Research Article

Understanding Sexual Assault Survivors' Perspectives on Archiving Qualitative Data: Implications for Feminist Approaches to Open Science

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Abstract

The open science movement has framed data sharing as necessary and achievable best practices for high-quality science. Feminist psychologists have complicated that narrative by questioning the purpose of data sharing across different paradigms, methodologies, and research populations. In these debates, the academic community has centered the needs and voices of researchers, and participants' perspectives are largely missing from this literature. In this study, we sought to understand how research participants feel about sharing qualitative data on a sensitive subject—sexual victimization. As part of a participatory action research project, we conducted qualitative interviews with sexual assault survivors about their post-assault help-seeking experiences. The federal funding agency that supported this project requires researchers to archive de-identified data in a national data repository (the National Archive of Criminal Justice Data [NACJD]). All participants consented to archiving data, and the vast majority expressed positive views about data sharing because they wanted to help other survivors. Participants emphasized that our participatory action research approach and our stated goal of helping survivors were important considerations in their decisions regarding data sharing. Researchers should obtain informed consent from their participants for data sharing/archiving, and discuss their dissemination plans during the informed consent process.

Keywords
open science, qualitative interviews, data sharing, archiving, sexual assault

The open science movement strives to make research more transparent and accessible, and to that end, academic journals, professional associations, and funding agencies often expect researchers to make their data and study materials (e.g., data collection instruments, analyses) available to other scholars for review and re-analysis (Siegel et al., 2021). In psychology, data sharing has been promoted as an essential strategy for remedying the "replication crisis," which has called into question the robustness and generalizability of psychological research (De Brock & Jeon, 2018). However, some scholars are questioning the widespread need for data sharing because replication is a focal concern for only specific types of inquiry, particularly positivist quantitative research (Feldman & Shaw, 2019; Tsai et al., 2016). Furthermore, as Brabeck (2021) noted, "the quest for 'objective science' has been a patriarchal journey" (p. 462), and such models of science reflect deeply gendered beliefs regarding what constitutes knowledge and rigorous research (Bennett, 2021; Sabik et al., 2021; Siegel et al., 2021). In contrast, other models of inquiry seek to promote liberation

and equity, emphasizing intersubjectivity and the co-creation of knowledge (see Denzin & Lincoln, 2017). Thus, for qualitative, feminist, and/or participatory research, the purpose of data sharing merits closer examination.

Though some qualitative scholars have argued that there are unresolvable epistemological tensions with sharing narrative data (see Tsai et al., 2016 for discussion), others suggest there are paradigm-congruent reasons to make qualitative data available to other researchers (Broom et al., 2009; DuBois et al., 2018; Fischer, 2021; MacLean et al., 2019). Reproducibility is not a focal aim in post-positivist scholarship, but transparency and rigor are core values, and data

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sharing allows others to see how researchers collected, analyzed, and interpreted the data (Rallis, 2015; Tuval-Mashiach, 2017). Moreover, by their nature, qualitative data are quite rich, and it is unlikely that primary researchers will pursue all possible questions that can be answered with a dataset, so "sharing data enables other [secondary] investigators to conduct novel research with the same dataset" (DuBois et al., 2018, p. 384). The time and effort required to collect qualitative data are substantial, and for publicly funded qualitative studies, sharing data is good stewardship and maximizes the return on investment (DuBois et al., 2018; Mauthner & Parry, 2013; Mozersky, Walsh, et al., 2020; Yardley et al., 2014).

In these debates about data sharing, the academic community has centered the needs and voices of researchers. In fact, the primacy of academics' perspectives is so entrenched that empirical research on data sharing tends to study researchers' beliefs, opinions, and preferences on the matter (Harper & Kim, 2018; Houtkoop et al., 2018). It is far less common to study *participants*' needs and concerns about what will become of the information they have provided to researchers. Sharing data poses differential risks for participants based on many factors, including the topic of the research (e.g., sensitive issues), the methodology used (e.g., narrative interviewing), and the potential identifiability of the data (e.g., dyadic events that are more easily re-identifiable to others). These are common features in qualitative, feminist, and/or participatory research (Bennett, 2021), so it is important to understand how research participants feel about data sharing in these contexts.

In this study, we sought to address this gap in the literature by asking participants how they felt about researchers sharing their data with other scientists. As part of a larger participatory action research project, we conducted qualitative interviews with sexual assault survivors about their help-seeking experiences with the medical and criminal legal systems. The federal funding agency that supported this project requires that researchers make their data available to other scholars, which prompted us to talk with our participants about mandated data sharing in qualitative studies on sensitive topics. To set the stage for this study, we begin by defining key terms and different types of data sharing, and then we review prior research that has explored how participants feel about sharing qualitative data.

What Is Data Sharing and How Is It Done?

Some proponents of open science have called for true open access whereby anyone—other researchers, journalists, government officials, and the general public—could obtain research data for review and re-analysis (see Hesse, 2018; Meyer, 2018; Nosek et al., 2015 for reviews). More typically, data sharing refers to making all study materials and raw data available to other researchers. There are many ways this can be done, including direct requests to and from individual

scientists to share their data (Meyer, 2018). Such case-by-case transfers necessitate that scientists know who has what data available, which is not a sustainable, transparent, or inclusive process for sharing data. To address these limitations, the Center for Open Science was founded in 2013 to support public research and collaboration, and one of its signature projects has been the creation of the Open Science Framework (OSF; see Foster & Deardorff, 2017 for a review). OSF is a set of online tools that allow researchers to share their entire workflow (e.g., project idea notes, study design and hypotheses, data collection instruments, raw data, analysis code, and written reports) either in real time as a project unfolds or after a project has been completed. Work in progress can be time-stamped to memorialize iterations and revisions, and each user, project, component, and/or file can be given a uniform resource locator (URL) and digital object identifiers (DOIs) to promote sharing and attribution. Researchers can specify and control different levels of access to their posted materials and data (e.g., full public access, access only to other researchers).

