Survivors of Childhood Abuse: The Experience of Receiving Acknowledgement from the Abusers

By

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ABSTRACT

Few studies have attempted to explore the area of abuser acknowledgement for survivors of childhood abuse. This qualitative research study used a case study methodology to explore the experience of a survivor of childhood sexual abuse in receiving acknowledgement from the abuser. Data was collected through an interview with the participant and was transcribed and analyzed as part of an in-depth data analysis process. Twelve themes of experience emerged from the data analysis process; these themes were experienced either in the immediate moment of receiving the acknowledgement or in the days, months, and years following the acknowledgement. These themes are discussed along with strengths and limitations of the study, directions for future research, and implications for practitioners.

Table of Contents

List of Tables

Acknowledgements

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Chapter One: Introduction

Background

Child abuse is a concern that is only now beginning to receive the attention it deserves. Research in this area has been ongoing for approximately 40 years, and yet, for the children being maltreated, this progress is not fast enough. For instance, according to Leventhal (2003), child sexual abuse only began to gain recognition in the 1980s (which is quite recent when compared with physical abuse which was recognized in the early 1900s). Research (Arias, 2004; Briere & Rutnz, 1990; Desai, Arias, Thompson, & Basile, 2002; Glaser, 2002; Hildyard & Wolfe, 2002; Johnson, 1990; Leventhal, 2003; Oates, 1996; Trocmé et al., 2001; Tzeng, Jackson, & Karlson, 1991; Widom & White, 1997; Wissow, 1995) is beginning to show just how common child abuse is, and how serious the consequences (in the areas of physical health, mental health, substance use, interpersonal relationships, criminality, and parenting) can be. Leventhal goes on to note that for the area of child abuse research to continue growing, four issues need addressing: (1) ongoing recognition by society, private and public agencies, and colleagues that see child abuse as a serious concern; (2) funding from national research agencies to ensure high quality research; (3) encouraging young researchers to enter this field of study; and (4) funding for services for children and families in need of assistance, because knowledge will need to be translated into practice.

In 1998, Health Canada commissioned a study to research the incidence and prevalence of child abuse in Canada. The Canadian Incidence Study of Reported Child Abuse and Neglect (CIS) is the first study of its kind in Canada (Trocmé et al., 2001). Specifically, it is the first investigation into the nation-wide prevalence of child abuse.

The report states that there were 135, 573 child maltreatment investigations conducted in Canada; this is consistent with an incidence rate of 21.52 investigations per 1,000 children. Of those investigations, 45% were found to be substantiated, 22% were suspected to be substantiated, but evidence was insufficient, and 33% were found to be unsubstantiated. Neglect was the most common reason for investigation, followed by physical abuse, emotional maltreatment, and sexual abuse.

There are several different definitions of child abuse in the literature. For the purpose of this study, I will refer to the Department of Justice Canada (2003), where child abuse is defined as "the violence, mistreatment or neglect that a child or adolescent may experience while in the care of someone they either trust or depend on, such as a parent, sibling, other relative, caregiver or guardian" (p. 1, 2003). The Department of Justice and other researchers (Wissow, 1995) go on to note that child abuse can take place in any setting and can occur regardless of age (when children are infants, toddlers, or adolescents – any age until they reach the majority age wherever they may live) race, gender, socioeconomic status, ethnicity and any other demographic factors. According to most researchers (Johnson, 1990; Oates, 1996; Tzeng et al., 1991; Wissow, 1995), as well as most organizations that deal with child protection concerns (Department of Justice Canada, 2003; Ministry of Children and Family Development of British Columbia (MCFD), 2005), child abuse is generally broken down into four different categories: Physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional abuse, and neglect.

Abuse is not disclosed as often as it occurs. Bell and Belicki (1998) found that only 47.8% of their participants who had experienced childhood abuse confided in someone, and of those, only 14.3% of those had confided in a professional. Bell and

Belicki and other researchers (Arata, 1998; Lamb & Edgar-Smith, 1994; Trocmé et al., 2001) note that there are many different reasons that children experiencing abuse do not disclose. First of all, there is a power imbalance between the victim and the abuser; the victim is often in a position of dependence on the abuser. Next, the abuser might be manipulating, bribing, threatening, or coercing the victim into keeping the abuse hidden. The victim might feel that s/he is to blame for the abuse. In addition, the victim often experiences feelings of shame, guilt, and fear; the fear can be of the abuser, of stigmatization, and/or of being punished.

Often, when abuse is disclosed, it is done so years after the abuse occurred, after the child has become an adult survivor. Arata (1998) found that only 31% of her participants disclosed their experience of childhood sexual abuse at the time of the abuse. Lamb and Edgar-Smith (1994) found that only 36% of the participants disclosed before the age of 14; the rest did not disclose their abuse until adulthood. Even when it is disclosed, the survivor might not name the abuser. There is no statute of limitation on child abuse, and as such, should the survivor name the abuser, charges can still be laid (MCFD, 2005), however it is unclear how often this occurs. Beyond all of this, if a child discloses abuse or an adult survivor discloses childhood abuse, the abuser can, and often does deny the abuse. A public example of this kind of denial is the issue of priests accused of sexually abusing children. The allegations have been made and yet, some of the abusers never admit or acknowledge having committed the abuse.

Researcher Motivation and Assumptions

Motivations. When I first began considering research topics, two points occurred to me. First, my professional interests lie in working with children who have experienced

childhood abuse and I wanted my research topic to reflect this interest. Second, I wanted my research to make an original contribution to the field of childhood abuse. This field of child abuse and trauma is such a vast one that I felt unsure of where to begin.

My supervisor recommended that I read Judith Herman's (1992) *Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence - From Domestic Abuse to Political Terror.* One of the pieces that stood out in my mind upon completing this book was the importance of acknowledgement to survivors of any trauma. I began thinking about children who have been abused by adults and have their experiences denied when they are not believed – how would their experiences be different if they had suffered through a one-time abuse or if they had been abused over a period of years? Following that train of thought, I began wondering what these children's experience is like when their abuse experiences are acknowledged, specifically, by the person who abused them. I reflected on my own reactions when I am involved in an argument with someone, and how much I appreciate it when that person admits that they were wrong. I do not mean to compare that situation to one of experiencing abuse, however, I thought that if I can appreciate acknowledgement in the context of a simple argument, what might it be like for a child who has experienced abuse?

After discussion with my supervisor, I decided to invite adult survivors of childhood abuse to participate in this study. I believed, and still do believe, that it would be easier to recruit adult participants as opposed to children. I also felt that adults would be more able to verbally describe the experience of receiving acknowledgement.

Researcher assumptions. Based on a constructivist lens, I approached my study from a perspective that was closer to the emic side of the continuum between emic and

etic. Pike (1954) first introduced the terms emic and etic to different anthropological approaches to research (as cited in Patton, 2002). Pike defined the emic perspective as the insider perspective; the emic perspective is one where the participants within a culture (or a study) are the experts and knowledge of that culture or constructs within that culture comes from the participants. The etic perspective is the outsider perspective. Etic perspectives emphasizes the scientific observers as the source of knowledge about a culture (or a study) as the observers have stood far enough away that they are able to note similarities and difference both within that culture and between that culture and others. Researchers do not necessarily have to choose between the emic and the etic perspectives, rather, they need to situate themselves along the continuum between the emic and etic.

As I approached this research study, I placed myself closer to the emic end of the continuum as I considered myself to be a participant in my research. Coming from a constructivist stance, I believe that I have shared in the meaning-making and sense-making processes with my participant. While she is the expert in her experience of surviving childhood abuse and receiving acknowledgement from the abuser, during the interviews, we engaged in a shared sense-making process. She shared her story and her acknowledgement experience with me, and I responded with comments, statements, and reactions that are part of my own life experiences and knowledge. I also disclosed my role as a researcher to her by explaining what that role entails, and what the process of conducting this research would be like for both of us. This research study is a representation of this co-constructed story about the experience of receiving acknowledgement that was our "truth" based on our shared experience of both interview

processes. I also consider myself a participant in this research as my thoughts, reflections, and internal processes have been documented through my journalling process. Excerpts from this journal are embedded in this paper to illustrate some of my experiences as I conducted this study. As such, I feel that my reflexivity also contributed to this research study.

I do note, however, that part of my role as researcher in this study was to provide the readers with my perspectives and my knowledge of the literature in the area of receiving acknowledgement from abuser. This aspect of my role coincides with the etic (outsider) perspective.

As I will discuss in the next section, I chose to explore the area of abuser acknowledgement from the perspective of survivors of childhood abuse who had received such an acknowledgement. My belief is that people are experts on their own experiences; my participant shared her truth, her reality with me as she experienced it and my hope with this research study is to honestly and truthfully represent her experience as she shared it with me to the readers. Yes, it will be presented from within my framework and my lens, but ultimately, it should still be an accurate representation of her experience.

Purpose of the Study

One of the reasons I wished to conduct this study is to shed some light on the area of abuser acknowledgment and how it impacts survivors of childhood abuse and how they heal from it. I hoped to gain insight and understanding of childhood abuse survivors' experiences of receiving acknowledgement from their abusers regarding the abuse they suffered. At the core of this research, I wanted to explore and describe the experience of

receiving the acknowledgement, and its effect on the survivors' survival, their healing, and their life.

This research will contribute to the field of treatment of child abuse from a different avenue. As mentioned earlier, there are very few (McKinzie, 2000; Morris, Lipovsky, & Saunders, 1996), if any, research studies exploring the area of abuser acknowledgment of the abuse. Hopefully, this study will open the door for more research to be done in this area. Eventually, as more research is conducted over time, implications for the helping professions will emerge and aid in helping survivors heal from their abuse experiences.

Research Question

The question I explored in this study is: For survivors of childhood abuse, what is the experience of receiving acknowledgement from the abuser? As mentioned, acknowledgement of the abuse by the abuser does not generally occur. As a result, there is no accessible research that addresses the idea of acknowledgement by the abuser and its impact on survivors.

In this study, I chose to focus on survivors of all four types of childhood abuse. Since this is an issue about which there is not much research, I believe that it is wiser to begin with a broader exploration. Once there is some literature that describes this issue, then research can begin to focus on each of the four types of abuse separately, and give them each more attention.

In this chapter, I provided a brief introduction to the issue of child abuse and acknowledgement from the abusers. In the next chapter I will present the current literature in the area of child abuse, healing from the abuse, and the role

acknowledgement may play. The third chapter will focus on the methodology I used to conduct this research study, including my data collection and data analysis methods. In the fourth chapter, I will present the findings of my research study and the themes that emerged from the data I collected. The fifth chapter will address my journey as a researcher and my experiences in conducting this study. In the sixth and final chapter I will discuss my findings, the strengths and limitations of the study, and possible directions for future research.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

In this chapter, I will review some of the literature that relates to my research question: *For survivors of childhood abuse, what is the experience of receiving acknowledgement from the abuser?* I will begin by introducing some of the literature around child abuse and its four subtypes (physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional abuse, and neglect), some of the challenges with the definitions of these subtypes, as well as some of the prevalence and incidence rates surrounding child abuse in Canada. Following that, I will review literature regarding the effects of child abuse, and the healing and recovery process. Next, I will discuss the construct of acknowledgement, as well as the idea of restorative justice, as it relates to survivors of childhood abuse. I will then end with a brief discussion of my research question. As I will be reviewing many articles, Table 1, at the end of this chapter, will provide a summary of the literature reviewed and all the pertinent information presented.

Child Abuse

Research in the area of child abuse began increasing after the landmark article by Kempe, Silverman, Steele, Droegemueller, and Silver in 1962. Leventhal (2003) discusses five reasons for the impact of this article. First, the title, *The Battered-Child Syndrome*, was graphic and noticeable. Second, it included a detailed description of both the physical and clinical characteristics of an abused child. Third, it made note of the difficulties professionals had in believing that parents could even abuse their children. Fourth, the article discussed some of the factors in parents and families that could potentially lead to a child being abused. Fifth, the authors supplied the first epidemiological data on the issue of child abuse. Kempe et al. (1962) brought the issue of

child abuse into the light where it could no longer be ignored; they began what is now a growing field of research.

Since then, research done in the field of child abuse has been increasing. There are a variety of opinions regarding the different issues of child abuse including etiology, effects, and statistics, but most researchers (Johnson, 1990; Oates, 1996; Tzeng et al., 1991; Wissow, 1995) define child abuse very similarly – they classify child abuse into four broad categories: physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional abuse, and neglect.

Physical Abuse

Health Canada funded the CIS (Trocmé et al., 2001) which was the first nation-wide study to investigate child maltreatment in Canada. Trocmé et al. define physical abuse as:

> The deliberate application of force to any part of a child's body, which results or may result in a non-accidental injury. Physical abuse may include shaking, choking, biting, kicking, burning, poisoning, holding a child under water, or any other harmful or dangerous use of force or restraint. Most child physical abuse is associated with physical punishment or is confused with child discipline.

This definition is one used by government agencies that deal with child protection issues. Many authors and researchers, however, have noted that defining physical abuse can be a challenge (Johnson, 1990, p. 14; Oates, 1996; Tzeng et al., 1991, p. 7). For instance, the definition used by Trocmé et al. (2001) mentions force, which can look very different to various people. Also, the association of physical abuse with punishment or discipline requires people to discern the difference between the two concepts, and therefore becomes a judgment call (Johnson, pp. 22-23; Oates). For instance, how serious does a

physical injury need to be to be seen as a result of abuse? Johnson notes that seriousness of an injury, as well as family history (previous incidents, family relationships [antagonistic, aggressive, friendly, loving]…etc) are some of the factors that are used to determine if an act can be classified as child abuse (pp. 21-23).

Sexual Abuse

Trocmé et al. (2001) state that sexual abuse occurs "when an adult or youth uses a child for sexual purposes. Sexual abuse includes fondling, intercourse, incest, sodomy, exhibitionism, and commercial exploitation through prostitution or the production of pornographic materials" (2001). As with physical abuse, this definition is used by governmental agencies entrusted with child protection issues. The Ministry of Children and Family Development of British Columbia (2003), notes that the criminal code defines what is and what is not an offence. Any non-consensual sexual activity is a criminal offense. Sexual activity between children is not a criminal offence when one child is between the ages of 12 and 14 and the other is between the ages of 12 and 16. However, the difference between their ages cannot be more than two years and one cannot be in a position of authority over the other. While a position of authority would denote a power over relationship, I would like to point out that power dynamics often come in to play in most if not all sexual abuse cases; The abuser holds a position of power over the victim whether they have authority over them or not.

Trocmé et al.'s (2001) definition of sexual abuse points out that it is not limited to sexual intercourse. The more publicized cases of child sexual abuse have indeed involved sexual intercourse and as such, have exacerbated the misconception that sexual abuse has to involve actual intercourse (Oates, 1996). In the CIS, Trocmé et al. note that of the

3,958 substantiated cases of sexual abuse, only 355 involved penetration (8.96%). An additional 144 involved attempted penetration (3.63%). This means that more than 85% of substantiated cases of sexual abuse did not involve actual or attempted penetration, i.e. sexual intercourse. If people are labouring under the misconception that sexual abuse always involves intercourse, they may not be aware of many other instances where a child may be sexually abused or exploited.

Emotional Abuse

Emotional abuse can be difficult to diagnose as there may not be many overt signs or symptoms (Oates, 1996). In the CIS emotional abuse is named 'emotional maltreatment'. Trocmé et al. (2001) state that emotional maltreatment could involve:

> acts or omissions by parents or caregivers that cause or could cause serious behavioural, cognitive, emotional, or mental disorders. Emotional maltreatment can include verbal threats, socially isolating a child, intimidation, exploitation, terrorizing, or routinely making unreasonable demands on a child.

Johnson (1990) also notes that emotional abuse is often present in the other types of abuse. Glaser (2002) adds that even if emotional abuse is present within other types of abuse, it is not often recognized or named; the more evident and observable abuses are addressed, leaving the emotional abuse untreated. Glaser notes that with emotional abuse, "the abuser is almost invariably the primary carer and attachment figure for the child. In two-parent families, either both parents contribute to the abuse or the nonmaltreating parent is unable to offer effective protection" (p. 700).

Neglect

According to Trocmé et al. (2001) child neglect happens:

> when a child's parents or caregivers do not provide the requisite attention to his or her emotional, psychological, or physical development. Unlike abuse, which is usually incident specific, neglect often involves chronic situations that are not as easily identified.

