Project Demonstrating Excellence

Meaning in Context: The Role of Context and Language in Narratives of Disclosure of Sibling Sexual Assault

by

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Abstract

This qualitative sociolinguistic study explored how female survivors of brother-sister incest talked about disclosing that abuse to family members. It examined how contextual factors influenced discourse usage and narrative structure in American Sign Language (ASL) and American English across two contexts – a conversation between two survivors, and an interview between a survivor and a person with no history of sexual abuse – allowing comparison across languages and across contexts.

The primary differences between the contexts studied were the sociolinguistic setting of the interactions (conversation vs. interviews) and whether the interlocutors shared the experience of sexual abuse. The data set included a first-time-told and first-time-retold narrative; no prior analysis of such texts has been found in the literature. The first-time-telling lacked cohesion and clarity, which increased significantly on retelling. The data showed the vocabulary choices the participants used to index the perpetrators, themselves, and the abuse were highly context dependent. The data also uncovered backchanneling that functioned to display shared identity. This study suggests that non-verbal information captured through video-taping is as essential to understanding spoken language interactions as for signed language interactions.

The ASL disclosure narratives revealed the ways in which audism and linguicism exacerbated the traumatic experiences of the Deaf participants. All participants displayed a pattern from agentive action with first disclosure, toward reduced sense of agency through dealing with family responses to disclosure, and back toward more agency with later reflection on and integration of their understanding of the abuse and its aftermath. The participants assert that disclosure is transformative.
Both the sociolinguistic and trauma findings suggest implications for the field of interpreting. In particular, the more extended background information that appears in ASL narratives as compared to English narratives provides important discourse analysis information for interpreters. That meaning is co-created and can be understood only in context has important implications for how the task of interpreting is conceptualized, and consequently for both the practice and teaching of interpreting. The centrality of context has not been fully integrated into interpretation studies; suggestions for how to begin this integration are made.

Keywords: Incest, sibling sexual abuse, disclosure narratives, trauma, ASL (American Sign Language), interpreting, discourse analysis, retellings, narrative analysis, sociolinguistics
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Dedicated to

Pearl, Fran, Bettie, and Grace

and

All the children, may you have every opportunity and all encouragement
to be zestful, peaceful beings
Table of Contents

Chapter I – Introduction
A. Preliminary Considerations 1
B. Overview 2
C. Research Questions 5
D. Theoretical Framework 6
E. Scholarly and Social Significance 10
F. Researcher Position 12
G. Organizational Overview 15

Chapter II – Review of the Literature
A. Introduction 16
B. Why People Tell Their Stories 16
C. Co-Construction of Meaning: Context and Interaction 17
D. Narratives 19
  1. Why Study Stories 19
  2. Narrative and Re-Tellings 21
  3. ASL Narratives 23
E. Backchanneling: An Interactive Device 25
F. Interpreting 28
G. Trauma 31
H. Sibling Sexual Abuse 34
I. Summary 37

Chapter III —Research Methodology
A. Introduction 38
B. Participants 38
  1. Solicitation and Selection of Participants 38
  2. Description of Participants 43
  3. Relationship to the Researcher 45
C. Procedures for Data Collection 46
  1. Recording Methods and Considerations 48
  2. The Conversations – Data Set I 50
  3. The Interviews – Data Set II 53
  4. Follow-up Conversations – Data Set III 56
D. Transcription and Translation Decisions 57
  1. Transcription Conventions 59
E. Data Analysis 60
F. Trustworthiness, Rigor, and Credibility 64
  1. Rigor 65
  2. Credibility 66
G. Ethical Considerations 67
  1. Confidentiality 67
  2. Risks and Benefits to Participants 68
H. Limitations of the Study 69
I. Summary 72
Chapter IV – Analysis: Speaking Out As Transformation Action
A. Introduction 73
B. Themes 76
  1. Disclosure: Secret No Longer 77
  2. Family Response 84
     a. Linguicism: Access to Communication Cut Off 84
     b. Retraumatizing Acts by Family Members:
        Compounding the Injuries 88
  3. Survivor Response and Reflection 96
     a. Understanding of the Impact of Abuse: Consequences and Truths 96
     b. Integration of Wounding and Gifts:
        For Ourselves and the Larger Community 105
C. Summary 109

Chapter V – Analysis: Talking About Disclosing
A. Introduction 110
B. Language and Interactional Features in Stories of Disclosure in Interaction 110
  1. Referencing and Indexing: The Perpetrators, Survivors, Experience 112
     a. Vocabulary: The Perpetrator 114
        i. English 114
        ii. ASL 116
     b. Vocabulary: Themselves/The Survivors 118
        i. ASL 118
        ii. English 119
     c. Vocabulary: The Experience 121
        i. ASL 122
        ii. English 124
  2. Backchanneling & Shared Experience:
     “I know your pain; I’m in your shoes” 127
     a. Shared Experience: Incest Survivor 128
        i. Fran and Grace Conversation – English 128
        ii. Bettie and Pearl Conversation – ASL 131
     b. Shared Experience: Deaf Person 136
        i. Bettie and Pearl Conversation – ASL 137
        ii. Pearl’s Interview – ASL 139
        iii. Bettie’s Interview – ASL 139
  3. Before the Stories: Background 141
  4. Smoothness in Background: First Time Told—First Time Retold 149
     a. Framing: When and Why 150
     b. Why No Prior Disclosure 151
     c. Factors Leading Up To Disclosure 152
     d. “That Night” 152
     e. Arguments with Her Brother 153
C. Summary 155
Chapter VI – Discussion and Conclusion

A. Introduction 157

B. Implications for Methodology: Research Design 158
   1. Focus: What and Who Gets Studied 158
   2. Techniques of Data Collection: Usefulness of Video Recording 159
   3. Participants: Who Volunteers and Why 160
   4. Theoretical Lens 161
   5. Complexity 162
   6. First-Time-Tellings: How to Elicit 162

C. Implications for Theory 163
   1. Sociolinguistic Theory 163
      a. Linguicism and Audism 164
      b. Vocabulary to Index: The Perpetrator, Oneself, The Experience 166
      c. Backchanneling – Display of Shared Identity 169
      d. Background Leading up to Narratives 172
      e. Smoothness – First-Time-Told and First-Time-Retold 174
   2. Trauma Theory 175
      a. Accountability 175
      b. Naming 179
      c. Power of Speaking Out – Transforming Silence 180

D. Implications for Application 183
   1. Implications for Theory and Application to Interpreting and Teaching Interpretation 183
      a. Conceptualization of Interpreting: Context and Co-Construction of Meaning 184
      b. Understanding and Shared Experience 186
      c. Preparation by Interpreters 188
      d. Understanding Language Differences 190
         i. Structural Differences 190
         ii. Cohesiveness in a Second Language 191
         iii. Linguicism and Audism 192
      e. Teaching Interpretation 193
   2. Application for Trauma and Incest 196
      a. Linguicism and Audism 196
      b. Role of Shame and Secrets 197
      c. Importance of Disclosure in Thriving After Trauma 200
      d. Ubiquity of Resistance 203

E. Recommendations for Future Research 204

F. Concluding Thoughts 207

References 210

Appendix A  Background Information Leading up to the First Narrative: Each Participant 224
Appendix B  Letter of Introduction 235
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Appendix</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Appendix C</td>
<td>Informed Consent Form, Videotape Release Form, Confidentiality Form</td>
<td>238</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix D</td>
<td>Confidentiality Agreement (Linguistic Assistant)</td>
<td>247</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix E</td>
<td>Preliminary Interview Questions</td>
<td>248</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix F</td>
<td>Union Institute &amp; University Institutional Review Board Approval</td>
<td>250</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix G</td>
<td>Gallaudet University Institutional Review Board Approval</td>
<td>251</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chapter I

Introduction

By context, I mean the setting – physical, geographical, temporal, historical, cultural, aesthetic – within which action takes place. Context becomes the framework, the reference point, the map, the ecological sphere; it is used to place people and action in time and space and as a resource for understanding what they say and do. The context is rich in clues for interpreting the experience of the actors in the setting. We have no idea how to decipher or decode an action, a gesture, a conversation, or an exclamation unless we see it embedded in context.

Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot (1997:41)

A. Preliminary Considerations

This is a study that examines discourse and interaction in which the participants tell their stories of revealing childhood sexual assault by siblings to their family. In order to discuss the study, I must first discuss the choices I have made about the ways in which I will discuss sibling sexual abuse.

In order to write this study, I have had to make certain choices about the words I use to discuss the topic of sibling sexual abuse. I use this term, sibling sexual abuse, to mean the experience of a brother perpetrating sexualized violence on his sister when they were children (under the legal age of 18). Although sibling can mean brother or sister, I use the term in this document to mean the brother as the perpetrator. And though sexual abuse is sometimes understood to refer to sexual acts accompanied by force, I use this term to mean the traumatic experience of violence (power), beginning from when the brother first began taking coercive actions, whether verbal and playful or physical and forceful, with the intention of manipulating his sister into doing something that at some later time would involve sexual acts. This conduct by the brother can include a wide

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1 Sexualized violence is a term Coates and Wade (2004) used instead of the legal term sexual abuse because sexual abuse connotes a sexual act, and the assault discussed here incorporates much more.
variety of controlling behaviors through visual glances, body language, making promises, threats, demands, “agreements,” and/or enticements, of the sister. Incorporated in the term *sexual abuse* is the notion of after-effects and the aftermath of non-sexual coercive acts. I use the following terms interchangeably in this document: *sibling sexual abuse, sexual abuse, sexual assault,* and *incest.* All of these terms are intended to include the explanation given above. I also use the term *brother-sister incest,* which I am aware can appear to mutualize responsibility for the incest; such mutualization is by no means my intention. I use this term to mean the same thing as the previously described terms and to convey the explanation given above. I use the term *survivor* to indicate the sister who was victimized by her brother by the type of trauma and violence explicated above. I do not intend *survivor* to connote the idea of “I survived that and now it is over.” Though none of these options feel completely satisfactory to me, I must select some terms to use. I am aware that in doing so I privilege these words and perhaps convey unintended meanings. I encourage the reader to bear these definitions and considerations in mind.

B. Overview

This study examines how discourse and narratives change or remain the same with a change in context. It explores how people talk about revealing the fact of childhood sibling sexual assault to their family members, and illuminates themes that

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2 As a *survivor,* and having spoken with dozens of other *survivors* about what to call ourselves and how we prefer to have others refer to us, it is clear that there is no agreed upon or acceptable term or set of terms. This is in line with the research on identity that argues that we have multiple identities that we “use” depending on the situation and context (de Fina, 2006; Schiffrin et al., 2001).

3 Traditionally narrative has been understood to mean a personal story recounting events that follows a relatively stable structure (Labov, 1972, 2001). Other researchers have taken a more expansive view of the boundaries and content of narrative, and view narrative as understood in the context of interaction (Mishler, 1986, 2004; Reissman, 1993; Schiffrin, 1996). This is the view to which I subscribe.

4 The notion of context includes the purpose and the setting of the interaction as well as the interlocutors’ relationships, goals, shared knowledge, background knowledge, and personal experience.
appeared in the narratives and interactions discussing disclosure\textsuperscript{5} of sibling sexual assault. These phenomena are considered in American Sign Language (ASL) and in American English interactions. The contexts that are investigated are conversations and interviews. The design of the study was also motivated by my interest in investigating discourse and interaction as applicable to the practice and field of interpreting and translating. This study does not examine interpreting or interpreted interactions directly; to do so would have required a different study design and set of research questions. Nonetheless, the findings of the study have implications for the practice and field of interpreting, and specifically ASL/English interpreted situations.\textsuperscript{6} Therefore, the reader will find a focus on interpreting in the review of the literature and the implications from the study.

For this study, I arranged conversations between two pairs of participants who had previously disclosed to one or more of their family members. One pair included Deaf\textsuperscript{7} participants, conversing in ASL; one pair included non-deaf\textsuperscript{8} participants, conversing in English. Later, each participant was interviewed in her respective language by an interviewer who had not experienced sexual abuse of any kind. The focus in both the conversations and the interviews was previous disclosure of the sibling incest to one or

\textsuperscript{5} Disclosures in this study constitute revealing the fact of sibling sexual abuse. Regardless of the form these disclosures take, they each include passing on information about the sibling sexual abuse.

\textsuperscript{6} I was most interested in examining whether and how context impacts meaning in an unmediated conversation. The mere presence of an interpreter and the act of interpreting changes, to a greater or lesser degree, how people communicate and interact. Looking directly at interpreted interactions would not have yielded the type of information I was most interested in. So, paradoxically, had I looked at interactions being interpreted, I would have been less likely to gather data on what is happening in the interaction between the two interlocutors. If the study had focused on interpreted situations, the investigation would be wholly different, investigating the effect of interpretation on the interaction as opposed to investigating interaction in each language. An understanding of the phenomena and particularities of ASL and English as used by interlocutors is clearly relevant and applicable to the teaching and practice of interpretation.

\textsuperscript{7} I use the term Deaf to refer to those people who are members of a linguistic and cultural minority. I use deaf to refer to the audiological condition of hearing.

\textsuperscript{8} I use the term non-deaf to refer to the participants who are not Deaf. I do not wish to focus on the concept of hearing or not hearing nor do I wish to privilege those who hear or the status of hearing.
more family members. Subsequent to the conversations and interviews, I conducted follow-up conversations\(^9\) with each of the four participants and the two interviewers.

My primary goals in designing this study were to explore how sibling incest survivors language their experiences of abuse and of disclosing that abuse to their families and whether contextual factors emerged as salient features/determinants in the participants’ discourse and interaction. The data I gathered is extraordinarily rich, and I found my attention drawn to the following: themes that emerged in the interactions; the amount and type of background that led up to the beginning of the first narratives; a first time told and first time retold narrative of disclosure; backchanneling, an interactive feature, as it related to the contextual factor of shared experience; and the vocabulary choices to index the perpetrator, oneself, and the experience of abuse. Each of these varied in relation to the context in which they occurred.

Researchers in numerous fields examine narratives, for a variety of reasons (Elliot Mishler, 1986, 2004; Catherine Reissman, 1993; Deborah Schiffrin, 1996). Sociolinguistics has a body of narrative research and research on retellings. My interest is in explorations of the stories of serious life situations, such as Holocaust survivors (Deborah Schiffrin), Alzheimer’s patients (Heidi Hamilton), and people who live with agoraphobia (Lisa Capps and Elinor Ochs), to name a few. The particular topic I chose is often startling to people when they first hear of it, and it is frequently dismissed out-of-hand as not actually occurring, or as not rising to the level of “real” sexual abuse. The notion that sibling sexual abuse is an equivalent trauma or injury to rape by strangers or

\(^9\) I use the term follow-up conversation instead of interview because although I had a set of questions to ask the participants, my meetings with them do not fit the definition of an interview, in part because of my shared status of survivor and in part because the questions posed were part of a larger organic conversation.
even incest by older relatives (fathers, grandfathers, uncles – the most commonly written about) is unfathomable to most people.