Another common strategy is to share completed projects—all study materials and de-identified data—in academic data archives. For example, the Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research (ICPSR) was established in 1962 and now includes over 750 member institutions and maintains over 80,000 datasets (ICPSR, 2022). For example, ICPSR maintains the National Archive of Criminal Justice Data (NACJD), which preserves crime and justice data from federal agencies, state agencies, and investigator-initiated research projects for secondary analysis. Multiple U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) funding agencies require researchers to archive their data in NACJD as a condition of grant funding. ICPSR provides standardized guidance for how data should be prepared and submitted to promote reuse by secondary researchers. Some archived datasets are fully open for public access, and others require an application, review, and vetting process before data are released (ICPSR, 2022).

Whichever method scholars may use to make their data available to others, open science proponents recommend that researchers obtain informed consent from participants for the release of their data to other parties (Meyer, 2018). In qualitative, feminist, and/or participatory research, the topics of study are often sensitive and the data may be highly identifiable, so informed consent for data sharing is particularly important in such work (Feldman & Shaw, 2019; Tsai et al., 2016).[1] In fact, some scholars have argued that if the original consent process did not explain that data would be shared with others, then researchers must re-contact participants to obtain consent or otherwise forgo releasing the data (Feldman & Shaw, 2019). Reconnecting with participants could be challenging and raise other ethical challenges, so including specific language about data sharing should be standard practice during a study's informed consent procedures (Meyer, 2018). These

recommendations are sensible, but they raise questions about whether, in fact, participants will agree to share data on sensitive topics, and if so, why.

Do Participants Agree to Share Qualitative Data, and If So, Why?

Although data sharing is not yet a widespread practice in qualitative research, in the limited number of studies that have sought informed consent for sharing, most participants have agreed to release their data. For example, in Kuula's (2011) study seeking re-consent to archive previously collected qualitative data, 98% of participants agreed to archive their data in the Finnish Social Science Data Archive. Most agreed because they wanted to contribute to science, as Kuula (2011) noted: "People had participated in the research because they had thought the subjects of the interviews were worth studying. Giving consent to archiving meant continuing to fulfill this wish" (p. 4). Similarly, Mozersky, Parsons, et al. (2020) interviewed participants who had been part of sensitive qualitative research projects, and 93% expressed a willingness to have their data shared with other researchers. Most participants (80%) indicated they were amenable to sharing data because they wanted to maximize what scientists could learn from their data; as one participant in that study said, "leave no stone unturned" (Participant 1, male, white, age 50–59 years, p. 17). VandeVusse et al. (2022) created an opt-in procedure whereby participants could choose whether their qualitative data about obtaining a legal abortion could be shared with other researchers; overall, 92% of participants agreed to have their data shared, and again, a sizable percentage stated that they did so because they wanted to contribute to science.

Taken together, these studies suggest that participants' perspectives about sharing qualitative data may indeed be aligned with researchers who advocate for this practice as a strategy for advancing knowledge. However, some participants may have other motivations. For example, in VandeVusse et al.'s (2022) study on abortion experiences, most participants agreed to share their data because they wanted to help other women and girls. They believed that sharing data with other researchers would ultimately promote awareness about reproductive health care, which would benefit those who might need such healthcare. Similarly, more than half of the participants (57%) in Mozersky, Parsons, et al. (2020) cited a desire to help others and benefit society as a key reason why they were willing to share their data with other researchers. For example, an African American woman who participated in that study was quoted as stating, "I actually want that information to be shared so everybody will know the information and everybody can put their dots together to come up with the solution" (Participant 25, female, African American,

age 40–49 years, p. 16). The desire to help others is a key reason why women agree to participate in research on health and social justice issues in the first place (Baker et al., 2005; Beck, 2005; Campbell & Adams, 2009; Gunn et al., 2021), suggesting that their interests may be action-oriented. Though it is tempting to draw a gendered inference that women may have different reasons for engaging in research and sharing their data, the literature is simply too small for such an analysis.[2] At the very least, it is reasonable to explore why participants might be inclined to share their data in relation to their own lived experiences.

What Are Participants' Concerns About Sharing Qualitative Data?

Though several studies suggest participants are open to having their narrative data shared, they also express concerns about the practice. Qualitative inquiry is a deeply relational method built on developing authentic, trusting relationships with participants, however, brief and situationally specific that relationship may be (Hesse-Biber, 2013; Rubin & Rubin, 2011). The degree of trust participants feel with researchers affects what information they choose to disclose, and they may not want all details shared with others (Broom et al., 2009; Campbell et al., 2019; Feldman & Shaw, 2019). For example, Yardley et al. (2014) conducted focus groups with research participants to discuss their views on sharing qualitative data with other researchers, and the degree of trust and intimacy they felt with researchers was a salient factor. The act of meeting directly with an interviewer and the back-and-forth dialog inherent in narrative methods helped them feel more comfortable disclosing details about their lives, and they expressed hesitancy that others might have access to that information. As a participant in that study noted, "But the thought that the stuff that I have could go off to another team at another time in another place [for] a completely different purpose is something I would want to balk at" (p. 106). Yardley et al. (2014) noted that participants remained open to the practice of sharing narrative data with other researchers, but they wanted to be informed ahead of time so they could decide how much to disclose in their interviews.

