research indicates that some organizational policies may not be enough to prevent inappropriate behaviour and do not necessarily provide the protection targets are seeking (Chamberlain, Crowley, Tope, & Hodson, 2008; Hertzog, Wright, & Beat, 2008). In a study of organizational responses to sexual harassment, Nelson, Halpert, and Cellar (2007) explored employees’ perceptions of which types of interventions were effective in responding to and preventing sexual harassment. Participants were asked to rate which of the following they perceived as most effective in communicating organizational intolerance of sexual harassment: victim reassignment and transfer, perpetrator counselling and rehabilitation, perpetrator apology and verbal/written reprimand (scolding), perpetrator demotion and leave of absence, or termination of the perpetrator’s employment. Results found that termination of the perpetrator was rated as most effective in communicating organizational intolerance of sexual harassment, while scolding the perpetrator was rated by participants as being the second least effective means of communicating organizational intolerance. It is important to note that results of this study indicated that participants rated any intervention that involved the victim (i.e., victim reassignment and transfer) as least effective in communicating organizational intolerance of sexual harassment. This study suggests that targets of sexual harassment believe that in order to communicate intolerance of inappropriate sexual

behaviour it is important for organizations to implement consequences that directly impact the perpetrator of the harassment.

Research findings regarding how harassing behaviours are perceived cross-culturally seems to be inconsistent. Some studies have found that harassing behaviours are experienced similarly by targets, regardless of culture, and that measures of sexual harassment can be applied cross culturally as an organizational issue with similar occupational, psychological, and health related consequences (Bergman & Henning, 2008; Wasti, Bergman, Glomb, & Drasgow, 2000). For example, in a study of sexual harassment of female nurses by male patients in Japan, the most common type of harassing behaviours were those that could be categorized as “gender harassment”— making sexual jokes and remarks, and teasing (Hibino, Ogino & Inagaki, 2006). Also, in their cross-cultural study on the structure of sexual harassment, Gelfand et al. (1995) found that behavioural relationships could be formed to support and fit into the three categories of harassment, even despite the fact that they were studying a culture whose language (Portuguese) has no word to describe the concept of sexual harassment. Other studies have found that sexual harassment will be experienced differently across cultures due to varying interpretations of everyday social interactions such as personal space, and verbal and non verbal cues (Li & Lee-Wong, 2005; Merkin, 2008). Other research has indicated that distinct societal traits such as patriarchy, collectivism, and socially acceptable gender roles can influence the way that unwanted sexual attention is perceived and the coping strategies employed by targets (Cortina & Wasti, 2005; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). In their research on coping responses across persons, organizations, and cultures, Cortina and Wasti (2005) found cultural affiliation to be one of the most influential components in the determination of coping styles. For example, women

from patriarchal, collectivist cultures were less likely to engage in assertive, public, or more vocal means of coping. Instead, they reported using avoidance, denial, and social-coping strategies without seeking formal advocacy. Women from these cultures also reported using subtle, non-verbal cues as coping strategies (e.g. frowning) to convey displeasure with the behaviour, while still allowing the perpetrator of the unwanted sexual attention to “save face”.

Effects of Sexual Harassment

Sexual harassment is detrimental to those who experience it, and can have serious and long term effects (Gruber & Fineran, 2007). Female targets of sexual harassment have reported a wide range of symptoms as a result of the experience, some of which are consistent with the symptomology associated with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (O'Donohue, Mosco, Bowers, & Avina, 2006). Women who have experienced sexual harassment have reported a range of symptoms and emotions, including, guilt, embarrassment, fear, anxiety, anger, depression, difficulty sleeping, confusion, and the inability to concentrate (Canadian Advisory Council Factsheet, 1993; Hibino et al., 2006; O'Donohue et al., 2006; Salisbury et al., 1986). Studies of women who experience sexual harassment in both high school and post secondary institutions have shown that the experience of being the target of harassment can lead to increased psychological distress, lower academic satisfaction, and a decrease in academic performance (Huerta et al., 2006; O'Donohue et al., 2006; Slotten, 2002). As the frequency and intensity of harassment increases, so do reported symptoms of depression and anxiety. Pryor (1995) found that 60% of women who have experienced sexual harassment in their school or work place will experience negative feelings about the institution in general. Sexual harassment can also take

away from a female target's performance in the workplace; several studies have found that in their sample over half of women reported that they experienced productivity problems after the harassing incident (Bowling & Beehr, 2006; Chan, Lam, Chow, & Cheung, 2008; Huerta et al., 2006; Pryor, 1995; Rederstorff, Buchanan, & Settles, 2007; Slotten, 2002). Studies of female nurses who experienced sexual harassment on the job reported that at times they found the inappropriate behaviours so distressing that they could not think clearly about assessment or patient care, and distracting to the point that they were more likely to make mistakes that were uncharacteristic of them (Hibino et al., 2006; Pryor, 1995; Valente & Bullough, 2004).

Coping

Coping is defined as “constantly changing cognitive and behavioural efforts to manage specific external and/or internal demands that are appraised as taxing or exceeding the resources of the person” (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984, p. 141). Lazarus and Folkman argue that coping strategies can be divided into the two categories of emotion-focused coping and problem-focused coping, and research is now employing this distinction. Emotion-focused coping strategies take place when the target of the stressful situation evaluates the threatening, harmful, or challenging environment and comes to the conclusion that it cannot be changed. Emotion-focused coping consists of cognitive processes that are intended to reduce distress to the target individual, and can include behaviours such as avoidance, minimizing, distancing, selective attention, positive comparison, and taking positive values from negative events. Individuals may also engage in behaviours in an attempt to “take their mind off of the situation”, such as strenuous exercise to express anger, meditating, indulging in alcohol or other mind altering substances, and seeking emotional support. Problem-

focused coping strategies take place when the target of the stressful situation evaluates the harmful, threatening or challenging environment and makes the decision that it is able to be changed. Problem-focused coping strategies are directed inward, as the individual attempts to brainstorm solutions in order to alter the stressful situation, conducting a cost-benefit analysis on these solutions to determine their potential effectiveness and finally choosing from the pool of solutions in order to put a plan into place.

Skinner, Edge, Altman, and Sherwood (2003) elaborated on the categorization of coping strategies as either emotion focused or problem focused, and argued that “any given way of coping is likely to serve many functions” (p. 248). These authors suggested that there were five categories of coping that commonly appeared in the studies they critiqued, which included: problem solving (e.g., planning, logistical analysis), support seeking (e.g., seeking advice, comfort, or contact with other people), avoidance (e.g., avoidant actions, or cognitive avoidance), direct action (e.g., deliberate action on part of the individual to control situation), and distraction (e.g., engaging in some other, more pleasurable activity, [p. 225]).

Coping with Sexual Harassment

Research on female targets’ responses to sexual harassment has shown that minimizing the impact of the incident is a common strategy that women employ in order to cope (Salisbury et al., 1986; Slotten, 2002; Wear et al., 2007). Studies have found that women will “make light” of the situation, shrugging it off as unimportant or even as acceptable, despite the fact that their behaviours may show otherwise. In a study of high school harassment, one young woman was the target of unwanted sexual touches and comments by a male teacher, but described the situation as “no big deal”; however, she also

disclosed that she “hated” the class that was taught by the perpetrating teacher, and that she felt that she had to stay quiet in class in order to avoid contact with him (Slotten, 2002). The same study reported that many young female targets of sexual harassment described their experiences with sexual harassment as “not important enough to tell anybody”, but also described general dissatisfaction with their high school experience. Women may also feel that they have no choice but to allow the harassment to “roll off their backs”; otherwise they will be unhappy in their school or place of work. A study of female medical students found that targets were likely to minimize frequent inappropriate sexual comments and behaviours made by male colleagues, stating in one sentence that it did not bother them, but later saying that they had to build up tolerance to this kind of behaviour because the only other choice was to be “miserable” during their residency (Wear et al., 2007). As previously discussed, women are hesitant to use the words “sexual harassment” to describe their experience with unwanted and/or inappropriate sexual behaviours, which can also be a way to minimize the experience. Instead of labeling the behaviours as harassment, female targets sometimes choose to frame the experience the most positive way possible, or to use “nice” or “academic” words to explain what happened, which serves as a way for targets to distance themselves from the impact of the experience and to separate themselves from the emotions involved (Salisbury et al., 1986).

Avoidance is another common way that female targets of sexual harassment choose to cope with the experience of harassment. Because the perpetrator of sexual harassment is typically in a position of power or authority over the female target of the harassment, women often fear the consequences of reporting or confronting the harasser. Therefore, it is not uncommon for women to report that in response to their experience with sexual harassment

that they chose to “do nothing”, choosing instead to avoid contact with the perpetrator both cognitively and behaviourally (Cortina & Wasti, 2005; Wilkinson, Gill, Fitzjohn, Palmer, & Mulder, 2006). Avoidance of the perpetrator can consist of negotiation with the accused to avoid being in the same place at the same time, quitting one’s job, dropping out of a class, finding a new supervisor, and so on. Avoidance can also consist of cognitive strategies such as denial that the harassment ever happened and refusal to acknowledge or discuss the incident. Several studies have shown that women’s satisfaction with the outcome of the situation of sexual harassment will decrease as the authority of the perpetrator and the organization’s tolerance for sexual harassment increases, which will lead to a greater likelihood of employing avoidance as a coping strategy (Bingham & Scherer, 1993; Handy, 2006; Malamut & Offermann, 2001).

Seeking social support is an emotion-focused coping method employed by vulnerable people, including female targets of sexual harassment (Dakof & Taylor, 1990). Social support networks can act as a safeguard for vulnerable people in stressful situations, and they have been shown to decrease target individuals’ levels of distress (Frazier & Burnett, 1994; Green & Pomeroy, 2007; Kocot & Goodman, 2003; Reynolds & Harris, 2006; Wethington & Kessler, 1986; Yagil, 2008). Studies have shown that it is common for targets of harassment to disclose their experiences to close friends and family members, and that it is more uncommon for women to turn to formal support providers such as the department of human resources, labor unions, or the police (Ahrens, Campbell, Ternier-Thames, Wasco, & Sefl, 2007; Cortina, 2004; Cox, 2005; Wilkinson et al., 2006). In a study of immediate coping strategies among rape victims (Frazier & Burnett, 1994), women were asked to respond to the open ended question “what have you done if anything since the rape that has made you

feel better?” Results showed that seeking social support and talking about the rape were among the most helpful actions mentioned by participants. In the same study, boyfriends, mothers, and female friends were listed as individuals to whom targets most commonly disclosed. One study examined the role that social support plays for victims of crime, and discussion of findings stated that “social support and emotion-focused coping appear to have a critical role in successful recovery from a crime event” (Green & Pomeroy, 2007, p. 109). A recent study also reported the benefits of social support in experiences of coping with sexual harassment, and interestingly found that having more female friends was positively associated with the act of reporting incidents of sexual harassment among both men and women (Elkins & Velez-Castrillon, 2008).