Similar to emotional maltreatment, neglect is quite challenging to diagnose. Neglect (unlike physical or sexual abuse, which generally consist of specific incidents) is usually chronic, and contributes to the difficulty in diagnosis (Hildyard & Wolfe, 2002). Additionally, the child does not typically display physical symptoms that are noticed by other adults in her/his life (Oates, 1996). In neglect cases (similar to emotional abuse cases) the parents or primary caregivers are almost always found to be the perpetrators of the abuse (Glaser, 2002).

Challenges with Definitions

Despite the fact that most of the definitions provided herein are the ones utilized by most agencies entrusted with child protection, defining abuse is not unproblematic. Johnson (1990) identifies five factors that contribute to the difficulty in defining abuse. First, one's own personal experiences can and do affect how one might define child abuse. For instance, individuals may reflect back on their own childhood experiences when considering what constitutes abuse. People will have had different experiences growing up and as such, might have different conceptions of what abuse is. Second, one's emotional responses to the idea of children, who are so vulnerable, being hurt, might impact definitions of abuse; one's sensibilities can be affected and, as such, could influence any discussion or debate around definitions. Third, the uncertainty and contextual nature of each situation of child abuse could influence how it is defined.

Definitions cannot be too broad or too rigid; they are usually open to interpretation. Each situation of child abuse is different and various factors may come into play. As a result, it is difficult to come up with a definition that will account for each situation that may arise. Fourth, definitions of child abuse also reflect the societal attitudes; these attitudes often change and as such the definitions that are used need to be constantly evolving and developing. For instance, as I mentioned earlier, physical abuse only began drawing attention in the 1960s, following Kempe et al.'s 1962 article; until then it seemed that physical abuse was an accepted part of life and society. Fifth, definitions of abuse can be, and usually are, culturally dependent. Cultural groups may differ in their child care practices and as such, abuse may look different through various cultural lenses – what one group views as normal practice, another group may see as abusive (pp. 14-20).

One underlying cause of the problems with defining child abuse is that no one is able to give a clear, concise description of what 'good enough' parenting looks like. People can identify extremely neglectful and abusive parenting, or 'excellent' parenting, but the in-between, average parenting is where the conflicts usually occur (Johnson, 1990, p. 20).

Incidence and Prevalence of Child Abuse

The Canadian Incidence Report (Trocmé et al., 2001) investigated reported incidents of child abuse and neglect in 1998 and estimated that there were 135, 573 child maltreatment investigations conducted in Canada; this is consistent with an incidence rate of 21.52 investigations per 1,000 children. Of those investigations, 45% were found to be substantiated, 22% were suspected to be substantiated, but evidence was insufficient, and 33% were found to be unsubstantiated. In the substantiated cases, neglect was the

primary reason for investigation 40% of the time, followed by physical abuse (31%), emotional maltreatment (19%), and sexual abuse (10%). While this might appear to contradict the above-mentioned definitions and opinions, Trocmé et al. note that the primary form of neglect that was investigated was 'failure to supervise leading to physical harm'. So, while neglect might not be identified very easily, once a child is injured because of neglect, those outward signs make it easier to realize that neglect could be occurring. Wissow (1995) notes that sexual abuse is present among different income groups which challenges the myth that sexual abuse is limited only to lower socio-economic groups. However, the presence of neglect and physical abuse tends to increase with poverty (Wissow). What is it about poverty and the circumstances that surround poverty that increases the possibility of neglect and physical abuse occurring?

Effects of Child Abuse

Hildyard and Wolfe (2002) investigated some of the developmental effects that child abuse and neglect has on the victims. Infants and preschool-aged victims of neglect are likely to have low problem solving skills and impulse control; they tend to have a disorganized attachment, which is the lack of an organized attachment style where children experience their parents as safe and dangerous at the same time. Children who experience neglect also maintain a negative mental representation of themselves. There is also a high likelihood that children who have been abused will be socially withdrawn and isolated, and that they will have difficulty coping with problems and regulating their emotions (Hildyard & Wolfe, 2002; Trickett & McBride-Chang, 1995; White, Halpin, Strom & Santilli, 1988).

White et al. (1988) found that children in infancy or early childhood, who have experienced sexual abuse, are more likely to have enuresis, particularly girls. They also found that children, particularly boys, have somatic complaints. Children in this developmental period also display inappropriate sexual behaviors, and experience anxiety and social withdrawal.

School-aged children and younger adolescents tend to have lower achievement in school (Hildyard & Wolfe, 2002; Trickett & McBride-Chang, 1995). They also have a negative view of themselves, others, and the world and have an increased risk of experiencing depression, especially girls (Hildyard & Wolfe; Kolko, Moser & Weldy, 1990; Trickett & McBride-Chang). Children in middle childhood also have a higher likelihood of being more aggressive, disruptive, and un-cooperative, especially boys (Hildyard & Wolfe; Kolko, Moser & Weldy; Trickett, 1993; Wissow, 1995). These children, particularly girls, are also increasingly socially withdrawn and they tend to internalize their problems (Hildyard & Wolfe; Kolko, Moser & Weldy; Trickett; Wissow). Finally, children in this age group also display sexually inappropriate behaviors and sexual activity (Kolko, Moser & Weldy)

Older adolescents and adults seem to have a similar pattern, although Hildyard and Wolfe (2002) note that research in this particular area is lacking. Older adolescents appear to have more academic difficulties such as a lower IQ and reading difficulties (Hildyard & Wolfe). They have an increased likelihood of running away from home and there is a higher risk of displaying delinquent and/or criminal behavior (Hildyard & Wolfe; Kendall-Tackett, Williams & Finkelhor, 1993). Adolescents who have been victims of child abuse may have higher rates of anxiety and depression; they are also four

times more likely (than non-abused peers) to be diagnosed with a personality disorder (Hildyard & Wolfe). Kendall-Tackett et al. found that adolescents are more likely to commit suicide or engage in self-injurious behavior. Wyatt (as cited in Trickett & McBride-Chang, 1995) also found that adolescents are more likely to engage in earlier sexual activities, and to have multiple sex partners.

Hildyard and Wolfe note, however, that most of these potential problems tend to decrease as the victim grows older and becomes an independent adult. They point out that by adulthood, the presence of the victims' life stressors, such as their abuse, that contribute to these problems is controlled and as such, some of the problems tend to decrease. Unfortunately, this is not the case with all victims of childhood abuse. Those adults who have not acknowledged their abuse or admitted that it has occurred tend to have problems in the areas of criminal behavior, personality disorders, and substance abuse. This does not mean that any adults who have not 'healed' from their abuse will have such problems, but only that the likelihood increases when these adults deny the abuse, to themselves and to others.

Arias (2004) discussed the long-term consequences for women survivors of childhood maltreatment. She notes that most research studies that explore this issue focus on women survivors. A suggested explanation is that women have a "greater tendency, relative to men, to participate in research and to self-disclose histories of child maltreatment and victimization" (p. 469). The few studies that include adult male survivors suggest that the results are similar for both men and women (Desai et al., 2002).

Some of the consequences for survivors of childhood abuse include posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), personality disorders, depression, anxiety, and suicidal behavior

(Arias, 2004; Briere & Rutnz, 1990; Widom & White, 1997). Another major potential consequence of childhood abuse is that survivors are two to four times more likely to experience subsequent victimization in their adult life by either intimate partners or non-intimate others, than adults who have not experienced childhood abuse (Arias; Briere & Runtz; Russell, 1986; Widom & White).

Healing and Recovery

Glaister and Abel (2001) interviewed 14 women who had experienced childhood sexual abuse and were in the process of healing. The women identified healing as a difficult and painful process, as bringing about positive changes in themselves and their lives, as resulting in significant changes in themselves, and as bringing about a sense of well-being and an acceptance of themselves and of the events in their lives.

The women in Glaister and Abel's (2001) study also identified seven factors that facilitated healing: (1) information that aided them in making meaning of and understanding the abuse and the healing process was important, (2) relationships with others and with themselves were important; supportive relationships were with people who listened without judgment, (3) experiential activities (feeling, experiencing, and taking risks; possibilities for growth; acknowledgment and acceptance of vulnerability), (4) inner strength and beliefs, (5) commitment to healing, (6) skills, and (7) coming to terms with the abuse and with themselves. When discussing the idea of coming to terms with the abuse, some of the women felt that forgiveness of themselves and their abusers was vital to their healing, whereas other women forgave themselves but not their abusers. The study does not mention how the participants came to forgive their abusers. How was

the forgiveness constructed or defined? Was the forgiveness in relation to the abuser acknowledging the abuse or was it independent of that?

Surprisingly, some of the women in Glaister and Abel's (2001) study identified relations with therapists and other individuals as interfering with healing. The therapists and other individuals were ones who did not listen or understand and who did not encourage the empowerment and growth of the survivors. Some women also noted that their relationships with themselves sometimes impeded their healing process and that they were their own greatest obstacles - their perceptions, their feelings, and their behaviors, including the internalization of their abuse experiences interfered with their healing.

In Godbey and Hutchinson (1996) women who had survived childhood sexual abuse, specifically incest, were interviewed. They found that there was a seven-phase process that survivors went through on their way to healing from the abuse. Godbey and Hutchinson titled this process 'resurrecting the buried self' and the seven phases are: (1) reappearing of the buried self, (2) revivifying of the buried self, (3) resuscitating the buried self, (4) renovating the buried self, (5) regenerating the buried self, (6) reanimating the buried self, and (7) reincarnating the buried self.

Reappearing of the buried self is about the participants receiving some signal that past pain and trauma exist and beginning to explore the feelings of discomfort or anxiety. For instance, some of the participants had experienced a profound life-changing event such as the birth of a child or the death of a loved one. *Revivifying of the buried self* can involve flashbacks and re-experiencing of the trauma. The participants are triggered by everyday objects or events. *Resuscitating the buried self* involves experiencing the many

emotions surrounding the trauma such as grief, abandonment, betrayal, and loss of control. This stage is about being with this grief and experiencing it, then moving beyond it to discover the joy and peace that is buried beneath. *Renovating the buried self* entails identifying and changing self-defeating thoughts, patterns, and behaviors. The participants spoke of being flexible, experimenting with new behaviors, giving up old ways of being, and being willing to change. *Regenerating the buried self* is about abdicating shame and responsibility for the abuse. The shame and self-blame is thought to lower self-esteem and injure the ability to love one's self, therefore an important task in this phase is assigning responsibility to the abuser. The study does not address the idea of the abuser accepting responsibility. How would the abuser's acknowledgment of the abuse or lack thereof, affect this stage, if at all? *Reanimating the buried self* is the phase where the participants began to find joy and peace in life; it involves facing life and living in the present. The final phase, *reincarnating the buried self*, is about accepting the trauma experience and integrating it into the self. All the participants in this study noted that having a commitment to healing was crucial to the entire process (Godbey & Hutchinson, 1996).

McKinzie (2002), in her doctoral dissertation investigated women's experience of confronting the perpetrator of their childhood sexual abuse. She interviewed eight women who had survived childhood sexual abuse and who had also confronted their abusers. Her study revealed five themes that seemed to be common to the women's experience in confronting their abusers. The first theme was around decision-making. Each woman had chosen to confront her abuser; it was seen as a necessary condition of her healing. The second theme was about timing. Each woman had control over when and where she

confronted her abuser; the decision to confront her abuser was based on each woman's readiness to do so. The third theme was about each woman confronting her abuser from a position of her own authority; they spoke of their own experience and their own reality. They knew that they had been abused, and that the person they were confronting was the one who abused them. In the fourth theme, the responses that the women received were looked at from a larger, wider perspective; it was not only about the actual confrontation. The women considered how honest the responses were and what that meant to them in their life as it was at that time. Finally, the fifth theme was around the personal effect of the confrontation on each woman. Each of the eight women received closure around the responsibility for the abuse and who it was attributed to. Also, each woman experienced a reduction of fear and a reinforced setting of personal boundaries. Finally, each woman experienced feelings of agency, healing, and empowerment.

For the eight women McKinzie (2000) interviewed, four of the perpetrators responded with denials that the abuse occurred. Another woman's father avoided the topic completely. The remaining three women received acknowledgements of the abuse but in very different manners. In one case, the acknowledgement came in the form of a monetary settlement on the condition that no criminal charges were pressed. In another case, the abuser (father) acknowledged the abuse and said that he had done that to make her (the participant) stronger. In the final case, the participant stated that her father who was the abuser was very understanding and gracious – no more details were given.

The McKinzie (2000) study focused more on the confrontation experience as opposed to the impact of the responses received. How is the receipt of an

acknowledgement different than the denial or avoidance? Is there a difference in the impact of a direct acknowledgement versus an indirect one?

Morris, Lipovsky, and Saunders (1996) investigated the role of perpetrator acknowledgement in mediating the impact of child sexual assault. The participants in this study were 66 children who had been victims of sexual abuse. The perpetrators of 34 of the participants had acknowledged the abuse while the remaining 32 perpetrators did not acknowledge the abuse. An important point to note is that the 34 children with acknowledging perpetrators were all part of a larger study exploring father-child sexual abuse. The measure used in this study was the Child Behavior Checklist (CBCL) (Achenbach & Edelbrock, as cited in Morris et al., 1996). The mothers of the children filled out the CBCL and the results were found to be significant. All the participants scored higher on the CBCL than the normative samples; there were also significant differences between both groups (acknowledging and non-acknowledging) in the Externalizing Behavior and Internalizing Behavior subscales, as well as in the total scores, with the children with the non-acknowledging perpetrator scoring higher.

Morris et al. (1996) hypothesize that acknowledgement by the perpetrator may serve as validation of the child's experience by other people in the child's life. They note that since research has shown maternal support to be an important factor in mediating the impact of child sexual abuse, perpetrator acknowledgement may result in more mothers supporting their children. Morris et al. recommend further research exploring the mediating effect of perpetrator acknowledgement, as well as the process by which the perpetrators come to acknowledge the abuse.

The Morris et al. (1996) study is the closest one to the research question posed in the present study. Some of the differences between Morris et al. and the present study include the participants (children vs. adults), the methods (CBCL vs. interview), and research paradigms (quantitative vs. qualitative). Morris et al. do not specify to whom the abuse was acknowledged nor do they speak to the children's experiences of that acknowledgement. The authors do state that this was an exploratory study and that further research is needed to clarify this issue.

Acknowledgement

In the Merriam-Webster Online dictionary, 'to acknowledge' is defined as "to recognize the rights, authority, or status of; to disclose knowledge of or agreement with; to express gratitude or obligation for; to take notice of; to make known the receipt of; to recognize as genuine or valid". Some of the synonyms of 'acknowledge' include 'admit', 'own', 'avow', and 'confess.' The definition of 'acknowledgement' from Dictionary.com (2006) is "an act of acknowledging; recognition of the existence or truth of something; an expression of appreciation; a thing done or given in appreciation or gratitude." Based on these definitions, it seems that acknowledgement is a word with positive connotations and while it is not explicitly stated, it seems that receiving acknowledgement is a positive thing. While preparing this thesis, I attempted to research the construct of acknowledgement to explore what is available in the current literature. As I mentioned earlier, I was only able to find one article that addressed acknowledgement in the context of abuse and trauma (Morris et al., 1996). The only other context in which the construct of acknowledgement appeared is restorative justice.

Restorative Justice

Restorative justice is a philosophical approach to justice that focuses on repairing the harm caused by a criminal act while still holding the offenders responsible for their actions (Cormier, 2002). This approach provides the victim(s), offender(s), and the community with an opportunity to identify and address any needs that might have risen as a result of the crime. All the parties involved search for "a resolution that affords healing, reparation and reintegration, and prevents future harm" (Cormier, 2002).

The origins of restorative justice can be traced to many different Aboriginal communities in North America and New Zealand as well as some faith communities, particularly the Mennonite community in Southern Ontario (Cormier, 2002; Ministry of Attorney General of British Columbia, 1998). According to Cormier, the values that are reflected in most restorative justice approaches include responsibility, inclusiveness, trust, hope, and healing. One of the main goals of restorative justice programs is to better meet the needs of the victims of crimes through the promotion of these values. One particular aspect of restorative justice that is emphasized is that of offender responsibility (Cormier; Ministry of Attorney General of British Columbia). Some of the actions taken in restorative justice programs include holding the offenders accountable for any harm done, and taking responsibility for their actions, which includes acknowledging their actions and the harmful effects of said action. Roberts (as cited in Cormier, 2002) evaluated restorative justice programs by interviewing those involved (victims, offenders, community members). He found that the victims appreciated being able to confront the offender and being able to give voice to the impact that the crime had on their lives. The Ministry of Attorney General of British Columbia also found that victims appreciated

participation in the program itself; they also appreciated the offender acknowledging and accepting responsibility and being accountable for the offense.