Participants have also expressed concerns about how their privacy and confidentiality would be protected if their qualitative narratives were available to other researchers (Mozersky, Parsons, et al., 2020; VandeVusse et al., 2022; Yardley et al., 2014). In studies on sensitive topics (e.g., health, sexuality, victimization), participants were keenly concerned about the risk of re-identification and the consequences that might befall them. In Mozersky, Walsh, et al.'s (2020) study, 67% of participants expressed concerns about the risks of re-identification, including embarrassment, stigma, judgment, discrimination, and the possibility of identity theft. The risk of re-identification is higher with dyadic

data, whereby the events being studied are necessarily known to another person as they are interpersonal interactions (Campbell et al., 2019; Finkel et al., 2015). In qualitative studies of violence and victimization (which are inherently dyadic), re-identification could pose significant safety threats to survivors (Campbell et al., 2019). Finkel et al. (2015) cautioned that some individuals may try to access data and breach confidentiality because they have ill-intent toward study participants. Thus, the risks of sharing qualitative data can be substantial, and there has been minimal research on how participants view these risks when deciding whether to agree to share their data.

Current Study

In this study, we sought to understand how participants felt about sharing qualitative dyadic data on a highly sensitive topic—sexual victimization. This study was part of a larger participatory action research project on the experiences of sexual assault survivors in the "rape kit backlog." A rape kit, also known as a sexual assault kit (SAK), contains biological evidence (e.g., semen, saliva, blood) collected from survivors' bodies by hospital emergency department personnel within the first 24–96 h after an assault (DOJ, 2013). The completed kits are supposed to be submitted by the police to a crime laboratory for forensic DNA analysis (DOJ, 2013), but law enforcement personnel have instead been placing untested kits in storage. Current national estimates indicate there are 300,000–400,000 untested SAKs in U.S. police property facilities (Strom et al., 2021). Given the scope and scale of this problem, multiple DOJ agencies have devoted funds to this issue, and our research team has been working with practitioners in Detroit, Michigan for 10 years as they have been testing their previously unsubmitted SAKs (see Appendix A for our research team's positionality statement vis-à-vis our work in this community). As forensic testing results are finalized, survivors are contacted and asked if they are willing to re-engage with the legal system to re-open their case, a process referred to as SAK "victim notification" (Ahrens et al., 2020; Sulley et al., 2021). Our research team was funded by DOJ's Office on Violence Against Women (OVW) to conduct a qualitative study with sexual assault survivors who were selected for SAK victim notification to understand their decisions regarding re-engagement. DOJ/OVW mandates that researchers archive their data (quantitative and qualitative) in the ICPSR's NACJD.[3] This mandate created an opportunity for a "study within the study" to explore participants' thoughts about mandated data archiving in the context of qualitative research on a sensitive topic.

To that end, we partnered with the sexual assault agency that co-conducted the SAK victim notifications to plan this study. The agency's advocates had worked closely with these survivors throughout the notification and re-engagement process, so they were well-positioned to advise on the development of trauma-informed recruitment, informed consent, and data collection methods. The advocates recommended that we tell potential participants about the archiving mandate during the consent process so they could make an informed decision regarding whether to be interviewed and what information to disclose (see Campbell et al., 2022 for full protocol). At the end of the interview, we reminded survivors about the archiving mandate, re-explained how data would be de-identified prior to archiving, and asked them to discuss their thoughts about data sharing. With this information, we explored three research questions:

1. How many participants completed an interview after being informed about the archiving mandate and how many expressed positive or negative views about data sharing?
2. For those who were agreeable to archiving, what reasons did they state as influential in their decision?
3. For those who had reservations about archiving, what concerns did they express?

Method

Sample

Survivors were eligible to participate in this study if: (1) they were 18 years or older; (2) they had been sexually assaulted in Detroit, Michigan, had a SAK collected and reported to police, but police did not initially submit their kit for DNA testing; (3) their previously unsubmitted SAK was discovered in this city's backlog and was finally submitted for testing, and based on the testing results, they were contacted for SAK victim notification; (4) their case was re-opened and prosecuted; and (5) that case had been adjudicated and was now closed. If the research team had contact with victims during ongoing legal proceedings, it is possible that the interviewers could become a party to the case (i.e., a witness). Although communications with the research team would be protected by a DOJ Privacy Certificate and could not be disclosed, it would create additional complications in already complicated legal cases. Therefore, our IRB and the county prosecutor's office stipulated that we could only interview survivors after their cases were adjudicated.

Over 20 months of recruitment, 112 survivors met the study's eligibility criteria. Survivors' contact information could not be provided to the research team, per the agency's confidentiality policy and the policies of their funders, so the advocates agreed to reach out to survivors to explain the study and request their participation. Advocates noted that it would likely be challenging to reconnect with these survivors, as many had been hard to find during their court cases (e.g., changes in phone numbers and addresses), and some had had negative court experiences and may not want to discuss the matter further. Overall, the

advocates were able to connect with 44 survivors (39% of eligible survivors) and were unable to reach 68 survivors (61% of eligible survivors). The advocates were significantly less likely to be able to reach survivors whose legal cases ended in a trial acquittal/non-guilty verdict ($\chi^2[2, N = 112] = 7.85, p < .05$). Of the 44 survivors who could be reached by the advocate, 32 agreed to schedule an interview (73% of eligible and reachable participants; 29% of all eligible cases); there were no significant differences between those who accepted and declined based on their legal case outcome ($\chi^2[2, N = 44] = 1.86, ns$). All the survivors we interviewed identified as women, and their current ages ranged from 25 years old to 60 years old (median age = 41 years). Most participants identified as African American/Black ($n = 28$; 87.5%), three identified as White (9.14%), and one identified as multiracial (3.1%). At the time these interviews were conducted, the survivors in this study had been sexually assaulted on average 18.5 years ago (range 6 years to 28 years ago).

Procedure

Participant Recruitment. All agency advocates completed our university's online IRB training prior to the development of the recruitment protocol and any outreach contact to survivors. The protocol can be found in Campbell et al. (2022), which outlined how advocates would contact survivors and what they would say when explaining the study and requesting participation (e.g., the purpose of the project, assurances that their decision would not affect services/relationship with the agency, the expected time commitment, the rate of compensation [$50 + transportation costs]). The research team and advocates conducted mock recruitment calls to practice the scripts, with weekly check-in meetings to ensure fidelity to the protocol.