As previously mentioned, it is uncommon for female targets of harassment to report their experiences to formal support providers. There are a number of reasons why women may be hesitant to make formal complaints; they may feel that there is “no point”, that they will not be taken seriously, or that the perpetrator will face no consequences. Research on female members of the United States military found that “a significant number of military women who filed formal complaints expressed dissatisfaction with the complaint handling process” (Vijayasiri, 2008, p. 55). Reasons for participants’ dissatisfaction included feelings that nothing was being done about their complaints, frustration that no disciplinary action was taken against the perpetrator of the harassment, and feelings that the harassing situation was not corrected. Research by Nelson, Halpert, and Cellar (2007) found that more severe responses to sexual harassment are perceived by participants as more effective in both communicating organizational intolerance of harassment and acting as deterrents to the inappropriate behaviour. Targets may also fear the consequences of reporting sexual

harassment; one woman said that female medical students who experience sexual harassment “become concerned about what would happen to their evaluations if they reported. Faculty couldn’t change your objective grade but they could say something in your subjective evaluation” (Wear et al., 2007, p. 23). A study of rape survivors’ first disclosures found that women most often chose to disclose their experiences to close friends and family members as an attempt to receive emotional support, information, and to have the ability to talk and “get things off their chest” (Ahrens, Campbell, Ternier-Thames, Wasco, & Sefl, 2007). In a study of cancer victims’ perceptions of social support, participants reported that it was most helpful when their spouse, friends, and family members provided emotional support, affection, and expressed concern or simply offered their physical presence. The same participants described that the situations they found most unhelpful and most hurtful were when family and friends would avoid social contact with them, or be critical of their situations (Dakof & Taylor, 1990).

Women who have experienced sexual harassment will also band together with other women as a means of coping. This can take the form of networking with other women who have experienced harassment, or simply making sure that they are not walking alone but are always in the company of another woman whenever possible (Handy, 2006; Slotten, 2002). This can help explain why group therapy is so helpful for female targets of sexual harassment; having the opportunity to share their experience with other women who have had similar experiences helps to validate the victim’s feelings and reinforce the fact that she did not “make it up”. It can also help women to feel less afraid, guilty, and alone when they have the opportunity to hear stories that are similar to their own and can identify with the feelings because they have “walked in their shoes” (Salisbury et. al., 1986; Sigal et al., 2003).

Summary

Sexual harassment is a pervasive societal issue that has been widely studied within the academic community. There is a great deal of quantitative research available which categorizes the behavioural responses of women who have experienced sexual harassment, as well as literature which describes the types of coping strategies that are employed by women who have been through a harassing incident. As a result of the existing literature, we know that the majority of women experience sexual harassment in schools or their place of work; however, they are also hesitant and even unwilling to independently label harassing behaviour as such, though they will agree the same behaviours constitute harassment when directly asked.

Sexual harassment can be emotionally and psychologically taxing for those who experience it, and it has been known to cause feelings of depression and anxiety, fear and anger, and lack of concentration. It has also been found that when women are the victims of sexual harassment they report feeling less satisfied with their lives in general, and that they show a decrease in productivity in school and/or their place of work (Canadian Advisory Council Fact sheet, 1993; Hibino et al., 2006; Huerta et al., 2006; O'Donohue et al., 2006; Salisbury et al., 1986).

Due to the potentially sensitive nature of the topic, much of the existing sexual harassment research is based on participants' responses to hypothetical scenarios of inappropriate sexual behaviour. However, while the use of hypothetical situations could cause less harm to participants as opposed to the use of real life experiences, it also reduces the validity of the results (Bingham & Scherer, 1993). My study contributes to the literature

by obtaining first hand accounts of real life experiences of coping with sexual harassment. Magley (2000) also explains that there is a lack of literature examining how women cope with harassment, and those studies that do exist simply categorize coping behaviours and the frequency with which these behaviours occur.

This chapter provided a definition of sexual harassment and reviewed existing literature. Chapter 3 will discuss the methodology used in the study and provide participant demographic information.

Chapter 3: Method

This chapter will provide a rationale for my choice of methodology, a description of the Critical Incident Technique, and a summary of participant demographic information. Details regarding research procedures will be provided, as well as procedures for data collection and analysis. Finally, trustworthiness checks proposed by Butterfield, Borgen, Amundson, and Maglio (2005) will be reviewed and results of trustworthiness checks from the current study will be presented.

Rationale for my Choice of Methodology

Traditionally, research employs quantitative methods of data collection, in which large quantities of data are collected and analyzed in the form of numbers so that the researcher is able to statistically describe tendencies of the general population (Creswell, 2005). Due to the sensitive nature of the topic of sexual harassment, one of the limitations of the existing literature is that most studies have focused on participants' responses to hypothetical scenarios as opposed to real life experiences (Weiss & Lalonde, 2001). Bingham and Scherer (1993) stress that the use of hypothetical scenarios to study incidents of sexual harassment can be less harmful to participants, but it also weakens the validity and generalizability of the findings. Magley (2000) suggests that future research should utilize qualitative methods of data collection.

Qualitative research focuses on the collection of specific, detailed stories from a small number of participants. While analysis of qualitative data does not result in statistics that represent the larger population, it highlights the significance of each participant's story, and it is the uniqueness of the participant's situation that is thought to be important. Qualitative research is important because researchers strive to learn more about the phenomenon under

study from the participants' view, without placing them in contrived contexts with controlled variables, which results in a comprehensive look at experiences that are particular to a small sample of individuals (Creswell, 2005; Krefting, 1991).

A limitation to the existing published research is that although there are studies that identify women's coping behaviours when sexually harassed, most are quantitative and fail to provide a comprehensive account of coping (Magley, 2002). A qualitative methodology was determined to be most appropriate for exploring women's experiences of coping with sexual harassment.

Critical Incident Technique

This study applied the Critical Incident Technique (CIT) as outlined by Flanagan (1954) and Woolsey (1986). The CIT is a qualitative method of data collection that was originally developed by Flanagan and which stemmed from the aviation psychology program of the United States Armed Forces. The CIT uses a set of data collection procedures to accumulate direct, specific, and detailed observations of behaviour that are significant and subscribe to the criteria outlined by Flanagan and other experts in the field. The direct observations are classified as "incidents"; however, in order to be critical an incident must significantly add to or significantly take away from the phenomenon being studied. Finally, the categorization of critical incidents determines the specific behaviours that are fundamental to the general aim of the activity being studied.

The CIT is a flexible methodology and can be used for many different purposes. For example, it can examine effective and ineffective behaviours, helpful and hindering factors, functional or behavioural descriptions of events or problems, and characteristics that are critical to important aspects of an activity or event (Butterfield, Borgen, Amundson, &

Maglio, 2005). This flexibility stems from the fact that the CIT does not embody strict methods of data collection, but can be tailored to the specific situation under study. The method has been used in a variety of fields to gather detailed incidents, such as in nursing (Dachelet et al., 1981; Kemppainen, 2000; Lindsey & Attridge, 1989), counsellor education (Doxsee & Kivlrghan, 1994; Tryon, 2000), management education and training (Ellinger & Bostrom, 2002; Ellinger, Watkins, & Bostrom, 1999; O'Driscoll & Cooper, 1996), counselling (Amundson, Borgen, Jordan, & Erlebach, 2004; Butterfield & Borgen, 2005), and social work (Weyers & VanBerg, 2006).

The present study applied the Critical Incident Technique to examine women's real life incidents of sexual harassment and what they found helpful and hindering in their experiences of coping. This methodology was appropriate for the study of the phenomenon of sexual harassment because it was able to provide first hand, detailed accounts of women's experiences, which allowed for the compilation of data to tease out specific processes that significantly added to and significantly took away from women's experiences of coping. Participants recalled particular incidents to provide valuable information regarding what was most helpful and most hindering in coping with sexual harassment based on the participants' observed and experienced incidents.

Participants

Approval to conduct the study was obtained from the Research Ethics Board of the University of Northern British Columbia. In order to recruit participants, flyers were placed in the community and on the local university campus (Appendix A). The posters included an email address and phone number at which potential participants could contact me if they wished to receive further information or to volunteer for the study.

I conducted screening via telephone and/or email in order to ensure that participants met the necessary requirements to successfully participate in this study. The criteria for inclusion in the study were that participants: a) were females; b) were at least 19 years of age or older; c) met the criteria of the operational definition of sexual harassment, which was that they had experienced one or more of the following: unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature; implicit or explicit employment or academic consequences to rejection of such conduct when such conduct interferes with an individual's academic or working performance, or when such conduct creates a tense or hostile working or academic environment; and d) experienced embarrassment, insecurity, discomfort, offense, or humiliation as a result of the harassing behaviour. In order to establish safety so that participants felt comfortable telling their story, I made certain that all participants understood that it was not necessary to discuss the details of the actual harassing incident itself if they were uncomfortable doing so, as the focus of the research was solely on helpful and hindering experiences of coping.

Individual interviews with participants were held in the counselling lab at the University of Northern British Columbia or other locations that were convenient, confidential, and safe for both the researcher and the participants. For safety purposes, the researcher carried a cellular phone at all times in case an emergency arose. Prior to each interview, participants were provided with an information sheet specifying the purpose of the research and places where they may access counselling if necessary (Appendix B), as well as an informed consent form (Appendix C). At the time of the interview, participants also provided demographic information (Appendix D) and were asked to complete a critical incident data sheet for each incident (Appendix E).

Sixteen women contacted the researcher regarding participation, and 15 women met criteria and participated in this study. One woman's story was not included because her experience did not meet the researcher's definition of sexual harassment. Participants ranged in age from 21 to 44 years, with a mean age of 30 years. Twelve participants identified themselves as Caucasian, while three defined themselves as being of "other" ethnic origin (Portuguese/Chinese, Native American, and Italian/Ukrainian). Six participants had received a university undergraduate degree, five had completed some college or university, one had obtained a high school diploma, two had completed a college diploma, and one had obtained a university graduate degree. Seven participants were employed full-time at the time of the interview, two were full - time students, five were full-time students who were also employed part-time, and one was unemployed. Eight participants had never been married, four were separated, one was in a common law relationship, and two were married. Twelve participants experienced their incidents of sexual harassment while at their place of work, one participant experienced the sexual harassment while at school, and two participants experienced the sexual harassment in places unrelated to school or work.