Hudson (2002) addresses more controversial applications of restorative justice. She contemplates whether it can address more serious crimes like sexual assault and domestic violence, as opposed to only addressing juvenile offences or less serious crimes. She notes that one of the main arguments for using restorative justice with young offenders and less serious crimes is that it avoids labeling the offenders. Labeling is seen as a heavy handed intervention that is more likely to lead to more crime as opposed to lessening it. An important notion is that of reintegrative shaming which is aimed at making the offenders ashamed of their actions and having them accept responsibility while avoiding labeling (Braithwaite, as cited in Hudson, 2002). In terms of using restorative justice for crimes such as sexual assault, its proponents suggest that it is about the empowerment of the victims. Hoyle and Sanders (2000) and Hulsman (1991) suggest that the victim is able to tell her story in her own way as opposed to being restricted by the law and its confines (as cited in Hudson, 2002). The idea is that the offender is not able to ignore the victim; in telling her story, the victim can come out of her silence and give voice to the pain and shame she went through. She can openly communicate, in a non-threatening environment, that the fear and harm she experienced are real.

One of the problems regarding restorative justice for serious crimes is that the court and justice system is still society's way of demonstrating that the crime is taken seriously. Hudson (2002) asks; "Is restorative justice, for all its potential to be fair and empowering to the victim, really effective in reducing the chance of re-offending?" There is insufficient research in this area to draw a conclusion.

As mentioned above, victims who have participated in restorative justice programs have noted that one of its benefits is that they are given voice, and that the offender is held accountable and responsible for the offense committed (Cormier, 2002; Ministry of Attorney General of British Columbia, 1998). How does the offender taking responsibility and accountability impact the victims? It appears to have a positive impact on their lives as it is seen as a beneficial aspect to restorative justice. Does this apparent effect of acknowledgement transfer to other situations outside of restorative justice?

I was unable to find any other research that specifically addressed the construct of acknowledgement in any other context. Given those circumstances, I would like to operationally define the term 'acknowledgement', as I will be referring to it for the remainder of this study. I am defining acknowledgement as the recognition of the existence or truth of something (Dictionary.com, 2006). In this particular context, I am defining acknowledgement as a form or recognition or admittance on the abuser's part that the abuse took place. I recognize that acknowledgement can come in many different forms, both directly and indirectly. Some direct forms of acknowledgement may include a face-to-face meeting with the abuser in which he/she acknowledges the abuse – this acknowledgement may or may not include an apology. Another direct form of acknowledgement may include a guilty plea in a court case. Some indirect forms of acknowledgement may include monetary settlements or statements made via a third party. As I mentioned earlier, acknowledgement often has a positive connotation. I would like to note that in this context, I recognize that acknowledgement could be either a positive experience or a negative one. Just because an acknowledgement is given does not mean that the survivor experienced it as a positive event. For instance, in McKinzie's

dissertation (2000), one of her participants who had been sexually abused by her father received an acknowledgement from him where he stated that he had done that to make her (the participant) stronger. A final point I would like to make is that the acknowledgement is not necessarily sought or initiated by the survivor; there may be occasions where the abuser or someone else initiates the events or circumstances in which the acknowledgement takes place.

I would like to note that this definition (or explanation) of the construct of acknowledgement demonstrates that there are many varied circumstances in which an acknowledgement takes place. I was aware of this as I approached this study, and given the lack of research in this area, I decided not to restrict the definition of acknowledgement in any way so as to increase or widen the pool of possible participants.

Table 1

Summary of the Literature

Authors	Year of publication	Number of Participants	Methodology	Findings	Relevance to Present Study
Child Abuse					
Johnson	1990	n/a	n/a	n/a	Book; provides definitions and characteristics of child abuse, as well as challenges with definitions and effects of child abuse
Kempe, Silverman, Steele, Droegemueller, and Silver	1962	n/a	n/a	Landmark article; described physical and clinical characteristics of an abused child; brought issue of child abuse to light	Provides historical context in the area of child abuse and how it became an area of research interest
Leventhal	2003	n/a	Review	Reviewed landmark article by Kempe et al. and discussed the impact of the article	Provides information on the beginning of research in the area of child abuse
Oates	1996	n/a	n/a	n/a	Book; provides definitions and characteristics of child abuse, as well as challenges with definitions and effects of child abuse

Authors	Year of publication	Number of Participants	Methodology	Findings	Relevance to Present Study
Trocmé, MacLaurin, Fallon, Daciuk, Billingsley, Tourigny, Mayer, Wright, Barter, Burford, Hornick, Sullivan, and McKenzie	2001	7,672 child investigations	Survey: Maltreatment Assessment Form	Incidence of child maltreatment was 21.52 investigations per 1,000 children. Neglect was the most common reason for investigation (40%) followed by physical abuse (31%), emotional maltreatment (19%), and sexual abuse (10%)	Provides incidence and prevalence rates for child maltreatment in Canada; also provides information on maltreatment investigation methods
Tzeng, Jackson, and Karlson	1991	n/a	n/a	n/a	Book; provides definitions and characteristics of child abuse, as well as challenges with definitions and effects of child abuse
Effects of Child Abuse					
Arias	2004	n/a	Report	Presents some of the long-term consequences of child abuse for women including the possibility of revictimization as adults as well as other mental health concerns	Provides information on the long-term effects of child maltreatment

Authors	Year of publication	Number of Participants	Methodology	Findings	Relevance to Present Study
Briere and Runtz	1990	277 female undergraduates	Authors developed scales to measure abuse related self-esteem, maladaptive sexual beh. and aggression; multivariate analysis	Sexually abused women were more likely to have maladaptive sexual behaviours; psychologically abused women were more like to have lower self esteem; physically abused women were more likely to display aggression	Provides some of the long-term effects of child abuse
Desai, Arias, Thompson, and Basile	2002	8,000 males; 8,000 females	Telephone survey; hierarchical logistic regression analysis	Results indicated that childhood victimization increased the likelihood of adult victimization	Provides information on the long term effects of child abuse
Hildyard and Wolfe	2002	n/a	Literature review	Neglect can have serious effects on children's cognitive, socio-emotional, and behavioural development; Some concerns are cognitive deficits, academic deficits, social withdrawal, and internalizing problems	Provides information about child neglect and maltreatment and effects in early childhood, middle childhood, and late adolescence/adulthood

Authors	Year of publication	Number of Participants	Methodology	Findings	Relevance to Present Study
Kendall-Tackett, Williams, and Finkelhor	1993	45 studies	Review	Presents some of the effects and symptoms of sexual abuse on children based on a review of empirical studies	Provides information on effects of child sexual abuse.
Kolko, Moser, and Weldy	1990	105 inpatient, 105 outpatient children	Pediatric health history interview; physical exam; abuse history interview; uni- and multi-variate analysis	Differences found between sexually/physically abused children and their non-abused peers in developmental and medical growth	Provides information on the possible medical and developmental consequences of child abuse
Russell	1986	n/a	n/a	n/a	Book; provides information on incest, incidence rates, and possible consequences of incest
Trickett	1993	29 families with physically abused children; 29 control families	Interviews, standardized tests, Q sorts, parent record keeping, structural observations	Differences in maladaptive behaviours between children who had been physically abused and children who had not. Differences in child-rearing practices may have had some effects	Provides information on effects of child abuse

Authors	Year of publication	Number of Participants	Methodology	Findings	Relevance to Present Study
Trickett and McBride-Change	1995	n/a	Literature review	Reviews literature on the developmental impact of child abuse	Provides literature on the effects of child abuse at different developmental levels
White, Halpin, Strom, and Santilli	1988	Not available	Questionnaire: MCDI-SAS	Behavioural differences were found between children who had been sexually abused or neglected and children who were non-referred.	Provides information on some of the effects of child sexual abuse and neglect
Widom and White	1997	672 abused; 518 control	Longitudinal study	Abused and neglected participants were more likely than controls to have substance abuse issues, arrests for violent crimes, and violent/nonviolent arrests	Provides potential long-term effects of child abuse
Wissow	1995	n/a	Literature review	Presents definitions, characteristics, and effects of child abuse	Addresses some of the therapeutic and diagnostic issues in the area of child abuse

Authors	Year of publication	Number of Participants	Methodology	Findings	Relevance to Present Study
Healing and Recovery					
Glaister and Abel	2001	14	Interpretive Interactionism; Interviews	Themes of healing included the importance of information, relationships with others and self, engaging in experiential activities, inner strengths/beliefs, commitment to healing, skills, and coming to terms with the abuse	Provides information on factors that could potentially affect the healing process
Godbey and Hutchinson	1996	10	Grounded Theory; Interviews	Discussed themes of healing that included the experience of discomfort, flashbacks and multiple emotions, changing self-defeating thoughts, abdicating shame, finding joy in life, and integrating abuse into life	Provides information on the process of healing

Authors	Year of publication	Number of Participants	Methodology	Findings	Relevance to Present Study
McKinzie	2002	8	Phenomenological inquiry; interviews	Themes around confronting the abuser include making the decision, the timing of the confrontation, confronting from a position of authority, exploring the responses received, and the personal effect of the confrontation	Provides information about the experience of confronting an abuser and the factors that come into play when deciding to do so
Morris, Lipovsky, and Saunders	1996	66	Survey: Child Behaviour Checklist (CBCL)	Discusses the mediating impact of perpetrator acknowledgement on sexually abused children	Provides support for the present research question: What is the experience of receiving acknowledgement from the abuser?
Restorative Justice					
Cormier	2002	n/a	n/a	Discusses restorative justice and its development in Canada	Provides information about the principles of restorative justice
Hudson	2002	n/a	Literature review	Presents arguments for and against the use of restorative justice with more serious offenses	Provides information on restorative justice and some of the issues with utilizing it with sexual violence

Statement of the Research Question

The research question that I explored in this current study is: *For survivors of childhood abuse, what is the experience of receiving acknowledgement from the abuser?*

There is no research that directly addresses this question although some of the studies included in this review come very close. Glaister and Abel (2001) found that forgiveness of their abuser was essential to some of their participants' healing process. Another part of healing is coming to terms with the abuse and abdicating responsibility for it. Godbey and Hutchinson (1996) address this in the 'regenerating the buried self' phase where the survivors of abuse assign responsibility to the abuser and take it off of themselves. McKinzie (2000) interviewed survivors of childhood sexual abuse and explored their experience of confronting their abusers. Some of her participants received acknowledgement of the abuse, however this was not addressed directly in the study. Morris et al. (1996) explored the role of perpetrator acknowledgement in mediating the impact of child sexual abuse. They ask almost the same question I explored but they approached it differently with different methods and participants. Morris et al. found that there was a statistically significant difference in behaviours between children whose perpetrators had acknowledged the abuse and children whose perpetrators had not acknowledged the abuse; the former group displaying less maladaptive behaviours. The authors admit that their study is a preliminary one, however, I feel that their results, although tentative, showed a mediating impact of perpetrator acknowledgement and, as such, the findings provide support for my exploration into the area of abuser acknowledgement.

My original intent was to explore the experiences of survivors of all four types of childhood abuse (physical, sexual, emotional, and neglect). The studies mentioned above (Glaister & Abel, 2001; Godbey & Hutchinson, 1996; McKinzie, 2000; Morris et al., 1996) all addressed victims and survivors of childhood sexual abuse. These studies also addressed women's experiences in surviving their childhood abuse. Desai et al. (2002) found that men and women suffer from similar long-term consequences of experiencing childhood abuse. Therefore, I also intended to explore the experiences of both men and women. In actuality, once I began to recruit participants, I found that I was not able to find many people willing to speak with me about their abuse experiences. After approximately eight weeks of active recruitment, I was able to find one person willing to share her experiences with me. I believe that the difficulty I experienced in recruiting participants speaks to the secrecy and the shame that still surround issues of abuse, on a societal/cultural level, a familial level, and an individual level. I would also like to note that while I acknowledge that topics such as abuse generally occur within the context of race and sexual orientation as well as gender, I realized that addressing these important issues was beyond the scope of this initial, exploratory study.

I was not able to access any research that specifically addressed abusers acknowledgement of the abuse and its impact (if any) on the adult survivors and their healing process (Academic Search Elite, CINAHL, pre-CINAHL, ERIC, PsycARTICLES, PsycINFO; "Acknowledgement", "abuse", "child abuse", "abusers", "perpetrators", "survivors") . As Herman (1992) suggests, receiving acknowledgement of one's abuse can be very important to the healing process, and as such, I feel that this is a valuable area to explore.

In this chapter I presented the current and relevant literature in the area of child abuse and abuser acknowledgement. In the next chapter, I will present the methods I used to explore my research question including my theoretical approach, my data collection methods, and my data analysis methods.

Chapter Three: Methodology

In this chapter, I will introduce and discuss the methodology I used when exploring my research question: *For survivors of childhood abuse, what is the experience of receiving acknowledgement from the abuser?* I will address my reasons for choosing a qualitative approach. I will also talk about the case study approach, and the epistemology behind it. I will then discuss participant selection, method of data collection, and methods of analysis.

Qualitative Research

I conducted this study using a case study method, under the umbrella of a qualitative research paradigm. Qualitative research fits this research question because of its holistic approach to exploring and understanding social phenomena and human dilemmas (Stake, 2005). Stake (1995) also notes that qualitative research is more about understanding as opposed to explaining. It also tries to "establish an empathic understanding for the reader, through description, sometimes *thick description*, conveying to the reader what experience itself would convey". There is also an understanding that people are unique and human actions and reactions are not simply caused, that one may never find out what causes them. Qualitative researchers appreciate that individual uniqueness and view the distinct cases and contexts as important and necessary for one to begin to understand (p. 39). Lincoln and Guba (2005) state that qualitative research is based on the understanding that social phenomena are situational and experiential; researchers view events as having more than one context and reality and as interrelated.

Another attractive aspect of qualitative research is the flexibility around interpretations. Qualitative researchers are called upon to observe, analyze, synthesize,

possibly exercise subjective judgment, but all the while, the researcher must be aware of their own interpretations. In other words, being subjective is not frowned upon, as long as the researcher is transparent about her/his own interpretations and assertions, and as long as the researcher is reflexive and aware of his/her own position (Guba & Lincoln, 1985).

In qualitative research, variables and issues are experientially defined. The researcher interacts deeply and powerfully with the participants and the environment with a constructivist orientation to knowledge (which I will describe in more detail in the following pages). This interaction between researcher and participant, along with the focus on researcher reflexivity, ultimately leads to a more personal view being reflected in the research (Stake, 1995).

In summary, qualitative research aims to promote deeper understanding of the presenting concern. Through the use of 'thick descriptions', experiential definitions and understandings, and through the acceptance of multiple realities (the researchers' and the participants'), the researcher can conduct research that is meaningful to them and the participants. Qualitative research will give voice to my participants' experiences as survivors of childhood abuse, seeking only to gain insight and understanding, not generalize or find causal relationships between different factors.

Research Design – Case Study

I planned to use multiple case studies to explore my research question. Stake (1995) defines a case study as "the study of the particularity and complexity of a single case, coming to understand its activity within important circumstances" (p. xi). He also refers to the case as "an integrated system. The parts do not have to be working well, the purposes may be irrational, but it is a system" (p. 2). Stake (2005) states that case studies

are utilized to learn enough about the case to encapsulate the many complexities and contexts in a manner that would provide enough description for readers to understand and experience the phenomena in their own way and come to their own conclusions.

There are three types of case study: intrinsic, instrumental, and collective. Intrinsic refers to the study of a case because of an intrinsic interest in it. One studies the case to understand it and its uniqueness. Instrumental case study is the study of a case to learn more about a general broader issue. The primary interest is not in the case itself but in the information we can gain from it to help us understand a larger concern. The collective case study refers to the joint study of a number of cases to inquire into a population, a general condition or concern (p. 22).

For this study I had planned to use multiple instrumental case studies. Each participant would be considered a single bounded case. I was interested in each individual's story; there may be commonalities among them but each one of them would be unique in their own way. I wanted to hear their stories out of sincere interest in their experiences of surviving childhood abuse and receiving acknowledgement of that abuse from the abuser. However, due to some difficulties I experienced in recruiting participants (which will be discussed further), I used a single instrumental case study approach, with multiple data sources, that was as detailed as circumstances would permit. I do not intend to make any broad generalizations about this specific concern. I recognize that there is no research in this area, and as such, much exploration of this area is needed before any generalizations can be made.