Participant Interviews. The interviews were conducted by advanced Ph.D. students who completed our university's IRB training plus additional training in: (1) community context (e.g., the history of the city's law enforcement agency, the county prosecutor's office, and the county's SAK multidisciplinary task force); (2) cultural awareness (e.g., how race/ethnicity, intersectionality, systemic racism, and community context impact survivors' experiences and access to resources); (3) the neurobiology of trauma and the impact of sexual assault on survivors' health and well-being; (4) qualitative interviewing methods (e.g., establishing rapport with participants, developing active listening skills, identifying impromptu follow-up questions); and (5) trauma-informed research practices (e.g., recognizing and responding to participant distress, altering the pace of the interview for participants' comfort; strategies for empowering participants and reducing power imbalances in researcher-practitioner relationships). During training, the interviewers conducted mock interviews with each other,

the project's principal investigator, and the agency advocates for developmental feedback. The survivor interviews were conducted either in-person at the victim service agency or by phone, based on each participant's preference. During the informed consent process, the interviewers described common provisions (e.g., the right to terminate the interview, the right to decline to answer questions), as well as our funder's mandate that we archive de-identified transcripts so that other researchers would be able to review and study their data. Participants were told that all names, dates, locations, and identifying case details would be removed from the transcripts prior to archiving. The interviewers also explained that all participants would have an opportunity at the end of the interview to remove/withdraw any other content discussed in the interview prior to archiving. Participants were asked if they had any questions about the consent process or archiving requirement, and their concerns were addressed before they provided consent. Per the recommendations of our partner agency, participants received payment prior to the start of the interview to affirm our commitment that they would receive financial compensation for their time and avoid what could feel like a cold, transactional exchange at the end of the interview after so much sensitive information had been discussed. For phone interviews, we explained that money would be sent via Western Union immediately and that the research team would cover the fees associated with that method of payment so that all participants received the same compensation. All participants were offered a copy of our partner agency's community resources brochure. Survivors were asked if they would consent to audio recording, and all agreed. The interviews lasted on average 80 min ($SD = 29$ min), with a range of 36–171 min. The audio files were transcribed verbatim, and each interviewer was responsible for reviewing the transcript for accuracy. Transcripts were reviewed weekly by the research team for interviewing feedback and discussion of patterns we were noticing during the data collection process. All procedures were approved by the IRB of Michigan State University.

Interview Guide

We developed a semi-structured qualitative interview to explore survivors' experiences with victim notification, their decisions to re-engage with the criminal legal system, their experiences with the re-investigation and prosecution process, their feelings about the case outcome, and their interactions with the agency's advocates throughout this process (see Campbell et al., 2022). At the end of the interview, participants were asked: "The requirement that researchers share anonymous transcripts of their interviews is getting more and more common, and we want to make sure that you have a chance to share any feelings you might have about this requirement. What do you think about the requirement that researchers share copies of their

anonymous transcript with their funder and with other researchers?" The interviewers asked tailored follow-up questions to solicit more details about the participants' answers (e.g., if they expressed concerns about how their privacy and confidentiality would be protected, the interviewer would ask them to elaborate or give examples of what was concerning to them and why). The participants' narrative answers to this question and the tailored follow-up questions were the data sources for the analyses reported in this paper.

Analytic Plan

We used Braun and Clarke's (2006, 2021) methods for thematic analysis to identify content themes in the interview excerpts pertaining to data sharing/archiving. Braun and Clarke (2006, 2021) recommend that researchers consider several guiding questions prior to beginning a thematic analysis. First, researchers should stipulate the guiding epistemological framework for the analysis. For our overall project on survivors' re-engagement with the criminal legal system, we were guided by a constructivist epistemological framework, though we note that for this "study within a study" on data archiving, our analysis was more realist in nature (see Creswell, 2010 for extended discussion on the use of multiple frameworks). The questions about data archiving were at the end of a long, emotional interview, so we decided to limit follow-up questions and probes (i.e., enough to clarify answers and seek examples); we did not explore sociocultural factors that may have shaped survivors' beliefs and experiences about science and engagement with researchers (e.g., historical racism in science). Given these decisions and limitations, our data were better suited for a realist approach, with a guiding assumption of "a largely unidirectional relationship between meaning and experience and language" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 85). Second, researchers must specify the level of meaning at which themes will be identified. Consistent with a realist approach, our identified themes were semantic and explicit rather than latent and underlying. Finally, researchers should indicate whether coding will be inductive or based on a specific theory. Given the exploratory nature of this study, we approached the analyses inductively without an a priori theoretical framework.

Consistent with Braun and Clarke's (2006, 2021) recommendations for a codebook thematic analysis, in the first phase of the analysis, two coders reviewed the transcripts and identified sections of text related to data archiving. Then, a subsample of four interview transcripts were reviewed in-depth to identify an initial set of descriptive codes that captured core thematic content in the survivors' responses (i.e., codes, such as "survivor fine with data sharing because she understands the process of research" or "survivor fine with data sharing because other scientists can learn from her experience"). These codes were developed inductively from the data, and coders met regularly to discuss the descriptive codes and their definitions as they coded the remaining interviews, adding new descriptive codes as needed. The same descriptive codes appeared consistently across interviews, indicating good saturation (Guest et al., 2006; Morse, 1995, 2015; Patton, 2015).