Research Procedures

The Critical Incident Technique (CIT) consists of five major steps described by Flanagan (1954) to outline the entire research process. These steps include: 1) ascertaining the general aims of the activity being studied, 2) making plans and setting specifications, 3) collecting data, 4) analyzing the data, and 5) interpreting the data and reporting the results. These five steps describe procedures for creating a definition of the activity being studied, describing the type of situations that will be observed and who will observe them, data collection and analysis, category formation, and reporting research findings.

Step one of the CIT is, “ascertaining the general aims” and involves creating a serviceable definition of the activity being studied, as well as clearly pinpointing the “aim” or objective of the study (Butterfield et al., 2005). Butterfield and colleagues argued that this can be achieved when the researcher is able to answer the following questions: a) what is the objective of the activity, and b) what is the person expected to accomplish who engages in the activity? Flanagan (1954) argued that the aim of the activity under study could be determined by questioning professionals who are considered experts in the field or by questioning individuals who actually perform the behaviour. In the present study, the “activity” was a woman’s attempt to cope with her experience of being sexually harassed. In order to create a working definition of the general aim of this “activity”, I consulted sexual harassment advisors from two Canadian universities, as well as the coordinator of the Women’s Center at The University of Northern British Columbia, who had herself researched sexual harassment and produced a DVD of her findings. After speaking to these experts, it was decided that the objective of women who are attempting to cope with the experience of being sexually harassed is a) for the harassment to stop, b) to feel safe in their everyday environment, and c) to move on with life. Along these same lines, it was decided that when coping with sexual harassment, a woman hopes to d) obtain a support network and a sense of understanding, e) a sense of justice against the harasser, and f) the opportunity to make sense of her experience. Flanagan argues that constructing a functional definition of the activity is required before any other planning or behavioural observations take place, as it defines the steps that should be taken if participation in the activity is thought to be successful. Woolsey (1986) states that creating a definition of the general aim is not only an important step, but also the most difficult. She argues that creating a definition requires “a

good deal of hard thinking” (p. 244), and that the researcher must form a well worded definition, as it is the one that participants use in order to decide upon which incidents they will report.

Step two of the CIT is “making plans and setting specifications.” One specification is to determine the types of situations that will be observed, and who will make the observations. According to Flanagan (1954), the observer should be as familiar as possible with the activity, and should have observed the individual engaged in the activity on more than one occasion. Woolsey (1986) wrote that the person making the observations can be anyone who has experience with the activity and who can make first-hand observations, but that training may be needed in situations where the observer is being asked to report on the actions of others. In this case, Woolsey suggests that it is important to review the general aim of the activity with the observer, and to also provide the observer with a clear explanation of the observations on which they are reporting. In the present study, participants were the “observers” and were asked to report in detail on the thoughts, actions and behaviours of themselves and others as it applied to the experience of coping with sexual harassment.

Another specification is that incidents need to be “critical.” Flanagan (1954) argued that an incident was considered critical when it made a “significant” positive or negative contribution to the general aim of the activity, with the definition of “significant” depending on the nature of the activity being studied. In order for incidents to be included in the present study, they had to be relevant to the general aim by either adding to or taking away from women’s attempts to stop the harassment, to feel safe in their everyday environment, to move

on with life, to obtain a support network and a sense of understanding, to feel a sense of justice against the harasser, or to make sense of her experience.

Data Collection

The third major step in the critical incident technique is collecting the data. When using the CIT, data collection usually takes the form of an interview, and it is helpful to send a copy of the interview questions to the participants prior to the actual interview itself (Flanagan, 1954; Woolsey, 1986). Woolsey (1986) notes that it is important for the interview questions to contain information about exactly what type of incidents are being studied, so that observers are less likely to report on less important incidents, causing the data to become diffused. Flanagan (1954) wrote that participants have better memories when they are aware that an incident being observed needs to be remembered; therefore, it would be beneficial for participants to be shown the questions prior to the interview in order to increase the likelihood that participants will remember incidents in greater detail. Flanagan also noted that the accuracy of an incident can be judged depending on the amount of detail given, indicating that less detailed reports are less well remembered and the data could therefore be incorrect. For the current study, research questions were sent electronically to participants in order to allow them time to reflect and prepare answers. Interviews ranging from 45 minutes to two hours in length were conducted and audio taped. Only first hand observations that were recalled in sufficient detail were included in the data pool.

Participants were asked to describe what they did to cope, whether or not the coping strategy was helpful or hindering, and how the coping strategy was helpful or hindering. Research questions for participant interviews were as follows, with subsequent prompts added as needed:

1. Tell me about a time when you attempted to cope with the experience of being sexually harassed.
2. How did you choose to cope with this experience of sexual harassment?
3. Tell me about any incidents that you found significantly helpful (significantly added to) or that you found significantly hindering (significantly taking away from) to your experience of attempting to cope with sexual harassment.
4. In what way did this incident significantly add to or take away from your attempt to cope?

The collection of helpful and hindering incidents were counterbalanced — that is, I inquired about helpful incidents before hindering incidents with the first participant, hindering incidents before helpful incidents with the second participant, and so on. The collection of incidents alternated between helpful and hindering to reduce the impact that participant fatigue might have on participant reporting. As details of the incidents were collected, I made some notes regarding my initial thoughts and impressions; this reflexivity assisted with subsequent analysis of the data.

Ethical Considerations

When conducting counselling research there are special ethical issues that need to be considered due to the potential sensitivity of the topics, with the main concerns being harms and benefits, privacy and confidentiality, and informed consent and deception (Creswell, 2005; Schultz, Sheppard, Lehr, & Sheppard, 2006). There were potential emotional and psychological risks associated with the study of sexual harassment, and as principal researcher it was my responsibility to foresee and attempt to minimize these risks. In an effort to make sure that consent was informed and voluntary and that the participants' best

interests were being served, I devised an information sheet with details on the purpose of the research, participants' commitment, confidentiality, where their information would be stored, who will have access to the data and when and how data will be destroyed (Appendix B). No deception was used, and I made certain participants were aware of how they could contact me if they had any questions or need for debriefing.

Potential Risks

There were no anticipated physical, social, legal, or economic risks associated with the present study. All participants chose to share their story on a volunteer basis with full knowledge prior to the interview as to what the study was exploring. Participants were informed that they could take a break during the interview process, or withdraw from the research at any time without penalty. However, due to the potentially sensitive nature of the topic, participants could possibly have experienced some psychological or emotional discomfort as a result of painful and/or embarrassing memories of their sexual harassment. A list of local counselling resources was provided at the time of the interview in the event that participants wanted information about where they could work with a professional to follow-up on any issues that may have surfaced as a result of participating in the study. Participants were also informed that it was not necessary to disclose information about the harassing experience itself, as it was not the focus of my study; however, if they did choose to disclose this experience to me I was open and willing to listen. I also allowed time for participants to debrief with me after the interview, and asked for feedback on how the experience was for them as well as what recommendations they had for how I might have made the experience better.

Potential Benefits

The interviews were conducted in a confidential environment using empathic listening skills, which provided women the opportunity to express their true feelings about the incident, perhaps for the first time since the incident occurred.

The study also provided women with the chance to reflect on and voice what was helpful and hindering to them during their attempt to cope with the experience of sexual harassment, and hopefully to return to these methods of coping in other stressful situations. Voicing their helpful experiences might also have helped women to feel more knowledgeable in the event that another woman should approach them on how to successfully cope with harassment or other stressful situations.

Another potential benefit of the present study was providing women with the opportunity to participate in a study that may help to make other women's experiences of coping with sexual harassment more effective than what they had experienced. Participants may have felt a sense of pride about participating in a project that will provide information regarding what women found to be helpful or hindering when coping with sexual harassment. Finally, this study allowed participants the opportunity to voice what they found unhelpful in their attempt to cope with sexual harassment which may provide relief for participants who had not previously had the opportunity to do so.

This study was based on participants' real experiences as opposed to the hypothetical scenarios that have been used in much of the previous research. A benefit of the present study was that stories were told and heard in the participants' own words, which I hope was an empowering and positive experience for the women.

Data Analysis

The fourth step in the Critical Incident Technique is data analysis. Similar to other qualitative research, analysis of data collected using the CIT method is a subjective process during which the researcher strives to tease out common themes using an inductive thought process. In the current study, the first step in the process of analysis was to assign each participant a numerical code, and transcribe verbatim all 15 interviews.

Category formation is a highly subjective process in which the researcher attempts to make a universal claim about the activity being studied using the specific critical incidents that have been collected (Flanagan, 1954; Woolsey, 1986). Raw data from the current study was divided into “incidents”, defined as direct observations of actions taken by participants or actions taken by others that were either helpful or hindering in an attempt to cope with the experience of sexual harassment. In order for incidents to be included in data analysis, it was necessary for participants to categorize whether each incident had been helpful or hindering, and to describe to the researcher how each incident added to or took away from the experience of coping, which had to include at least one objective from the general aim. A total of 79 incidents were collected from the data; seven incidents were omitted from data analysis because they failed to add to or take away from the general aim of the activity being studied, leaving a total of 72 incidents to be included in the study. For example, one participant said “I basically just laughed it off and moved aside... to keep peace in the workplace” (09). In this case, the participant was able to identify the coping behaviour, but could not indicate how the behaviour added to or took away from the general aim of coping with sexual harassment.

Incidents were copied verbatim from participants' transcripts and placed separately on cards. Participant numbers and incident numbers were placed on each card which allowed the researcher to track incidents within their categories. Details from participants' critical incident data sheets were placed on incident cards when appropriate, and when necessary, I used the critical incident data sheet as a reference tool to provide contextual information for incidents.

Initially, all incidents were sorted into two major groups, "Actions of Participants", and "Actions of Others". This distinction assisted me with the organization of incidents and a place from which to begin more in depth analysis. Within these two major groups, incidents were further divided into groups of "helpful" and "hindering" incidents, which resulted in the formation of four major groups: "Actions of Participants, Helpful", "Actions of Participants, Hindering", "Actions of Others, Helpful", and "Actions of Others, Hindering".