Constructivism and the Epistemological Assumptions

As the research design for this study is modeled after Stake's (1995, 2005) case study approach, and as he identifies himself as a constructivist, and as this fits with my worldview, this research study will be conducted under the umbrella of constructivism and following those epistemological assumptions.

"At the core of constructivist theory is a view of human beings as active agents who, individually and collectively, co-constitute the meaning of their experiential world (Neimeyer, 1993, p. 222). Constructivists, as Stake (1995, 2005) identifies himself to be, assume that knowledge is constructed as opposed to discovered. Knowledge is determined by personal experience, and is socially constructed. Construction of knowledge begins with the sensory experience of some form of external stimuli. When experienced, these stimuli are assigned personal meaning, and as such, there is no aspect of the world that exists only externally, without any human construction. Neimeyer (1993) states that constructivists view individuals as meaning-making agents and that they challenge the traditional view of people as reactive and passive. Each individual has their own reality that consists of interpretations of stimuli and their experience of those stimuli integrated together, and those realities are constantly changing. Life is full of different experiences and people need order and organization. People make meaning of the experiences they have and develop patterns of being. Human experience is a continuous process of experiencing and explaining. As we experience new things in our lives, we try to make meaning of them, and to do so we draw on what previous experiences we've had (Guidano, 1995; Mahoney, 2003; Neimeyer, 1995). As Guidano states:

> knowledge should be considered from an ontological and epistemological perspective in which knowing, consciousness, and all other aspects of human experience are seen from the point of view of the experiencing subject. How an individual experiences is affected by the self-knowledge that he or she has been able to conjure (p. 94).

Wilber (1999) states that there is no objective truth when one considers internal subjective experience. However, he also notes that some constructivists take an extreme postmodernism stance which he states is a performative contradiction: in order for the notion of no objective truth or reality to be true, it must be false. Thus, the statement's own truth negates its assertion of no truth existing outside of one's construction of it (p. 119).

For the purpose of this study, I believe that my participant's internal subjective experience is her own truth; her story represents her reality as she experienced it. The way she experienced her abuse and the receipt of acknowledgement will have been influenced by her previous life experiences and knowledge. She will have come into the interview with her own understanding of her experiences – her truth. During the interview, we engaged in a shared sense-making process. She shared her experiences with me, and I responded with comments and statements that are part of my own life experiences and knowledge. Together, we co-constructed a story about the experience of receiving acknowledgement that was our truth based on our shared experience of the interview process. The goal was not to get to a single objective truth, but to give the participant an opportunity to share her truth, her reality as she saw it, which I then interpreted and understood through my frame of reference. Stake (1995) notes that a

constructivist view of research is one that provides the readers with enough information so that they can make their own interpretations and construct their own understanding of the presenting issue. "The emphasis is on description of things that readers ordinarily pay attention to, particular places, events, and people, not only commonplace description but 'thick description', the interpretations of the people most knowledgeable about the case" (p. 102). I am now presenting this co-constructed story for the readers who can then construct and/or supplement their own ideas around the topic of acknowledgement.

Participants

To explore the question – For survivors of childhood abuse, what is the experience of receiving acknowledgement from the abuser? – I had planned to interview six survivors of childhood abuse. These six participants were to be recruited from community counselling and support agencies, as well as from the general public. The participants were required to meet the following criteria:

- The participant must be an adult 19 years of age or older.
- The participant must be a survivor of childhood abuse.
- The participant must have received acknowledgement of the abuse from the abuser (directly or indirectly).
- The participant must be open to and able to engage in dialogue with me, the primary researcher, regarding their experiences of abuse, confrontation, and receipt of acknowledgement.

However, I was not able to recruit the number of participants I needed. I had some responses to the recruitment posters I had placed around the community, however, they did not meet the criteria for participation in the study. All four respondents who

demonstrated interest in participating in my study contacted me via e-mail. After I returned their e-mails, providing them with some information regarding the study, three of them did not respond. I attempted to contact them one more time and one did not respond; the other two replied that they were no longer interested in participating – one cited time constraints and the other did not give me a reason. The one respondent who did reply lived a considerable distance away and wondered if I would be willing to travel to interview her. As this would have entailed considerable travel distance and expense, I let her know that unfortunately I was not able to travel. There was one other potential participant that was a friend of a friend; she was reportedly interested in participating in the study to help me out, however she did state that she would rather not participate if I had already found suitable participants. I felt that had I recruited her as a participant, she would not be giving me her free and informed consent, and as such, I did not feel that she was suitable to participate.

After consulting with my supervisor and committee members regarding the difficulty I was experiencing in finding suitable participants, I decided to concentrate my efforts on recruiting one participant and to conduct as detailed a case study as possible in the circumstances. I was able to find one participant through word-of-mouth

Data Collection

My data collection methods included a pilot interview, the two interviews with my participant, as well as conversations with therapists and practitioners in the community. Before I interviewed my participant, I conducted a pilot interview with a peer who took on the role of a survivor of childhood abuse who had received acknowledgement from her abuser. Maya (pseudonym) was a colleague of mine in the

Masters of Counselling Psychology program at the University of Victoria; she was also a co-counsellor at my practicum site – a community agency that provided counselling services for children who had been sexually abused or who displayed inappropriate sexualized behaviours. Before Maya agreed to this role-play, I explained to her that the purpose of this pilot interview was to give me a better understanding of what an interview process might be like, and to give me a chance to test out the sample questions I had come up with. The pilot interview served its purpose; while it was an awkward experience as I knew that it was a role-play, I was still able to get a sense of what my interviews with my participant might look like. The pilot interview was particularly helpful as I had never interviewed anyone in the context of research. I also obtained a better understanding of the questions I might ask my participant. Finally, the pilot interview gave me a sense of how nervous I would probably be for the interview, and what I could do to calm those nerves so that they would not hinder my process. Following this pilot interview, I met with my supervisor to discuss my experience and learning and to talk about how I would apply this learning to the interviews with my participant. While I was still nervous, I feel that the pilot provided me with the ability to anticipate possible developments in the participant interviews.

I conducted my first interview with my participant, which was one and a half hours in length, at the University of Victoria campus. The interview was semi-structured with several open-ended questions (Appendix A) designed to explore the participant's experience of abuse and receipt of acknowledgement. Some of the information I hoped would emerge included the form of abuse, how long ago it occurred, who the abuser was (family, friend, acquaintance…etc), if the participant confronted her abuser, how it

happened, the experience of receiving the acknowledgement, and the impact this acknowledgement has had on her healing from the abuse, and her life.

I felt that this interview went quite well and that we were able to establish rapport between us. At the beginning of the interview I admitted to her that I was a bit nervous, having never conducted research before, and she admitted feeling the same way. This helped us form a connection, and I feel that it made it easier for us to begin our conversation about the acknowledgement. After the consent forms were signed, she was unsure as to how to begin, so I reminded her what my research was exploring, and I invited her to begin her story wherever she felt comfortable. From that point on, our interview became more of a conversation, a discussion. I asked very few questions and most of the questions I did ask were clarifying in nature. The conversation provided me with much of the context in which the acknowledgement took place and I felt that I had a strong understanding of what my participant's experience was of receiving acknowledgement from the perpetrator. At the conclusion of our interview, I invited my participant to ask me any question that may have arisen for her, and I thanked her for being willing to share her experiences with me. I explained what the next steps in my research were, and that I would be contacting her for a second interview once I had completed my data analysis.

> *From my journal: I just finished my first interview and it went so much better than I could have hoped....I was so nervous but I think it helped that she was also nervous, and I think it helped her that I admitted I was nervous. Once we laughed over that I felt the mood in the room lighten a bit, which really, considering what we were about to talk about, I really appreciated. Throughout the interview, part*

of me thought to myself "I can't believe I'm finally doing this". I felt like I was flip-flopping between being nervous and really excited. As the interview went on, I felt that both of us fed off of one another in terms of our thoughts, as well as our excitement...hmm, I don't know if excitement is the right word...our interest, I think, in what we were talking about. I REALLY wish I had more participants! What are the chances, I wonder, of finding someone else in the next couple of days?

My second interview with my participant took place in her home, and was approximately 45 minutes in length. The purpose of this interview was to validate the themes that had emerged from my data analysis process. Although two months had passed since our last meeting, I felt that we had maintained the rapport that we had initially established. I explained to her the purpose of this second interview and I shared with her the themes that had emerged from our first interview. We reviewed them together and I explained my process of data analysis to her; specifically, I explained to her how I explored the data and generated the codes that led to the emergent themes that I was now presenting to her. We engaged in a discussion about the themes and at the end, my participant let me know that the themes fit with her experience and that she felt that they accurately and honestly represented her experience. The details of this validation interview will be discussed further in the next section.

As I mentioned earlier, I also had conversations with therapists and practitioners in the community. When I encountered challenges in finding participants for my study, I began having conversations with counsellors in the community. I hoped that through these conversations, I might gain some insight into the area of acknowledgement, and

how I could better recruit participants. One of the therapists I spoke with is a counsellor at a community agency that provides counselling services for men who had experienced trauma (Alana Samson, MA, personal communication, May 2006). Our conversation included discussion about the construct of acknowledgement and how I defined it, as well as the likelihood of survivors receiving acknowledgement from their abusers. We also spoke about my recruitment methods – I had put up some posters at counselling agencies in the community, however, it was brought to my attention that if acknowledgement had a positive effect on survivors, then they may not be seeking counselling. Another point we discussed was the acknowledgement that survivors may receive from people in their lives other than the abuser, such as their family, friends, and support systems and how would that acknowledgement differ from an acknowledgement from an abuser. Is it more likely that survivors would receive acknowledgement from others? I also engaged in discussions with therapists at a community agency that provided services for children who had been sexually abused, or who engaged in inappropriate sexualized behaviours (Helen Durie, MA, Shawna Paul, BCRAT, Judith Wright, BCRAT, personal communication, May 2006). These discussions also focused on the construct of acknowledgement and its definition. We also discussed acknowledgement for children who have been abused, and how that could potentially impact their healing processes.

These conversations increased my knowledge and understanding of acknowledgement which then became part of the frame of reference on how I approached the interviews. It was part of my contribution to the co-construction and sense making process that was ongoing during the interviews, and as such is considered part of my data collection.

Data Analysis

To analyze the data I collected in my interviews, I referenced Bogdan and Biklen's (1994) methods of data-analysis, and incorporated Marshall and Rossman's (1999) ideas. The analysis process consisted of seven steps: (1) organizing the data; (2) generating categories, themes, and patterns; (3) coding the data; (4) testing the emergent understandings; (5) searching for alternate explanations; (6) validation of data; and (7) writing the report.

Organizing the Data

I tape-recorded the interview, with the consent of the participant. I then transcribed, word-for-word the interview. Once the transcription was complete the participant was assigned a pseudonym to identify her as the data got coded. The transcript consisted of 15,520 words, and was 30 pages in length. This transcription was to focus on the verbal language and would not have included non-verbal behaviours. I recognized and acknowledged that there may be information lost by using this approach; however, due to time constraints I initially felt that this method would be best suited to this study. However, as I changed the number of participants, from six to one, I decided to include non-verbal behaviours (such as tone of voice and emotionality) in the transcription. This decision came after some discussion with my supervisor and some reflection on my part. I had initially chosen not to include non-verbal behaviours because I would have had six participants and I felt that I would have had enough data to work with. However, once I realized that I would only have one participant, I realized that including the non-verbal behaviours would provide more detail and depth to my participant's story. Specifically, including those behaviours helped me with my data analysis by enriching the transcript

and bringing more of the tone of the interview to my consciousness, so that it was something I considered when generating categories, codes, and themes.

Generating Categories, Themes, and Patterns

In this step, I read my transcripts at least five times and recorded any words or phrases that seemed to be reoccurring; I identified any salient themes or codes that appeared to be central to the participant's story. While reading the transcripts, I kept the construct of acknowledgement and my research question in mind. Initially, many different ideas and themes jumped out at me, and all of it was very interesting, however, I was conscious of the fact that my research question revolved around the experience of receiving acknowledgement. So instead of discounting the information that was interesting but did not answer my research question, I used it to inform the context in which the acknowledgement occurred. I tried, as much as the data permits, to stay true to the language used by the participant in re-telling her experiences. As I read, I also engaged in the process of journalling and recording any thoughts or comments that came to me regarding either my participant's story or my personal reaction to her experiences.

> *From my journal: Wow, after the interview and all that transcribing, I thought I had a good sense of the themes that were within the data but I need to go re-visit the transcripts and the codes again. I spoke with Tim and after our discussion, I realized that I was getting sidetracked by my interest in her story and I was losing focus from my research question. That interview was SO rich with L's experiences and her emotions that it's been challenging to stick with the research question. I had to remind myself so many times that L's experience of the acknowledgement could not have happened before the acknowledgement even took place...I realized*

that instead of losing all that information, I could still include it as context for the acknowledgement... Thank goodness... because if I couldn't include that information, it would feel like a big piece of L's story would be missing.

Once I read the transcripts and came up with a complete set of codes, I assigned each code/category a colour. I then moved on to the next step of coding the data.

Coding the Data

Here, I re-read the transcript once again, and as I did that, I assigned each unit of data a colour that corresponded to the appropriate code. A unit of data may be a word, phrase, sentence, sequence of sentences, or paragraphs; each unit of data may fit into more than one category. Upon completing the coding of the transcripts, I then collected all the relevant data for each code and placed them together as a potential theme for further analysis. Next, I went through the data in each theme to ensure that it fit with that theme, and that the theme fit with the story and the research question. If the data did not fit with the themes, I went back and re-read the transcripts to ensure that the appropriate codes were noted. As the themes emerged, they appeared to fit into one of two over-arching, temporal categories.

Testing Emergent Understandings

As I read the data within each theme, I noted down any ideas that emerged regarding the participant's process of receiving acknowledgement and the effect that it may have had on her healing. I also looked for any patterns that may surface from the data that could be useful in exploring the research question. I also met with my supervisor during this data analysis process and discussed with him the themes and understandings

that were emerging to test their fit with my research question and with my participant's experiences.

Searching for Alternate Explanations

As I tested the fit of the emergent themes in the previous step of my data analysis process, I also critically challenged those ideas and searched for any other explanations that may fit the emerging patterns. I took each theme individually and explored it to make sure of two things: first, that the theme fit the participant's story and experience; and second, that the theme responded to my research question. If a theme did not meet one of these two criteria, then I searched for other explanations or patterns within that data. This occurred with a couple of themes, however, through discussions with my supervisor, we were able to look at the data through a different lens and find a different way to frame the same data. As I went through this step in my data analysis process, I kept in mind that the themes would be validated with my participant, and if they did not fit for her, then I would re-visit them. Also, I engaged in self-reflection activities, specifically, journaling, to ensure that I was aware of my thought process, as well as any personal biases that may be coming into play.

> *From my journal: I'm starting to notice that L has used the words trial and sentencing interchangeably...later in the interview, she commented that by trial, she meant pre-trial, trial, and sentencing...I guess why I'm thinking about this is that some of the processing that she did and the revelations that came to her could have been a result of the whole trial process, as opposed to the actual acknowledgement...It would be easy to assume that since the interview was about the acknowledgement experience that everything that L mentioned would be about*

the acknowledgement, but as I have already come to realize there was a lot that L talked about the happened before, and after the acknowledgement that is more about context than about the actual acknowledgement...I suppose these are things I'm going to have to check out with her and see what she thinks...I hope I'm on track.

I hoped, through this process, to come up with the pattern that best fits my participant's stories.

Validation of Data

Having come up with the categories and themes that best fit the participants' stories, I checked their accuracy by consulting with my participant. I contacted my participant, and invited her to a second interview so that I could check the emergent themes with her and ensure their fit with her story. This meeting was approximately 45 minutes long, and it took place in her home. I began by explaining my analysis process to her and explaining to her how the themes came to be. I then presented her with the categories and themes that I had developed, and invited her to review them and share her thoughts with me. I then presented her with some questions that had come up during my analysis process. The main issue that I needed to clarify with her was around the context. She had received her acknowledgement in a trial context, during the sentencing of the perpetrator, and during our first interview, she had used the words 'trial' and 'sentencing' while discussing her healing process. Any of our discussion about the trial, pre-sentencing, would inform the context (as the acknowledgement had not yet taken place). From the sentencing onwards, the issues and thoughts she shared with me could have been related to her experience of receiving acknowledgement. Therefore, I needed to

clarify and get a better sense of where her experiences fit in relation to the acknowledgement. My participant was quite willing to clarify this issue for me and we engaged in a discussion about that.