Through this study, I hope to contribute to the literature and our understanding of sibling sexual abuse and disclosures, and the effect of context on co-construction of meaning. I believe the phenomenon of sibling sexual abuse is part of a larger issue of violence against women (for the most part, though it also is sometimes violence against boys) and is an unfortunate systemic problem in our society in which violence towards girls, women, and children is carried out and supported (Judith Lewis Herman, 1997; Diana E. Russell, 1986). I hope to contribute to our understanding of this in a larger context as well.

My review of the literature shows no previous studies comparing ASL and English to investigate a change in context, and no previous studies on disclosure stories of sibling incest in either language.

C. Research Questions

In this study I explored the discourse and interaction between two pairs of women with a shared experience of surviving child sexual abuse, discussing that experience in a conversation, and the discourse and interaction between each of these women with an interviewer who did not share that experience. Throughout this study I have been guided by the following questions:

1) How do the participants talk about revealing the fact of the sexual assault to their families?

2) How does discourse and narrative change or remain the same according to a change in contextual factors?
Each of these questions is applied to the interactions in the language in which they took place (ASL or English) and also applied to compare and contrast the information across languages and conventions in the culture associated with the language.

D. Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework from which one operates informs everything in the work one does. An ideological position is taken up, whether we admit to one or not, every time we speak or write. As Norman Fairclough (1989) pointed out, independent realities are not reflected in discursive practices, but “discursive practices entail an active relationship with reality and, in fact change reality” (37). Next I discuss the theoretical framework that guided me in my work.

Feminist Theory

The wider lens through which I have conducted this study is feminist theory. In feminist research the researcher brings, foregrounds, and acknowledges both a focus and a sensibility (Michael Patton, 2002; Shulamit Reinharz, 1992). Mary Bucholtz and Kira Hall (2004) point out that feminist approaches locate the issues of the study “with respect to regimes of power and speakers’ agency in relation to these” (486). Australian scholar Dale Spender (1985) speaks to feminist knowledge as compared to patriarchal knowledge: “feminist knowledge is based on the premise that the experience of all human beings is valid and must not be excluded from our understandings, whereas patriarchal knowledge is based on the premise that the experience of only half the human population needs to be taken into account and the resulting version can be imposed on the other half” (cited in Reinharz, 1992:7).
Every part of a research project is affected by the way we choose to frame it and how we choose to conduct ourselves, including the focus of our research questions, the explanation and instructions that we give the participants, how we make decisions (e.g. is the location of data collection negotiated with the participants or announced to them), how we analyze and interpret the data, and how we write and what we choose to write about in our report (Reinharz, 1992). I hold a feminist understanding of the political utility, meaning, and implications of violence against women in our society; this contributes a framework for understanding the data and the implications of this study, namely, the foregrounding of the words and experiences of survivors of brother-sister incest.

**Qualitative Research: A Philosophical Stance**

Patton (2002) proposes that a researcher’s philosophical stance conditions the trustworthiness of the study conducted. Qualitative inquiry is the most appropriate method to explore the research questions in this study. “Qualitative inquiry is particularly oriented toward exploration, discovery, and inductive logic” (Patton, 2002:55), and is backed up by one’s assumptions to ground the data, expectations, analysis, findings, and way of writing (Mishler, 1979; Reinharz, 1992). Furthermore, context is not only a central issue of exploration in this study, but also is central to the construction and analysis of the issues in this study.

Qualitative research can employ a variety of methods of design, data collection, and data analysis; it is not the use of particular methods that denotes a qualitative approach (Norman Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln, 2000; Patton, 2002, Reinharz 1992). Amanda Coffey and Paul Atkinson (1996) propose that a common thread in qualitative
research is that “qualitative data analysis deals with [inherently] meaningful talk and action” (5). The talk and action in this study occurs in conversations and interviews to access what the participants say about disclosing the fact of sibling sexual abuse and how they say it. The epistemology of qualitative interviewing is more constructivist than positivist (Carol Warren, 2001). “The purpose of the interviews and study drive the analysis to understand the meaning of people’s experiences and life worlds” (83). This is a guiding and fundamental assumption upon which I operate, which includes interviewing as a way of “access to people’s ideas, thoughts, and memories in their own words, rather than in the words of the researcher” (Reinharz, 1992:19). Reinharz states that this is a particularly important asset in studying people who have not historically been the focus of non-objectifying study, who have been marginalized, whose ideas have been ignored, or who have been spoken for by other people. Both incest survivors, particularly those whose perpetrator was a brother, and Deaf women are members of marginalized groups to which these considerations apply.

Reinharz and Susan Chase (2001) propose that an interview may not seem remarkable on its face, but that in fact it may well be a remarkable activity for some people, especially participants in a study and even more so for participants who were selected because of defining criteria that may not garner attention otherwise. They discuss how interviews can have a radical impact on the participants, and that by being interviewed a participant may “discover her thought, learn who she is, find her voice” (225). Reinharz, quoting from Bernice Lott (1981), an American psychologist, states “Feminist scholarship and empirical research…have particular qualities that distinguish it from other research…in its choice of problems and ultimate objectives” [italics added]”
(cited in Reinharz, 1992:3). This is a distinction from quantitative research, which is geared to attempting to make generalizations. As Patricia Cayo Sexton (1982) wrote, “generalizations can be misleading, inadequate, and lacking in any flesh and blood reality, they can also fail to take account of the astonishing variations among women and the work they do. Women have not one but many voices. …Both the themes and the variations, the individual and the collective voices need to be heard” (cited in Reinharz, 1992:4). The choice of focus and my ultimate objectives, along with analyzing and displaying a variation of themes and voices as well as a collective voice, are at the heart of this qualitative study.

**Interactional sociolinguistics**

In this study I employed interactional sociolinguistics as a way to conduct discourse analysis. John Gumperz (2001) explains that interactional sociolinguistics is concerned with everyday communicative practice (or speech events, to use Roman Jakobson’s term) involving two or more people, in order to “show how individuals participating in such exchanges use talk to achieve their communicative goals in real-life situations, by concentrating on the meaning-making processes and the taken-for-granted, background assumptions that underlie the negotiation of interpretations” (218). He notes that interactional sociolinguistics operates from the basic assumption that meaning is inferenced, and the inferences “build on local or context-specific background knowledge that takes the form of presuppositions that shift in the course of an encounter” (218) and that “to the extent that background knowledge is not shared, interpretations may differ.” (219). The goal of interactional sociolinguistics is to understand “how interpretation and

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10 Interpretation here is meant in the general sense of how one interlocutor interprets what another interlocutor says. This is not about translation or interpretation of discourse from one language into another.
interaction are based upon the interrelationship of social and linguistic meanings” (Schiffrin, 1994:8).

Schiffrin (2006) states that “By carrying out acts of reference, interactants continuously constitute and reconstitute their positions with respect to each other, to objects, places, and times” (4) and that this interactive process “goes beyond simple referential anchoring to encompass the ability of linguistic expressions to evoke, and relate to, complex systems of meaning such as socially shared conceptualizations of space and place, ideologies, social representations about group membership, social roles and attributes, presuppositions about all aspects of social reality, individual and collective stances, practices and organization structures” (4).

Gumperz argues “that the relationships between ideological constructs and practices are the most useful point of entry” (2003:110) for exploration of interaction and discourse use. I would argue that this includes knowing what each person brings to an interaction, including background knowledge and experience, shared knowledge and experience, and ideas about roles and status and power dynamics, as well as their purposes and goals for interacting. These considerations are at the heart of the research questions for this study.

E. Scholarly and Social Significance

The significance of this study rests both in the academic and social application of its findings, and in the very fact that it focuses on sibling incest survivors and Deaf ASL users.

This study is part of a dialogic process across disciplines that will add to the perspectives and literature in discourse analysis, sociolinguistics, interpretation studies,
anthropology, sociology, psychology, and other academic disciplines. The information and perspectives herein will also be useful to organizations and activists and individuals in the areas of trauma and sexual abuse, specifically the sexual violence that occurs in families. The findings and interpretations can be expected to enhance our understanding of the phenomenon of childhood sexual abuse and be applicable to the practices and fields of interpreting and translating, and linguistics and sociolinguistics.

Reinharz (1992) underscores the importance of designing studies “to reevaluate and reform knowledge… to name new topics, to examine the invisible, to study the unstudied, and to ask why it has been ignored” (248). Shining a light on sibling sexual abuse, and putting Deaf ASL users at the center simply because they and their language are as worthy of study as anyone else, serves “to bring the margin to the center, to render the trivial important, [and to put] the spotlight on [these] women as competent actors” (248).

Sibling sexual abuse is a highly toxic trauma that carries with it isolation and shame of profound magnitude. For the participants in this study, the act of volunteering for this study, stating their desire to be contributors to it and to have their voices heard, is a demonstration of agency and resistance on the part of the participants (Linda Coates and Allan Wade, 2004; Herman, 1997; D. E. Russell, 1986). The participants make it clear that their intention in choosing to be a part of this study was to offer a hand or some hope to other survivors by speaking the unspeakable and breaking the cycle of silence and shame.

Alice Sebold (1999) writes in her memoir Lucky, “without a name attached to my story, it remains fiction, not fact” (235). Similarly, without survivors speaking their
stories, society can continue to treat sibling sexual abuse as “distant fiction.” By bringing forward the voices of survivors, this study helps those who have not experienced this trauma see and understand the heartbreaking experience of survivors.

F. Researcher Position

Feminist research is often driven by the researcher’s interest in the subject matter and questions needing answers in a study (Reinharz, 1992). My motivations for this study and the research questions are both professional and personal. My interest in the topics and questions in this study stem in part from my work as an interpreter, an interpreter educator, and consumer of interpretations, coupled with my professional observations and experience of variability in the success, precision, and accuracy of interpreters’ work. My observations and experience have led me to believe that a major determining factor in whether or not an interpretation will be successful is the interpreter’s knowledge of contextual factors (relationships, purpose, shared knowledge, roles, etc.). My particular interest in studying the language pair ASL and English arises because those are the languages with which I work as an interpreter and with which I also have a personal interest. My interest in the subject matter is also personal--my brother sexually assaulted me as a child and I long ago revealed to my family the fact of the incest. This experience is the basis for my continued interest in the topic of childhood sexual abuse and disclosures to family members.

I bring the perspectives of an academic, a survivor, and an ally to the Deaf community. This multiplicity of perspectives can serve to enhance or bias design of the study and perception and understanding of the data. As a researcher I bring my experiences as a survivor, activist, writer and speaker on the topic of incest to the table,
along with my experiences as an interpreter practitioner and educator, and ally to the Deaf community. In my writing I have attempted to be reflective and open with bracketing, so that readers are made aware of my own biases and experiences, and how these might color my lens as a researcher, as well as how they enhance work that any researcher could produce. The foundation of knowledge and experience that I bring to this study allows for exploration on a deeper level than would be possible without it.

Choosing to focus on sibling incest in the first place was prompted in part by my own experience, and by the lack of literature and research on the topic, and was further motivated by my participation in my first IRB meeting with the full Board. I anticipated a full board review because sibling sexual abuse was the subject of the study. What I did not anticipate was the resistance the Board expressed about women being willing and indeed wanting to talk about their experience of life after sexual assault by their brothers. Some members of the Board stated that they felt that talking about this topic could only be harmful and risky for participants, and could not possibly be meaningful or growth-promoting for the survivors. This study substantiates the exact opposite and corroborates much of the literature on the topic of trauma: that speaking of one’s experience and witnessing others speak of it are ways to integrate it and cope with the negative effects (Linda Bass, Brent Taylor, Carmen Knudson-Martin, Douglas Huenergardt, 2006; Mary R. Harvey, Elliot G. Mishler, Karestan Koenen, Patricia Harney, 2000; Herman 1997; Shonna Trinch, 2001a; Smita Vir Tyagi, 2001).

The framework from which I operate, from which I conducted this study and write this document, is informed heavily by the work of Shulamit Reinharz and other feminist scholars. I am well aware of the authority and credibility granted to me simply
by being in a Ph.D. program, conducting research, and writing a dissertation (Michelle Fine, 1985), as well as being a member of the dominant culture (non-deaf, white, and middle class) (Reinharz, 1992). I am also aware that my status as a member of the dominant cultures falsely lends enhanced authority and credibility to my study of a minority culture and language (Deaf women and ASL). I wish to make it clear that I do not speak on behalf of other people. That would only serve to strip them of their agency. But I attempt to, as Renate Klein suggests we must do, “speak out for other people” (Reinharz, 1992:16). I believe that the participants in this study are producers of knowledge (Fine, 1985; Reinharz, 1992), and I follow Reinharz’s definition of research that includes “the production of a publicly scrutinizable analysis of a phenomenon with the intent of clarification” (9).

I have consciously adopted stylistic choices that reflect my feminist stance (Reinharz, 1992:16). Above I have explained my use of terms for this study. I also use non-sexist language, non-masculinist terms, and non-military language throughout this document, and therefore the first mention of an author in the body of this document I use the author’s full name instead of the vague, impersonal, masculinist surname.

Reinharz (1992) proposes that the writing of a research project reveals “the process of discovery” (211) and that the entire process of the work becomes part of the product, beginning long before the putative start of the project. By writing in a reflexive, transparent manner, or in a format that allows the reader to see the researcher’s process, the writing is then “linked to the rejection of the discourse of positivism and objectivity” (212). The notions of positivism and objectivity are, at best, at odds with the design and goals of this study.
G. Organizational Overview

This document is organized as follows. Chapter 2 is a review and critique of the existing literature. Chapter 3 details the methodology used for this study, including study design, participants, data collection, transcription and translation considerations, data analysis, trustworthiness of the study, and ethical considerations. Chapter 4 presents the data and analysis of three categories of themes that arose in the interactions: disclosure; family response (including linguicism and retraumatizing acts by family members); and survivor response (including survivor understanding of the impact of the abuse, and integration of the wounding and gifts resulting from the abuse, for the survivors and the larger community). Chapter 5 presents the data and analysis of the language and interactional features in four sections discussing: the vocabulary used to reference and index the perpetrator, the survivors, and the abuse experience; the use of one type of interactional feature, backchanneling, to signal shared experience; differences in the amount of background leading up to the narratives; and the “smoothness” of background in a first-time-told and first-time-retold narrative. Chapter 6, the concluding chapter, discusses the methodological, theoretical, and application implications of the data and conclusions of the study.
A. Introduction

In order to situate the research questions for this study, I reviewed the literature in the fields of sociolinguistics, interpretation, and trauma, constellating around the following concerns: co-construction of meaning: context and interaction; narratives; backchanneling; interpreting; trauma; and, sibling sexual abuse. The overarching question uniting these diverse areas was exploration of why people choose to, or are motivated to, tell their stories examined in the context of disclosure stories of sibling sexual assault. The focus on sibling sexual assault as a form of trauma is investigated here through the disclosure stories that the study participants told in diverse interactions, and through analysis of their discourse choices, both across contexts and across languages.