In the second phase of the analysis, the coders identified associations and linkages between descriptive codes (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2021). The descriptive codes were grouped into higher-order themes that synthesized the meanings and relationships between descriptive codes. For example, the descriptive codes listed above—understanding the process of research and sharing so other scientists can learn—were grouped with other similar descriptive codes into the content theme "advancing scientific knowledge." The coders developed these higher-order themes independently and then met to reach a consensus on a set of themes. In their review and discussions, the coders evaluated the amount of evidence for each theme (i.e., whether there was sufficient evidence to assert the presence of a theme), and the conceptual coherence of the theme (i.e., whether the meaning of the theme was clear and consistent across cases). There was again strong evidence of saturation, as evidenced by conceptual coherence *within* each theme and distinctiveness *between* themes (Saunders et al., 2018). The coders also examined the extent to which the themes co-occurred within the participants' narratives. Some participants provided a single focal answer (i.e., a single theme), but some participants mentioned multiple themes; in those cases, the coders considered whether co-occurring themes were best characterized as two distinct ideas or whether there was a newly emerging theme that bridged and connected multiple ideas into a theme of its own.

In the third phase of the analyses, the coders developed data visualizations (see Figure 1) and identified exemplar data passages/quotes to illustrate each theme, tracking their selection to ensure that they did not over-represent particular participants. Throughout the analysis process, we used multiple strategies to ensure quality practice and to establish the trustworthiness and credibility of the findings (Creswell & Clark, 2017; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The coders conducted weekly peer debriefing to assess consistency in coding procedures and evaluate saturation. Each coder independently grouped the descriptive codes into themes and carefully considered discrepant evidence (i.e., negative case analysis) when developing the higher-order themes. The research team maintained an audit trail throughout the project, tracking all data collection methods, coding processes, coding decisions, and analysis drafts.

Results

How Did Survivors React to the Data Archiving Mandate?

In the informed consent process, we told potential participants that we were required by our funder to archive

Figure 1. Sexual Assault Survivors' Views on Archiving Qualitative Data.
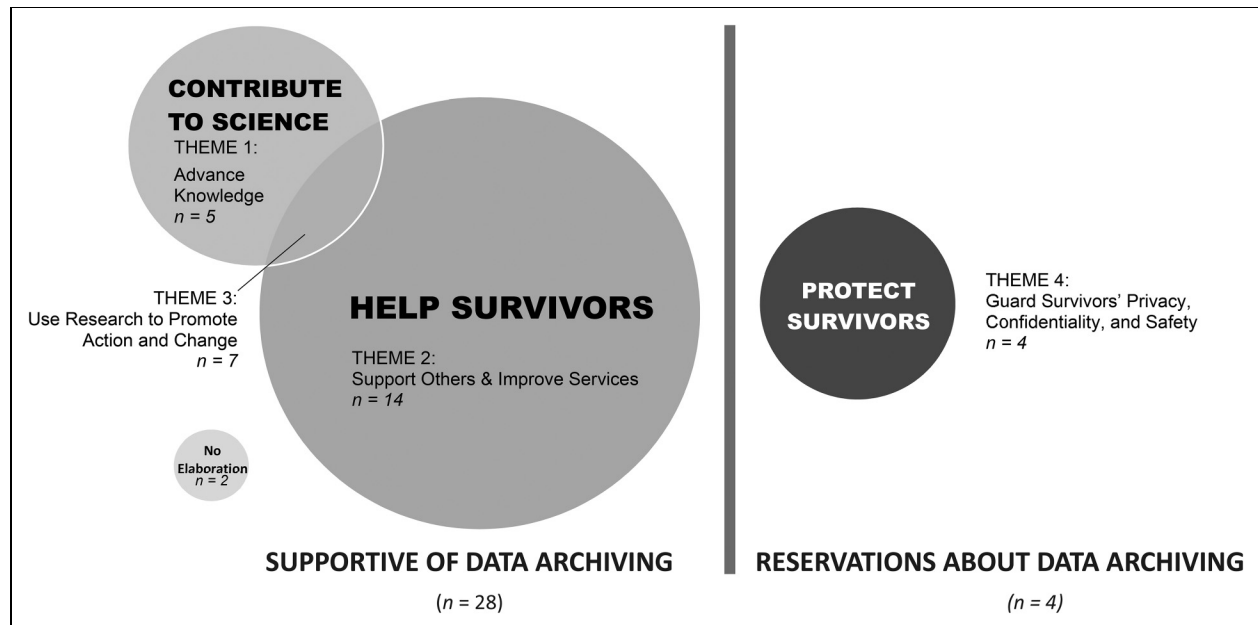
de-identified transcripts and that other researchers would then have access to those data for further study. None of the recruited participants declined participation, so the final sample size remained ($N = 32$). Given that survivors were informed about this requirement and agreed to participate in the study, it is not surprising that most ($n = 28$, 87.5%) had positive opinions about the practice of data sharing. Overall, 12.5% ($n = 4$) expressed concerns about data sharing, though all agreed to participate in the study and to have their data archived, and no participants removed substantive data from their transcripts prior to archiving.

Why Were Survivors Amenable to Archiving Their Data?

Nearly all of the survivors who had positive opinions regarding data archiving provided at least one reason why they supported this practice ($n = 2$ affirmed support but did not elaborate why; see Figure 1). Overall, 12 participants discussed the value of research and contributing to science, five of whom highlighted this as their sole reason for supporting archiving (the other seven discussed research in combination with other reasons, which will be discussed below). These five participants stated that they supported data archiving because they wanted to advance scientific knowledge (Theme 1). They expected their data would be—and should be—shared with other scientists, as one participant succinctly summarized, "I mean, isn't that the whole point of the interview?" (Participant 32). Similarly, another survivor emphasized how sharing data gives other researchers a chance to learn from the data: "It's a research study ... everybody

can study it.... I don't see nothing wrong with it" (Participant 8). Relatedly, another survivor noted that it is reasonable to expect that funders would want to review the data they sponsored and ensure that other researchers would have access too:

> I think it's understandable because if I'm funding or investing in something, then I would like to see the results or the research ... they're providing funds [for] this, they definitely have a right to see what's going on. (Participant 28)

These survivors affirmed that sharing data with other scientists is a critical part of knowledge generation and that archiving data is a reasonable means to that end.