Within each of the four major groups, incidents that appeared to thematically fit together were sorted into tentative categories. When this initial sorting was complete, the most representative incidents from each group were selected to act as a prototype for that group and assigned a color for identification purposes. A prototypical incident is the incident that best represents the category as opposed to one that only loosely fits the category. All other incidents were re-collected, individually compared with the various prototypes, and then re-sorted according to which prototypical incident they most resembled (Woolsey, 1986). Notes were kept by the researcher to track thoughts on the categorization process, and to document the formation of categories as a reference tool. Prototypical incidents remained consistent; however, all other incidents were collected and compared to the prototypes on

numerous occasions. Once I was certain that all incidents had been placed with the appropriate prototype, categories were further subdivided until I was satisfied that they accurately represented the data that was collected. Subcategories emerged when I felt that an overall theme was being represented by small groups of specific, yet different, incidents. In order to assist with the formation of subcategories, a prototypical incident was chosen for each subcategory, assigned a color for identification purposes, and the categorization process proceeded as outlined above. Incidents were not “forced” into categories but emerged from the data itself. I then wrote descriptions of categories in order to summarize the type of incidents each category represented, and included direct quotes from the prototypical incident for each category, which I felt would embody the overall message being represented in each description.

The final step of the Critical Incident Technique is reporting the findings. At this point, findings should be laid out in clear and precise categories to make interpretation of the data as simple as possible. Flanagan (1954) suggests that during this stage it is important to revisit the other four major steps in order to be aware of any biases that may be associated with the technique up until this point. As suggested by Woolsey (1986), category descriptions incorporated direct quotes from prototypical incidents as a means of accurately reporting the findings of a critical incident study. By using an incident that is most representative of the category, the readers will develop a distinct sense of the findings and a firm grasp of the characteristics of the category.

Trustworthiness

Butterfield et al. (2005) proposed nine trustworthiness checks to ensure reliability of data and proper execution of the critical incident technique, seven of which were implemented in the current study. Researchers at the University of British Columbia have proposed a check that involves conducting a second interview with participants once the data from the first interview has been analyzed and placed into tentative categories. The second interview allows the participant to affirm that the categories for the data make sense, and provides opportunities for participants to review their story and make sure it has been adequately recorded and to add and take away from it as they see fit. In the present study I altered this credibility check and transcribed all interviews verbatim and sent a copy of the interviews to each participant for revisions and suggestions in order to ensure that the participants felt their story was being accurately represented (Ellinger & Bostrom, 2002; Ellinger, Watkins & Bostrom, 1999). Thirteen of 15 participants reviewed their transcripts and provided the researcher written confirmation of accuracy. A second attempt was made to contact the remaining two participants regarding their transcripts, and when no response was received accuracy was assumed and the data was included in the research.

As a second reliability check, 25% of the total number of incidents were randomly chosen and placed by independent judges into the categories formed by the researcher. In the present study two graduate students acted as independent judges, both of whom had taken courses in qualitative methodology and were completing their own qualitative research. The higher the rate of agreement between the independent judges and the researcher, the more reliable the category is thought to be (Barbey, 2000; Borgen, Amundson, & Harder, 1988; Butterfield, 2006; Duplassie, Macknee, & Williams, 2008; Ellinger & Bostrom, 2002;

O'Driscoll & Cooper, 1996; Sherack, 2003). Existing literature suggests that an acceptable agreement rate between judges is 75% to 85% of incidents in major categories, and 60% to 70% of incidents in subcategories (Andersson & Nilsson, 1964). The researcher sat with each judge separately and provided an hour long training session which included a brief explanation of the categorization process, and finished with a minimum of four practice incidents which judges placed in the appropriate categories under the supervision of the researcher. Judges were then left with category descriptions for all four groups and 18 incidents to independently place in the appropriate category. Table 1 depicts the results of categorization of incidents by independent judges. The criterion for an acceptable rate of agreement between judges and the researcher was met for both major categories and subcategories.

Table 1

The Percentage of Agreement Between the Judges' and the Researchers' Category Schemes

	% of Agreement	
	Categories	Subcategories
Judge 1	100%	91.6%
Judge 2	100%	83.3%

Note. $n = 36$ incidents, 18 incidents per judge

Third, it is important that researchers track the point of saturation of the data, which occurs when no new categories emerge from the data and redundancy takes place. In critical incident studies, sample size is determined not by number of participants but by number of incidents (Woolsey, 1986). Andersson and Nilsson (1964) explain that saturation can be assumed when two thirds of the total number of incidents represent 95% of the total number

of categories and subcategories used in a study. In the current research, the categorization of 48 randomly selected incidents embodied 20 of 21 categories/subcategories, resulting in a 95.2 % saturation rate, which indicated that the saturation criteria was met.

Fourth, the present study calculated participation rates within categories by taking the number of participants who reported incidents in a particular category and then dividing it by the total number of participants, with a participation rate of at least 25 % for a category to be considered valid. Flanagan (1954) argued that the larger the number of participants who report the same incident, the more relevant the incident is to the general aim of the study. In the present study, participation rates were recorded; however, no categories were excluded. The sentiment is that by excluding categories the researcher risks the loss of valuable information; therefore, regardless of the calculated participation rate, all categories were maintained and reported (Andersson & Nilsson, 1964; Barbey, 2000; Bedi, Davis & Williams, 2005; Woolsey, 1986). Table 2 represents participation rates for *Actions of Participants, Helpful*, and as indicated, two of the five categories met the participation rate requirements.

Table 3 depicts participation rates for the group *Actions of Participants, Hindering*. As shown in the table below, two of the five categories met the participation rate requirements. Table 4 portrays participation rates for the group *Actions of Others, Helpful*. As indicated, two of three categories fulfilled participation rate requirements. Finally, Table 5 illustrates participation rates for the group *Actions of Others, Hindering*. Of the three categories in this group, none fulfilled participation rate requirements.

Table 2

Participation Rates: Actions of Participants, Helpful

Category	Number of Participants	Participation rate (%)
1. Discussing experience with a coworker	8	53%
2. Protecting younger coworkers	3	20%
3. Taking formal action	3	20%
4. Participant tells perpetrator to stop	3	20%
5. Participant removing self from situation.	6	40%

As a fifth check, Butterfield et al. (2005) suggest that researchers focus on theoretical validity. The reasoning behind this is that researchers be clear about the assumptions involved in their study and then examine them in comparison with the existing literature to see if they are supported (Barbey, 2000; Butterfield, 2006; Butterfield et al., 2005; Morley, 2003). In the present study, assumptions were compared with a review of the existing literature and findings have been carefully tracked and appear to be well supported by previous research (Chapter 5: Discussion).

As a sixth trustworthiness check, all interviews were audio-taped and transcribed verbatim from the tape in order to work directly from the transcript and be as precise as possible (Bormann et al., 2006; Ellinger et al., 1999; Ellinger & Bostrom, 2002).

The final trustworthiness check involved having an expert in the CIT method listen to a sample of interview tapes to make sure that the interviewer is correctly following the

method. In the present study my supervisor, Dr. Corinne Koehn, acted as the expert and reviewed every 4th interview from my collection of tapes in order to ensure that proper interview techniques were being employed (Bormann et al., 2006; Butterfield, 2006).

Active listening was also used to increase accuracy in the present study. As described by Woolsey (1986), active listening is used during interviews to ensure the interviewer is developing a comprehensive understanding of the incidents being reported and the message that the participant is trying to convey.

Table 3

Participation Rates: Actions of Participants, Hindering

Category	Number of Participants	Participation rate (%)
1. Minimizing harassment:	6	40.0%
a) Making light of harassment or minimizing severity	3	20.0%
b) Ignoring harassment	4	26.6%
2. Participant discusses harassment with perpetrator	6	40.0%
3. Use of drugs and alcohol	1	6.60%
4. Altering style of dress	1	6.60%
5. Avoiding perpetrator	2	13.0%

Table 4

Participation Rates: Actions of Others, Helpful

Category	Number of Participants	Participation rate (%)
1. Support	12	80.0%
a) Providing assurance of future support	4	26.6%
b) Coworkers assure participant she is not doing something wrong	4	26.6%
c) Providing emotional support	7	46.6%
2. Protection	4	26.6%
a) Coworker protecting participant from perpetrator	3	20.0%
b) Taking action to stop harassment	2	13.0%
3. Problem solving	3	20.0%

Table 5

Participation Rates: Actions of Others, Hindering

Category	Number of Participants	Participation rates (%)
1. Judgmental responses	3	20.0%
a) Criticizing participant	2	13.0%
b) Blaming participant	1	6.60%
2. Information giving in the absence of support	1	6.60%
3. Not taking action	2	13.0%

Chapter 4: Research Findings

This chapter will report on the research findings of the current study, and summarize findings from the critical incident data sheet. Category descriptions and direct quotes will be provided and findings will be presented in the context of how they relate to the main research question posed in this thesis: what is significantly helpful, and what is significantly hindering in women's experiences of coping with incidents of sexual harassment? Table 6 identifies the groups, major categories, and subcategories formed in the findings of the current study.

As indicated in findings from the critical incident data sheet, all perpetrators of sexual harassment were male, and 13 of 15 participants perceived the perpetrator of their harassment as being in a position of power and/or authority over them. Eighty percent of harassing incidents were reported as occurring in the target's place of work, and all participants chose to disclose their experiences of harassment to some type of support provider. Informal resources such as co-workers, friends, family members, and the target's boss, supervisor, or manager were among the most common support providers to whom participants chose to disclose. More formal resources such as counsellors, and Human Resource personnel were among the least common support providers to whom participants chose to disclose.

Actions of Participants, Helpful

The first group consisted of 23 incidents that had been placed into five major categories. This group focused on all actions of participants that were significantly helpful in the experience of coping with sexual harassment.

1. Discussing Experience with a Coworker

This category consisted of incidents in which participants disclosed their experiences of sexual harassment with a female friend, coworker or family member. These incidents were considered significantly helpful because the participant reported that it helped them to feel that they were not alone in dealing with their situation, and because the opportunity to share their experience with someone else helped to take weight off their own shoulders. For example, one participant said:

I had also talked to other women about it and they were all like 'yeah he's done the same thing to me, he's a jerk, he's a pervert, he's all this...I didn't feel alone I guess, I felt supported that way (07).

One participant disclosed to a female coworker and reported that “*just talking to her yeah, kind of like it helped me get it off my own shoulders*” (15) while another spoke to other female students and said that “*it just kind of reassured me that I wasn't the only one thinking that, you know?*” (06).