B. Why People Tell Their Stories

People tell their stories to “construct who they are and how they view the world.” (Capps and Ochs, 1995:8). They tell stories to make sense out of their lives, to create identities situated in their families and in society through choices they make as they narrate (Schiffrin, 1996), and to understand their own interpretations of their experiences, which come from the actual telling\(^{11}\). “Stories are shaped by their tellers and, at the same time, [stories] shape the way tellers see and experience themselves in their world.” (Capps and Ochs, 1995:13.) There is power in telling one’s story, in narrating one’s experience that helps make difficult events meaningful. Narratives help people “bridge our past, present, future, and even imagined lives to formulate coherent identities.” (Capps and Ochs, 1995:14). Barbara Johnstone (2001) posits that “the urge to make our

\(^{11}\) See Laurel Richardson (2000) on writing as a form of inquiry.
lives coherent by telling about them, must be universal; personal narrative is how we make sense of ourselves as individuals and as member of groups.” (640-641). She adds that there are political effects and that narratives give meaning in a variety of ways, including creating community, dominating others, expressing solidarity, resisting and dealing with conflict. Susan E. Bell (1988) states that, “It is by now commonplace to assert that people make sense of their life experiences by narrating them” (100).

Capps and Ochs (1995) suggest that because narratives function in this way in people’s lives, researchers should seek to understand this “sense-making process,” and that by looking at the linguistic structures and devices that narrators use, researchers can tell how people “maintain and struggle to transform their lives” (12). They say that although the specifics vary, narratives give rise to the “master storyline, which dominates the narrator’s existence.” (11). While Capps and Ochs looked at the narratives of people with agoraphobia, what they say applies equally to anyone telling their story, and certainly to incest survivors, who are telling their stories with greater frequency than in the past (whether in very private, selective situations, or very public, open situations). Capps and Ochs point out that the meaning one ascribes to one’s experiences changes as one changes, that storytelling is not about objective truth, and that one’s memories are not snapshots (15). Speaking of one’s experience and witnessing others speak of it are ways to integrate it and cope with negative effects of one’s experiences (Bass et al., 2006; Harvey et al., 2000; Herman, 1997; Trinch, 2001a; Tyagi, 2001).

C. Co-construction of Meaning: Context and Interaction
Stories are told in context and in interactions. John Heritage (1984) holds that context and the talk in context are reflexive in relationship, and therefore the co-conversant (likewise, the researcher and the interpreter) “cannot conceptualize social identities and context as static attributes of settings and participants” (Charles Goodwin, 1987:120). Emanuel Schegloff (1997) holds that there are multiple ways of conceptualizing contexts; the possible conceptualizations in any given interaction are not of equal weight but are determined, established, and reestablished by the interlocutors, depending on what the interlocutors determine (by their actions, not necessarily consciously) to be the relevant social context.

M. A. K. Halliday (1976) described three interdependent functions in the creation and understanding of meaning: the interpersonal, the ideational, and the textual. The interpersonal refers to the relationships among interlocutors, the ideational refers to the referential or dynamic meaning of the content, and the textual refers to how the structural elements (semantic, syntactic, and grammatical) are internally constructed. Halliday argued that all three of these functions are demonstrated through talk. Frederick Erickson (1979), Clark and Mishler (1992), C. Goodwin (1986, 1987, 2003), Mishler (1997, 2005), Schegloff (1982, 1997), and Deborah Tannen (1989) are among those who have added to Halliday’s work by demonstrating how meaning in interaction is co-constructed by the participants in the interaction. Schiffrin (1994, 2003, 2006) demonstrated connection between the textual and social worlds in order for meaning to be grasped by showing features of talk that are “related to the contexts that underlie their production and influence their interpretation” (2003:84). A. L. Becker (1991) argued for the importance of studying language of particularity; i.e., not language that is used in common, but
language that makes one particular instance conceived of and produced differently by attaching what we have at our disposal, ways of languaging.

Fairclough (1989, 1992) furthers this discussion, arguing that language use is social action, “discourse is a practice not just of representing the world, but of signifying the world, constituting and constructing the world in meaning” (1992:64), and by acting out what interlocutors wish to accomplish through language use, they invoke prior texts and experiences. Patricia Hill Collins (2000) reminds us “behavior is a statement of philosophy” (17), that all actions, linguistic and otherwise, are social and political.

D. Narratives

1. Why Study Stories

William Labov (1972) states that evaluation is the narrator’s way of indicating the point of the narrative, “why it is told, and what the narrator is getting at” (366). In order to identify the evaluation, one must know why the narrator feels his/her narrative is worth telling, and why this narrative has events that are reportable. He goes on to say that “the narratives themselves may serve only as a framework for the evaluation” (371). Labov not only provides a classical structural approach through which to study narratives, but he also offers the idea of reportability, that the event narrated must be unusual in some way to run counter to expectations or norms (390); in other words: why stories are worth narrating. They are “not ordinary, plain, humdrum, everyday, or run-of-the mill” (371).

Charlotte Linde (1993) posits that a life story (of which a narrative is one type or one episode) “must make some evaluative point about the speaker or about some event framed as relevant specifically because it happened to the speaker. …the evaluative point of the story is roughly the understanding that the addressee must agree to about what the
protagonist’s actions mean – that is, the general, moral communication of what kind of a person this is and what kinds of actions these are.” (21). She states further that the “evaluative point is primarily to show something about the kind of person the speaker is, rather than to demonstrate something about the way the world is. ...[to show] how the story is constructed” (22). Storytellers “use words, grammar, and narrative structure to weave a tale in which events are linked temporally, causally, and emotionally and protagonists are depicted with a particular evaluative hue.” (Capps and Ochs, 1995:13).

Catherine Riessman (1993) notes that the study of narrative is a combination of several disciplines and that it is an examination of the narrator’s story, “how it is put together, the linguistic and cultural resources it draws on, and how it persuades a listener of authenticity”: “Why was that story told that way?” (2). She says that narratives are produced to reveal intersections of the personal, societal, political, and/or cultural worlds. She also states that Labov’s evaluation is the “soul” of the narrative. The evaluation is how the narrator wants to be understood, her point in the telling, and it reflects the narrator standing back from the action as it unfolds, telling how she is interpreting the events. If the evaluation is the “soul” of the narrative, and the teller is shaped by the telling while formulating her narrative, then perhaps the process of analyzing narratives allows a window to the sense making and transformation for the narrator.

Researchers have chosen to focus on various topics by which to study narratives and language in use and to add to the body of research on those topics. Those topics have included agoraphobia (Capps and Ochs, 1995; Ochs and Capps, 1994, 2001), perpetrator responsibility for violent crime (Coates and Wade, 2004), contested illness (Pia Bülow, 2004), Holocaust stories (Schiffrin, 2003), and sexual assault in domestic violence
Though the subject of incest has entered the public discourse more in the last 30 years (Herman, 1997), there remains, in general, an absence of study on this topic in the sociolinguistic research.

2. Narrative and Re-Tellings

Narrative has been widely studied across many disciplines, including linguistics, literary theory, psychology, anthropology, and philosophy. Labov’s work in the early 1970’s paved the way for many of the sociolinguistic studies that followed. Labov not only described the requisite parts that he found in elicited narratives, he also established ways to create a telling of personal experience narratives that were “more real” than simply speaking to a tape recorder, thereby capturing more authenticity in the telling of the story and using the language, and removing some of the artifice of a research setting. Studies on narrative have examined variation (Labov 1972; Ceil Lucas, Robert Bayley, and Clayton Valli, 2003; Penelope Eckert, 1989, 2000), tense (Schiffrin 1981, 1996, 1997), adverbials, positioning and identity (Michael Bamburg 1997; Heidi Hamilton 1998; Schiffrin 1996, 1998), co-construction (C. Goodwin 1986; Tannen 1989), and retellings (see below).

The early work of Labov (1972) on narratives, a structural approach upon which much of the later research is based (Reissman, 1993), does not account for narratives in conversation except when the interlocutor holds the floor relatively uninterrupted, delivering narratives as “discrete units, with clear beginnings and endings, as detachable from the surrounding discourse rather than as situated events” (Reissman, 1993:17). Labov’s work does not account for the relationship between the interlocutors, context, or the social action of the talk.
The notion of studying language in use (as opposed to studying the structures of language in isolation) is central to sociolinguistics. Also central to the field is the inseparable relationship between context and language (e.g. Wallace Chafe, 1994; Gumperz, 2001). This has also been one of the challenges in the field because of the obvious effects of the presence of recording equipment and the participants’ knowledge of being recorded on how they construct their language. Labov (1972) has contributed to the field of sociolinguistics by suggesting methods of overcoming observer’s paradox and lessening people’s anxiety with regard to their own talk.

Narrative retellings have been investigated from a sociolinguistic approach by Chafe (1998), Linde (1993), Livia Polanyi (1981), Alessandro Portelli (1997), Neal Norrick (1997), and Schiffrin (1996, 1998, 2003). Schiffrin (1998) examines retellings across texts and contexts in order to focus on “how and why the forms and meanings so critical to one person’s initial telling of a story may be reshaped to fit whatever changing circumstances form the same person’s subsequent telling of the same story.” She examines several versions of a single narrative from four interviews and two written versions of one person’s (a Holocaust survivor) story. Schiffrin refers to this as a “distributed” narration, which draws upon intertextuality as well as what can be viewed as a meta-narrative because retellings incorporate parts of the earlier tellings and therefore are not simply about an experience, but also “‘about’ [the] prior narratives.” I would add that by incorporating parts of earlier tellings with each retelling being in part “‘about’ prior narratives,” each retelling can also reveal information about positioning and identity of the narrator in relation to herself, to the other interlocutor(s), and to the context of the situation.
Norrick (1998) describes what people do in spontaneous storytelling by looking at what makes a retold story. He suggests a method of analysis to determine if the “kernel” of the story is present in both tellings, and discusses co-narration by a group of interlocutors. His work raises several additional questions: how do people talk about the topic, construct or show their identity in their stories, show agency (or its absence) of themselves and the other characters in their story, position themselves in relation to others, etc. What is the function of their stories? Why do people tell their stories? What does telling the story do for and to them? Norrick (2003) continues his work on retellings and looks at authenticity in stories that involve forgetting and remembering. He incorporates the importance of interactional context and shared understanding in reflecting the interlocutor’s goals in a setting, but he does not describe what those features are in the contexts he analyzed. Unlike the work of Schiffrin, Norrick also does not address the significance of the topic of stories or the purpose of telling them.

Nothing in the literature indicates that the research on retellings includes study of first time telling and first time retellings.

3. **ASL Narratives**

Narratives are one type of ASL discourse that has been widely studied in the relatively brief history of research on ASL. This research includes study of monologues (Julie Wilson, 1996), constructed dialogue and constructed action (Melanie Metzger, 1995; Metzger and Benjamin Bahan, 2001), and use of space and comparative monologues (Elizabeth Winston, 1993). Metzger (1995) described how constructed dialogue is a predominant part of any ASL narrative. Bahan and Samuel Supalla (1995) examine literary narratives and line segmentation.
Rachel McKee (1992) studied how the narrator shifts footing in a lecture. Her study is pertinent in examining the ways in which narrators separate sections of their text from one another, whether through parentheticals, asides, interrupting their own thoughts, or because they are talking to another person. Valerie Dively’s (1998) study on repair in ASL discourse is important, especially regarding positioning of the narrator within her storytelling and within the interaction with the other interlocutor.

Lucas et al. (2003) collected hundreds of hours of conversation during an extensive seven-year research project (NSF Grant beginning in 1994) studying variation. Their work provided data for many other researchers studying narrative. The authentic nature of the data offers unquestionable credibility to these studies. Wilson (1996) analyzes the structure of ASL narratives by analyzing one personal experience narrative that naturally occurs during a conversation. Metzger and Bahan (2001) examine discourse markers in narratives in conversation.

A more recent development is the study space and role shifting in ASL from a cognitive linguistics framework (e.g. Paul Dudis, 2002; Scott Liddell, 2003). The pool of studies on ASL narratives is growing. However, there are no studies to date on retellings in ASL, nor any comparative studies of similar types of narratives told in ASL and English for similar purposes and in similar contexts. Research in this area will have implications not only for the field of ASL and English linguistics, but also for interpreting studies.

To date there have been no studies focusing on the background leading up to a narrative in ASL. However, it is common for ASL teachers to tell their second language students that as the narrator they must “set the scene” by providing background
information prior to beginning the story, and there is general agreement among ASL teachers that non-native ASL users frequently do not provide the requisite information that would be expected by a native ASL user leading up to a narrative (personal communication, MJ Bienvenu, July 15, 2007). Although there have been studies on some of the constituent markers (see above) that create coherence in an ASL narrative, there have been no studies focused on the “smoothness” of a narrative as a whole. The collective wisdom among ASL teachers and researchers is that in addition to “setting the scene,” the narrator must frame the discourse, provide information on focus, mark when that focus changes, provide time markers, and repeat information when repetition serves a discourse function (personal communication, MJ Bienvenu, July 15, 2007.)

E. Backchanneling: An Interactive Feature

Backchanneling (a term coined by Victor Yngve, 1970) is a phenomenon that has been studied in conversations, though it also occurs to a greater or lesser degree, depending on cultural norms, in lectures and other less interactive talk. Backchanneling has been described as the verbal and non-verbal utterances of the “addressee” in a conversation that serve a variety of functions and are conveyed in a variety of ways depending on language and culture (Pino Cutrone, 2005). Yngve (1970) is often recognized as developing the first extensive treatment of backchannels, though backchannels were recognized as “tokens of active listening” by Bronislaw Malinowski in 1923, and as “phatic communication” by Jakobson in 1960 (cited in Richard Young and Jina Lee, 2004:381). Cutrone (2005) lists early researchers such as Charles Fries (1952) who noted utterances such as *Uh Huh, Yeah, Mmm, I see*, etc., and Adam Kendon (1967) who called these devices “accompaniment signals.” Cutrone includes the work of
Starkey Duncan, 1974 and Duncan and Donald Fiske, 1977, who extended backchannels to include lexical items as well as head nods and head shakes, in addition to the previously discussed paralinguistic vocalizations in spoken languages. These early researchers believed that the main purpose of backchannels were to signal agreement, which Cutrone refers to as “a supportive function” (243).