As shown in Figure 1, most survivors ($n = 21$) agreed to share their data because they believed doing so would help other survivors; one participant captured the sentiment of many when she answered, "Anything to help someone else" (Participant 12). Fourteen participants highlighted this as their sole reason for supporting data archiving, and the other seven discussed helping survivors in relation to other reasons (discussed below). These 14 survivors wanted to share their stories to support other survivors and to improve services for victims (Theme 2). For example, survivors wanted to break the silence surrounding sexual victimization, and help others know they are not alone, as this participant described:

> I don't care [if you share the transcript] as long as it's to help a person. I want to help a person like I've been helped. I want to let

that person know it's not your fault. It's going to be okay. The sun will shine brighter. It will. (Participant 27)

Survivors discussed how they hoped sharing their stories would help other victims—as well as service providers—learn from what they went through, as these two quotes illustrate: "If you don't share it [the data/the transcript] amongst other people nobody will learn from those experiences. That's how I look at that" (Participant 22) and "[You] can share mine [the transcript] … what you are doing for me, if that could help somebody else, I'll have no problem with that … if it can help somebody make a better decision, go ahead with it. Use all information" (Participant 30). Building on this idea, some participants discussed how sharing their stories could improve services for survivors and make their help-seeking experiences more supportive. For example, Participant 26 shared, "It's important because you never know your story might touch somebody. They want to give more input to really make the services and things more supportive for survivors." Survivors talked at length about how poorly they were treated by the criminal legal system, and by sharing those experiences and archiving those narratives, they wanted to reveal those commonalities and help build better programs for victims, as these two quotes illustrate:

> I think it's needed [data sharing/archiving] to get to the end result. I don't have a problem with it [data sharing]. You guys say you're taking this information to try to help other victims…. I feel like it'd be a number of people that need to hear it and understand what happened in order to build … a better program. (Participant 19)

> I really hope that there's some program that is started from this, when they train police officers on how to deal with rape victims and rape kits. This should be, this is a bad lesson for everybody. I hope they should. (Participant 18)

Taken together, the narratives in this theme conveyed a clear desire to help survivors and prevent others from experiencing what they had endured when they reported their assaults to the police.

Figure 1 depicts how seven survivors drew a direct connection between their wish to contribute to science and their desire to help others by describing how research should promote action and change (Theme 3). Theme 3 was distinctive from Theme 1 (advancing knowledge) in that the latter theme emphasized knowledge for knowledge's sake, and the former focused on how research can help survivors. In Theme 3, survivors discussed how they wanted to contribute to science when the end goal of that research was helping others. Participant 7 shared, "I really don't have an issue with it [sharing/archiving data] because it's for research. I'm a scientific person, so I understand what research is. If it's to better a cause or a situation, I'm all

for it." Survivors described how sharing their stories with our research team was a way they could help others because we had a common goal of supporting survivors. These participants recognized that our action research project was "different" than other types of research, and they trusted that we would use their data in service of survivors. For example, Participant 10 shared, "[You're] trying to help [so] it's a totally different kind of research, so I think it's fine [sharing/archiving data]." Relatedly, Participant 33 stated,

> I'm all for research and to make things better. I believe … you guys, what your mission is to get a better understanding of where we're coming from and the processes that it took to get from point A to point B and to where we are today.

Theme 3 was distinctive from Theme 2 (sharing stories to support survivors and improve services) in that the former articulated a role for researchers as advocates for system change. In Theme 3, participants called upon our research team (specifically) and the research community (generally) to leverage our knowledge to change how the criminal legal system treats survivors:

> I think it's okay [data sharing/archiving] people need to know what's going on. To get something done, to try to get something done…. That's the only way to get it out there, is to talk about it otherwise they won't know what they can do or try to do to keep these butt heads [the police] from doing what they do. (Participant 4)

Further illustrating this theme, one survivor explained how sharing data can facilitate action because researchers will not need to conduct the same studies over and over again, and instead they can apply these findings to create solutions:

> I feel that it's a good thing on multiple levels because if all the researchers share, then there is no reason to duplicate anyone's projects, or any of those things. And you can just expound on it, or find another avenue to research if that makes sense … because what you're doing right now and once it's shared, and the findings and everything is shared, there should really not be a need to redo this. They could just take those findings and say, "Okay now we need to apply these findings to how we fix this overall problem." (Participant 1)

These survivors wanted to contribute to science as a means of helping survivors and challenged researchers to be part of that mission too by bridging science and action.

What Concerns Did Survivors Express About Data Archiving?

Though most participants had positive views on data sharing, some survivors (*n* = 4) expressed concerns about the practice (see Figure 1). These survivors questioned whether data sharing would lead to enough benefits to balance the risks and felt that survivors' privacy, confidentiality, and safety must be guarded (Theme 4). For example, two survivors emphasized the intimacy and privacy of their discussions with their interviewers, and questioned whether sharing beyond our research team was necessary and what other scientists—who were not present for these conversations—would gain from just the transcripts:

> I honestly don't really understand why the funders need it to pass it on to somebody else. To my understanding, this is something I tell to you [the researcher], you and your teacher … why are you passing that along everywhere? (Participant 23)

> I don't really think that's good…. It should probably be more private. Like who's going to read it and it's, well yeah, I guess it's case studies, but I just wonder how it would be set up…. Them not being present, I don't know what they're going to get out of a transcript. (Participant 25)

Picking up on this question of who would have access to the data and who might be reading these transcripts, one survivor spoke at length about the potential risks archiving poses to survivors:

Participant 3: Well, depends on who the funder is. I feel like if the funder is someone who is trying to support women's rights and protect women that's one thing, but if it's just another way to hurt women, I don't think they should have anything. I mean, not women, but victims period, but in a lot of cases there's a lot of stuff going on with the world and a lot of victims are being put in situations where they shouldn't be put in. I just think that that needs to be addressed. If someone is just using it to be able to push forth an argument on some other type of crap, definitely I think the funders should be, what's the word, vetted, before being able to get the information.