2. Protecting Younger Coworkers

This category consisted of incidents in which participants came to the defense of a younger coworker to protect her from a situation in which she may potentially be sexually harassed. Participants described these incidents as significantly helpful to their coping because they felt they had gained their power back in the situation and took comfort in being able to prevent another coworker from potentially having the same negative experience with sexual harassment. One participant believed it was important to share her experience with younger coworkers and said “*so then it just became open for the whole floor and wasn't just my own personal crisis and that just helped immensely and we were all just sort of on the lookout for each other*” (04) and added,

Table 6

Groups, Categories, and Subcategories

Groups, Categories, and Subcategories	Number of Participants	Number of Incidents
<i>Actions of Participant, Helpful</i>		23
1. Discussing experience with a coworker	8	8
2. Protecting younger coworkers	3	3
3. Taking formal action	3	3
4. Participant tells perpetrator to stop	3	3
5. Participant removing self from situation	6	6
<i>Actions of Participant, Hindering</i>		17
1. Minimizing Harassment:	6	
a) Making light of harassment or minimizing severity	3	3
b) Ignoring harassment	4	4
2. Participant discusses harassment with perpetrator	6	6
3. Use of drugs and alcohol	1	1
4. Altering style of dress	1	1
5. Avoiding perpetrator	2	2
<i>Actions of Others, Helpful</i>		23
1. Support:	12	
a) Providing assurance of future support	4	4
b) Coworkers assure participant she is not doing something wrong	4	4
c) Providing emotional support	7	7
2. Protection:	4	
a) Coworker protecting participant from perpetrator	3	3
b) Taking action to stop harassment	2	2
3. Problem solving	3	3
<i>Actions of Others, Hindering</i>		9
1. Judgmental responses:	3	
a) Criticizing participant	2	3
b) Blaming participant	1	1
2. Information giving in the absence of support	1	1
3. Not taking action	2	4

Note. Participants provided more than one incident each.

Knowledge is power, and to empower the younger nurses, that 'oh watch out for this kind of thing', or, if he was trying to get them alone you'd make sure he didn't, because you didn't want them to have the same experience (04).

Another participant confronted the perpetrator of her harassment on behalf of a younger coworker who was also being harassed and said about the experience:

He laid off her right away too because I cornered him and I felt, I felt like this huge amount of power so I was like 'what are you doing?' ... I had this strength from all the other women in the workplace as well because when they found out he was doing this to her because she was just a young one right, so then all of a sudden it was like well he can't do that, so we're all coming against him for her (07).

3. Taking Formal Action

This category consisted of incidents in which participants took formal action against the perpetrator of the harassment or the establishment in which the harassment took place. Participants described these incidents as significantly helpful in coping with their experience of sexual harassment because there was some form of justice against the perpetrator of the harassment, and because it validated that what they had gone through was unacceptable. Participants described feeling empowered by this action and therefore able to feel they had obtained closure in the situation and were comfortable moving on. One participant chose to file a complaint against the institution and said:

It [sexual harassment] doesn't have to be part of the job, and as long as you have those rights and that power that you know, you have, you can deal with it, and you can move on. So yeah, it definitely empowered me, as an individual anyway (01).

The same participant also said that the act of filing a formal complaint “gives you that level of validation that you're like okay, what I did was the right thing, because now it's in his face that there are consequences” (01). Along these same lines, another participant chose to bring legal action against the perpetrator for sexual touching, and explained that it was:

Something that has helped me move on and I have had some more closure from that. I think it just, it kind of empowered me more to know that I could do that, I had the right to do that, that I wasn't at fault, that it wasn't appropriate, I didn't feel so vulnerable (11).

The final participant in this category chose to report the perpetrator's behaviour to her boss and reported that it was helpful to her because *"I knew he didn't get away with it kinda thing. It was comforting to me knowing that he would actually be talked to about it and not just continue doing it to other people"* (14).

4. Participant Tells Perpetrator to Stop

This category consisted of incidents in which participants definitively told the perpetrator to stop the harassing behaviour. Participants described these incidents as significantly helpful to their coping because their actions helped to stop the harassment, and helped the participant feel strong in being able to handle the situation themselves. It is important to note that incidents in this category do not focus on the fact that the participant confronted the perpetrator about his behaviour, but rather, the language that was used by the participant while doing so. All participants in this category directly and assertively instructed the perpetrator to desist the harassing behaviour. For example, one participant responded to a perpetrator by saying *"get away from me, I don't need your help...get away from me, this is totally ridiculous"* (08) while another reported that *"once, I told him not to touch me"* (03). The third participant in this category chose to handle her situation more aggressively and told the perpetrator *"I'm so sick of you doing this...this is bullshit, you know, you keep doing this and it's really inappropriate and if you're not careful I will slap a sexual harassment suit on you"* (01).

5. Participant Removes Self from Situation

This category consisted of incidents in which participants removed themselves physically from the environment in which the harassment was taking place, which meant that there was no longer potential for contact with the perpetrator of the harassment. Participants described these incidents as significantly helpful because once out of the situation the harassment immediately stopped, and there was a sense of relief over no longer having to “deal with” the perpetrator(s). For example, one participant walked away from the perpetrator and returned to the place where she was staying and reported that it was helpful because “*it removed me from the place, and it removed me from where he asked me, and it removed me from him*” (12). Another participant in this category quit her job and went home as a means of coping with the harassment, and disclosed that “*it made me feel much safer never having to see him [the perpetrator] again*” (14).

Actions of Participant, Hindering

The second group consisted of 17 incidents divided into five categories and two subcategories, and all incidents in this group were actions of the participant described as significantly hindering to experiences of coping with sexual harassment. The first category “Minimizing harassment” was divided into two subcategories: *a) Making light of harassment or minimizing severity*, and *b) Ignoring harassment*.

1. Minimizing Harassment

a) Making light of harassment or minimizing severity. This subcategory consisted of incidents in which participants “normalized” or laughed off the harassment in order to avoid conflict, or questioned whether or not their experiences were severe enough to disclose to anyone. These incidents were described as significantly hindering because the harassment

continued, and because participants felt discouraged from seeking further support. One participant described her experience as being the only female in a vehicle full of men: *“I was like kind of going along with it and kind of like laughing because I was really nervous and uncomfortable”* (13). Another participant described discomfort after confiding in a counsellor because *“I felt it wasn’t severe enough to be talking to anybody about”* (02).

b) Ignoring harassment. This subcategory consists of incidents in which participants ignored the harassment they were experiencing. These incidents were described as significantly hindering because the harassment continued, because participants did not feel they had control over the situation, and that by ignoring the harassment they were unable to deal with the situation and move forward. One participant explained *“I think I ignored it to cope. Because I didn’t understand what was happening, so by ignoring it I didn’t even need to think about it”* (05). Another said *“when it first started I just thought that ignoring it would make it go away and obviously that didn’t work out very well and it just escalated from there”* (11).

2. Participant Discusses Harassment with Perpetrator

This category consisted of incidents in which participants attempted to discuss the harassment with the perpetrator, and/or asked the perpetrator to stop the harassing behaviour in an indirect or unassertive manner. These incidents were described as significantly hindering because they did not stop the harassment, and in some cases were perceived as contributing to the escalation of the harassment. The participant who had the prototypical example of this said: *“I tried to ask him, like what’s this about? And in my nervous, naïve way it wasn’t coming across properly, he almost, he liked that more probably...he would take*

it as a level of interest” (04). This same sentiment is echoed by another participant, who explained,

I said to him “what are you—why are you always following me like what the hell? Why... you don’t need to be following me why are you doing this? And he said “Oh I want to get in your pants” and I was like, oh, okay and I didn’t... I said well, that’s not going to happen and he’s like yeah well I’ve got to try anyway... and I said something smartass back to him, and it was almost like he took it as encouraging him (07).

3. Use of Drugs and Alcohol

The third category consisted of an incident in which the participant used drugs and alcohol to cope with her feelings. This incident was described as significantly hindering because the participant was unable to effectively process her experience. The participant described her experience of turning to alcohol as hindering her ability to gain understanding of and to move on from her experience of sexual harassment, and said:

It [alcohol] definitely kept me away from being able to do those things because I didn’t want to do those things, I didn’t want to deal with them, I didn’t want them to be part of me, I didn’t want to acknowledge them after... yeah I didn’t want to acknowledge them so alcohol kept me from all those things for sure because I didn’t have to think I just had to be, I didn’t have to think about these gross horrible things that they would say or do I didn’t have to think at all I could just disappear into it, so it didn’t help me cope it helped me escape (10).

4. Altering Style of Dress

The fourth category consisted of an incident in which a participant changed her style of dress in order to discourage the perpetrator from making comments about her body. This incident was perceived by the participant as significantly hindering because the harassment continued. The participant in this category chose to wear bigger clothing in an attempt to conceal her figure, and said:

It just progressed really gradually and I think where I got the point where I really started feeling uncomfortable that's when I changed the way I looked, like the dressing like not wearing skirts and making sure I wore baggy jeans and looking like the guys I guess you could say. Wearing an ugly shirt (03).

5. Avoiding Perpetrator

The final category consisted of incidents in which participants chose to avoid the perpetrator of their sexual harassment; however, the potential for contact with the perpetrator was always present and could not be avoided. These incidents were considered significantly hindering because the harassment continued, and because it affected the participants' ability to be effective at school and at work. One participant said *"I hated gym class, and it just like, it made me feel like really—I just didn't want to go to class so obviously that leads to skipping class"* (06). Another participant explained:

It hindered my job I think. Because I'd always try and avoid him and so if he was in the shipping area I wouldn't go out there until he was gone like if I had to ship something out, because he would stand by me and make comments (03).

Actions of Others, Helpful

The third group consisted of 23 incidents divided into three major categories and five subcategories. Incidents in this group focused on actions of others that were significantly helpful to participants' experiences of coping with sexual harassment.