There is a significant focus in prior studies on whether backchanneling constitutes a turn or taking the floor, but these studies do not address how backchannels extend the notion that discourse and meaning are co-constructed by the participants. Other scholars have emphasized the interactive and cultural functions of backchanneling. Erickson (1979) and Scheglof (1981) focused on interactive functions and contextual cues in backchanneling. Erickson found that in interracial interviews, addressees were obligated to show more active listening behaviors through backchanneling. Scheglof (1981) recognized backchanneling devices as a part of the co-construction of discourse, and also noted that they serve a function of expressing the listener’s response, so characterized them as “assessments.” In addition, Gail Jefferson (1983) identified backchanneling behaviors as continuers, and C. Goodwin (1986) found backchanneling to function as an evaluative tool or a means to signal the speaker to continue. Senko Maynard (1997) distilled previous research and proposed six functions that backchannels play: allowing the speaker to continue, displaying understanding of the content, supporting and showing empathy toward the speaker’s judgment, demonstrating agreement, showing a strong emotional response, and offering a correction or requesting clarification. However, as researchers in intercultural communication and second language teaching have found, backchannels, regardless of their function, are culturally bound (Cutrone, 2005; Bettina
Heinz, 2003; Virginia LoCastro, 1987; Maynard, 1997; Sheida White, 1989; Young and Lee, 2004). LoCastro (1987) claims that socio-cultural norms and discourse use, and interpretation of such, are interdependent. She underscores the importance of the cultural frame by stating “To further amplify the semantic dimension of language, it seems advisable to include social and/or cultural knowledge in ones’ analysis and not separate such knowledge from linguistic signals” (Locastro, 106).

Charlotte Baker (1977) found that in ASL, eye gaze was a core regulator of turn-taking. She also found that rest positions of the interlocutor’s hands, and increase in the size and quantity of head nodding and indexing, served as backchannel devices. Each of these – eye gaze, rest positions, head nodding, and indexing – serve both verbal and non-verbal functions in ASL, thereby distinguishing them from their non-verbal use in spoken English. Baker found that these regulators were often missed or misused by interlocutors who did not grow up using ASL. These studies show the importance of taking into account the cultural and linguistic distinctions of these verbal and non-verbal behaviors, their duration and frequency, and how they function in conversation.

The need to understand the cultural significance and demonstrate knowledge of how to use backchannels appropriately (Baker, 1977; Erickson, 1979; LaCastro, 1987; White, 1989) holds true not only for interlocutors in a direct conversation but also for interpreters, who are interpreting conversations across languages and cultures. Previous studies have shown how backchanneling plays an interactive function, thereby helping to shape the interaction. The data in this study showed an interactive feature of backchanneling that had not previously been discussed in the literature; namely, that of displaying shared identity. Implications for interpreting will be discussed in terms of the
form and function that the backchanneling took, and the significance of understanding and then conveying the meaning of those backchannels in an interpreted interaction.

F. Interpreting

Although this study does not examine interpreted interactions, it was designed in order to examine the implications of the study findings for interpreting and teaching of interpretation. Therefore, I review the literature on interpretation to provide context to the reader for later discussion on how this study is applicable to interpreting.

Research on interpretation is relatively new, with a growing body of literature, theories, and studies. Theorists have long identified certain features as being key to an interpreter’s ability to produce effective interpretation. Danica Seleskovitch (1978) stated “to interpret one must first understand” (11). She described contextual factors, knowledge base and comprehension of information, recognition of one’s own personal opinions, and relationships among interlocutors, as well as proficiency in the languages and cultures as the basis for understanding. Much of the research that has been done in the field draws upon her work and theories. William Isham (1985) proposes six contextual factors that lead to understanding in interaction (content, function, register, affect, contextual force, and metanotative qualities). Though not data based, this work (Seleskovitch and Isham, as well as the work of Sandra Gish, 1987, 1996), has supplied researchers with theories from which to proceed in their own work.

Studies in interpretation have shifted over the years from focusing on information and cognitive processing (Eva Paneth, 1957; David Gerver, 1974; Eugene Nida, 1964; Barbara Brasel, 1976; Dennis Cokely, 1992) to a sociolinguistic perspective focusing on the role of interpreters as participants in interpreted events. There is a growing body of
sociolinguistic research on interpretation (Claudia Angelelli, 2004; Susan Berk-Seligson, 1990; Metzger, 1999; Roy, 2000; Cecilia Wadensjo, 1992, 1998). This shift in focus is evident in Jemina Napier’s (2003) work on omissions, as compared with Cokely’s (1992) work on errors (miscues). Cokely created a taxonomy of miscues indexed with linguistic and cognitive evidence for their occurrence. Napier, by contrast, looks at errors, specifically omissions, in a sociolinguistic context and offers an analysis of how interpreters are making strategic decisions in order to produce effective interpretations. Angelelli (2004), Metzger (1999), Cynthia B. Roy (2000), and Debra L. Russell (2003) have all studied interpretation in interactive contexts and have examined the interpreter as a participant in the interaction, who has an effect by his/her presence and discourse on that interaction and interpretation. D. L. Russell (2003), who studied accuracy in consecutive and simultaneous interpreting in four mock trials, also examined the effect of the interpreter’s presence in the interaction by interviewing the attorneys, judges, and Deaf witnesses who participated in the mock trials after they were over. The participants in the trials spoke eloquently about how the interpreter’s manner of approach and behaviors prior to, during, and after trial influenced their trust of the interpreter. In their recommendations to interpreters, they noted that had the interpreters discussed with them the type, amount, and reasons for preparation, they would have complied and provided preparation materials to them. Once the participants understood the importance of preparation for interpreters to ultimately provide accurate interpretations, they questioned why the interpreters did not request more information and did not talk more with them prior to beginning their interpretations. In other words, the participants saw the efficacy of preparation in interpreting settings even when the interpreters did not mention it or
pursue it with them. The follow-up interviews that D. L. Russell (2003) conducted
provided important information that was not available otherwise. Cokely (1992), Metzger
(1999), and Roy (2000) did not conduct follow-up interviews with the study participants,
thereby omitting crucial information about why the participants did what they did in the
study.

Basil Hatim and Ian Mason (1990) discuss interpretation interaction as “a
communicative transaction taking place within a social framework” (2). The effects of
framework, or context, have not been widely studied, though they are taken into account
in the more recent research and considered in earlier studies (Peter Newmark, 1977,
1981; Nida, 1964, 1976). There are no studies to date that have specifically studied the
change in the “social framework.” My research focused on this directly, and though it
was not a study on interpretation per se, it has direct implications for interpreters with
regard to noting the effects of context on the interpreter’s understanding of the situation
and interpreter preparation.

The literature on interpreting underscores the importance of interaction and
context and the co-construction of meaning by the participants in an interpreted
interaction. Interpreters work in a variety of situations and virtually any topic can arise
during an interaction; people talk about their life experiences in various ways and in
various situations. Therefore, it would not be uncommon for an interpreter to be exposed
to a new topic or to have a strong reaction (e.g. interest, discomfort) in an interpreting
situation. When an interpreter has no experience or knowledge of a topic, her/his
interpretation will be adversely affected, just as having experience or knowledge of a
topic will favorably affect her/his ability to interpret. Familiarity and exposure affect the
The interpreter’s ability to understand and make sense of the talk, which may be explicit, ambiguous, or euphemistic, as well as his/her ability to convey the meaning into the second language in a culturally and linguistically appropriate way. Because the topic of the narratives in this study is a taboo subject in our society, the findings of this study also have implications for interpreting about incest and trauma, and potentially other socially charged subjects.

G. Trauma

Scholars in psychology and psychiatry have been the leading researchers in the area of trauma and the impact that it has on survivors’ lives. Herman (1997) argues that the aftermath of violence, ranging from political terror to domestic abuse, is similar notwithstanding particular differences in the type of violence survived. She finds that similar processes permit people to recover and move on in their lives even though their circumstances are superficially very different (see below). She establishes a historical context for the attention that traumatic events receive in our society, arguing that political and social agendas determine the amount of attention paid to trauma and its effects at any given time.

Researchers have been studying how people, both children and adults, who grow up with adversity (particularly stressful situations in their lives) have not only survived but have thrived in their lives. These studies include examining gay men growing up in heterosexist environments, women living with AIDS, people living in prison, and teenagers during adolescent development, as well as paradigms of illness and health, poverty, and educational achievement.
Harvey et al. (2000), Herman (1997), and Bessel van der Kolk, Alexander McFarlane, & Lars Weisaeth (1996) have applied narrative analysis to survivors of trauma, and in particular to survivors of sexual abuse. The field of psychology has long used narratives to study various phenomena from a psychological perspective. This includes using narrative to understand trauma and the process of recovery. Harvey et al. (2000) explored how survivors of sexual abuse make and remake meaning of their experiences and “restory” them in order to move through the recovery process. They analyzed stories told by three survivors during research interviews from an ongoing study of recovery and resiliency to see how the narrators “reflect [the] dialectic interplay between culturally available framings of their experiences and their individual struggles to find explanations that are personally meaningful” (307). They found that the survivors in their study were “replacing long-standing feelings of powerlessness with a new sense of agency and reclaiming a positive identity…Each has acted, spoken, made hard choices, and begun to control her life” (306).

Sean Massey, Ann Cameron, Suzanne Ouellette, Michelle Fine (1998) critically review how qualitative approaches have helped researchers deal with the issues and dilemmas (conceptual, methodological, and ethical) that arise when studying resiliency and thriving. They explore issues of social, cultural, and political contexts, researcher values, and the implications of conceptualizing thriving as a process. This work provides important contextualization for the narratives that the participants in this study will tell and re-tell.

Herman (1997) discusses the four events required for recovery from trauma: remembrance and mourning, a public forum in which survivors can speak their truths,
formal acknowledgement of what has been done to them, and organized efforts to hold individual perpetrators accountable. This framework has proven vital as I analyzed the narratives and interactions of the study participants.

Stories related to trauma one has experienced are not “happy, everyday stories” that are told frequently, in part because telling the stories is a way of reliving them. These stories are recounted nonetheless because reliving them allows one to make sense of and integrate the experience, which studies have shown is a necessary task in order to recover from such experiences and be able to thrive in light of such experiences (Harvey, 1996; Herman, 1997; Massey et al., 1998).

Labov’s original and groundbreaking work (1972) using narratives studied “life and death” stories. This was done intentionally in order to obtain more natural data (for his study on variation) following on his assumption that such stories would not be “happy, everyday stories.” Talking about intensely personal and emotional experiences allows the narrator to be more involved in their storytelling and less aware of their performance. Stories that are out of the ordinary, emotionally charged, and intensely personal offer rich data. By studying retellings of this type of story, across narrators, across contexts, and across two languages, this study contributes to our understanding of these phenomena in the area of sociolinguistics, ASL, and interpretation, as well as contributes to the body of work of telling and retelling survivor stories. “Sharing the traumatic experience with others is a precondition for the restitution of a sense of a meaningful world” (Herman, 1997:70).
H. Sibling Sexual Abuse

Research on sibling sexual abuse is relatively recent. Researchers have reported that the occurrence, nature, and impact on the victims (who are overwhelmingly female while the perpetrators are overwhelmingly male) of rape and incest in general have been severely underestimated (Herman, 1981, 1992; D. E. Russell, 1986), and the findings are similar as applied to sibling sexual abuse as this area has gained the attention of researchers and scholars. However, research on and attention to sibling sexual abuse is limited (Bass et al., 2006; John Caffaro and Allison Conn-Caffaro, 2005; Mireille Cyr, John Wright, Pierre McDuff and Alain Perron, 2002; Jane Rudd and Sharon Herzberger, 1999), and the dearth is even greater for survivors who are women of color (Tyagi, 2001).

Studies have shown that the frequency of sibling sexual abuse is comparable to, and may indeed exceed, other types of incest (Bass et al., 2006; Caffaro and Conn-Caffaro, 2005). Researchers also report that the incidence of brothers perpetrating sexual abuse on their sisters is three to five times higher than other forms of incest (Ellen Cole, 1982; Holly Smith and Edie Israel, 1987) and of equal seriousness to other forms of sexual abuse (Cole, 1982; Cyr et al., 2002; Rudd and Herzberger, 1999). Cyr et al. (2002) studied whether brother-sister incest differs from other forms of incest by assessing girls under the age of 18 who were abused and had come to the attention of child protective services. They found that abuse by fathers, step-fathers, and brothers was equally harmful and severe and that the abuse by brothers has not been taken seriously.

Family dynamics and patterns, along with the social context (including gender roles, current and past relationships of family members, and culture) precipitate and establish conditions for the perpetrator’s abuse (Bass et al., 2006; Caffaro and Conn-
Caffaro, 2005; Janet DiGiorgio-Miller, 1998). Bass et al. (2006) underscore the influence of family dynamics, “the concept of loyalties,” and the power and hierarchy of the family, maintaining “sibling incest is experienced in context of these relational patterns and contributes to them” (89). They also note “highly complex family dynamics often lie behind the abuse in ways that contribute to the acts of abuse themselves or to the maintenance of the secret” (90).

Researchers have found several reasons why victims and survivors do not disclose. D. E. Russell (1986) observed that the girls who disclosed being abused by their brothers received negative responses from their parents, while Caffaro and Conn-Caffaro (2005) found that victims/survivors often do not disclose due to family members’ failure to acknowledge the abuse and its effects. Findings from Cyr et al. (2002) suggest that when the perpetrator is the brother/son parents respond negatively toward and may blame the sister/daughter to a greater degree than if the perpetrator was the father. Rudd and Herzberger (1999) found that while some girls disclosed but received no help and some did not disclose because they thought that would make things worse, they “often [felt] betrayed and unprotected by both parents” (924). Rudd and Herzberger (1999) were surprised at the large amounts of data they received and the comprehensive perspective of their experiences that study participants offered, which suggests that given the right environment survivors want to disclose and want to tell their stories.

DiGiorgio-Miller (1998) examined treatment of the family and the perpetrator. She noted that denial of the abuse by the family and support of the perpetrator should be interrupted and that support of the perpetrator without allowing and expecting him to face the consequences of his behavior is often the result of the family not understanding the
impact of the abuse. She reported that the parents must shift their position in order to facilitate accountability by the perpetrator, and that the perpetrator must take responsibility for his behavior.

Sarah Ullman (2003) reviewed research on disclosure of adult survivors of childhood sexual abuse (not limited to perpetrators who were family members) to assess whether the results of telling others is harmful or helpful. She reports that survivors are less likely to disclose at all and more likely to delay disclosure when the perpetrator was a relative and the abuse more severe or of longer duration. She also reports that disclosures are useful only if the survivor receives support, although the impact of not disclosing can be harmful, and that negative reactions from others are harmful to survivors’ well-being. Her analysis finds that reactions to victims are salient and influential and “disclosure and support may be helpful to survivors in the long run, even if stress and anxiety result from telling others in the short-run” (113).

Bass et al. (2006) made “visible the unique ways that sibling incest is experienced and how family issues such as secrecy, violence, forgiveness, and communication are understood and dealt with by those involved” (101). By analyzing the way survivors use language to describe their experience(s) of disclosure, this study will offer systematic analysis and draw attention to the meaning-making process (how survivors make sense out of and construct meaning) of their experiences, and how they relay those experiences according to who they are telling and the purpose of their telling.

While studies of narratives and retellings are common, they have never addressed the comparison between ASL and English or had a direct application to interpretation,
and few studies on trauma have addressed sibling incest or the disclosure of the incest to family members.