Another point I needed to check with her revolved around language. During our first interview, we both used the words 'perpetrator' and 'abuser' interchangeably, and I wanted to see if she had a preference for which word was used. She indicated to me that she preferred the word 'perpetrator' as it suggested some distance between her and him. In this paper, I have attempted to use the word 'perpetrator' when referring to my participant's experience; however, when I am discussing the area of acknowledgement in general, I use the word 'abuser' to maintain consistency with the literature.

As we concluded the interview, my participant informed me that she felt that the themes I shared with her fit with her experience of receiving acknowledgement. Since there were no concerns, I moved on to the final step of writing the report.

> *From my journal: I just got back from meeting with L to validate the themes and boy am I relieved...the meeting went really well, at least I thought it did, and she validated the themes.....it was amazingly validating to hear from her that I got her experiences down correctly, and that the themes that I had highlighted did in fact fit for her and how she saw her experiences...I was really nervous going in, because I kept thinking "I really hope I got her story right, I hope I didn't misunderstand", and I was dreading this "what are you talking about?" response that I thought I could maybe get. I mean, I was confident in what I was presenting to her, and yet at the same time, I had been so immersed in the data analysis process that it was very possible that I had missed something that would have*

been glaringly obvious to her, so, to hear that the themes did represent her experience really boosted my confidence.

Writing the Report

Finally, after completing the above six steps, I moved on to writing down the ideas and patterns that emerged from the data that best reflected the participant's experiences. These themes were the ones that fit with my research question. As I mentioned earlier, I engaged in self-reflexivity and continued to monitor my own processes as I engaged with this process. The area I explored is one with a lot of emotions attached to it and as such, I felt that it was my ethical responsibility to ensure that I was conscious of what my thoughts and emotions were, and how they may be influencing my analysis of the data.

Quality of Data

When conducting research, it is the responsibility of the researchers to ensure the validity of their study. When evaluating qualitative studies, validity may be referred to as rigor, trustworthiness, and/or credibility. The concepts of validity and reliability and how they are measured are seen to be more suited to quantitative research studies. This is not to say that qualitative studies should not be held to the same standards of quality, but rather, that different ways of conceptualizing and measuring these concepts should be used to evaluate qualitative studies (Krefting, 1991; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Mason, 2002). Lincoln and Guba proposed four constructs that may be used to evaluate qualitative research studies: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

Credibility

A study is considered credible if the researcher has represented the truth of the participants' reality in the context being studied. Lincoln and Guba (1985) note that the concept of internal validity is based on the idea that there is a single reality to be observed and measured. If we replace this idea with the concept of multiple realities, the researchers' responsibility is to represent and relay those realities as best they can. If a researcher presents an accurate enough description that anyone who shares that experience will recognize the description, then the study may be considered credible (Sandelowski, as cited in Krefting, 1991).

During my process of data analysis, I met with my supervisor at least once a week to review my progress. During those meetings, my supervisor assisted me in gaining a deeper understanding of the data, as well as clarifying each theme, so that the quotations included spoke only to that particular theme. This process helped ensure the validity of the themes that emerged from the data and that they represented Lila's experience faithfully. Another method I used to validate the emergent themes was peer examinations (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I presented the themes and the representative quotes from the interview to two of my peers. The first peer who reviewed my themes recently graduated from the Masters in Counselling Psychology and is currently working in a community agency that provides counselling services for children who have been sexually abused. The second peer who reviewed my themes is currently in her third year of the Masters in Counselling Psychology, and is in the process of conducting her own research study for her thesis. They confirmed for me that the themes that I had identified were ones that fit with the data. Following the peer review process, I utilized the strategy of member checkings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) which entails checking back with the participants of a

study after producing codes and categories from the data analysis process to ensure that any interpretations made were accurate and that their story was accurately presented. For this study, I met with Lilah once more to present her with the themes that had emerged during my analysis of the data. At that meeting, I invited Lilah to review each theme and the representative quotes to ensure that I had stayed true to her experiences and that the themes fit with those experiences. I also felt the need to clarify with her that the experiences she had described in the interview were related to the acknowledgement and not merely the trial experience. Lilah explained she had done some re-evaluation of her life while she waited for the sentencing and that the acknowledgement was crucial in bringing to the surface all the unconscious processing that she had been going through. She validated the themes that I presented to her and let me know that she felt that they were accurate in representing her experiences of the acknowledgement and the context in which it occurred. The meetings with my supervisor, the peer examinations, and the member checking with Lilah ensured that I met the criteria of credibility.

Transferability

A study meets the criteria of transferability when its findings can be compared to contexts that are similar to the study's context. In quantitative studies, this is referred to as external validity. Lincoln and Guba (1985) state that researchers have addressed the criteria of transferability if they have provided enough descriptive data to allow someone to make the comparison. Transferability is seen more as the responsibility of the person wanting to make the comparison or transfer the findings to another context. By providing detail about Lilah's case while still maintaining her confidentiality, I have ensured that anyone desiring to make any comparisons could do so.

Dependability

In quantitative studies, reliability is an important criterion that must be met. A study is considered reliable if the findings would be consistent should the study be replicated with the same participants and/or in a similar context. This concept is also based on the assumption that there is one tangible reality. If one subscribes to the belief in multiple realities, reliability no longer applies. Lincoln and Guba (1985) state that dependability refers to the ability to track variability in findings and ascribe it to identified sources. According to Krefting (1991) because qualitative research looks at the range of experience, atypical or varied situations are valued. Dependability refers to the ability of the researcher to track these variabilities and identify their sources. As the present study was a single, detailed case study on a subject area that has not been studied before, none of the findings can be identified as varying from the norm; due to the lack of other research studies, there is not a norm to compare these findings to.

Confirmability

This criterion refers to the extent to which the findings are free of bias and are a result of the participants and the conditions/contexts of the research. In quantitative studies, objectivity is described as scientific distance where the researcher is not influenced by and does not influence the study or the findings (Krefting, 1991). In qualitative research, less distance between the researcher and participants is valued. Lincoln and Guba (1985) note that the neutrality should shift emphasis from the researcher to the data. As long as the findings of the study reflect the participants' experience (credibility) and descriptive data is provided (transferability) confirmability is usually achieved (Krefting).

Along with the peer examinations and member checkings, I engaged in a process of journaling to track my own experiences as I conducted the study. I wrote in my journal as challenges arose and as I experienced rewarding moments throughout this process. This journaling allowed me to reflect upon my experiences and how they may be affecting my research. This process assisted in ensuring that I met the criteria of confirmability.

To ensure that this research study meets the criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability, I utilized multiple strategies including peer examinations, member checkings, and journaling. Throughout the entire data collection and analysis process, I consulted with my supervisor regarding any issues or concerns that arose.

Ethical Considerations: Research and Practice

This research study was considered to be above minimal risk to anyone who participated in it (Appendix B: Human Research Ethics Approval). The participants may encounter emotional distress that may be more than they would normally encounter in the aspects of their life that relate to the research question. Although I did not anticipate that my participants would be harmed as a result of participating in the study, I was prepared for the possibility. Before I began the interview with my participant, she was asked to sign an informed consent form (Appendix C) that described the research process. By signing this form, the participant indicated that she understood what was being asked of her, and that she consented to participate. This form explained to the participant that she had the right to stop the interview or withdraw at anytime, and that if she chose to, she could withdraw her data from inclusion in the study. The participant was also informed of

the confidentiality procedures that were in place including the use of pseudonyms, the storage of the data under lock and key for two years, and the destruction of the data after that time period had expired. I explained my dual role to my participant, that is, I let her know that although I was a counsellor by training, I was there in the role of a researcher. I explained that I was trained to assist her should she experience distress as a result of discussing her abuse. During the course of the interview, when my participant did become emotional, I used my counselling skills to alleviate her distress to the best of my ability. I also gave her the opportunity to halt the interview; however she chose to continue. I provided my participant with a list of community resources that she may access should she require assistance processing her participation in the research study or further processing her abuse experience.

Chapter Four: Findings

In this chapter I will present the findings of this study. I will begin by presenting the case description which is a brief portrayal of my participant and the context in which the acknowledgement took place. Following that, I will present the themes that emerged from my interview with my participant. Each set of themes is accompanied by a brief description, and followed by quotes from the interview transcripts that illustrate that theme. Finally, I'd like to note that all the names that are mentioned are pseudonyms used to protect my participant's confidentiality.

Case Description

Lilah is a 42 year old woman living in Victoria. Lilah currently works in the helping profession, and identifies as a lesbian. When she was 10 years old Lilah was sexually abused by a man who was staying with her family in a small town in British Columbia. This abuse lasted just over a year in duration. It ended when Lilah's mother asked the man, Frank Williams, to leave the house as she was suspicious of him. Mr. Williams did however maintain contact with the family. Lilah did not disclose this abuse to her family at the time.

At age 28, Lilah's marriage was struggling and she felt that if she worked through her abuse she might be able to save her marriage. Lilah disclosed her abuse to a family member. They then contacted the crown prosecutor who had been looking for anyone who had any encounters with Frank, and they proceeded with criminal charges against him. Lilah went through a preliminary trial and a jury trial where she had to testify against Mr. Williams, and where he denied the abuse ever took place. Mr. Williams was found guilty and the sentencing was scheduled a few months later. During those months

before the sentencing, Lilah spent time processing her experience of the trial, as well as her sexual abuse. She made some changes in her life, including divorcing her husband and 'coming out' as a lesbian to her family and friends.

At the sentencing, just before the proceedings began, Frank Williams' lawyer approached Lilah and said to her that Mr. Williams would like to apologize to her. Lilah felt that this apology was being made in hopes of receiving a lighter sentence and as such, she told the lawyer that Mr. Williams could apologize to her later. During the proceedings, Mr. Williams was given the opportunity to speak and he made a general statement, apologizing for any harm that he may have caused to anyone. He received a sentence of four years of incarceration. He did not return to apologize to Lilah after the proceedings were concluded. Although she did not perceive his intentions as sincere, Lilah believed that Mr. Williams' attempt to apologize through his lawyer qualified as an acknowledgement of the abuse.

This acknowledgement happened in the context of a trial, and it was challenging to separate the experience of the acknowledgement from the experience of the whole trial. During my data analysis, I checked in with Lilah to ensure that the themes that emerged were representative of her experience of the acknowledgement.

Theme Descriptions

After going over the transcripts and becoming familiar with the data, I noticed that Lilah's experiences around the perpetrator's acknowledgement occurred either in the immediate moment of the acknowledgement or in the days, months, and years after the receipt of the acknowledgement. As such, it seemed to make sense to have two over-arching temporal categories to best present the themes that emerged from the data: (1)

Immediate Experiences at Time of Acknowledgment and (2) Experiences in Days, Months, and Years Following Acknowledgment. These two categories and the themes that emerged in each category are outlined in Table 2. Before I continue on with the themes and the representative quotes, I'd like to present a brief legend to help the reader understand the formatting of the text of the quotes:

- Underlined text refers to words spoken with emphasis.
- **Underlined and bold text refers to words spoken with emphasis and strong emotions (indicated by a louder tone of voice and/or tears).**

Immediate Experiences at Time of Acknowledgment

In the moment of receiving the acknowledgment from the perpetrator, Lilah reported several experiences. The themes of experience that emerged included: (1) questioning perpetrator's intentions; (2) feelings of being manipulated; (3) feelings of anger; (4) rejection of attempt to acknowledge; (5) feelings of empowerment; and, (6) reassignment of blame. It is important to note that, although these experiences have been separated into individual themes for the purpose of presenting the findings, they were experienced by the participant in the span of only a few minutes and, as such, are interconnected and overlapping.

Questioning perpetrator's intentions. The first theme that emerged was Lilah's judgment that the perpetrator's intention was insincere. In the instant of receiving that acknowledgement, Lilah perceived that the perpetrator was only attempting to apologize to receive a lighter sentence, that he was attempting to manipulate both herself and the judicial system and was not at all genuine in his intentions. During the interview, when

Table 2

Emergent Themes from Lilah's Experience of Receiving Abuser Acknowledgement

Immediate experience of receiving acknowledgment	Days, months, years, following acknowledgment	Miscellaneous experiences
Questioning perpetrator's intentions	Changes in general self-perception	Experiences of multiple emotions
Feelings of being manipulated	Movement from passive to active sense of self	Awareness of body sensations
Feelings of anger	Separating abuse experience from perpetrator	Purging the pain of the abuse
Rejection of attempt to acknowledge		
Feelings of empowerment		
Reassignment of blame		

Lilah spoke about the judgment she made about the perpetrator's intentions, she appeared to still be strongly affected by those realizations. Although these emotions had occurred

in the past, during the moment of acknowledgement, Lilah had spent time since then thinking about them and during the interview they seemed to be quite vividly remembered.

> "…if he would have said it to me directly, I think, in my recollection, I think, you know, he had the opportunity to say something at the sentencing, and he was like 'I'd like to apologize for lalalalala…' and it was all vagaries(…)and I remember thinking, huh, that's real nice, what the hell did you just put me through that for, and um, and why aren't you saying that to me directly (*yeah*) you couldn't say that to my face? He wanted to say it to my face I guess, prior to the final stuff, and I just said no, if you want to, if it's going to be sincere, and I guess that's really what I was going for, if this is going to be sincere, if this going to be, really, something meaningful from you, take your medicine and then come and apologize, so…"

> "…there was tons of time between the actual trial in December, and the sentencing in March, where he could have, you know, ample opportunity to kind of, you know, through some ways or means make some kind of contact and apologize and you know, <u>own</u> <u>up</u>, and you know, he didn't. He did it at the very last minute, just some kind of last…like, and umm, so yeah"

Feelings of being "played" or manipulated. Next, Lilah stated that she experienced feelings of being manipulated. Based on the initial judgment she made about the perpetrator's intentions, Lilah experienced feelings of being 'played' or manipulated.

"'How convenient for you, now I know that you're trying to just manipulate the system, and you want to, you know, get a lighter sentence.'"

"…yeah, **Fuck You**, you know, like, you played the system, you played me, you played my whole family, you know, so no, you're not going to do that now. So that acknowledgement, right at the last minute…"

Feelings of anger. Along with those feelings, Lilah experienced feelings of anger. Her anger was directed at the perpetrator and related to her feelings of having been manipulated. Lilah talked with me about how she had spent so much time during the trial wishing for him to admit and acknowledge what he had done; instead he plead not guilty and insisted that he had not committed any abuse. For him to come to her at the sentencing (after having been found guilty by a jury) wishing to acknowledge the abuse only to receive a lighter sentence was extremely anger-provoking for Lilah. I believe that in that immediate moment, Lilah's response to the acknowledgement was instinctive; she responded from an honest, empowered place within herself. Her anger and feelings of being manipulated were her genuine reactions to an event that she had not anticipated.

"…but when it came to me feeling like he was manipulating the system when I was at the sentencing, it was all of a sudden like 'ok you bastard, now you're really making me mad',"

"At the sentencing there was that spark of anger, kind of like '**OK Fuck You!'**, so his acknowledgement then kind of released this kind of like **ARGGGG**, you know?"

"Yeah. There was just this, sort of this unequivocal (indrawn breath) '**FUCK YOU!'** was really what it was. It was like, 'fuck off! As if now I'm going to take that shit from you'"

Rejection of attempt to acknowledge. Those feelings of anger and of being manipulated led to Lilah rejecting the perpetrator's attempt to apologize, which was the next theme. Lilah described how the feelings of being 'played' and the anger led to an instinctual rejection of the abuser's apology attempt. It seems that part of that instinctual rejection was this sense of indignation on Lilah's part – how dare he try to apologize now? How dare he try to manipulate me? Does he think I'm stupid? Although I mention these thoughts and questions, my sense is that there was not conscious thought involved in the decision making process; Lilah did not stop and think about how she was going to react and what she was going to say, she just reacted. Part of that was that the acknowledgement was unexpected and as such, Lilah could not prepare for it.