1. Support

The first major category was titled "Support" and was comprised of three subcategories: *a) Providing assurance of future support, b) Coworkers assure participant she is not doing something wrong, and c) Providing emotional support.*

a) Providing assurance of future support. This subcategory consisted of incidents in which the manager and/or supervisor assured participants that they would provide them with

further support if needed. These incidents were described as significantly helpful because managers encouraged participants to come back and speak with them if the harassing behaviour continued. Participants described this reaction from the managers as supportive and reassuring. One participant explained that when she disclosed the harassment to her boss an offer was made to discipline the perpetrator and she said that this experience “*validated the fact that yeah it’s wrong, the fact that the supervisor was willing to help me with it*” (14). In a similar incident, another participant said,

When I told the managers, while they kind of brushed it off and said whatever, it happens, at the same time they said if it happens again come talk to us and we’ll talk to him. Well then I felt supported. Then I felt like okay, at least I have that support and if it happens again I can go talk to them about it (07).

b) *Coworkers assure participants they were not doing something wrong.* This subcategory consisted of incidents in which coworkers to whom participants had disclosed assured them that they had had similar experiences with the perpetrator and that the participants were not doing something to “cause” the harassment. These incidents were described as significantly helpful because they helped to alleviate participants’ guilt over the situation, which allowed them to realize that they were not the only person who had ever been through this type of experience. One participant described a situation in which a coworker told her she was not alone in her experiences, and assured her that other female employees had been in similar situations with the perpetrator. When describing this incident, the participant said: “*I definitely felt validation and acceptance of it, that there’s nothing wrong, that there’s nothing I’ve done incorrectly*” (04). Another participant explained:

I had also talked to other women about it and they were all like... yeah he’s done the same thing to me, yeah that’s the way he is, he’s a jerk, he’s a pervert, he’s all this and that so then there was this, there was this huge kind of all these women banding together and um saying yeah he’s done that... You

know whatever so just having those women behind you to support you was huge in, in kind of coping with it. And knowing that it wasn't just me, he was just a big pervert (07).

c) Providing emotional support. This final subcategory consisted of incidents in which the individuals to whom the participant disclosed provided emotional support. These incidents were described as significantly helpful because participants felt comforted by the fact that other people understood what they were going through, that her feelings were valid and accepted, and that they were supported in the way they chose to handle the situation. One participant received empathy and understanding from her friends regarding her situation, and described this experience as helpful because “*you can talk about it with the person, just that you weren't the only one in the situation- that you weren't alone*” (15). Another participant disclosed that her manager had contacted her at home to offer support after an incident at the workplace. The participant said:

The manager had called me at home and said 'you know I had heard that this had happened to you today and I am wondering how you're dealing with it' and so they really just let me tell the story from my side and whatever I was feeling and thinking and they were letting me know that... it wasn't my fault and things could get better and they would and that it would be alright (11).

2. Protection

The second major category in this group was divided into two subcategories. This category was comprised of incidents in which individuals to whom participants disclosed took action or made suggestions to protect participants from perpetrators of the harassment.

a) Coworkers protecting participant from perpetrator. This subcategory consisted of incidents in which coworkers protected participants and did not allow them to be in situations where they were alone with the perpetrator of the sexual harassment. These incidents were described as significantly helpful because they helped stop the harassment, and helped the

participant to feel safe. One participant described an ideal prototypical incident for this category:

If I went outside somebody noticed, one of the women noticed that he was following me—because I said he followed me all over the yard, they would either they would come out or they would send one of the guys out [to] ‘go find (Participant’s name) and get her to do this’ so there was always an extra set of eyes and we would do that for each other (07).

b) Taking action to stop harassment. This subcategory consisted of incidents in which the individual to whom the participant reported took action on behalf of the participant to stop the sexual harassment. These incidents were described as significantly helpful because the harassment ended and the participant felt validated. In a prototypical incident for this category the participant’s boss spoke to the perpetrator of the harassment in order to convey that the harassing behaviour was inappropriate. The participant said this incident “*was helpful in that it stopped the actual harassment*” (13). Another participant describes an incident in which HR personnel spoke to the perpetrator regarding his inappropriate behaviour; she says about the experience, “*there was that support there for me, and I felt... I felt vindicated after that one, for sure (07).*

3. Practical Suggestions

This category consisted of incidents in which an individual gave participants practical advice or suggestions on how to handle the situation. These incidents were described as significantly helpful because they helped participants to stop the harassment and helped participants to clarify the situation in their minds. In a prototypical incident for this subcategory, the participant, who was married, was advised by her coworker to wear her wedding band to work. The participant explains: “*she said ‘you don’t have a ring on, wear a ring’, she said that might help. So I did, I went and bought a plain gold band*” (04). In this

situation, the participant described this advice as significantly helpful to her experiences of coping with sexual harassment because “*he stopped coming around quite so much which was good ok, this is over, type of thing and then you could get on with, with your life*” (04).

Actions of Others, Hindering

The fourth group consisted of nine incidents which make up three major categories and two subcategories. Incidents in this group focused on actions of others that were significantly hindering to participants’ experiences of coping with sexual harassment.

1. Judgmental Responses

This major category was broken into two subcategories: *a) Criticizing participant* and *b) Blaming participant*. This category was comprised of hindering incidents in which individuals to whom participants disclosed were judgmental of the participants’ situation.

a) Criticizing participant. This subcategory consisted of incidents in which individuals to whom participants’ disclosed criticized them for the way they chose to handle their experiences of being sexually harassed. These incidents were described as significantly hindering because they interfered with the participant feeling supported. In a prototypical incident for this subcategory, the participant explained “*my sister kind of in some ways she sort of made me feel bad about what happened because she thought I should go to the people I work with and tell them*” (08). Another participant said,

They [friends and family] always tell me you have to do something I can’t believe you just let them do that to you. My friends get mad at me like, I thought you were stronger than that... so it definitely doesn’t help me when I tell people because I almost feel like my friends and my mom judge me negatively because I didn’t do anything (10).

b) Blaming participant. This subcategory consisted of an incident in which a superior at the workplace told the participant to “stop socializing” with the perpetrator. This incident

was described as significantly hindering because the participant felt blamed for being in the situation. The participant explained that the supervisor, with the good intentions of trying to interrupt the potentially harassing situation, approached her and accused her of socializing with the perpetrator as a means of interrupting the potentially harassing situation. However, the supervisor's actions were misinterpreted by the participant, who felt blamed and explained her reaction to this situation as: *"Oh, horrible, just thinking about it, it bothered me for days... I think I took some time off I there, I think I took a long weekend off, just to de-stress a little bit"* (04).

2. Information Giving in the Absence of Support

The incident in this category was one in which a counsellor failed to provide emotional support and instead simply informed the participant of steps to take if she would like to take legal action against the perpetrator. This incident was described as significantly hindering because it took away from her attempt to seek emotional support and because she felt overwhelmed by the information given. The participant said:

She didn't address my feelings over it, she just addressed that yes this happens, you can and then she gave me the options of what I could do to further it, you know like maybe I should start writing it down so I could take him to court and stuff and that was too overwhelming for me because I just wanted to talk to someone about it (02).

3. Not Taking Action

The final major category in this group consisted of incidents in which a superior at work failed to take action to assist participants with their experience of sexual harassment. These incidents were described as significantly hindering because management did not acknowledge that the perpetrator's behaviour was a problem, and took no action on behalf of the participant to stop the behaviour from happening. In a prototypical example one

participant explained: “*I talked to my boss about it and he was like ‘oh that’s just the way [perpetrator’s name] is he’s just— that’s just the way he is’*” (07). This participant described feeling frustrated by this response, and confused as to why management was not protecting their female employees from perpetrators of sexual harassment.

Summary

A total of 72 incidents were divided into four major groups: *Actions of Participant, Helpful*; *Actions of Participant, Hindering*; *Actions of Others, Helpful*; and *Actions of Others, Hindering*. These four groups were further divided into 15 major categories and 9 subcategories.

Emotional support was reported as significantly helpful regardless of the individual who was providing it and participants reported that these incidents helped them to feel comforted, understood and validated. Social support was also significantly helpful in coping, and took many forms. Women reported disclosing to coworkers, peers, friends, or family members; protecting younger coworkers; and banding together with other women. Also described as significantly helpful were incidents which helped to stop the harassment, such as: directly asking the perpetrator to stop the unwanted behaviour, practical suggestions, taking formal action, and choosing to be physically removed from the harassing situation to ensure there was no longer potential for contact with the perpetrator. Actions of others on behalf of the participant to stop the harassment were also found to be significantly helpful.

Hindering incidents were ones in which the harassment did not stop or were perceived to get worse, or incidents in which the participant did not feel emotionally supported and even blamed for being in the situation. These incidents included use of drugs and/or alcohol, discussing the harassment with the perpetrator, being accused of “socializing”

with the perpetrator, avoiding the perpetrator, minimizing or making light of the harassment, ignoring the harassment, and altering style of dress. Actions of others who failed to act on complaints of sexual harassment, who criticized the way the participant chose to handle the situation, and who blamed the participant for the situation were also reported as significantly hindering to experiences of coping.

Chapter 5: Discussion

This chapter will discuss interpretations and implications of findings from the present study. Links between my research and the work of others will be explored, limitations of the research will be acknowledged, and implications for counselling practice, employers, and future research will be discussed.

The purpose of this study was to use a qualitative method of data collection to examine women's perceptions of what was helpful and what was hindering in their experiences of coping with incidents of sexual harassment. There has been a great deal of research done categorizing behavioural reactions and coping styles of women who have experienced sexual harassment (Bingham & Scherer, 1993; Fitzgerald et al., 1988; Lazarus and Folkman, 1984; Magley, 2002). This study expanded on existing literature by exploring actions of participants and actions of others and describing how these actions added to or took away from experiences of coping with sexual harassment.

Emotion Focused Coping

Social Support

As found in previous research, social support plays an important role in victims' experiences of coping with stressful life events (Frazier & Burnett, 1994; Green & Pomeroy, 2007; Kocot & Goodman, 2003; Wethington & Kessler, 1986). It is common for women who are harassed to disclose their experiences to close friends and family members (Ahrens et al., 2007; Cortina, 2004; Cox, 2005). Similar to previous research, the current study found that the majority of participants chose to disclose their experiences of sexual harassment to female co-workers, female friends and/or family members, and romantic partners. To expand on existing literature, the present study found that it is not simply the act of

disclosing to social supports that is the helpful or hindering factor in coping with sexual harassment; rather, it is the response of the individual that the participant disclosed to that helps or hinders coping. Participants described it as most helpful when social supports reassured them that they were not doing something wrong or “causing” the harassment, and when social supports provided emotional support. These responses from social supports were categorized by participants as significantly helpful to their experiences of coping with sexual harassment because they felt supported, reassured, and validated. These responses were also described as helpful because they provided participants with the feeling that the individuals to whom they disclosed had a sense of understanding for what they were going through.