I. Summary

In this chapter I have examined the literature on why people tell their stories; co-construction of meaning; context and interaction; narratives; backchanneling as an interactive device; interpreting; trauma; and sibling sexual abuse. The design of this study builds on the work of Capps and Ochs, Coates and Wade, C. Goodwin, Harvey et al, Herman, Mishler, Reinharz, D. E. Russell, Schegloff, Schiffrin, and Trinch. This study explores narrated lived experience of a traumatic nature in conversations and interviews, and examines discourse usage and interactive features/devices that have implications on interpreted situations. This confluence of context and discourse in interaction, through disclosure stories of sibling sexual assault in ASL and English, is the focus of this project.

The following chapter details the methodology employed in this study.
Chapter III

Methodology

A. Introduction

In this chapter I present and describe the research methodology I used for this study. This was a qualitative study that employed purposeful\textsuperscript{12} sampling design with criterion sampling, collection of qualitative data, and application of interactional sociolinguistics theory analysis with inductive analysis.

Three sets of data were collected. The first set was from two conversations: one in ASL with two participants and one in English with two participants. The second set was a series of four interviews, two in ASL with each of the Deaf participants who took part in the conversations, and two in English with each of the non-deaf participants who took part in the conversations. The third set was follow-up conversations with each of the participants.

B. Participants

I selected participants by use of purposeful sampling, a design strategy that allows for selection of “information-rich cases whose study will illuminate the questions under study” (Patton, 2002:231) and which is intended to “offer useful manifestations of the phenomenon of interest” to be studied (40). Participants were selected by criterion sampling, criteria that were pre-determined to allow for in-depth study on a small sample of participants.

1. Solicitation and Selection of Participants

Six persons were selected for this study. Four were participants and two were

\textsuperscript{12} In the literature the terms purposeful and purposive are used for the same concept. In this document I follow the conventions of Patton (2002) and use purposeful.
participant-interviewers.

The four participants were required to satisfy the following criteria:

a. Be a native user/speaker of the language in which they will be an interlocutor\textsuperscript{13}
b. Be female
c. Have been sexually assaulted as a child by her brother
d. Have talked with one or more family members about the incest
e. Have a support network upon which she can and will rely, before, during and after her participation in this study.

The two participant-interviewers had to meet the following criteria:

a. Be a native user/speaker of the language in which they will be an interlocutor
b. Be female
c. Not have experienced sexual assault of any kind
d. Hold an MA or Ph.D. in counseling, social work, psychology, or a related field
e. Have work-related experience in sexual assault, child abuse, and/or domestic violence
f. Have an understanding of and experience with appropriate interview techniques on the topic of childhood sexual assault.

The participant-interviewers were participants and not co-researchers or research assistants because their language use and interaction in the interview was part of the study.

\textsuperscript{13} For English users this included having exposure to American English from birth and growing up using the English language. For ASL users this included having exposure to ASL from birth and growing up using the ASL language, and being Deaf.
As a childhood sexual assault survivor, I am a member of the community from which I solicited participants. I solicited the four study participants by contacting individuals I know to be involved in or have interest in the area of childhood sexual assault, including people who are connected to organizations, and individuals I know to be survivors of childhood sexual assault. This was done by email. Some of the people who had received the email from me already knew of me and my previous work, and had expressed interest in knowing more about my work and/or being involved in the study. Many of these were people with whom I had not had previous direct contact and I did not know personally. Because of my book, Not Child’s Play: An anthology on brother-sister incest (herein referred to as Not Child’s Play) and speaking engagements I have done on the topic of brother-sister incest, I am known in the community. I had talked for several years about doing other projects on this topic and about including the topic of sibling sexual assault in my dissertation. Word spreads quickly in small communities, so it is not surprising that I was contacted without solicitation by people expressing their interest in this study and expressing an interest in possibly being involved.

My initial contact requesting assistance in locating potential participants provided an overview of the study. I included a copy of the Letter of Introduction (see Appendix B) describing the project and criteria for participation, and asked that people forward my request as they saw fit. I made only one attempt to contact any particular person who had expressed interest, and then left it to them to respond in order to be considered further for this study (in order to avoid the risk of a person feeling pressured or recruited). Potential participants contacted me and I provided them additional information and responded to any questions they had. I went through the checklist of criteria for participation with
them, to ensure that they met all the criteria. For those who did not meet all criteria, I explained that some criterion was not satisfied and thanked them for their interest. From the pool of people who did meet all criteria, I selected four participants. My selection was based in part on their schedules, location, and willingness to travel. Each data-collection event required the coordination of at least three people’s schedules, and this prohibited participation by some who were interested.

To solicit the two participant-interviewers I contacted individuals I knew, including those at institutions and organizations, who recommended people for this role. Based on their qualifications and experience as interviewers with experience in the subject area, I selected both participant-interviewers on the recommendation of one person. She has interview and counseling experience in the subject area, has worked in the Deaf and non-deaf communities, and has conducted research in both of these communities, and this helped ensure that I would be selecting people who would be able to perform the role needed for this study. Her expertise and qualifications assisted me in making an informed choice and helped with locating two participant-interviewers of comparable status and experience.

I discussed the criteria for being in the study with each of them and selected them based on their experience, willingness to participate, respective schedules, and willingness to travel. Upon selection, each completed an Informed Consent Form that included a Confidentiality provision (see Appendix C) regarding the names of all other people involved in the study.

Prior to data collection I described the research situation to the participants, and further introduced myself to those who were not acquainted with me. The participants
had the information that I had provided to them in the Letter of Introduction. In addition to this, I made sure that the Deaf women knew that I am not Deaf and that ASL is not my native language. I did this via e-mail, videophone, telephone, and in person. In describing the research situation, I explained the process of data collection and the logistics, including that filming would occur.

In addition, I reminded the Deaf participants that because I am not a native user of ASL, I would select an ASL linguistic assistant to work with me on my analysis of the Deaf conversation and interviews. Prior to the linguistic assistant viewing the tapes, I provided each Deaf participant with her name and gave them the option of requesting that I locate a different assistant, without having to provide me with any reason or explanation. Both participants agreed to the assistant named. The linguistic assistant signed a Confidentiality Agreement (See Appendix D) prior to viewing any of the data.

Once the pool of participants was narrowed down, I had each potential participant complete an Informed Consent Form that included a confidentiality provision committing her to keep confidential the identity of the other woman with whom she would have a conversation. This form included a provision that allowed me to provide the potential participants’ names to one another, for the purpose of ensuring that each was comfortable having a conversation with the other. In both the survivor and Deaf communities, there is a strong possibility that one survivor would know or know of another survivor, or that a Deaf woman would know or know of others because of the small size and overlap in the communities. Potential participants were given the opportunity to request another conversational partner or opt out of the study based on the name of the woman she was given, without having to provide any reasons or explanation. None of the participants
made such a request; each agreed to participate. In addition, none of the participants knew one another prior to participating in the study.

Each participant also received the name of the interviewer-participant and was given the option of requesting that another person take this role, with no request or expectation that they provide any reason or explanation. None of the four participants made such a request; each agreed to the interviewer-participant named. All four of the participants said that they did not know the interviewer-participant by name. One of the Deaf participants and interviewer-participant recognized one another by sight when they met in person, and I again gave them the option of requesting a different pairing. Both indicated that they were comfortable conducting the interview together, and no change was made.

No compensation was offered or provided to any of the six participants. When travel was required, I paid for all expenses incurred (travel, lodging and per diem). Non-alcoholic drinks and snacks were available in the room where data collection took place.

2. Description of the Participants

Each individual participant met the criteria outlined above. In order to preserve confidentiality in light of the small size of the Deaf community, I do not provide individual demographic information. The literature shows that this type of violence knows no boundaries when it comes to race, ethnicity, religion, socio-economic status, education level, and region of the country (Bass et al. 2006; Herman, 1997; Collins 2000). For purposes of interest and full disclosure, I include the following aggregated demographics as they apply to these participants. As a group, the participants ranged in age from 25-65. They grew up in Midwestern and Eastern areas of the country, in both
rural and urban areas. As a group, they are Caucasian and Native American, grew up in Catholic, Jewish and Protestant households, and identify as lesbian and heterosexual. Their ages when their brothers first started abusing them range from 5 to 15. Their ages when the brother stopped the sexual assaults range from 9 to 15. The women in this study all experienced assaults that occurred numerous times and over a significant span of time.\textsuperscript{14} Their socio-economic status growing up included working class, middle class, and upper class, and currently includes the same. Their education levels range from one year of college to master’s degrees. Birth order of the participants in their family ranges from the youngest to the second oldest, with 2-5 siblings in the family, and 2-7 years separating the perpetrator and study participant. Three of the participants are younger than their brothers, and one is older.\textsuperscript{15} The age of the participant when she first disclosed the incest to a family member ranges from 5 years old to 40 years old. For each participant, following this first disclosure, there were subsequent disclosures, conversations on the matter, and/or attempts at broaching the subject that were rejected by family members.

The participant-interviewers were between the ages of 30 and 40, are African American and Caucasian, grew up in Catholic and Christian households, and identify as bisexual and straight. Their socio-economic status growing up included middle class and working class/poor. One has her MA degree in counseling and is pursuing her PhD., and the other has a PhD. in Psychology. Neither interviewer-participant had history of any

\textsuperscript{14} This is not always the case; sometimes it is a one time occurrence, but with no less effects (Bass et al., 2006; Caffaro and Conn-Caffaro, 2005; Herman, 1992; D. H. E. Russell, 1986).

\textsuperscript{15} The perpetrator is most commonly older than the victim, though this is not always the case and age is not the determining factor of whether sexual assault occurred (Bass et al., 2006; Caffaro and Conn-Caffaro, 2005; Cyr et al., 2002). In situations where the perpetrator is younger, there are usually factors that contribute to the perpetration of this type of violence, including a power differential (Kerrie James & Laurie MacKinnon, 1990). In this case, the participant believes that the fact that she is Deaf and her brother is not, was a contributing factor.
type of sexual assault (criteria for participation). Their experience with the topic of childhood sexual abuse, and specifically with sibling sexual abuse arose from their interest in mental health work and their experience working with people with trauma histories, including sibling sexual abuse and incest perpetrated by other family members, physical abuse, domestic violence, and eating disorders. They had a range of 4-10 years of interviewing experience, and each had training through formal coursework, professional development, and supervision. They both said that because of their interest in and desire to see more research on the topic and trauma work in general, they each saw this as important work to which they wanted to contribute in whatever way they could. The Deaf interviewer had a similar response to Deaf people being in the research and wanted to be involved because Deaf people were a part of the study. Both interviewers stated their desire to participate in this study examining sibling sexual abuse and including Deaf participants was spurred by experiences of disenfranchisement, oppression, and marginalization in their own lives and from their professional work experiences.

3. Relationship to the Researcher

The literature offers divergent views on whether research may benefit or be compromised when the researcher and participants know one another. Those who acknowledge the benefits of prior relationship stress the importance of the researcher attending to possible adverse effects of that relationship, and advocate for full disclosure in the researcher’s writing and analysis (Mishler, 1986; Patton, 2002; Reinharz, 1992). Many also contend that without a prior relationship between researcher and participants, the research may suffer (Mishler, 1986; Patton, 2002; Reinharz, 1992). The ability to
establish the connections needed for research in sensitive areas often rests on the participants’ ability to assess the credibility of and establish trust with the researcher (Reinharz, 1992).

Prior to this study, I did not have a close personal relationship with any of the participants; two of them I had never heard of or met, two of them I had a prior relationship with that I would not characterize as close. The two who I knew previously, I knew through our communities and because of my work in the area of sibling sexual assault. All four of the participants knew of me because of Not Child’s Play, and I had friends or acquaintances in common with each of them. All four of the participants cite these as reasons why they volunteered for the study and that provided them with some assurance and ease about being a part of this study. They also stated that the fact that I share their experience of being a survivor influenced their willingness to be a part of this study.

Neither of the interviewers knew of me or Not Child’s Play prior to my contacting them to participate in the study. Several potential participants informed me that they were interested in participating in the study, but because of our prior relationship they felt that their participation would be prohibited.

C. Procedures for Data Collection

Interaction between the researcher and the study participants is a part of the data collection process (Patton, 2002; Reinharz, 1992). In this study, where context and interaction are central concepts, I see not only my first contacts with participants, but also the design of the study and the manner in which I have conducted myself throughout, as contributing to the data. I have taken this into consideration in my analysis and the
conclusions of the study. I kept notes, beginning with the initial soliciting for participants, of what I did and my reflections of what I was doing. I also kept all responses that I received from participants once I began conducting the study. I continued recording such notes during data collection sessions and analysis and writing.

I collected three sets of data for this study. The first set of data consisted of the two conversations between survivors (one in ASL and one in English). The second set consisted of the four interviews, each of the four survivors being interviewed by an interviewer-participant. The third set consisted of follow-up conversations with each of the six participants.

The interviews were semi-structured, with open-ended questions (see Appendix E) “to achieve the active involvement of [the] respondents in the construction of data about their lives” (Hilary Graham, 1984, cited in Reinharz, 1992:18). This is a widely accepted approach that allows for maximum flexibility to pursue lines of inquiry and maximum discovery and description (Ann Oakley, 1981; Patton, 2002; Janice Raymond, 1979, cited in Reinharz, 1992), while allowing participants to respond in the way they want, so that the interviewer is not controlling for meaning by controlling how people talk (Riessman, 2001).

As a qualitative data collection technique, focused conversations serve a similar purpose to semi-structured interviews. By giving the participants a focus for their conversation (Reinharz, 1992), I provided them with a means of constructing their discourse and interactions with one another. With such focus, the data becomes equally as valid and meaningful as semi-structured interviewing for study of their language use and lives (Graham, 1984). Both the conversations and the interviews in this study provide
1. Recording Methods and Considerations

All data was captured by video camera. While it is obvious that any conversation or interview conducted in ASL must be videotaped to record the language use, there are compelling sociolinguistic reasons for recording the English versions on videotape, rather than only audiotape, as well (see C. Goodwin and Marjorie Harness Goodwin who have been video recording spoken language interactions since the 1970’s). In spoken face-to-face conversation there is much more to the conversation than the vocalizations that can be captured by an audiotape. The non-verbal communication that occurs is also important data that must be captured and analyzed to gain a more thorough understanding of the interaction. The language that occurs, in any situation, occurs not in a vacuum, but in a physical context and with the visual cues and movements that accompany the spoken language in that context.

Three small (approximately the size of one’s hand), digital video cameras placed on tripods were used for recording each interaction in ASL and in English. Two cameras were focused solely on one interlocutor each and a third camera captured the interaction between them as a whole. The equipment was set up prior to the participants arriving on location and was set up in the most inconspicuous manner possible. Although I proposed and originally intended to use two video cameras for recording the English interactions, after speaking with a video consultant I made the decision to use three cameras in the same manner for all of the interactions.