"…his lawyer came skulking over just kind of into the benches and he was like 'Mr. Williams would like to apologize' and at that point I was like, '**Well, Fuck You!**!'(…) Like, at that point then, it was like, ok '**Too Late!**! **I needed you**, or I **needed** some kind of acknowledgment prior to this',"

"I distinctly remember kind of the, the tension in my face, and the way that I could sort of say, so quickly, to his lawyer…no more niceties, no more good girl, which I always was, you know (*yeah*). I was like 'no, you tell him he can apologize afterwards', and it didn't, I didn't even think twice, and it was like 'wow'…you know"

"…obviously at that point it was just instinctual, it was instinctual…I had what I needed so I could say I don't give a fucking shit if you want to apologize to me now, apologize to me now after you've heard what your sentence is, whatever,"

"…there's an opportunity, I think, during the sentencing for the defense lawyer to say, this dude, you know, he wanted to apologize for, you know, any harm that he did, or whatever, and I just thought, 'yeah no', there was tons of time between the actual trial in December, and the sentencing in March, where he could have,"

"So at the sentencing, another huge marker for me was that moment when I could say '**no! Fuck You**! I could have used your apology a while ago…but I don't **need** it now…'"

Feelings of empowerment. Lilah then described experiencing feelings of empowerment after rejecting the perpetrator's acknowledgement. Part of that empowerment was a sense of not being a victim any longer. When the acknowledgement

occurred, it reinforced for Lilah that she was no longer being 'controlled' by the perpetrator or by his actions; she was able to react how she felt she needed to.

> "…and when he said 'now he wants to apologize', I was like, I told his lawyer, 'tell him he can apologize after the sentencing' you know, and it was like, there was this thing of power, that kind of came back"

> "So I think the ability to be able to say 'yeah fuck you, it's not good enough' there was something really sort of powerful in that for me that really, umm, yeah, it felt like it gave me power back somehow"

Reassignment of blame from participant to perpetrator. The final theme that emerged from the immediate experience of receiving acknowledgment was Lilah's reassigning the blame for the abuse from herself to the perpetrator. In the moment of receiving the acknowledgement she was able to realize that she was not to blame for the abuse; she also described, in her own words, how she was able to release the "inside shame" she felt and "reclaim her innocence". During the months between the verdict and the sentencing, Lilah mentioned that she had spent time trying to refocus her life and decide on what path she was going to take. She did not consciously or intentionally process the trial experience or her abuse. However, at the sentencing, when the acknowledgement occurred, Lilah described this sense of 'everything clicking together' and of thoughts falling into place. The theme of reassigning blame is about those thoughts that had been in her unconscious coming through to her awareness and enabling her to let go of the shame and the self-blame in which she had engaged.

"so there's all of that, so there was something about that anger in that moment, that was like 'Fuck you!' that really did start for me being able to kind of make sense of okay you know what, he was the creep, he was the asshole, I have every right to be angry, right, so, that whole inside shame…"

"…so I think that was part of what was really important about that too, was that all of a sudden it was like, hey wait a second, why should I feel ashamed about this? You know, like, so I think that has been also in the emotion that I remember about that, like, fuck you, I don't need your fucking apology now or whatever, was kind of about yeah, I'm angry about what you did, it was your fault, and it allowed me to kind of pin all of that blame on him, and reclaim my own innocence, kind of, you know,"

One of the interesting thoughts that occurred to me many times was just how many experiences Lilah went through in the seconds it took for the acknowledgement to occur. The words are said and immediately, judgments are made, emotions are experienced and Lilah reacts by rejecting the acknowledgement. I found the speed of the instantaneous and simultaneous reactions very fascinating. Lilah and I discussed this and she also talked about how amazing it was that in one moment, so much can change.

Experiences in Days, Months, Years Following Acknowledgment

In the days, months, and years following the acknowledgment from the perpetrator, Lilah reported several experiences that related to the receipt of the

acknowledgement.. The themes of experience that emerged included: (1) changes in general self-perception; (2) movement from passive to active sense of self; and, (3) separating the abuse experience from the perpetrator.

Changes in general self perception. In the days, months, and years following the acknowledgement, Lilah experienced some changes in the way she perceived herself – changes that she attributed in part to the experience of receiving the acknowledgement. These changes included a change in general self-perception where Lilah described feelings of inner strength. This change occurred over many years and did not happen instantaneously. As I listened to Lilah describe some of these changes, it seemed to me that they revolved around her own sense of identity. Lilah discussed these changes in how they impacted who she was, how she viewed herself, and how she was more than just the abuse experience. She also talked about feeling like she was a different person after the trial and acknowledgement and receiving the same comments from friends and family, which relates to the next theme.

> "…but now I'm able to kind of realize, wow, it was the merging of my own internal acknowledgement and the acknowledgement of my family and friends that was that internal strength of character, core strength that kind of was then able to come out and I am a very different person now, from what I was before, prior to that"

> "…but after the trial, it was that validating myself, acknowledging who I was, and who I am, and what all of that experience was for me and how it shaped me…"

"…it was a nightmare when I was actually in it, because it was so hard for me, but now I see it as an opportunity, it was, it really shaped me."

"So pre trial was definitely me minimizing my experience completely, and in some ways sort of denying, not being able to see what the impact was, and post was definitely appreciating and acknowledging the impact, and acknowledging, not minimizing, totally being like this is what it is, and now trying to you know, continue to acknowledge, I have strengths, I am, you know, a good person, I am more than this abuse, I am, you know…all these other things…"

Movement from passive to active sense of self. The next change was a movement from a passive to an active sense of self. Lilah described feeling in control of her life and consciously making decisions and taking responsibility for her life. I listened to Lilah describe her experiences and I understood that she was talking about actively engaging in her own life. It seems that after the abuse she passively went through her life, but after the trial and acknowledgement, she was able to take more control over her life and the decisions she was making. I believe that part of this change was about Lilah not being a victim any more; Lilah described feeling an inner strength that enabled her to become actively involved in her own life and be more forgiving of herself when she fell back on old patterns of being. It seemed to me that Lilah was becoming more compassionate towards herself.

"It was like I found my voice, I found a strength to kind of speak my piece, I was validated for that, and then all of a sudden it was like, I'm taking my life back."

"And so, my pre self was so passive and just kind of went with whatever happened and it was way more influenced by everybody else, and now, I'm far more, yeah, I think, I've taken charge more, I've pursued more things, I still find that it's hard to sort of acknowledge, I think of myself sometimes as passive 'oh I sort of just lucked into this, or I just fluked into this job', but, I think there has, I've been definitely more proactive, and certainly, I feel stronger as a person"

"There's something about not being a victim, like all of a sudden, and it may take me a little while to be like, 'no, no,' my initial reaction might still be, a legacy of sort of being a victim, oh well, it just happened. But if I can, I now have the opportunity and I have the ability to kind of look back and to say, 'Just a sec. I'm going to give myself credit.'"

"…and I've, yeah, taken charge of, you know, been more in control of, you know relationships for the most part, and career, and things that I'm interested in, yeah "

Separating the abuse experience from the perpetrator. Lilah also described the separating of the abuse experience from the perpetrator. Lilah reported the importance of owning her own abuse experience, without the perpetrator being anywhere within it. This included Lilah noticing a change in how she viewed the perpetrator, where he became less significant. This change was about Lilah being able to integrate the abuse experience into her life experiences without having to involve the perpetrator. When I met with Lilah

to validate these themes, we talked about the words 'abuser' and 'perpetrator' and part of the reason Lilah preferred the word perpetrator was that it allowed her to put more distance between herself and him. While there may always be a link of some sort between them, Lilah wanted to be able to look back at the experience and reflect on the growth and the healing she has done without always having to have his face all over it.

> "…so that allows just the abuse to be, to get him out of the picture, the direct person, it allows the abuse to be something that was a part of my experience that I've learned from that I've grown through (yes, grow, yeah), it allows me to go to that positive side, I guess, get the perpetrator out of the picture, and then it becomes my experience again (*mm-hmm*), does that make sense?"

> "…he started off as the most significant, fucking crazy thing in my life, and now he's become this small puny, like, pfft, let's brush him away"

> "…let's brush him away, and I'm left with being able to kind of take charge of, and own, and do what I want with the experience"

> "…because it does seem important to kind of, for me to own what this is for me, I don't want his face on it, I don't want his image anywhere around it, right, (…)and I, yeah, I get to kind of control and own the experience. It's my experience, this is what I've done with it, this is what I can, what I am doing with it, this is what I've learned, and grew, you know, from it…"

"There's something that feels right now, as I think about that, really important in being able to like get him, get that, get the perpetrator, the actual person out of the picture,"

"…so it's being able to kind of put him in that place, you know, he's insignificant, you know,"

Miscellaneous Experiences

The final experiences that I would like to address are the experiences of multiple emotions in the moment of acknowledgement such as hurt and frustration, as well as the experience of bodily sensations such as facial tensions, and the purging of the pain of the abuse after the acknowledgement. Lilah identified these as part of her experience of receiving acknowledgement however they did not fit into any of the earlier themes. I felt that it was important to include these quotes as they were a part of Lilah's experience; however they were only mentioned at one instance each and as such, I did not feel that they could stand alone in their own separate themes. The experiences of the multiple emotions and the corresponding bodily sensations occurred in the moment of receiving the acknowledgement and were described by Lilah as an important part of her experience. The hurt and frustration that Lilah experienced were part of that immediate, instinctive reaction I alluded to earlier.

Experience of multiple emotions. After having wanted and needed that acknowledgement from him and not received it, Lilah described having come to a sense of peace about the trial in the months before the sentencing; to then have this

acknowledgement be given in a manipulative and insincere manner resulted in that peace being disturbed and her experiencing the hurt and the frustration.

"…it was all of a sudden like 'ok you bastard, now you're really making me mad', and um, yeah, it might have been that moment where, um, where I felt lots of hurt and frustration"

Awareness of body sensations. When talking about this, Lilah's hands were moving from her waist up towards her throat, palms facing up. She talked about feeling like the feelings were gushing out of her. I found that image to be very powerful; it relates to the instinctiveness of Lilah's reaction and the many emotions she experienced in that moment and how they just flowed out of her, without conscious thought.

"I distinctly remember kind of the, the tension in my face"

"M: Gushing out of you (*yeah*)…I'm just noticing your hands and motions (*yeah, exactly*) are kind of like going from the inside out (*yes*)."

Purging the pain of the abuse. The purging of the pain relates to Lilah wanting to remove the perpetrator from her abuse experience; Lilah wanted to remove the negativity and the pain from within her, and integrate the abuse experience in with the rest of her life experiences.

"And my friends' acknowledgement that after the trial, I was really different (*a different person*) (…) it was sort of a purging of all that pain…"

"Yeah, exactly, purging, you know, this dark cloud, of the abuse, purging kind of the pain,"

Summary

This chapter included a case description of Lilah and the context in which she received acknowledgement from the perpetrator. Following that, the themes that emerged from the interview were defined and presented along with some of my thoughts from the interview with Lilah as well as some representative quotes from the interview transcripts. These themes will be addressed further in the next chapter.

Chapter Five: Researcher's Journey

My journey from the beginning of this thesis to where I am today has been a fulfilling yet challenging experience. I will now share some of the issues that surfaced for me during this journey. I hope to convey to the reader what my experiences of conducting this research were, and how they may have played out in the research.

Challenges

Throughout the process of conducting this research, I experienced many challenges, most of them attributable to the fact that I had not conducted research prior to this study; I often felt that I did not know what I was doing. This feeling was present from the first step of my process, finding a research topic, through to the last stage, writing the final thesis. This feeling was to be expected as I did not always know what I was doing. I will not mention every instance this feeling arose, but I will address the two instances that were particularly challenging. The first instance I will address occurred during participant recruitment. I had anticipated that it would be difficult to find six people who had received acknowledgement for their abuser; however, I did not think that I would have difficulty finding even one person to participate. I received e-mail from individuals who were interested in participating, however, they did not meet the criteria I had set out for participation. I experienced excitement when I received the e-mail, and then I felt let down when they were not eligible for participation. It was during this time that I experienced feelings of self-doubt, as well as feelings of doubt around the topic I chose. I felt that the difficulty I was experiencing around finding participants spoke to the secrecy and the shame that still surrounds child abuse. I did not doubt that there were people out there who had experience childhood abuse, and had received

acknowledgement of some sort; however, given that abuse is still a taboo subject in society and that the survivors may still feel shame and humiliation for having been a victim of abuse, part of me was not surprised that no participants came forward. I consulted with many people including my supervisor, my committee members, and my colleagues. I was encouraged to be patient and to believe in the research study. I did eventually find a participant who met the criteria for participation, and I felt quite thrilled to be able to continue on with the interview.

The second instance that was particularly challenging for me was my data analysis process. I had just concluded my interview and was quite excited to discover what would emerge from that interview. The transcription was time-consuming and yet I did not mind as it brought me closer to the data-analysis. After the transcription, when I began coding and categorizing, I realized just how complex of a process it really is. I met with my supervisor at least once a week to review my progress and those meetings were quite helpful in keeping me on task. I often felt frustrated when I realized that I had to go deeper in my analysis and yet, when I did, it was very rewarding as themes emerged that seemed to fit with my participant's experiences. As my supervisor advised me, I had to constantly remind myself that I had not conducted research before, and as such, I could not be expected to have a perfect understanding of what a data analysis process would entail. I also realize that even if I had experience analyzing data, this may still have been a different experience. As I mentioned, when the data analysis process was concluded, it was quite rewarding to see the results and have them resonate with my participant. Those two instances are the ones that come to mind when I consider what was most challenging

for me during this process; these challenges, and the other small ones that occurred throughout the process all enhanced my learning as a researcher.

Learning as a Researcher

When I first began this research study, I really wanted to make sure that I 'got it right', and that I managed to represent my participants' stories accurately. As it turns out I only had one participant, however, I was just as concerned with presenting her story and her experience as accurately as possible. That accuracy was part of the 'getting it right' mentality. Having never conducted research before, I was under the impression that in order for the research to be 'right', there was a certain way that things had to be done. One of the most important things I learned is that there is no one right way to conduct research. Sure, there are many things that need to be done in order for the research to be ethical (ethical approval, informed consent) and methodologically sound (rigor and trustworthiness), however, each individual researcher will approach her/his own research with a particular lens that will inform how they frame their work. What I mean to say is that two researchers who are interested in exploring the same research question can find two very different manners by which to explore it; before my experience with this study, I would have been more inclined to believe that there was only one way to explore a research question, but now I have learned that there is usually more than one way to look at almost any research. The manner that is chosen will be a reflection of the researchers' theoretical stance, their personal beliefs, and the assumptions that they make both in the research, and in their worldview.

Another piece of learning I had about conducting research is just how much of the researcher is invested in the process. I found that so much time, energy, and emotion are

devoted to the research in order for the researcher to feel a measure of success. I had REALLY underestimated the effort it would take to conduct this research study. That is not to say that I was not willing to work or do what I needed to, however, I did not realize just how much time the process would take, and just how much patience and perseverance is required to come out of this process with a measure of sanity. When I was waiting for my ethics approval, when I was unable to find participants, when I was continuously attempting to go deeper in my data analysis, these are all times when I felt frustration and distress at the slow and stalling process; however, through time, I began to realize that what I thought was the process stalling, was in fact part of the process. In other words, part of research is waiting for ethics approval, and part of research can be the struggle to find participants, and part of the research was to conduct a deep data analysis. Just because I struggled with these issues and just because they took time does not mean that I did anything 'wrong' as a researcher, but that this was just a part of my research process. The next time I conduct research I could potentially run into the same concerns, even though I would be more 'experienced', or I could have much smoother research experience; either way would provide me with a rich learning experience.

There are so many other things that I have learned I could write a whole other paper on them. Overall, I feel that I learned how rewarding it can be to conduct research; I learned that I could feel so much success and validation after each step in the process, even though the research itself was not complete; I learned that I could be transparent about my process as a researcher, and that I could include that in my research to enhance and enrich the study; I learned that each struggle only made me more determined to see the process through; finally, I learned that I tried my absolute best to ensure that my

participant's story was portrayed and shared with the readers in a manner that validated her experience and that fit for her, and that as long as I did that, I could feel a measure of satisfaction and success.

Tension Between 'Researcher' Self and 'Counsellor' Self

Another piece of my experience that I wish to address is the tension that I sometimes felt between my role as a researcher and my role as a counsellor. As I mentioned above, there was so much I did not know about conducting research and interviews with participants. In addition, it seemed that my training as a counsellor could sometimes be in conflict with what I needed to do, as a researcher. This tension was present at two different times in my research process: during my interview with my participant as well as during my data analysis process.