Interviewer: Okay, got it. Just so that you're aware, our funder is the Office For Violence Against Women.

Participant 3: Oh, okay. Well, never mind.

Interviewer: Which is at the federal level. I do believe they actually have a vetting process for people who can access the transcripts.

Participant 3: Yeah, that's the only thing I want. I would hate for some sadist to be able to access transcripts of these women.

This survivor voiced a concern that many others touched on throughout their interviews, namely that telling their stories is inherently risky, so sharing their stories with researchers requires tremendous trust that we will indeed protect their identities and that we will do our best to use their data to promote change.

Discussion

The open science movement reflects an on-going discussion within and among multidisciplinary research communities about how to make science more transparent and accessible. To date, the voices and perspectives of research participants have been largely missing from this dialog. Understanding participants' views on data sharing is important in all types of research, but because sharing qualitative data poses unique challenges, we need to examine the benefits and risks specific to this type of inquiry as the demands for open science practices gain traction (Siegel et al., 2021). In other words, we need to "walk the walk" and embody the principles of open science by being transparent about our intentions and by engaging participants in the data sharing process. In this project, we were required by our study's funder to archive de-identified data in NACJD, so we disclosed that information to participants in the consent procedures, explained how we planned to de-identify data prior to archiving, empowered participants to make their own decisions about what information would be shared, and invited them to discuss their views about the risks and benefits of data sharing.

All participants agreed to have their data archived, and the vast majority expressed positive views about data sharing. Their primary reason? They wanted to help other sexual assault survivors, and they believed that making their data available to other researchers would help achieve that end goal. Participants described how they wanted to break the silence surrounding sexual assault, help other survivors know they are not alone, raise awareness about the pervasiveness of this problem, highlight the injustices survivors experience, and advocate for reforms in the criminal legal system. Survivors wanted their data used to help change policies regarding untested SAKs, train the police in trauma-informed investigation techniques, and build more supportive programs for survivors. This vision is consistent with the notion of "giving psychology away" for the public good, which has been a key theme among feminist proponents of open science practices (Gervais et al., 2021; Matsick et al., 2021). Some survivors specifically called on the research community to be more engaged in translating their findings

into action (Theme 3). In fact, one survivor pointedly noted that data sharing might stop researchers from doing the same studies over and over again, so we could instead shift our focus to generating empirically based solutions to social problems.

It is perhaps not surprising that the survivors in this study focused on these themes. This was a study about sexual victimization and the oppressive harms of the criminal legal system. Furthermore, we conducted this study in a predominately African American city with a long history of social justice unrest and community activism, often led by Black women (Campbell et al., 2022). Most of our participants were African American women, and their lived experiences of intersectional oppressions based on gender and race—and for many in this study, social class as well—have placed them at disproportionate risk for violence and harm. Buchanan and Wiklund (2020) emphasized that intersectionality is a theory of social justice action, and researchers must work with communities not only for critical analysis but also for critical application of that knowledge. The survivors we interviewed were motivated to see change in their community, and they agreed to share their data with other researchers in hope that their experiences would be heard and understood by more people—and in turn, acted upon to create social change.

To that end, we have been engaged with this community for over 10 years as they have been seeking justice and closure for survivors of the rape kit backlog. The victim advocates who recruited survivors to participate in this study vouched for us based on the trust we have built over years of collaboration—and social action. We have worked with this agency for years to develop and co-conduct training for local and state practitioners, develop model sexual assault investigation policies, and advocate (successfully) for new SAK testing legislation in our state (see Campbell et al., 2021 for a discussion of our social action work stemming from this participatory action research project). The advocates were well aware of our commitment to social action and to using our findings to help this community because we have been doing so for years. Given this history, they could truthfully say to potential research participants that our goal was to help survivors and that we have made good on that promise. Participants valued these shared goals, agreed to participate in the study, and trusted us to archive their data safely because of this connection. In this study, *under these highly specific and contextualized conditions*, participants were agreeable to archiving qualitative dyadic data on a sensitive issue, but these findings are by no means a universal endorsement of open science data sharing. Years of relationship building in this community and with our partner agency undoubtedly affected participants' views of our research team and our trustworthiness.

In addition to this critical contextual caveat, we note the following methodological limitations of this study that temper the strength of the conclusions that can be drawn

from this work. First, we acknowledge this is a one-group case study design, with no comparison group(s) that received different information or options regarding data archiving. We were required by our funder to archive our data, which we explained to participants before they consented, essentially making data archiving a "term and condition" of participation. One could argue that our data reflect how participants justify compliance with a mandate rather than a true open-ended exploration of their views regarding data sharing. We could not provide participants with an "opt out" option, other than declining to be interviewed, so we encourage future research to explore whether participants' views of data sharing differ when that option is truly volitional. Results of such research could offer valuable insights to funders regarding the ethical and methodological impact of requiring data sharing. In addition, the results of such work could inform researchers' decisions on whether to seek funding from agencies that require data sharing.