To collect the data in the conversations and interviews, once participants were seated I checked and adjusted the camera angle and picture to be captured, started the
cameras, thanked the participants, and left the room. For the follow-up conversations in which I participated, I started the tapes and then took my seat in the room.

I transferred all recordings into i-Movie\textsuperscript{16} on my computer, burned in time codes, and compressed the data into QuickTime Pro\textsuperscript{17} movies for ease of viewing and coding during analysis of the data. By videophone, telephone, and email I worked with technical consultants to learn how to stream, code, and compress the data. None of these consultants viewed or heard any of the data.

As would be expected, the participants were aware of the video cameras in the room, and aware of their talk and interaction being recorded. The cameras were not hidden from sight, and my presence in the room was for the purpose of turning on the cameras. Although the cameras were already set up and in place when participants arrived, I had to take a moment to focus the participants within the frame, start recording, and then make my exit. At the end of the interactions, participants notified me they were done and I returned and turned off the cameras. There is no indication in any of the interactions that a participant or interviewer is speaking \textit{to} the camera (I looked at vocabulary, eye gaze, reference, etc.). They made comments in the conversations and interviews that indicated their awareness of the cameras and of being filmed, including discussing the length of time they had talked on camera, inadvertently using a person’s real name and then commenting that it was okay because I could omit the name later, and commenting on the fact that one of them had not noticed one of the cameras previously.

In my follow-up conversations, I asked each participant whether she felt that the presence of cameras affected either her part of the conversation or interview, or the

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{16} iMovie is a video editing program for MacIntosh computers.
\textsuperscript{17} QuickTime Pro is also a video editing computer program.
\end{flushright}
discourse in total. Each participant reported that while she had been aware of the cameras, she did not believe that the cameras’ presence had any effect on what she said or how she said it. They reported this to be true for both the conversation and the interview.

2. **The Conversations – Data Set I**

In January 2007 the two conversations took place and were recorded on videotape: one in ASL between the two Deaf participants, and one in English between the two non-Deaf participants. The focus of each conversation was the same: to discuss having talked with one or more family members about the fact of the sibling sexual assault.

Both conversations were held in my living room in the same week. I discussed the location of the conversations with each participant, offering four sites to select from—my house, their house, my workplace office, or another location of their choice. All of them expressed a desire to hold the conversations at my house or their own house, and all expressed a desire *not* to hold them at my workplace or at an office of any sort. They gave reasons of wanting to be comfortable and to maintain confidentiality. Prior to, during, and after the filming, no one else was in my house, so that the participants came and went in a manner that maintained their confidentiality.

All participants were given the opportunity to come to my house to assess their comfort level prior to making their decision about where they wished to hold the conversations. One participant requested to do so, and came to my house at a time when no one other than myself was home.

At the time of the study, after I welcomed the participants into my house, I showed them the area where the filming would take place and where I would be (on a
different floor) during their conversation, and I invited each participant to make herself comfortable. Both pairs of participants sat in the living room – each woman sitting where she would be filmed – and I provided the same information to both pairs to guide their conversation, and offered to answer any questions they had.

When I left the room, I made contemporaneous notes about what we had discussed immediately prior to the beginning of data collection from both conversations. Both pairs posed a question to me regarding the length of their conversation and wanted to know what would happen if their conversations only last 15 minutes, and whether that would give me the data that I needed. I assured them that as long as they discussed talking with one or more family members, that I would have the data I needed. One participant remarked that she does not remember very much, to which I responded that whatever she discussed would be just fine. One participant asked if they would get “some instructions” before they started. I said yes and provided the following information to the participants just prior to beginning data collection (from notes that I used for both conversations):

- Begin any way you would like; end any way you would like.
- Please talk with one another about telling your family about the sexual abuse
- You are not expected to talk about the incest *per se*, or details or specifics about the abuse
- Talk with one another for as short or long a time as you like
- The tapes will record for up to 90 minutes
- I will turn on the cameras and then leave the room; please come get me when you are finished
I will be upstairs and will not be able to see or hear any of your conversation.

Should you say anything on film that you later decide you do not want included in my discussion or write-up, you can let me know and I will honor your wishes.

In addition, I asked the non-deaf participants if my decision to have three cameras recording instead of two, as I had originally planned and discussed with them, was acceptable. They both said that it did not matter to them. Neither pair seemed fazed by the cameras, though they both did want to get started. One participant wanted to know why I was not staying in the room and listening to what they had to say while they were talking. I explained that my presence would make it a three-way conversation, and I wanted just the two-way conversation between the two of them. I reiterated that I would be happy to have a three-way conversation with them after I was done with the project, and that she would have the opportunity to talk with me at another time if she wanted.

Much of this information had been relayed to the participants in the Letter of Introduction (see Appendix B) and the Informed Consent (see Appendix C), and was discussed in my conversations with the participants prior to selecting them to be in the study.

The conversation between the non-deaf women took place on a weekday evening (7:00 pm) and lasted 1 hour and 17 minutes. The conversation between the Deaf women took place on a weekend morning (11:00 am) and lasted 1 hour and 13 minutes.

A difference between the two pairs was that the non-deaf women arrived, looked around, got something to drink, sat in the chairs they would be in for the data collection, talked with me, and began their conversation. In contrast, the Deaf women arrived,
looked around, got something to drink, and stood in the kitchen talking for approximately 30 minutes prior to taking their seats and focusing on the conversation for the study. During this time, they did not talk about what they would discuss for the study, or talk about the study in any way. They discussed usual Deaf culture topics such as where they each grew up, people they knew in common, where they had lived, etc. This is a common occurrence in American Deaf Culture (personal communication, MJ Bienvenu, June 26, 2007).

3. The Interviews – Data Set II

In February 2007 the four interviews took place and were recorded on videotape: two in ASL between a Deaf interviewer and each of the two Deaf study participants, and two in English between a non-Deaf interviewer and each of the two non-Deaf study participants.

It should be noted that although the interviews were for the purpose of comparing the discourse use, narratives, and interaction between the conversations and interviews as distinct settings, I attempted to ensure that the interviews were authentic interviews.

The interviewer-participants worked with me to create the interview guidelines and protocol, including what questions they would ask, the order of those questions, and how they would debrief and close the interview. To ensure the same basic line of inquiry with all participants, both interviewers used the same set of questions and protocol.

The interviewer-participants knew I would be looking at the narratives that the study participants told in the conversations and how they told them again in the interviews. They were aware that I needed to ensure that the data collected in the interviews included these narratives. Therefore I provided them with information
regarding the narratives that the women told in the conversation so that the interviewer could elicit the narratives, if necessary. I told each interviewer-participant the role of the family member each participant had talked about in her conversation narratives (e.g., the parents), so that the interviewer could ask the participant about having told that person, if necessary. I asked the interviewer-participants to conduct their interviews for approximately one hour.

The four study participants were again given options regarding the location of the interviews. They all expressed interest in having their interview at my office. I was prepared to have the interviews elsewhere if any of the participants wanted that – especially the Deaf participants, since my office is on the campus of Gallaudet University (which is part of a small community and has historical, political, and linguistic meaning embedded in it). I had an alternate office space available to use as a location if necessary; I intended that all of the interviews take place in the same location as one another, as the conversations had. Everyone expressed interest in having the interviews at my Gallaudet office, and they were held there.

Once the participant and interviewer-participant arrived at the location, I welcomed them and showed them where we would be doing the interview and filming and where I would be during the interview, and invited them to make themselves comfortable. Immediately prior to each interview I reviewed the parameters of the interview with them (see below) and answered any questions they had. The only question that one participant asked was whether the interviewer would guide the interview with questions; when I responded affirmatively, she said she was glad of that fact. I provided them with non-alcoholic drinks and snacks. When I left the room, I made
contemporaneous notes about what we had discussed immediately prior to the beginning of data collection for each interview.

I provided the participants with the following information, both prior to the day of the interview (see Appendix B Letter of Introduction) and again verbally (in English or ASL as appropriate) immediately preceding the interview, with the interviewer-participant present:

- The interviewer is conducting the interview for me – she is a clinician who has experience in this area and has interview experience.
- The interviewer is not a survivor – she has no sexual abuse history of any sort (childhood sexual abuse, rape, etc.), but does have interest and experience working in this area.
- The interviewer has guidelines and questions for a semi-structured interview.
- You do not have to answer any questions or say anything that you are not comfortable with.
- You may ask the interviewer whatever you would like to.
- The interviews are set for approximately an hour. Shorter is fine; longer is fine. The tapes will record for 90 minutes.
- The interviewer will be asking you about telling your family member(s) about the sexual abuse.
- You are not expected to talk about the incest *per se*, or details or specifics about the abuse.
- I will turn on the cameras and then leave the room; please come get me when you are finished.
I will be in the next room, and will not be able to see or hear any of your interview.

Should you say anything on film that you later decide you do not want included in my discussion or write-up, you can let me know and I will honor that request.

Prior to the start of the interviews, the pairs discussed the following: Pearl and Aislynn talked about pagers; Bettie and Aislynn talked about people they knew in common and Aislynn mentioned she had not noticed the third camera in the first interview she conducted, to which Bettie responded with an explanation of how the three cameras would capture three different images; Grace and Annette talked about the weather and previous snowstorms; Fran and Annette did not talk just prior to the start of their interview.

The ASL interviews lasted 1 hour and 6 minutes (Pearl) and 1 hour and 20 minutes (Bettie). The English interviews lasted 36 minutes (Grace) and 42 minutes (Fran).

4. Follow-up Conversations – Data Set III

Triangulation of data addresses validity concerns, as well as allowing the researcher to clarify and verify the data and the researcher’s analysis directly with the participants. It also allows participants to reflect on and expand on the data, and to ask questions of the researcher (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000; Patton 2002; Reinharz, 1992). Laurel Richardson (2000) argues that conceptualizing the process and product as a crystal with many facets, rather than a triangle, we can deepen our understanding of the research we conduct.

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18 All participants are identified herein by pseudonyms.
After the interviews, I held follow-up conversations with each of the participants and interviewer-participants. After analyzing the data, I identified questions for each of the four study participants and for both of the interviewer-participants, as well questions and items for further discussion with each of them individually. I encouraged participants to comment on how my analysis fit with their experience in the research conversation and interview, and to add any other comments they would like. They also had questions for me about the study and about their participation in it. I have incorporated their comments from these conversations in my analysis.

All six follow-up conversations occurred face-to-face during April and May 2007. Four of them took place at my home or the home of the participant, one in my office at work, and one by videophone. They were all recorded on video in the same manner described in the previous section except the one that took place by videophone, which was recorded onto one mini DV tape directly from the television monitor.

During each follow-up conversation, I had a copy of that participant’s data available for playback. This allowed us to look together at specific segments of the discourse. The participant could choose to view as much of the data as she wished, which amount varied among the participants. Some of the participants requested to view their tapes in their entirety at another time, which was done. No data was given to or left with any participant, to maintain confidentiality. These follow-up conversations were each one to two hours in length.

**D. Transcription and Translation Decisions**

Mishler (1986) and Ochs (1979) suggest that transcripts are influenced by the researcher’s theoretical stance. In a written document it is impossible to preserve and
provide examples of the actual spoken or signed linguistic data. It is challenging, at best, to attempt to capture an accurate transcription of an interaction in any language. English transcriptions often leave out auditory information, non-verbal, gestural, and interactional information that is of consequence and is vital to the creation and understanding of meaning, and none of which can be represented on paper in the same way they are reflected in sound/visual waves relative to the surrounding information. ASL transcriptions are even more challenging due to the fact that there is no written form of the language to begin with. In addition, many of the features of signed languages occur simultaneously, and, as with English transcriptions, non-verbal, gestural, and interactional information that is of consequence to the interaction is often left out. In this study, transcripts were used primarily for reference, to note patterns and coding.

Writing about one language in another language presents challenges for the author, and even more challenges for the reader. This can be especially problematic if the reader knows only one of the languages being discussed. For example, a reader versed in English may read an English transcript and reconstruct a plausible version of what the discourse sounded like. For a reader not versed in ASL, attempting to read an ASL transcript and reconstruct a plausible version of what the discourse looked like would be nearly impossible. Mindful of the limitations of transcriptions, I have chosen to use an adaptation of James Gee’s (1991) transcriptions for representing the English interactions and language, and a glossing system adapted from Charlotte Baker and Cokely (1980) in order to represent the ASL interactions and language. Furthermore, I provide translations of the ASL interactions and language, accompanied by notes and explanation of import about specific language choices when quoting and illustrating themes that are the focus of
my discussion. These translations, which are seen as quotes in this document, have been checked for accuracy of meaning, register, etc. by the participant who originally uttered the original discourse.

In order to both preserve confidentiality and provide the reader with examples from the data (in both English and ASL on DVD), I would need to have linguists or actors re-create the data taken from the interaction to show the actual linguistic usage and behaviors. Due to limits on my resources and the scope of this dissertation, I have not done this. In future presentations of the findings of this study, I plan to create linguistic examples, replicated by a linguistic assistant or actor, to demonstrate the linguistic properties from the original discourse; none of the study participants’ images will appear.

1. Transcription Conventions

Transcription conventions used for data excerpts. Adapted from Baker and Cokely (1980) and Schiffrin (1987, 2006) and Tannen (1989):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Period</th>
<th>Indicates end of sentence (falling intonation in English; non-manual indicators in ASL)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>,</td>
<td>Comma indicates end of a clause with more to follow</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>!</td>
<td>Exclamation mark indicates exclamation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>?</td>
<td>Question mark indicates a question (yes/no, wh, rhetorical)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The</td>
<td>Underline indicates emphatic stress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“...”</td>
<td>Quotation marks indicate dialogue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>( )</td>
<td>Parentheticals indicate gestures and non-verbal information/behavior</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YES</td>
<td>Capital letters indicate a gloss for an ASL sign</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>–</td>
<td>Hyphen between glossed words is used when more than one English word is used to represent an ASL sign</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#</td>
<td>Number sign in front of a gloss indicates the word is lexicalized</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E-D</td>
<td>Hyphen between letters indicated the word is fingerspelled</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
E. **Data Analysis**

Data analysis begins during the conceptualization and data collection stages of research (Steinar Kvale, 1996; Reinharz, 1992). The interaction between the researcher and the study participants is part of the data collection and analysis (Reinharz, 1992), and thus the researcher notes how these interactions inform the study from the first contacts.

Data analysis in qualitative studies has a fluid and emergent nature, is inductive rather than deductive, and begins without a predetermined hypothesis (Patton, 2002). Coffey and Atkinson (1996) emphasize that qualitative data analysis is a cyclical process and a reflexive activity that is inseparable from writing and theorizing. They also emphasize the inductive, data-led, systematic, and methodical nature of the analysis, coupled with the requirements of the researcher to be imaginative, artful, and flexible in
her analysis process. Inductive analysis is a strategy “to discover important patterns, themes, and interrelationships [which] begins by exploring, then confirming [, and] is guided by analytical principles rather than rules” (Patton, 2002:41). Through this process findings are allowed to emerge, rather than following from forcing data into pre-existing categories. Patton states “qualitative interpretation begins with elucidating meanings… and asks, What does this mean? What does this tell me about the nature of the phenomenon of interest?” (477). The researcher then makes inferences, confirms and disconfirms explanations, draws conclusions, and attaches significance to the findings in the data (Mishler, 1986; Patton, 2002). Matthew Miles and A. M. Huberman (1994) suggest that by the time the researcher has coded and categorized the data, a great deal of interpretation has already occurred.