In the beginning of my interview with Lilah both of us were admittedly nervous about what was to come; I was able to utilize my counselling skills to establish rapport between us and that seemed to make the interview process less stressful. Having said that, there were moments during the interview when Lilah got quite emotional and teary-eyed. During those moments, I once again utilized my counselling skills to assist her in dealing with her distress, and yet, I had to make a conscious effort not to turn our interview into a counselling session, and that was challenging. As a researcher, as a counsellor, and as a human being I felt such a strong sense of empathy for Lilah, and seeing her distressed as she shared a painful story with me made my role as a researcher that much more difficult. I had to be aware of that empathy I was feeling and I also had to be sure that it did not lead me to begin to counsel Lilah. I was able to express my empathy for her and share my feelings in the moment and also make sure that when she was able to continue, that we

moved along with the research questions. There were also moments when Lilah would describe experiences that as a counsellor, I would have explored in more detail. For Lilah, this was the first time that she had shared her story in this particular manner; she had shared her abuse experience with her family and friends, and she had gone through personal therapy to process her abuse, however she had not talked about the abuse from the perspective that I was inviting her to. As such, both of us were a bit fascinated by the revelations that Lilah was having in the moment, as well as the recollections she was sharing about her acknowledgement experience. Both as a counsellor and as a person, there were many paths that I could have followed, out of personal interest, and out of a counselling interest. I had to consciously remind myself that I was there in the role of a researcher and if that path or that experience was not relevant to the research question or the context, I had to let it go. I was glad that I had been prepared by my supervisor for this process, and that I was aware that this tension was likely to surface. Had I not been, I'm sure the interview would have been equally rich, however I may not have had any data in response to my research question.

I also felt tension between my role of counsellor and my role of researcher in my data analysis process. In the first steps of this process, I went through the transcripts and noted any words or phrases that seemed to be reoccurring. I also took note of any salient themes or patterns that seemed to be emerging. It was during this process that my 'counsellor' self began to appear again, without my awareness of it, at least not initially. After a meeting with my supervisor, I realized that I had been noting down themes and patterns that were interesting to me as a counsellor and I had lost track of my research question. I had to connect with my 'researcher' self again and become more self-aware; I

began to look at the data again with a researcher lens and I was able to notice the themes that were emerging that were in response to the research question without losing the rest of the story. Also during the data analysis process, as a researcher I had to make inferences and look beyond the participant's spoken words to see what themes were emerging. That felt uncomfortable to my 'counsellor' self as my training emphasizes the importance of not making assumptions and checking my thoughts and impressions with my clients. I was able to check the themes with my participant and validate them eventually, however until I did so, I felt somewhat uneasy. When my participant validated the themes and confirmed for me that they were a fit with her experiences I felt relief that I had been able to fulfill my role as a researcher without compromising her story. I also felt validated because Lilah had found the way that I re-framed her experience to be compelling and accurately representative of her experience. That gave me a surge of confidence in my abilities as a researcher.

This is Why I'm Doing This

What I would like to discuss now is my interview with Lilah and how that interview experience re-confirmed for me why I wanted to ask this research question. As I mentioned earlier, there were challenges in conducting this research, however, my interview with Lilah reaffirmed for me why I wanted to conduct this research to begin with. I was quite nervous to begin with, as I kept thinking to myself that 'this is it!' Once the interview began, my nerves dissipated. The interview was actually more of a conversation as I did not have to ask very many questions. I began by inviting Lilah to tell me about her experience and from then on, we had a dialogue, back and forth, about what she was describing. I remember feeling very excited during the interview as I began

to realize that this is what I had wanted to do. While I struggled a bit to ensure that I maintained my role as a researcher, I was able to appreciate the experience that I was sharing with Lilah, in that moment, and realizing how thankful I was that Lilah was as willing as she was to share her story with me. After we were finished, Lilah was describing to me how helpful and insightful she had found the process, and I mentioned to her how glad I was that she experienced it in that way. I do not know if I would have felt the same way had she not mentioned to me that she found the interview helpful and insightful. As I ended that interview, I recall thinking to myself that I wished I had more participants! I was not able to find the number of participants that I had initially set out to, however I feel that my experience with Lilah made me appreciate how wonderful it can be to conduct research. At that point, I felt that all the challenges, the self-doubt, and the difficulties were worth it

Throughout this research process I have experienced many highs and lows, and I now feel exhilarated that I have managed to complete this project, from the conception of my research topic to this final report. I also feel somewhat drained, so while I enjoyed this process, I will have to take some time before I tackle another research project. In the meantime, the next chapter will discuss my findings, how they contribute to the current literature, implications for practitioners, the strengths and limitations of the study, as well as possible future directions.

Chapter Six: Discussion

In this chapter, I re-introduce my purpose statement and research question. My findings are discussed in light of how they support current existing literature as well as how the unique findings of the study contribute to the relevant literature. I introduce possible implications for counsellors and practitioners working with adult survivors of childhood abuse and discuss the strengths and limitations of this study. Finally, I address possible future directions for research, and end by addressing my personal experience of conducting this research study.

Purpose Statement and Research Question

The purpose of this qualitative research study was to explore the experiences of survivors of childhood abuse in receiving acknowledgement from the abusers. These experiences were explored and described using case study methodology in an attempt to shed light on the area of abuser acknowledgment, how it impacts survivors of childhood abuse, and their healing process. An additional goal involved contributing to the field of child abuse treatment as few studies (McKinzie, 2000; Morris, Lipovsky, & Saunders, 1996) exploring the area of abuser acknowledgment currently exist. The research question this study sought to answer was: For survivors of childhood abuse, what is the experience of receiving acknowledgement from the abuser? Finally, I wish to remind the reader that I am defining acknowledgement as a form of recognition that the abuse took place.

Relationship to Current Literature

Literature that addresses the issue of abuser acknowledgement is scarce. However, the findings of this study do support some of the related literature that currently

exists, specifically in the area of healing from childhood abuse. Glaister and Abel (2001) found that women described their process of healing from childhood sexual abuse as difficult and painful but that it brought about positive changes in themselves. The women also identified supportive relationships with others as helpful, along with inner strength and beliefs, and coming to terms with the abuse and with themselves. These findings are supported by Lilah's experiences, as demonstrated by the themes of 'changes in general self-perception', 'movement from passive to active sense of self' 'reassignment of blame from participant to perpetrator', and 'separating the abuse experience from the perpetrator'. In those themes, Lilah described the importance of support and acknowledgement from her friends and family, the recognition of her own internal strengths, forgiving herself, reassigning the blame to the perpetrator, and the sense of owning her own abuse experience without the face of the perpetrator attached to it.

Godbey and Hutchinson (1996) found that women who were healing from childhood sexual abuse, specifically incest went through a seven-phase process: (1) reappearing of the buried self, (2) revivifying of the buried self, (3) resuscitating the buried self, (4) renovating the buried self, (5) regenerating the buried self, (6) reanimating the buried self, and (7) reincarnating the buried self. Lilah's experiences provide support for the existence of some of these stages. *Resuscitating the buried self* refers to the experiencing of many emotions that surround the trauma. The 'experiencing multiple emotions theme' speaks to this phase. *Renovating the buried self* refers to identifying and giving up old ways of being, experimenting with new thought patterns, and behaviours, and being flexible. In both the 'changes to general self-perception' and the 'movement from passive to active sense of self' themes, Lilah speaks to the ways in which she feels

she has changed, including her thought patterns and her behaviours. *Regenerating the buried self* is about abdicating shame and responsibility for the abuse and Lilah speaks to this phase in the 'reassignment of blame from participant to perpetrator' theme. Finally, the last phase, *reincarnating the buried self*, is about accepting the abuse experience and integrating it into one's life. Lilah spoke about owning her own abuse experience in the 'separating the abuse experience from the perpetrator', again providing support for the existence of a few of Godbey and Hutchinson's seven phases.

McKinzie's (2000) study, which examined the issue of victims confronting their abusers, generated five themes of experience. The first theme centered on the decision to confront the abuser; the second theme centered around having control over the timing of the confrontation; the third theme involves the experience of confronting the abuser from a position of the women's own authority; the fourth theme was about looking at the responses the women received, from a wider perspective than the actual confrontation; and, the final theme focused on the personal effects of the confrontation on each woman.

The findings of this study provide support for two of McKinzie's (2000) themes. In the fourth theme, the women considered how honest the responses were and what that meant to them in their life as it was at that time. Similarly, Lilah also had thoughts about the honesty and genuineness of the perpetrator's intentions in acknowledging the abuse. It appears as though honesty, whether the survivor initiated contact or not was a factor in how the women, including Lilah, experienced the event. Another manner in which the present findings support McKinzie's findings relates to the fifth theme. Although Lilah had not initiated or sought out the confrontation with the perpetrator, she did experience some of the same effects that the participants in McKinzie's study reported experiencing.

Lilah described feelings of empowerment and a sense of agency after receiving and then rejecting the acknowledgement.

Strengths

One of the major strengths and contributions of this study is that the experience of receiving abuser acknowledgement has not yet been explored in the literature. As such, many of the findings of this study are unique and contribute to the current body of literature. As I discussed earlier, some of the findings of this study support existing literature around healing from childhood abuse. However, when placed in the context of receiving acknowledgement, these same findings are unique to our current understanding of the effects of such acknowledgement. This specific research question has not been explored before; in fact, I have only been able to find one other article (Morris at al., 1996) that explored the area of abuser acknowledgement. Morris et al. explored the role of perpetrator acknowledgement in mediating the impact of child sexual assault. They found that, according to their CBCL scores (as filled out by their mothers) that there was an apparent mediating impact of perpetrator acknowledgement. The children whose perpetrators had not acknowledged the abuse scored higher on the Externalizing Behaviours and Internalizing Behaviours subscales, as well as on the total scores. As I described in chapter two of this study, some of the differences between Morris et al. and the present study include the participants (children vs. adults), the methods (CBCL vs. interview), and research paradigms (quantitative vs. qualitative). While it was helpful to find another study that explored the area of abuser acknowledgement, Morris et al. did not provide sufficient information regarding the context of the acknowledgment such as to whom the abuse was acknowledged, and whether or not the children were direct

recipients of the acknowledgement. As this study has shown, the context of the acknowledgment is a key factor in understanding the experience. Thus the current study informs and complements the findings of the Morris et al. study. Another issue that Morris et al. did not speak to was the children's experiences of that acknowledgement. The authors did state, as did I, that theirs was an exploratory study and that further research is needed to clarify this issue. Table 2 (found in chapter three) outlines the themes that emerged from Lilah's experience of receiving acknowledgement from the perpetrator. The experiences that Lilah described have not been explored in the current literature within the construct of receiving acknowledgement. As this is a preliminary study, generalizations cannot be made; more research is necessary to enhance our understanding of the experiences of abuser acknowledgement across contexts. This present research study will open up a new avenue of study and will provide other researchers with a starting point from which they can begin their own explorations.

Another strength of this study is the methodology. I had initially intended to interview six participants but due to a lack of suitable participants, I conducted a detailed interview with one participant, Lilah. I believe this is a strength because the in-depth interview provided me with such rich data which I was able to analyze deeply. I also drew on multiple sources of data that helped broaden the understanding of the issue of acknowledgement, including perspectives from professionals working in the field. I consider this to be a strength because I would not have had the opportunity to include this kind of detailed information if I had six participants and multiple interview transcripts to work with. Given the 'newness' of this area of study, I feel that it is an advantage to have been able to thoroughly explore this one participant's experience, which will inform

researchers as to possible future directions of study. Stake (2005) states that the case being studied is "a complex entity located in a milieu or situation embedded in a number of contexts or backgrounds" (p. 449). He goes on to state that qualitative case study research requires the exploration of these complexities and contexts. The construct of 'receiving acknowledgement' is deeply embedded in a context unique to each individual person; as such, using a case study methodology to explore this construct is beneficial as it would be difficult to extract the acknowledgement experience from the context in which it takes place, without losing relevant information and experiences.

Other strengths related to the methodology of this study include the careful data analysis, the validation process, and the strategies I utilized to ensure the quality of the study. Lincoln and Guba (1985) proposed four constructs that may be used to evaluate the quality of qualitative research studies: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. A study is considered credible if the researcher has represented the truth of the participants' reality in the context being studied. A study meets the criteria of transferability when its findings can be compared to contexts that are similar to the study's context. Dependability refers to the ability of the researcher to track variabilities in the findings and identify their sources. Confirmability refers to the extent to which the findings are free of bias and are a result of the participants and the conditions/contexts of the research.

By engaging in a careful, in-depth data analysis process, employing strategies such as peer examinations, member checkings, and reflexivity, and providing enough detail that others may replicate this study or transfer the findings to other situations, I

attempted to ensure that this research study meets the criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

Limitations of Study

A limitation of this study is that I was not able to find more than one participant that met the criteria for suitability. While I was able to explore Lilah's experience in detail, it would have been helpful to have had more than one participant as this would have provided a general sense of how unique or common Lilah's experience of receiving acknowledgement was, in comparison to other survivors who had experienced acknowledgment. Lilah's experience of receiving acknowledgment occurred in the context of criminal trial proceedings. It would have been interesting to explore other experiences that may have occurred in different contexts.

A possible explanation for the lack of suitable participants could be found in my recruitment methods. To recruit participants, I put up posters in counselling agencies in the community, as well as at the University of Victoria. I also relied on word of mouth. When I was not able to find suitable participants I consulted with some colleagues about my recruitment methods. One of the concerns that arose was around the word 'acknowledgement'. 'Acknowledgement' has a positive connotation to it, but not all acknowledgements are positive, as this present study demonstrates. It was brought to my attention that due to the positive connotation, people might be assuming that 'acknowledgement' implies that an apology was made and that the abuser felt remorse. As such, it may be that a survivor of childhood abuse who saw my poster or heard of my study did not feel that they met the criteria for participation when in fact they did. In the future, it would make sense to take particular care when selecting the language to be used

in a study to ensure that those reading it would have a similar understanding of the concept being discussed.

Another limitation is that the findings from this study are not generalizable. While generalization was not my intention, the specificity of the information in this study may make it challenging for the readers to understand how these findings may apply to their situation. It is also important to point out that the findings of this study rely solely on self-report data and as such there may have been relevant contextual information left out. Also, as I only had one participant, I was unable to learn from each interview and refine my interviewing skills along the way. I do not believe that these factors detract from the study, however, I did want to present them as some readers may consider them to be limitations.

Implications for Practitioners

As this is a preliminary study, I do not assume that all survivors of childhood abuse will share the same experiences that Lilah went through. Based on my findings, I will present some possible avenues that therapists might want to consider when working with clients who may have received acknowledgement from their abusers or who may be expecting or anticipating the receipt of acknowledgement from the abuser. It is important to note that if the clients have experiences that are very different from Lilah's then the following avenues may not be relevant, however, the findings from this case study could be used as a conversation starter for therapists who are working with clients that are considering seeking acknowledgment from their abusers.

It is essential, for therapists working with survivors of childhood abuse who have received acknowledgement from their abusers, that first and foremost, the therapists

consider the client's story as individual and unique. Acknowledgement occurs within a context that is unique to the survivor, and as such, it is essential that the context is explored and considered when helping survivors process that experience. The context of Lilah's acknowledgement was an integral piece of the entire story and this study demonstrates that context must not be ignored.

It is also important for therapists to explore how receiving acknowledgement may change the survivors' thoughts and emotions related to the abuse. When working with clients who have already experienced the acknowledgment, it would be helpful to explore these kinds of changes, as they may have occurred without the survivors' awareness or intentionality. Bringing these new awareness and realizations to the surface and including them in the healing process would be beneficial for the survivors. This may include discussion centering on the survivors' response to the acknowledgement and why they may have responded in that manner. This may also include a conscious discussion about the survivors' healing processes up to the moment of acknowledgement and how that may have changed after the acknowledgement from the abuser.