Information and practical suggestions from social supports were also described as significantly helpful to experiences of coping. However, it is important to note that participants described practical suggestions as significantly helpful only when they were accompanied by emotional support. In fact, situations where social supports provided the participant with information but failed to offer emotional support were described as significantly hindering to experiences of coping with sexual harassment. Similar to existing research, participants in the current study also described it as significantly hindering when social supports would criticize how they chose to handle their experiences of sexual harassment, or when social supports blamed them for being in the situation (Dakof & Taylor, 1990). Therefore, to expand on existing literature, it seems that it is important for social supports to provide targets of sexual harassment with emotional support, assurance that they are not to blame for the situation, and assurance that they will continue to be supported in the

future if necessary. It also appears that practical advice is appropriate and appreciated when paired with emotional support.

Women often choose to “band together” with other women as a means of coping with sexual harassment (Handy, 2006; Salisbury et al., 1986; Sigal et al., 2003; Slotten, 2002). Consistent with the existing literature, participants in the present study reported that protecting younger coworkers, receiving protection from coworkers, and discussing their harassment with coworkers or peers were all significantly helpful in coping with experiences of sexual harassment. Protection of the participant by others and protection of younger coworkers by the participant took the form of sharing information, coming to the defense of a younger coworker, and offering physical presence. These incidents were reported as helpful to coping because participants felt empowered, safe, and comforted in knowing that they were able to potentially prevent other women from having similar negative experiences. Participants also reported that reaching out to other women helped them to feel that they were not alone in dealing with the situation, and that some of the weight had been taken off of their shoulders.

Avoidance

Avoidance is another common coping strategy among targets of sexual harassment (Bingham & Scherer, 1993; Cortina & Wasti, 2005; Handy, 2006; Malamut & Offermann, 2001). Findings from the current investigation found that the majority of women chose to avoid the perpetrator of their harassment or to remove themselves from the situation in which the harassment was taking place. Findings indicated that it is not the act of avoidance that is helpful or hindering to experiences of coping, but the potential for contact with the perpetrator. Incidents in which participants avoided the perpetrator but the potential for

contact was still present were described as hindering, while incidents in which participants were able to completely remove themselves from the harassing environment were described as helpful. This suggests that avoidance of the perpetrator is significantly helpful to experiences of coping with sexual harassment when the potential for ongoing contact with the perpetrator is eliminated.

Avoidance can also consist of cognitive strategies such as denial that the harassment ever happened, and refusal to acknowledge or discuss the incident (Cortina & Wasti, 2005). In the present study, some participants chose to ignore the harassment as a means of coping with their experience of sexual harassment, and in retrospect described this strategy as hindering to their attempts to cope because they were not able to deal with the situation and move on with their lives.

Minimizing

Minimizing or making light of their experiences was also a coping strategy employed by participants of the current study. Research on female targets' responses to sexual harassment has shown that minimizing the impact of the incident is a common strategy that women employ in order to cope (Salisbury et al., 1986; Slotten, 2002; Wear et al., 2007). Studies have found that women will "make light" of the situation, shrugging it off as unimportant or even as acceptable, despite the fact that their behaviours may show otherwise. Participants reported engaging in such conduct as "laughing off" inappropriate behaviour in order to avoid conflict, or questioning whether or not their experiences were severe enough to disclose to someone. These incidents were described as significantly hindering to experiences of coping because the harassment continued and participants felt hesitant to seek further support.

Substance Use

The existing literature describes substance use as an emotion focused coping strategy employed by targets of sexual harassment as a means of “taking their minds off the situation” (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). One study of middle and high school girls states that “the use of alcohol or drugs by bullied or harassed girls suggests that they use these substances as a coping mechanism for upsetting events in the same way that adults do” (Gruber & Fineran, 2007, p. 640). Surprisingly, only one participant in the current investigation reported turning to drugs and alcohol as a means of coping with her experience with sexual harassment. While it is possible that other participants may have also used this coping strategy but failed to report it for reasons of social desirability, I suspect that this number would have been higher had a greater number of participants from a more diverse population been interviewed.

Problem Focused Coping

Confrontation

There was not a great deal of research found on targets of sexual harassment choosing to confront the perpetrator as a means of coping with their harassment. However, research does explain that women are more likely to confront the perpetrator when harassment is frequent or ongoing (Stockdale, 1998). In the present study a number of women chose to confront the perpetrators of their harassment, and it is important to note that it does not seem to be the act of confronting itself that is either helpful or hindering in attempts to cope with sexual harassment. Instead, it appeared to be the manner in which the target chose to confront, and what she chose to say to the perpetrator. In other words, incidents in which the participant was direct and assertive in telling the perpetrator to stop the inappropriate behaviour were described as significantly helpful in coping with harassment. On the other

hand, incidents in which the participant attempted to discuss the motives of the perpetrator or indirectly asked the perpetrator to stop were described as significantly hindering. This suggests that it is most effective when targets of sexual harassment address the specific unwanted behaviours of harassment perpetrators and take a direct approach in telling the perpetrator to desist.

Formal Complaints

Consistent with existing literature, findings from the present study indicated that women were less likely to choose to file formal complaints as a strategy for coping with sexual harassment than use other strategies of coping. Studies have even shown that when targets of sexual harassment do employ more assertive coping strategies such as filing a formal complaint, they report increased dissatisfaction with their place of work and/or the procedures involved in making the complaint (Stockdale, 1998; Vijayasiri, 2008). Results from this study are contradictory yet meaningful, because although few women chose to make a formal complaint, all women who did so also reported these incidents as significantly helpful to their experiences of coping. These incidents were significantly helpful in coping with experiences of sexual harassment because there was some form of justice against the perpetrators of the harassment, and because it validated that what participants had gone through was unacceptable. Participants described feeling empowered by the act of filing a complaint and therefore felt they had obtained closure in the situation and were comfortable moving on.

Implications for Counselling Practice

This study has shed light on a number of potential implications for counselling practice. Emotional support was reported as significantly helpful in all incidents of coping with sexual harassment where it was received, regardless of the role of the individual who provided it. This would suggest that when dealing with female targets of sexual harassment, it is important for practitioners to use empathy in order to convey an understanding of what the individual is experiencing. Along these same lines, it appears important for practitioners to assure the client that she is not to blame for her situation, and to validate her experiences and the way she chose to handle the situation. Furthermore, once a foundational rapport has been developed, practical suggestions and advice regarding complaint processes and legal options could be helpful. Filing formal complaints were found to be uncommon yet significantly helpful in coping with sexual harassment. It is also possible that if a trusting relationship exists between client and practitioner, it could be helpful for the practitioner to provide a safe environment in which the client could explore both the benefits and pitfalls of filing a formal complaint as a means of coping with her experience of harassment.

Findings from the current study demonstrated that one of the most common coping strategies employed by women when coping with sexual harassment was reaching out for support from other women. Participants reported that the opportunity to share knowledge, exchange stories, and provide and receive support from other women were valuable incidents in experiences of coping with sexual harassment. These findings provide further support for previous research which proposes that group therapy would be a helpful intervention for female targets of sexual harassment by providing a medium for sharing of knowledge the solidarity of common experiences (Salisbury et al., 1986). These findings also suggest that

practitioners should assist clients in identifying individuals outside of the therapeutic setting who they can trust and rely on for support.

The present study revealed that confronting the perpetrator of the sexual harassment can be significantly helpful to women's experiences of coping when concerns are expressed a certain way. Specifically, confrontational incidents were described as most helpful when the participant directly told the perpetrator to stop or used assertive language. These findings suggest that it may be helpful for practitioners to role-play scenarios with clients and to coach them in the use of assertive language as a means of coping with perpetrators of harassment.

Implications for Employers

It is interesting to note that of the 15 participants interviewed for this study, none reported incidents in which they had meaningful, helpful conversations with perpetrators regarding their behaviour. Based on participants' perceptions of what was helpful and what was hindering, I suspect it would be important for employers to host training seminars to educate all employees on the dynamics of sexual harassment, the effects it has on targets, and the types of behaviours that are acceptable and unacceptable in the workplace. This training would be a proactive measure in the creation of a safe workplace, and should also contain information regarding how an individual should respond when accused of sexual harassment, which would include encouraging the accused to portray an understanding of the situation and to validate the feelings of the individual making the accusation. However, I believe it would be important for employers to portray that the most desirable end result would be for the accused to stop the inappropriate and unwanted behaviour.

Another question posed by findings of the current study was how managers should respond to complaints of sexual harassment. Research by Kane-Urrabazo (2007) found that reactions of employers to complaints of sexual harassment can be equally as important to targets as preventative factors. Participants in the present study reported that it was most helpful when managers or supervisors responded to complaints of sexual harassment with reassurance that they would continue to support them in the future if needed, and when managers took action to end the harassment. It is interesting to note that not all managers who took action to stop the harassment also provided the participant with emotional support. Despite findings which indicate that in the majority of situations targets of sexual harassment find emotional support significantly helpful to their experiences of coping, these findings also suggest that actions taken by others to stop the unwanted behaviour can be valuable as well.

Limitations

There are several limitations in the current study that need to be addressed. Despite the 15 interviews that were conducted, not all categories met the criteria for the 25% participation rate. I believe that had more participant interviews been conducted similar results would have been generated, and that the majority of categories and subcategories would have met the participation rate. However, all categories and subcategories were included as results of the research, as I believe that each is valuable and contains pertinent information.

It is also important to note that the majority of participants from my sample were recruited through advertisement at the local university. For this reason it can be assumed that participants were coming from a specific, narrow population and had certain characteristics

in common. Perhaps this limited the range of incidents being reported; I suspect that if a more diverse population had been interviewed a broader range of incidents may have been generated. For example, the majority of participants interviewed found disclosing their experiences of sexual harassment significantly helpful to their experiences of coping. It is possible that these findings could be due to the fact that the university population is accustomed to verbal processing, sharing experiences with others, and receiving meaningful feedback. Only one participant reported turning to drugs and alcohol as a means of coping with her experiences. However, had there been more participants from the surrounding community, it is possible that a greater number of participants would have reported incidents of drug and/or alcohol use as a coping strategy.

The Critical Incident Technique relies on individuals to provide details on first hand observations of behaviour. This is important because it allows a platform for women's perspectives to be acknowledged and for the documentation of helpful and hindering coping strategies in the context of responses to real-life situations. However, there is the possibility that participants were hesitant or less likely to report certain coping strategies (e.g., use of drugs and/or alcohol) as a means of appearing socially acceptable to the researcher.