In this study, I employed interactional sociolinguistics as a way of making sense of the data and organizing it by identifying patterns and themes. The first step of analysis in interactional sociolinguistics is to scan the recorded materials for content and discourse organization, in order to locate sequentially bounded units that have thematic coherence (Gumperz, 2001). The next step is to create detailed transcripts of the “event sequences in order to prepare interactional texts and analyze them in greater depth” (Gumperz, 2003:90, italics in the original).

Beginning with the first set of data, the conversations, I looked for and noted content and discourse organization as they appeared through patterns, similarities, differences, and themes in the discourse and the interaction. I then created modified transcripts for the first set of data,\(^\text{19}\) which included detailed notes identifying the critical elements of the interactions and discourse use. These notes served the same function as a

\(^{19}\)See above for discussion of transcription and translation decisions.
detailed transcript, cued to allow me to return to the actual video-taped data to analyze the event sequences without any loss of information through a transcript. I replicated these steps after collecting the second set of data.

I then made three more passes through the data in order to identify and verify the emergent categories of interest and their potential relationships. I analyzed for structural and inferential similarities and differences within the contexts in which the discourse and interaction occurred, including looking at lexical items, referring terms, and responses by a participant to the other person’s discourse. I examined these constructs as they appeared for each interlocutor and as they compared across language and participant.

As categories began to emerge, I found three overarching themes in the data: what stories were retold and how those retellings were similar or different; how the participants named four central concepts; and, what themes emerged in the tellings and retellings of disclosing. I then noted what data belonged in each of these three categories and how the categories broke down further.

I looked at the stories each participant told that were repeated in the interviews, noted where these stories began and ended, and noted what marked those entries and exits, and what content was the same in both tellings and what content was different. I also looked at how the participants interacted in the process and engaged in activities such as backchanneling. This information is discussed in the first section of my findings.

I looked at how the participants indexed four central concepts: themselves, the perpetrator, the experience, and the disclosures. This is discussed in the second section of my findings. I also looked at themes that emerged in the tellings and retellings and noted those. This is discussed in the third section of my findings. Each of these sections
includes quotes and examples of the interaction that illustrate the phenomena I highlight, along with my analysis and interpretation of the importance of each of these items.

In order to verify my analysis I returned to the participants and interviewer-participants with questions for clarification, expansion, and checking of my understanding of their discourse and intentions. Gumperz (2001), like many other researchers, argues that the researcher must not only conduct interviews and in-depth analysis of what happens in the interaction, but also share the tapes of the interaction with the participants in order to understand intentions and interaction.

I had originally intended to strengthen this study by having an ASL linguist verify my understanding of areas of ASL use that were not clear to me (because of my non-native capacity in that language). Though I believe in theory that would strengthen the study, it did not prove to be necessary in this instance. After watching the ASL tapes with the ASL linguist, I found it less helpful than I had anticipated it would be. I see two possible explanations for this: 1) that I did not pre-establish the appropriate conditions for the assistance I was seeking from this assistant, which reduced its usefulness; and/or 2) I did not need the assistance in understanding. In addition, I had already built in a way to verify my understanding directly with the participants, which I did in my follow-up conversations with them. In this way, I strengthened this study, as Patton (2002) suggests, and I mitigated the effects of not having the assistant verify my language understandings by having the participants verify them.

The results of my analysis and interpretation of the data are reported in the next chapter.
F. Trustworthiness, Rigor, and Credibility

In any study, a core question is trustworthiness of the data and conclusions; demonstration of rigor and credibility help the reader assess the quality of the study. This is equally true for qualitative and quantitative research; however, because the two types of research have different philosophical bases, they must be measured by methods appropriate to each (Patton, 2002; Reinharz, 1992). The concepts of generalizability, reliability, and validity apply to quantitative research and do not easily transfer to qualitative research.

Debate about how to measure the quality of a study is not new. Mishler, 1979, argues that the concept of generalizability is central to a positivist perspective, which requires stripping a study of its context, which is in conflict with basic principles of qualitative research. Likewise, Reinharz, 1992, argues that quantitative perspectives and requirements do not fit with feminist research, and that generalizations derived from quantitative research provide little real understanding of how people live their daily lives. She includes the words of Patricia Cayo Sexton (1982) who did a study of female hospital workers, to make this point:

Generalizations can be misleading, inadequate, and lacking in any flesh and blood reality, they can also fail to take account of the astonishing variations among women and the work they do. Women have not one but many voices… Both the themes and the variations, the individual and the collective voices need to be heard.” (cited in Reinharz, 1992:4)

The problem with applying the concept of generalizability to qualitative studies is aptly put by Lincoln and Eugene Guba (1986), “The trouble with generalizations is that they
don’t apply to particulars” (110).

Lincoln and Guba (1986) suggest that it is important to address trustworthiness (Patton, 2002, uses the term rigor), which includes credibility, transferability, dependability, confirmability, and authenticity. Patton (2002) synthesizes these concepts to focus on what he calls rigor of the methods, credibility of the research, and the philosophical belief in qualitative inquiry. The latter is addressed above in the theoretical framework of this study. Below I describe how I addressed rigor and credibility in the study in order to enhance its trustworthiness and provide the reader with a way to assess its quality.

1. Rigor

As stated above, I solicited participants for this study using purposeful sampling techniques, which according to Patton (2002) “aim[s] at insight about the phenomenon, not empirical generalization from a sample to a population” (40). This strategy does not purport to offer a representative sample; its aim is to lend credibility to the study results.

Mishler (1979) emphasized the multiplicity of social contexts from which one selects the center of one’s study: “human action can be understood only within its own context of socially grounded rules for defining, categorizing, and interpreting the meaning of our conduct” (8). I carefully chose social contexts for this study and have conducted my analysis through the lens of these contexts.

Mishler (1979) also discussed the importance of systematic investigation: “Any regularity discovered through research that describes a patterned and systematic association between two variables is itself context-dependent” (9). The study design and methodology were selected and carried out in conjunction with my analysis and
interpretation, all of which have been dependent on one another, therefore adding to the rigor of this study.

Reinharz (1992) asserts that use of multiple methods (triangulation) within a single project serves several functions, including “reflect[ing] the intellectual, emotional, and political commitments” (197) of the study and the participants, allowing the researcher to be responsive to the project and participants in order to “illuminate previously unexamined or misunderstood experiences,” (197) and thereby increasing the rigor, credibility, and utility of the research. Reinharz also writes about the commitment to thoroughness in order to “enhance understanding...add layers of information and use one type of data to validate or refine another” (210). I have triangulated the data by conducting follow-up interviews and asking the participants to clarify and verify my understanding of what they said.

2. Credibility

In order to measure the credibility of any research, the reader must be able to answer questions about what the researcher did or did not do (Mishler, 1979; Patton, 2002; Reinharz, 1992). To address the question of credibility, I have been reflexive in my writing, data collection, analysis, and interpretation throughout the study and the reporting of it. I selected participant-interviewers with lived experience to obtain data that is trustworthy. I have included a section on the theoretical framework that guides this study, from conception to design to methods to interpretation. I have included a section on researcher perspective and biases, and located myself not only in the study but also within the communities from which I solicited participants (Patton, 2002).
G. Ethical Considerations

This study involves human subjects and therefore I abided by ethical requirements and considerations as required by the Institutional Review Boards at Gallaudet University and the Union Institute & University. I submitted my research proposal to both universities’ Institutional Review Boards and received approval from both. My research did not begin until I had received approval from both Boards. The Informed Consent Form, Videotape Release Form, and all Confidentiality Forms are in the appendix.

1. Confidentiality

Participants’ identity has been and will remain confidential. All participants either chose or were assigned, and are heretofore identified only by, a pseudonym in all written material. Other identifying information, including names of friends and family members and demographic information is not and will not be used in the dissemination of information regarding this study. In accordance with Institutional Review Board procedures, identifying information and the videotape recordings are kept in separate, secure, locked files to which only I will have access. The recordings of data collection are identified with the pseudonym and date of recording, not the actual name of the participant. Pseudonyms are kept separate from the informed consent forms. In addition to the primary researcher, a linguistic assistant was employed for clarifying and identifying linguistic information. This assistant was required to sign a Confidentiality Agreement (see Appendix D) prior to viewing the tapes. Only the primary researcher and assistant have viewed the videotapes. No copies of any of the recordings have been provided to anyone. The original recordings and all copies remain in my possession.
Quotes from the participants are used in this document. Any information that was potentially identifying has been removed or changed.

2. Risks and Benefits to Participants

The anticipated risk to participants of the study was low, and the study posed no physical harm to any of the participants. Because participants would be talking about emotion-laden topics and experiences, each participant was required to represent to me that she has a support network upon which she could and would rely, before, during and after her participation in this study. I further recommended that each participant discuss her participation in this study with someone in her support network (e.g. therapist, counselor, clergy, doctor, support groups, or 12 step program, etc.) before and after her participation in the study. I also offered to provide additional suggestions and resources upon the request of any participant. No one has made such a request as of the writing of this document. Each participant was also told and later reminded that in the event that she experienced any emotional discomfort during a data collection conversation or interview, she would have the option to not respond and/or to discontinue the data collection session and/or her participation in the study.

Another risk that participants were informed of and which most potential participants raised in discussion with me prior to participation (because it was referenced on the Informed Consent Form), was the risk of revealing information that will be required to be reported to the authorities. The Gallaudet University IRB required that I list mandatory reporting as a risk. Even though this risk was extremely low, if there were any federal or state statutes that required mandatory reporting of any information in accordance with state and federal statutes, I would be bound to do so. Once participants
volunteered for the study, I investigated the applicable state laws for the states in which the potential participants reside and the states in which I would gather data, and informed participants if there were any relevant mandatory reporting laws. There was only a slight risk that participants would share any information that could fall under such a statute, and only a slight risk that there would be a duty to disclose. No information raising a legal duty to report was reported during any part of the study.

Possible benefits to the participants include the opportunity to speak about and from their own experience, potentially leading to increased self-knowledge, empowerment, and/or beneficial catharsis. They may gain a better sense of their experiences within a larger context and see their place in a larger community of survivors of brother-sister incest. They may also have a positive sense of contributing to the development of a more in-depth understanding of narrative tellings and retellings and discourse patterns in ASL and in English, in general and specific to the topic of disclosure of sibling sexual assault. Participants might also benefit from increased knowledge and understanding of the experience of other incest survivors, victimization and the subject of childhood sexual assault, as well as contributing to the knowledge of how context affects what interpreters must consider to create successful interpretations.

H. Limitations of the Study

The fact that I share the experience of being an incest survivor with the four participants could be seen as a liability in a study such as this. However, I believe that this commonality of experience provided a depth of understanding of the issues that would not otherwise have been possible. I was cautious to discuss ideas that I had with the participants instead of jumping to conclusions or overlaying my experience in order
to interpret their talk and interactions. Though I could never remove the lens through which I analyzed the data (and designed the study), neither would I wish to do so. By showing the participants the quotes that I have used of theirs and confirming ideas that I have attributed to them, I have strengthened the trustworthiness of the study. I communicated to the participants my willingness to remove any quotes they did not want included in this document. To date, no such requests have been made.

Limitations on how to represent and discuss the interactions and languages were the most problematic to me. There is no way to truly convey on a page the language and the interactions that took place; the ASL is visual and 3-dimensional, and the English is auditory with visual cues and content, so information and detail are necessarily lost when the actual interactions are not viewed. No transcription system can convey the entirety of meaning one can glean from looking at an interaction, with its timing, pace, overlaps, eye gazes, fluctuations in intonation or forcefulness of production of a sign, etc. all in relation to one another and the subtle and nuanced, or less subtle, changes that take place. Transcription or a narrative explanation of any sort omits critical information. In addition, if a reader is not versed in the language being discussed, much of a transcription or explanation will be unintelligible. I believe that recreating examples of the data for the reader to see is a way to provide ideas of what the participants did and what is being analyzed. By this I mean having linguists or actors re-create the examples of the interactions so the actual linguistic use and interaction can be seen. Due to limits on my resources and the scope of this dissertation, I have not done this for this study. In future presentations of the findings, I will provide linguistic examples that have been replicated by a linguistic assistant or actor to demonstrate the linguistic properties and qualities of
the interactions from the original discourse, while maintaining the anonymity of the study participants.

This study could have been strengthened by having a co-researcher who was a Deaf native ASL linguist, specifically for the data analysis and drawing implications and conclusions. As a second language learner of ASL, although I have more than 20 years training and experience analyzing the language, my abilities to do so are nonetheless limited. I do not possess the intuitive tools to analyze ASL in the way I would were I were a native user of the language. Though these intuitive tools alone are not enough to analyze the discourse and interactions, they do provide a foundation and understanding that is lost without them. I relied upon them for analysis of the English interactions and data, but did not have them at my disposal in a similar manner for the ASL. Though I collaborated with an ASL linguist who is a native language user early in the analysis process, I do not believe I understood at that point how she could be most helpful to me and therefore did not glean the benefit that I might have had at a later date by confirming my analysis of ASL discourse with her. However, I believe a co-researcher would have been a better choice so that she could offer her first impression perspectives and we could collaborate in ways other than simply having someone verify my analysis.

The amount of data collected was enormous, yet it is limited to four survivors’ experiences in two contexts with two interviewers. I do not draw sweeping conclusions, but I highlight commonalities and patterns that arose in the data. The data was not intended to be generalizable to all incest survivors, or all users of ASL or English. Nonetheless, it is rich and varied; subtlety, nuances, and patterns emerge.
I. Summary

In this chapter I have presented the methodology used for this study, including the design, participants, procedures, analysis, ways of assessing the quality of the methodology, and ethical considerations. The methodology was developed to set a foundation for varied and rich data analysis. The next two chapters will present my analysis of the data.
Chapter IV

Analysis: Speaking Out As Transformative Action

*I have come to believe over and over again that what is most important to me must be spoken, made verbal and shared, even at the risk of having it bruised or misunderstood.*

Audre Lorde (1984:40)

A. Introduction

This chapter presents an analysis of the disclosures and themes that emerged in the narratives and interactions about disclosure of sibling sexual assault. Prior to discussing the data and the analysis, however, I wish to make note that I intentionally present the data in the next two chapters in a way that does not privilege English. Thus, the reader will find that I have organized my report by, at times, discussing ASL first, and, at times, discussing English first. Though doing that may not be conventional, it is a conscious choice so that English is not made the reference point for the ASL data. There are also times when it makes sense to discuss one language first, followed by the other.