Another important consideration for therapists relates to the emotions that may be experienced in the moment of acknowledgement. In this study, anger appeared to be an emotion that was felt strongly; specifically, Lilah experienced feelings of anger towards the abuser related to his lack of sincerity and his attempt to manipulate her and the system. Lilah also felt anger at the abuser because of the abuse itself. Anger is an emotion that is laden with societal values. For instance, it is thought to be more socially acceptable for men to outwardly express anger than it is for women. Anger is also an emotion that is viewed negatively – to be angry is often thought to be problematic. As

such, it might be particularly challenging for clients who are angry to admit that they are. Once clients are ready to express their anger, another point to consider is how they may do so. As anger is often associated with violence, clients may feel that the expression of anger involves hitting something or someone, screaming out loud …etc; clients may not admit to feeling anger, or may not express their anger for fear of being perceived as violent, particularly for women who seem to have more limited socially accepted ways by which to express their anger. In similar contexts and in a similar situation, other survivors may also experience anger and therapists will have a role in assisting their clients express this anger and in validating them. Therapists may assist their clients in exploring the anger more deeply and finding appropriate ways by which to express this anger, ways that also fit for the client. This also holds true for any other emotions that may be experienced by the survivors.

Clients who are anticipating an acknowledgement from their abusers may have different concerns; this study can inform therapists working with these clients. Once again, context will be an important factor – how is the acknowledgement coming about? Who initiated the contact? Depending on the responses to these questions and others, therapists will have different issues to address with their clients in preparation for the acknowledgement. For instance, if a client is seeking an acknowledgement from her/his abuser, they might be more invested in the response they receive, as opposed to someone who might not have been seeking the acknowledgement. If a client sees an acknowledgement as a crucial step to her/his healing, s/he might be approaching the acknowledgement with different expectations. Regardless of the context however, there may be a multitude of emotions that are experienced in that moment; therapists can

initiate conversations with their clients regarding the emotions they are expecting to experience, and can bring to the clients' attention the emotions that they may not expect to experience but may be present (e.g. anger). Another item for discussion may be the abuser's intention in acknowledging the abuse. Therapists and their clients can have a conversation around the abuser's possible intentions and how that may affect the way in which the client reacts. Another topic of discussion between the therapists and their client is what the client is expecting to gain from the acknowledgement experience, if anything. While the clients may not have an answer to that inquiry, it is an important point to bring to their awareness and to consider. As I mentioned earlier, clients who are expecting an acknowledgement and see it as a crucial element to their healing might be approaching that moment with different expectations. Therapists will need to address this concern and discuss with their clients the possible outcomes of the acknowledgement and help them prepare for the possibilities.

The results of this study can assist therapists and survivors in learning that receiving acknowledgement from an abuser is a complex experience that involves varying degrees and types of emotions experienced by the survivors receiving acknowledgement. The survivors receiving the acknowledgement might find the experience empowering and may find that they get clarification about the abuser's role and presence within the abuse experience and in their lives. Given some time to process the experience, survivors may find that they are gaining new insights into themselves and that their self-perception may be changing. During this processing period, therapists may assist their clients by provided them with a safe place to explore their new insights and self-awareness. Therapists may also respectfully provide their clients with a different

perception of events that may have taken place, which may then allow the clients to integrate their acknowledgement experience in the manner that fits best for them.

Therapists working with clients who are expecting to or who have already received an acknowledgement may use the findings of this study as a checklist to assist them in keeping track of the possible issues that may arise. As more is learned about acknowledgement and the contexts in which it can occur, this type of 'checklist' can be modified and tailored to fit each client's unique experience.

Directions for Future Research

Due to the uniqueness of this study, I feel that there are many possible directions that future research can take. But first, before I begin, I'd like to address the construct of 'receiving acknowledgement'. Through the process of exploring this construct, I realized just how embedded it is in a context that is specific to each individual person. In this case, the acknowledgement occurred in the context of a trial process. As such, it would be challenging to separate the specific experience of the acknowledgement from the overall experience of the trial. When I validated my themes with my participant, I checked that the themes that had emerged were indeed related to the experience of receiving the acknowledgement, and not just a result of being engaged in a trial process. Lilah confirmed that the acknowledgement was a key piece of the experience, and that without it her life might be very different. Therefore, a possible direction for future research would be to explore other trial experiences where acknowledgement from the abuser occurred. Another possible direction would be to continue on with this research question, but to explore other contexts where acknowledgement may take place. Potentially, this will provide us with a better understanding of abuser acknowledgement, across contexts.

Another point of interest in this present research study was the time lapse between the trial and the sentencing. Lilah had three months after the trial was concluded before she had to return for the sentencing. Lilah noted that she took some time during those three months to decide what direction she wanted her life to take. Part of that included processing the trial experience. Lilah did note, however, that most of this processing was not conscious and was not part of her awareness. She then stated that the abuser's acknowledgement, during the sentencing was a catalyst for her to unlock that processing, bring it to her own awareness, and it allowed her to be more intentional about her process. Would the acknowledgement have been considered a catalyst had Lilah not had that time in between to process, had the sentencing occurred immediately following the guilty verdict? Also of interest is whether or not Lilah would have responded to the acknowledgement in the same manner had she not had that time to herself.

Another point of interest that Lilah described during our discussion is the idea of acknowledgement. As we talked, Lilah reported that in the time between the trial and the sentencing, she came to the realization that the acknowledgement from her family and friends was what she really needed, and that the abuser's lack of acknowledgement did not matter. As we talked about that, Lilah also described how her family and friend's support during the trial allowed her to acknowledge the abuse and its impact on her life to herself. Lilah then addressed the realization that there were in fact three types of acknowledgement that came into play within her experience: (1) acknowledgement from family and friends; (2) acknowledgement from and for herself; and (3) acknowledgement from the abuser. I believe that this would be an interesting area to explore further. Do other survivors of abuse share that belief that there are three types of acknowledgement?

Another possible direction for research is the area of race, gender, and sexual orientation. Lilah identifies as a White, Lesbian female. Are any of her experiences of receiving acknowledgement related to her race, gender, or sexual orientation and ability? It is interesting to note that Lilah did not come out as a lesbian until after the trial. How much, if any, of that decision was related to the experience of receiving acknowledgement? How would the experience or receiving acknowledgement be different for someone else – a male; a heterosexual; a racial minority? The issue of gender is a particularly interesting one as it is less socially acceptable for men to admit to any abuse experiences, particularly sexual abuse. Having said that, what would it be like for a male survivor of childhood abuse, who may be concerned about being believed and validated, to have his abuser acknowledge that the abuse took place?

Lilah's childhood abuse was of a sexual nature. What would the experience of receiving acknowledgement be like for someone who had been physically or emotionally abused or neglected? This would also be an interesting direction for future research.

Finally, other possibilities for future research include the development of tests or measures that are related to the experience of receiving acknowledgement. It would be interesting to conduct some quantitative studies with large sample sizes that would utilize these measures to gain an understanding of just how common the acknowledgement experience may be and in what contexts it most often occurs; this might then provide more specific avenues for qualitative research to focus on. It would also be interesting to conduct other qualitative studies with more participants to get a deeper understanding about just how different people experience the receipt of acknowledgment from their abuser and how that experience plays out in their lives and in their healing process.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I re-stated the purpose of this study as well as my research question. I then outline the ways in which my findings supported existing literature. I continued on by outlining the unique contributions this study made to the current literature. Next, I discussed the ethical considerations that I included in this study. I then presented some implications for therapists working with survivors of childhood abuse. Next, I discussed the strengths and limitations of this study. I followed that with a discussion of possible directions for future research. Finally, I concluded by discussing my personal experiences as a researcher throughout this process including the challenges I faced, the rewarding experiences I went through, and the tension between my researcher self and my counsellor self that was present during this process. This research study was a new experience for me, one that included many challenges and many fulfilling experiences. I am proud of myself for having accomplished this thesis and very thankful to all of those who contributed to and helped me through this process.

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Appendix A

Sample Interview Questions

1. You have identified yourself as someone who has experienced childhood abuse. How would you characterize the abuse you experienced? (Physical, sexual, emotional, neglect, or other).
2. Was the person who committed the abuse a family member, a family friend, a stranger, or someone else?
3. How much time has passed since the abuse ended?
4. This study is about receiving acknowledgement of the abuse, from the individual who abused you. Can you explain the circumstances that led to the acknowledgement. (Was the acknowledgment self-initiated or other initiated? Direct or indirect?)
5. What was your experience of receiving that acknowledgement?
6. What do you feel were the immediate impact of receiving that acknowledgement? What are the present effects of that acknowledgement?
7. How has receiving that acknowledgement affected your healing process?

Appendix B

University of Victoria

Human Research Ethics Board
Office of Research Services
University of Victoria
Room A240 University Centre
Tel (250) 472-4545 Fax (250) 721-8960
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Human Research Ethics Board
Certificate of Approval

Principal Investigator	Department/School	Supervisor
Marwa Fadol **Graduate Student**	**EPLS**	**Dr. Tim Black**
Co-Investigator(s):		

Project Title: **Survivors of Childhood Abuse: The Experience of Receiving Acknowledgement From The Abusers**

Protocol No.	Approval Date	Start Date	End Date
06-077	**04-Apr-06**	**04-Apr-06**	**03-Apr-07**

Certification

This certifies that the UVic Human Research Ethics Board has examined this research protocol and concludes that, in all respects, the proposed research meets appropriate standards of ethics as outlined by the University of Victoria Research Regulations Involving Human Subjects.

Dr. Richard Keeler
Associate Vice-President, Research

This Certificate of Approval is valid for the above term provided there is no change in the procedures. Extensions or minor amendments may be granted upon receipt of a "Research Status" form.

06-077 Fadol, Marwa

Appendix C

Survivors of Childhood Abuse: The Experience of Receiving Acknowledgement from the Abusers

Participant Consent Form

You are invited to participate in a study entitled *Survivors of Childhood Abuse: The Experience of Receiving Acknowledgement from the Abusers* that is being conducted by Marwa Fadol. I am a Graduate student in the department of Educational Psychology and Leadership Studies at the University of Victoria and you may contact me if you have further questions by calling me at 516-0502 or emailing me at mfadol@uvic.ca.

As a Graduate student, I am required to conduct research as part of the requirements for a Masters of Arts in Counselling Psychology. It is being conducted under the supervision of Dr. Tim Black. You may contact my supervisor at 250-721-7820.

Purpose and Objectives

The purpose of this qualitative research study is to explore the experiences of survivors of childhood abuse in receiving acknowledgement from the abusers. You will be asked to talk about your experience of receiving acknowledgement from the person who abused you, and how that impacted your healing and your life.

Importance of this Research

Research in this area is important because it can contribute to the field of child abuse treatment from a different avenue. While there are research studies that explore abusers' denial of the abuse and its impact on survivors, there are very few research studies exploring the area of abuser acknowledgment of the abuse. Hopefully this study will open the door for more research to be done in this area. Eventually, as more research comes out over time, implications for the helping professions will emerge and aid in helping survivors heal from their abuse experiences.

Participant Selection

You are being asked to participate in this study because you have responded to a recruitment poster that was posted at the University of Victoria, or at one of the community counselling agencies in Victoria and you have self-identified as an adult who has experienced childhood abuse and have received acknowledgement from the person who abused you.

What is involved?

If you agree to voluntarily participate in this research, your participation will begin with a 1 hour audio-taped in-depth interview. Once all the data has been collected and analyzed, you will be requested to attend another 1-hour session. In this session, you will be invited to review the interpretations I will have made to ensure their accurate reflection of your experience.

Inconvenience
Participation in this study may cause some inconvenience to you, including the time taken for the interviews, as well as time taken for travel to and from the interview.

Risks
There are some potential risks to you by participating in this research and they include emotional stress, psychological discomfort, and possible embarrassment due to the emotionally laden topic of your childhood abuse experiences.

To prevent or to deal with these risks the following steps will be taken:

- The focus of the interview is not on the actual abuse you experienced. The only questions that will be asked around the actual abuse are demographic-type questions (i.e., what type of abuse, how long did it go on for, who was the abuser). The focus will then shift to the acknowledgement piece.
- I will pace the interview so as not to overwhelm you. I will also ensure that the interview does not go over the hour initially agreed upon.
- You may also decline to answer any question that you do not wish to respond to.
- Although I am a counsellor by training, I am with you in the interview in a research capacity and in the role of a researcher.
- However, having stated my role, I would like to let you know that should you experience distress, I am a trained counsellor, with experience working with abuse issues, and as such I will be able to help you alleviate any immediate distress, and debrief that stress. At the end of the interview, I will provide you with referrals to community agencies and the Victoria Crisis Line that may help you further address the distress you may have experienced if you wish to do so.
- Should you experience distress at any time during the interview it can be terminated and rescheduled at another time, if you so choose.
- Your participation is voluntary; if you feel that you are no longer willing to continue with this research you may withdraw at anytime without risk or consequence.

Benefits
The potential benefits of your participation in this research include the opportunity to share your experience and reflect on it; you may also get a different perspective on your experience. Finally, you may also gain some insight and get some closure on your abuse experience(s).

The potential benefits to society include the opportunity to learn more about child abuse, a problem that affects society in many ways. You may learn things about yourselves and your abuse experiences that may help contribute to the treatment of child abuse in the helping profession.

The potential benefits to the state of knowledge include the opportunity for you to contribute your own experiences and insights to the present research on child abuse

treatment and healing. Your willingness to share your experiences will help generate more needed research in this area.

Voluntary Participation
Your participation in this research must be completely voluntary. If you do decide to participate, you may withdraw at any time without any consequences or any explanation. If you do withdraw from the study I will ask if you would like to have the data that you have provided included in the study. Your confidentiality will be ensured by the use of pseudonyms (and identification numbers during the data analysis phase). Should you agree to that, I will obtain your written consent. If you would rather not have your data included, then that data will be not be used and will be destroyed.

On-going Consent
To ensure that you have the opportunity to withdraw at any time, I will obtain ongoing informed consent by reminding you that your participation is completely voluntary. I will also request that you initial this consent form when you come in for your second interview (to review findings from the data analysis process) to indicate that you are still consenting to participate.

Anonymity
Due to the nature of this research, you will be known only to myself, the researcher. Your anonymity will be ensured by assigning you a pseudonym or a code in the data analysis process. Any identifying information will not appear in the transcripts, thesis, and published articles or in any presentations. The signed consent letters will be kept separate from the audio-tapes, transcribed interview notes and any other data analysis information, and only myself, as the researcher, will have access to this information.

Confidentiality
I will maintain your confidentiality throughout this research process with only one limitation. The topic of this research study is related to child abuse and if I become aware of any children who are currently in need of protection or whom I feel are in need of protection, I have a legal obligation to report that information to the Ministry of Children and Families. Should the need arise to make that report, I will protect your identities to the extent that I am able.

Your confidentiality and the confidentiality of the data will be protected by securing the audio-tapes and transcribed data as well as the signed consent forms in a locked filing cabinet in my, the researcher's, home. Also, any data that is stored on my computer will be put in a password protected folder. This data will then be destroyed after 5 years.

Dissemination of Results
It is anticipated that the results of this study will be shared with others in my MA Thesis. This research may also be written up for publication in academic journals or for presentations at scholarly conferences.

Disposal of Data

Data from this study will be disposed of in the following manner:

- All the audio tapes will be erased at the University of Victoria Computer Services (or a similar service).
- All the consent forms, written transcripts, and other notes will be shredded through the University of Victoria's confidential shredding (or a similar service).
- All the computer files will be deleted and any back up disks destroyed, also through the University of Victoria Computer Services (or a similar service).

Contacts

Individuals that may be contacted regarding this study include:

- Marwa Fadol – Researcher 250-516-0502 mfadol@uvic.ca
- Dr. Tim Black – Supervisor 250-721-7820 tblack@uvic.ca

In addition, you may verify the ethical approval of this study, or raise any concerns you might have, by contacting the Associate Vice-President, Research at the University of Victoria (250-472-4545).

Your signature below indicates that you understand the above conditions of participation in this study and that you have had the opportunity to have your questions answered by the researchers.

_____	_____	_____
Name of Participant	*Signature*	*Date*

A copy of this consent will be left with you, and a copy will be taken by the researcher.

Ongoing Consent to Participate

Your signature below indicates that you understand the above conditions of participation in this study and that you have had the opportunity to have your questions answered by the researchers. It also indicates that you are providing your ongoing consent to participate in the second interview to review the interpretations I have made to ensure their accurate reflection of your experience.

_____	_____	_____
Name of Participant	*Signature*	*Date*

A copy of this consent will be left with you, and a copy will be taken by the researcher.

Consent to Use Data in the Case of Withdrawal

I, _____, give consent for Marwa Fadol, the researcher of this study, to use the data I have contributed to this study, even though I am choosing to withdraw from the study.

_____	_____	_____
Name of Participant	*Signature*	*Date*