Second, our study sample is highly atypical vis-à-vis sexual assault survivors. All participants in this study had disclosed their assaults, reported to the police, had a SAK collected, re-engaged with police and prosecutors after the kit was finally tested, and all of these cases were prosecuted by the criminal legal system. Most survivors do *not* seek formal help, and those who do are more likely to have been assaulted by a stranger, to have been injured, and/or to have a weapon used against them in the attack (Campbell, 2008; Spohn, 2020). In other words, help-seeking is directly related to whether a survivor's experience fits common stereotypes of a "real rape" (Spohn, 2020). Many of the survivors in this study were assaulted by strangers and experienced physical injuries, and they needed medical help after the assault. They reported to the police to keep others safe, and they decided to re-engage years later because they still wanted to keep others safe (Campbell et al., 2022). It stands to reason that survivors who have had to tell their stories in court proceedings may have different views about sharing data. They have already "gone public" and have withstood grueling cross-examinations—as one survivor noted, having their de-identified data shared with other researchers is, by comparison, far less invasive. Whether survivors who have not disclosed or engaged with formal community systems would feel as positively about sharing their data with other researchers remains unknown. Our results do not suggest that sexual assault survivors are agreeable to data sharing; our results indicate that a very specific subpopulation of survivors who worked with a participatory action research team were amendable to archiving as one of many strategies that may help survivors in the long run. We also acknowledge that our study's sample overrepresents sexual assault survivors whose cases were settled by guilty pleas or trial convictions, as the advocates were unable to reach many of the survivors whose cases ended in non-guilty verdicts. We do not know whether those survivors would have made different decisions about archiving

their data and what specific concerns they may have had about re-identification.

Third, for those who did participate in the interview, our questions about data archiving came at the end of what were long, emotionally charged interviews, so the quality of the data regarding these topics was certainly affected by participant and interviewer fatigue. For example, in our data analysis phase, we noticed that some participants' answers about data archiving also mentioned their reasons for participating in this study in the first place. We did not adequately probe to understand the degree to which participants' feelings about archiving were interconnected with those earlier decisions. Likewise, we did not explore how sociocultural and historical factors shaped participants' beliefs about data sharing. Given that most of our participants were African American women, we lost a meaningful opportunity to understand how they considered the long history of racism in science and the scientific exploitation of African Americans in their decisions to make their data available for further study. The open science movement has largely not examined these sociocultural factors, and future research is needed on how marginalized and minoritized populations feel about data sharing.

Practice Implications

Many survivors were strongly invested in their interviews being used to help other sexual assault victims, whether through a general desire to support survivors and improve services or a specific expectation that the research they participate in be used to facilitate change. Researchers should give careful thought to how they can use survivors' data toward these ends and communicate likely outcomes and commitments to participants. Relatedly, researchers could consider asking participants about their hopes for their data and work to incorporate those goals into their dissemination plans. Practitioners may also want to interview potential research collaborators about their plans for utilizing their data and request sample dissemination products from prior projects before deciding whether to collaborate. Finally, some survivors raised concerns about how their privacy would be protected if their data were shared. Although these concerns did not stop any survivors from participating in the interview, they reinforce the importance of researchers developing a rigorous de-identification plan and being prepared to communicate that plan to participants at the time of the interview.

The open science movement has framed data sharing as a necessary and fully achievable best practice for high-quality science. Feminist psychologists have complicated that narrative by raising challenging questions about the meaning and purpose of this practice across different paradigms, methodologies, and research populations (Bennett, 2021; Brabeck, 2021; Siegel et al., 2021). As Brabeck (2021) argued, "open science is both a feminist and an ethical issue because the production, dissemination, and control of access to information and knowledge dissemination are all issues of power" (p. 457). Researchers have an ethical responsibility to protect the confidentiality of their data, and thus we also bear responsibility for ethical data sharing. We must ask hard questions—of our funders, of data archivists, and each other—to understand how data will be shared and to make every effort to protect the identity and safety of our research participants. We should not uncritically accept mandates and pressures to share data without fully exploring both the positive and negative potential consequences of such actions. Research participants should have power and control in decisions about how their data will be used, and this is particularly vital for vulnerable and traumatized populations who have had their control, agency, and dignity taken from them. In the end, research participants may consent to archive their data and support data sharing, but the reasons for that decision are important to understand so that we may help fulfill what they hope will come from sharing their stories.

Appendix A: Research Team's Positionality Statement

This study was part of a long-term community-based participatory action research project that began in 2009 between the principal investigator (Rebecca Campbell) and multidisciplinary practitioners in (Detroit, Michigan) who serve and support sexual assault survivors (see Campbell et al., 2021 for history). The composition of the project team has changed over the years, and for this current study, all members/paper authors are university-affiliated researchers (three faculty members and two advanced Ph.D. students). Our team includes cisgender and genderqueer women; three are White, one is African American, and one is biracial. Some members of our team identify as LGBTQIA+ and some have disabilities. All authors are trained in participatory action research and work from the assumption that researchers can partner with community members to co-create knowledge to address locally situated social problems. Our work is informed by Black feminist theory, particularly the work of Professor Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw's (1991) theory of intersectionality, which articulates how systems of oppression built on gender, race, disability status, sexuality, and other factors shape a person's unique experiences of oppression. We engage in critical conversations about our identities and how they shape the ways in which we conduct research and interpret our findings. All members of our research team are trained in qualitative research methods, feminist research methods, and trauma-informed research methods. We approach interviewing as the co-creation of knowledge with participants, so to address the inherent power dynamics between interviewers and interviewees, we emphasize that survivors are the experts of their own lives, and they are

welcome to share with us as much or as little as they choose. We debrief with our participants at the end of each interview and solicit critical feedback on the content and administration of the interview. We identify as scholar-activists and all members of our research team have been or are currently staff/volunteers in community-based rape crisis service programs and/or intimate partner violence programs.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The authors declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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Notes

1. See O'Callaghan and Douglas (2021) for an extended discussion of additional ethical considerations when analyzing sensitive public disclosures made in social media posts that individuals knowingly made public but did not knowingly share as research data.
2. Likewise, there is a need for research on how transgender and gender diverse individuals feel about data sharing and the extent to which their motivations for participating in research are influenced by a desire to promote social action and justice.
3. For qualitative research and evaluation projects, de-identified interview transcripts must be archived, but voice recordings are exempt, as such records could identify participants.

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