Finally, in the present study, only three participants identified themselves as being of an ethnic origin other than Caucasian which may also have limited the range of incidents being reported.

Future Research

Results from the current study revealed a range of helpful and hindering incidents used by women as a means of coping with sexual harassment. Future researchers may conduct a larger study with the addition of more participant interviews and the collection of a

greater number of incidents to meet participation guidelines as set out by Butterfield and colleagues (2005). Further research might also select one coping strategy and use the critical incident technique to complete a more in-depth investigation. As previously discussed, existing sexual harassment research states that taking formal actions against the perpetrator is a rare coping strategy employed by female targets. Furthermore, research indicates that women who do choose to take formal action report being dissatisfied with the process and with their employment setting in general. Contrary to previous research, the current study found that all women who chose to take formal action against the perpetrators of their harassment reported it as significantly helpful to their experiences of coping. To expand on results from this study, future research may examine women's experiences of taking formal action against perpetrators of sexual harassment.

Previous research has found that harassing behaviours and their categorization is consistent cross culturally (Gelfand et. al., 1995; Hibino, Ogino, & Inagaki, 2006), but there is a dearth in the literature regarding the coping styles of targets of sexual harassment across cultures. To address questions of cultural diversity it may be worthwhile for future studies to explore helpful and hindering incidents in coping with sexual harassment among women from a variety of cultural backgrounds.

To expand on the current study as well as existing literature, future studies may conduct interviews to examine men's perceptions of helpful and hindering incidents in coping with sexual harassment.

Conclusion

The current study expanded on previous sexual harassment research by identifying helpful and hindering experiences of coping with sexual harassment, and describing how

these incidents added to or took away from coping. This study has contributed to the field by examining sexual harassment in a naturalistic setting, and expanding beyond categorizations of coping behaviours to detailed accounts of which behaviours are helpful and which are hindering, and why. Participants were provided with the opportunity to share what was perhaps a previously unheard story, or at the very least given the opportunity to disclose to an active listener. As the researcher, it is my hope that these findings will provide a basis of reflection for practitioners, employers, and formal and informal support providers regarding how to effectively receive complaints of sexual harassment. I also hope that findings from the present study will inspire thought in readers, and that the issue of coping with sexual harassment will be translated into a more global context. As the researcher, I am left with a number of questions. In Chapter One, I asked whether or not responses to sexual harassment met the needs of targets, and I expressed regret over not having asked my friend what she needed to help her cope with her experience. Findings from the current study answered this question by neatly categorizing helpful and hindering incidents of coping. However, I do wonder why these findings did not address the gender issues that accompany sexual harassment, and why participants did not specifically discuss their experiences as female targets of harassment. Reflecting upon the stories shared by participants of my research, I echo the sentiment of one participant who asked, why are women not being protected more? It is interesting to consider the findings of the present study as symptoms of a larger societal issue. Does gender matter? Is being a woman helpful or hindering when coping with experiences of sexual harassment? This study categorized helpful and hindering incidents in coping with harassment, and addressed how incidents added to or took away from participants' experiences. However, findings did not reveal the reasons behind why women

chose various coping strategies over others, and did not tie experiences of coping in isolated situations to coping with the issue of harassment in a broader context. I believe that before we can truly understand what is helpful and what is hindering in coping with sexual harassment, we must first understand the motivations behind using different coping strategies, and the various gendered, cultural, and societal influences that drive them.

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Research Participants Needed!

I am looking for females 19 years of age or older who are willing to share their stories of coping with sexual harassment to participate in my study.

Participants will be asked to complete a one-on-one interview with the researcher, and in appreciation for your time you will receive an honorarium.

If you are interested in sharing your story or if you would like more information, please contact Tracey at 640-9993 or garber@unbc.ca

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Appendix B

Information Sheet- Research on Women's Perceptions of Helpful and Hindering Incidents in Coping with Sexual Harassment

I am a student of the University of Northern British Columbia, currently working toward my Masters in Education in Counselling degree. As part of the requirement for completion of this degree, I have chosen to complete a written thesis and complete an oral defense under the supervision of Dr. Corinne Koehn. Because of personal experience in the field, I have chosen to study women's experiences of being sexually harassed, and the specific incidents they found to be significantly helpful and significantly hindering in their attempt to cope with the situation. While I understand that this is a potentially sensitive topic, I believe that your thoughts and experiences are invaluable and will provide me with rich, insightful data that I hope will contribute to the body of knowledge related to how women cope with sexual harassment.

Purpose of Research:

I believe that there is a gap between what women who have experienced sexual harassment would like to see when attempting to cope with sexual harassment, and what actually happens. Therefore, with this research I hope to obtain first hand examples of what women found especially helpful and especially hindering in their experiences of coping with sexual harassment, and use this information to help close the gap.

Participant Commitment:

Your participation in this study is completely **voluntary**. I will be conducting one-on-one interviews during which I will be asking you to tell me about a time when you attempted to cope with sexual harassment, and specific incidents that you found significantly helpful and/or significantly hindering in your attempt to cope with the situation. Interviews will be tape recorded to ensure accuracy, and you are free to turn off the tape at any time during the interview. You are encouraged to take a break during the interview process whenever you feel it is needed, and you are also free to withdraw from the research at any time without penalty. I will also ask you to complete a demographic questionnaire and a questionnaire for each incident(s) you report. If you do decide to withdraw from the research your information will be destroyed. Otherwise, your information will be transcribed and typed verbatim and sent to you to review and make any necessary changes. It is important for all participants to understand that anonymous quotes in written form may be included in the final thesis report, publications, or conference presentations.

Confidentiality:

I will not use any identifying information in any of my transcripts or my finished paper. Each participant will be given a code which will be used to organize their information, and the interview data will be kept separate from signed consent forms. Only the research team will have access to the tapes and transcripts. If you decide to bring a sexual harassment case to court, and if information is subpoenaed the researcher will need to comply with this order.

Interview data and all tapes and transcripts will be kept in a locked cabinet and electronic data will be kept under password, and after 10 years hard copy information will be shredded, electronic files will be deleted and audio tapes will be destroyed.

Dissemination of Results:

Results of this study will be published in journal articles and discussed in conference presentations. Participant quotes may be included, but any identifying information will not be revealed.

Benefits and Risks:

This study will provide you with the chance to reflect on and voice what was helpful to you during your attempt to cope with the experience of sexual harassment, and hopefully to return to these methods of coping in other stressful situations. You may also feel a sense of pride to have given your input to a project that is intended to provide information regarding women's perceptions of what is helpful or hindering in their attempts to cope with sexual harassment. I am aware that the topic of my research is sensitive in nature and it is possible that participants may feel uncomfortable talking about their experiences. The following agencies provide support and counselling:

Walmsley & Associates- 564-1000

UNBC Counselling Center (for UNBC students only) - 960-6369

Elizabeth Fry Society, Victim Services- 563-1113

If you would like any further information about this study, please feel free to contact the researcher, Tracey Garber at 640-9993 or research supervisor Dr. C. Koehn at (250) 960-6264 or koehn@unbc.ca. You may obtain a copy of the results by contacting the researcher by phone or email, during which time a summary of the results may be sent to you. A summary of results will be available January 1, 2010.

Please let the researcher know if you have any questions before continuing with the study. Complaints about the study can be directed to the Office of Research, UNBC at (250) 960-5650.

Tracey Garber
garber@unbc.ca
(250) 640-9993

Appendix C

Research Ethics Board Informed Consent Form

To be completed by the Research Participant.

Do you understand that you have been asked to be in a research study?	Yes	No
Have you read and received a copy of the attached information sheet?	Yes	No
Do you understand that the interviews will be recorded?	Yes	No
Do you understand that some of your actual words may be published in a written form?	Yes	No
Do you understand the benefits and risks involved in participating in this study?	Yes	No
Do you know what resources you can access for counselling support?	Yes	No
Have you had an opportunity to ask questions and discuss this study?	Yes	No
Do you understand that you are free to refuse to participate or to withdraw from the study at any time? You do not have to give a reason and there will be no penalty for withdrawing.	Yes	No
Has the issue of confidentiality been explained to you?	Yes	No
Do you understand who will have access to the information you provide?	Yes	No

This study was explained to me by: _____
Print Name

I agree to take part in this study:

Date: _____

Signature of Research Participant

Printed Name of Research Participant

I believe that the person signing this form understands what is involved in the study and voluntarily agrees to participate.

Date: _____

Signature of Investigator

The Information Sheet must be attached to this Consent Form and a copy given to the

Research Participant
Appendix D

Demographic Information

Code: _____

Please complete the following:

1. Current age: _____
2. Highest educational level completed:
 - a) Grade school
 - b) Grade 12
 - c) Some college or university
 - d) College diploma
 - e) University undergraduate degree
 - f) University graduate degree
 - g) Other _____
3. Marital status:
 - a) Married
 - b) Separated
 - c) Divorced
 - d) Common law
 - e) Never married
 - f) Widowed
4. What is your ethnic origin (eg. Caucasian, Asian, Aboriginal, etc.)?

5. Current employment status:
 - a) Employed full time
 - b) Employed part time
 - c) Employed seasonally
 - d) Unemployed
 - e) Permanently out of labor force due to illness/disability
 - f) Out of labor force due to decision to be a homemaker
 - g) Student
 - h) Other (please specify) _____
6. Type of occupation: (please specify, eg., teacher, nurse, manager, probation officer server, etc.): _____

Appendix E

Critical Incident Data Sheet

Code: _____

Helpful: _____ Hindering: _____

Incident Number: _____

Tape Number: _____

1. What year did the harassing incident occur? _____
2. How old were you when the incident occurred? _____
3. Was the perpetrator of the harassment male or female? _____
4. In what context did the harassment occur?
 - a) Workplace
 - b) High school
 - c) Post secondary institution
 - d) Social setting
 - e) Other (please specify) _____
5. Was the perpetrator of the harassment in a position of power and/or authority over you?
Yes _____ No _____
6. If "yes", how so? _____
7. Was there anyone involved in making your coping experience helpful or hindering?
8. Yes _____ No _____ Who were they?
 - a) Friend
 - b) Family member
 - c) Romantic partner
 - d) Co-worker
 - e) Teacher
 - f) Boss/Supervisor/Manager
 - g) Counsellor
 - h) RCMP
 - i) Department of Human Resources
 - j) Have never disclosed the harassment to anyone
 - k) Sexual Harassment Advisor
 - l) Other (please specify)