Table 1 presents an outline of the family members the participants told. Included are persons outside of the family as well. They are listed in the order they first were referenced in the conversation and interview. This table and my comments are provided simply to orient the reader to the context of the interactions and to give an idea of the variation and range of the kinds of disclosure involved.
Table 1
Disclosures that each participant discussed in the conversation and the interview

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Conversation</th>
<th>Interview</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bettie (ASL)</td>
<td>Parents</td>
<td>Parents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Interpreter</td>
<td>Interpreter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Classmate</td>
<td>Classmate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Priest</td>
<td>Priest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male Counselor</td>
<td>Male Counselor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Therapist</td>
<td>Therapist – more specificity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Partners</td>
<td>Partners – more specificity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Friends</td>
<td>Friends – more specificity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fran (English)</td>
<td>Brother (perpetrator)</td>
<td>Brother (perpetrator)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Husband</td>
<td>Husband</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sister (next oldest to her)</td>
<td>Sister (next oldest to her)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Oldest sister</td>
<td>Oldest sister</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Parents</td>
<td>Parents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Brother (other)</td>
<td>Brother (other)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Family therapist &amp; family session</td>
<td>Family therapist &amp; family session</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Letter to mom &amp; dad</td>
<td>Letter to mom &amp; dad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Therapists</td>
<td>Therapists</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cousin</td>
<td>Cousin – less specificity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Client</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Neighbors</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Friends</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grace (English)</td>
<td>Parents</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Twin sister</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Brother (perpetrator)</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Co-workers</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Friends</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Partners</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Therapists</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Children</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pearl (ASL)</td>
<td>Partners</td>
<td>Partners</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Friends</td>
<td>Friends</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>High school friends</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dorm supervisor</td>
<td>Dorm supervisor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Counselors</td>
<td>Counselors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mother</td>
<td>Mother</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As the table shows, each of the four participants made at least one disclosure to one or more of their family members. Who they told, and when and how they told their family members varied, and some of them were not the first to tell another family.
member about their experience. In Bettie’s case, she had planned an occasion to tell her parents, but that opportunity disappeared when the police and a social worker showed up at her home and told her parents. Grace had “desperately wanted to tell her parents,” but felt emotionally unable to do so directly; she gave permission for a pastoral counselor to do it for her. Both of these participants have had some, but very little, subsequent conversation with their parents about the incest after that first telling. Pearl had not planned on telling her mother, but she “could not hold it in any longer due to family circumstances” and disclosed to her mother on an impulse after a build up over many years. Pearl told her mother more than 30 years after the abuse ended, and reported that she was “happy I told her,” but that she had no plans to discuss the topic with her mother again. Fran consciously planned to tell her parents, first talking with her brother (the perpetrator) years before talking with any other family members. Later, she spoke with her two sisters and then her parents. She has had numerous conversations with each of her family members since the initial disclosures. Hers is more likely the type of situation we think of when we hear the word disclosure, yet as we see from the experiences of these participants, it is only one of many possibilities.

Bettie, Fran, and Pearl discussed telling the same family members (and nearly all of the same non-family members) in both the conversation and their interview. Grace was the exception to this. She discussed her disclosure to her parents in both data sets, and only implied having told other family members and non-family members in the interview. She did not name those other people or mention their discussions in her interview; she
gives no indication of having disclosed to any of her siblings or her children, disclosures she had explicitly discussed in the conversation.\textsuperscript{20}

The dominant themes in the disclosures are analyzed in the following section.

**B. Themes**

Attention to the narratives of survivors offers an opportunity for insights into how they view and cope with their experiences (Karen Oaksford and Neil Frude, 2003), how they see themselves and other people, and how they evolve and re-story (Mishler, 2004) their lives. Audre Lorde (1984) describes the importance of speaking in one’s own voice, especially when the act of expression is conflicted, “Of course I am afraid, because the transformation of silence into language and action is an act of self-revelation, and that always seems fraught with danger” (42). This transformation, this act of languaging, and this act of self-revelation fills the survivors’ ways of telling. And in these individual voices, which are a part of a collective voice (a growing collective) lies richness that only they have to offer.

In this section I present recurring themes\textsuperscript{21} that appeared in the discourse and narratives related to the experience and aftermath of sibling sexual abuse and of disclosures of that abuse to family members. The themes (except for (2a), which I explicate and analyze below) appeared regardless of language or setting. Although not every interlocutor pursued each theme, each did join in discussion and did not dispute any of the themes raised by her conversational partner. The three categories of themes are as follows:

\textsuperscript{20} Grace explained in the follow-up conversation it was her understanding that she should focus on the first disclosure only, and that in the conversation she went beyond those bounds.

\textsuperscript{21} The quotes of Bettie and Pearl in this section, as in all sections, are my English translations of what they said in ASL.
1. Disclosure: Secret No Longer

2. Family Response
   a. Linguicism: Access to Communication Cut Off
   b. Retraumatizing Acts by Family Members: Compounding the Injuries

3. Survivor Response and Reflection
   a. Understanding of the Impact of the Abuse: Consequences and Truths
   b. Integration of Wounding and Gifts: For Ourselves and the Larger Community

These categories follow a trajectory of the disclosure: telling ones’ family; family members’ responses; and survivors’ integration of those responses and their own understanding of the trauma in their lives. The survivor moves from taking control by telling, to a sense of diminished control, to regaining control. Disclosure was an agentive action for the participants – “I am going to take control of my life; I am going to tell someone.” Family responses led to participants feeling and being disempowered and retraumatized, and divested of agency – being told not to tell others, or that it was their fault. Finally, survivors responded by trying to make sense of what had happened to them, to move to and through understanding and integration, and to take charge of their own lives again.

1. Disclosure: Secret No Longer

The participants in this study disclosed in a variety of ways. The disclosures were made for a variety of reasons, disclosing had varying impact on the participants, and the participants illuminate a range of conflicts that arose from disclosing.
Reasons for Disclosing

The data showed varying reasons why the participants told family members about the sexual abuse their brothers had perpetrated on them. Talking to their family members was in part an attempt to regain some sense of balance and semblance of normalcy in their lives. “Traumatic events call into question basic human relationships” (Herman, 1997:51). Talking to one’s family about traumatic events is an attempt to make sense of one’s experiences within the family system and an attempt to regain some coherence in the family (Bass et al., 2006; Herman, 1997; Tyagi, 2001).

For Bettie, disclosure was something she learned she needed to do as a young child during the first round of abuse (at school they were taught about “bad touch” and told to tell an adult about it if it happened to them). As stated above, Bettie decided to tell her father first, and then she told her mother. The second time her brother began abusing her, the act of disclosing was taken from her, although she had planned to tell her parents.

I had planned on telling my parents that night [after returning from school the day after her brother abused her], but… (she trails off, showing exasperation).

For Fran, disclosure was an assertive action that was well-considered and decided upon ahead of time. She said:

This was about me and my choice to come out. So to speak.

I decided to tell my sister. … And the most flabbergasting thing that happened was she said that my oldest brother abused her as well. …So we compared stories a bit.

Fran has had numerous conversations with her family members since she first disclosed. Disclosing to and talking with her family members was and is one of the strategies Fran employs in order to understand and lessen the impacts of the abuse on
herself. She said she told her parents and talked to her brother “because I wanted them to take more responsibility for it.” She also said:

And I think, even at the time I was still definitely blaming myself for it [the abuse]. And I wanted to see if there was any opening to get rid of some of that guilt. …I think it was just very, weighing heavily on me. I just could no longer carry it by myself. And at that point I still was, you know, feeling a hundred percent responsible for it.

She goes on to explain what has happened for her subsequent to the first disclosures:

And then in subsequent conversations, it’s interesting. With my brother...in subsequent conversations, I tried to give it to my brother. Give him the responsibility. Force it on him. And, and more recently I did the same thing with my parents. …And then finally, when I stopped blaming myself, I just stopped looking, you know, I just finally given up on them anyhow.

Later, she says that in fact she hasn’t really “given up on them” because she has had recent conversations with her parents and she continues to hope that some day they will take and show some responsibility. The relationship is strong between the guilt and shame Fran feels and her need for the perpetrator and her parents to take responsibility and be accountable to her. Though Fran initially disclosed because she wanted her brother to “take responsibility” for his actions and her parents to do the same for their part in what happened to her as a child, she disclosed for other reasons as well (for her brother and family to carry some of the weight, to deal with the shame she felt) and continues to have conversations for a variety of reasons.

Grace disclosed to her children because she was part of a group of contributors to an anthology who would be doing a reading at a local bookstore, and she wanted her children to know from her about the abuse, not from someone else. She considered having contributed to the book to be a disclosure, and taking part in the reading had been
“a very important disclosure for me to stand up and read this thing.” When she talked about telling her children, she said,

I did disclose this to my children. …And, not that my children would run into this book, but I didn’t know. And they were old enough, so I told them. It was a hard thing to say. And, you know, Brad 22 put his arms around me, and Naomi said she was very sorry, but she never wanted to read the poem. And I said, “There’s no reason you need to. I mean I just want it out in case you find it.” So that was an important disclosure. You know it’s the voice, giving voice to it and all.

Grace was asked in the interview about telling people outside the family and about whether having told her parents influenced her decision about telling other people.

She responded similarly to Fran,

[No], that doesn’t strike me as true. [Not] that it encouraged me to talk to other people because I talked to my parents.

And telling my parents had nothing to do with it. In part, I don’t want to give them any credit (laughter). “Sorry guys, I did this on my own!” But it’s, so what ever that’s worth for this study, “this little talk [with my parents] didn’t do a damn thing!” I mean I’m sure it did. I know that it did. I mean even if I didn’t speak it, someone was speaking it for me, and the secret was out. You know, I know that had to have, on many levels probably, had a huge effect on me, but there were so many things after that that were so awful.

For Pearl, disclosure was something she had thought she would never do, but felt compelled following her father’s death, and thus disclosing was an impulsive act 30 years after the abuse had stopped. Although she wanted to tell her parents growing up, she felt she could not because “My father would have done something to him, like shot him, and then my father would have ended up in jail, and I would have lost my father.” She continued,

If my father had not died, I wouldn’t be here [participating in the study]. I didn’t plan on telling my mother, but all of a sudden I had decided to, out of the blue. Maybe I shouldn’t have, but it felt really good [to have told her]. … It was the right time.

22 Not their real names.
So I blurted out, “He destroyed my life. He did something to me.” Her jaw fell open, and she wanted to know why I had never said anything before. I told her I was afraid of what my dad would have done to him, and I didn’t want to risk losing my father because of him.

**Impact on Survivor of Disclosing**

The data revealed that disclosing was important for each of the participants, but not necessarily positive because disclosing had differing impact on the participants. In discussing the disclosures to her parents, Bettie focused on her opportunity to tell having been stripped from her, and being deprived of the ability to deal with disclosure in the way she would have chosen. She also talked about her family’s unwillingness to talk about the abuse post-disclosure, or to deal with what had happened and its aftermath. The family has never spoken about the abuse again.

Fran talked about reactions from non-family members to whom she disclosed:

I did start to tell like my client [co-worker] who was a really good friend of mine. Which was really good because that’s when I was in the heaviest part of my therapy, and I would just all of a sudden start tearing up and be very depressed, and every Sunday I’d just go into a total funk. And so it was really great to have somebody at work who would say, “oh just go home.”

Later on I told a couple neighbors and friends. And, [got] different reactions. Some nurturing. Some not so nurturing. So it was an interesting process.

For Grace, her first disclosure was suggested and encouraged by someone else and she was grateful (and desperate, in her words) for this push to tell her parents. She said,

I moved away when I just turned 18. And started acting out. And fortunately there were enough people around to notice. And called my parents and that was the first time I confronted them with what had happened. …Then my mother didn’t speak to my brother for the longest time; my father said, “He’s my son, of course I’ll speak to him.” I didn’t talk to my mother for two years. …When I told my parents, there were very few questions asked. They did pay for my therapy. And I know it was hard for them because they’re not well off. I mean I think they re-mortgaged the house or something. But I felt it was appropriate and I couldn’t do
it myself anyway. …My parents came up to visit at another point and went to see my therapist. …But we never talked after that about it. In letter or speak. So we were just the quiet (gesture: sweeping both hands backwards out to the side, as though sweeping things out of the way). Go away.

Grace also disclosed to her twin sister, her children, and numerous other people outside the family. She attributed her ability to tell her sister to the fact that she was in a halfway house, and could explain why she was there by disclosing.

When I told [name], [name] my twin, she had a hard time believing it. I think because she couldn’t figure out how it happened because we were always in the same room.

Grace talked to her brother, and attributed her ability to have that conversation to having been drunk when she confronted him.

I did confront my brother, although I was a little drunk. And that was probably why I could do it. …I wasn’t flat out drunk but it was just enough of a buzz that I could just go ahead and dial that number. And I said, “You really fucked me up. And I will always have reactions to it and it will always be a pain in my life. I will go to my grave with that pain. But don’t you dare take any credit with my being a lesbian. I’m very happy with that decision. And I don’t want you to think for a minute you’re responsible for it.” … He was shocked. He said he was sorry.

Grace talked about the contradictory results for herself that had followed her disclosure to her parents:

[It was like] tearing of the scab off. …I mean, I wasn’t cured or anything, and I don’t know that I was even surprised at that. It was just sort of the beginning of … … … a combination of awareness and the more aware and the more I allowed myself to feel the emotions, the more shame there was.

I’m sure that there had to have been some just physical relief. That these two people, even though they weren’t going to be able to do anything about it, and didn’t do anything about it, it wasn’t that much of a relief. And I think that the fact that I kept acting out, and that I needed a whole lot more after that. But I can’t say that it wasn’t a relief, but it wasn’t in the terms that I would have wanted.
Conflicts About Disclosing

The data reveal conflicts for the survivors and that disclosing is a mixed bag because of the shame, culpability, and guilt they feel because the abuse occurred in the first place, because they had not told sooner, and because they now feel saddled with the responsibility of telling. The participants reported feeling that they could not disclose, though they wanted to, because they feared that the consequences would be too great:

I told her I was afraid of what my dad would have done to him, and I didn’t want to risk losing my father because of him. (Pearl)

I think there was fear in telling them [my parents] how awful they’d think I was, (laughter) as opposed to the perp. And I also felt a slight betrayal of my brother. Of betraying my brother, but I don’t know how active that was at the time. It’s very complex, isn’t it? (Grace)

I feel like I shouldn’t have told – I got in trouble for it and they put all this guilt on me when I already felt guilty enough. I think that was one of the worst feelings I’ve ever had, that I’d done something wrong. (Bettie)

When I told the dorm supervisor [she was like a second mother to me] she wanted me to report the abuse to child protective services, but there was no way I was going to do that because of what might happen to my dad if he found out. …I knew how the system worked. …By that time my half-brother was out of the house anyway. (Pearl)

Though Pearl reported that when she disclosed it had been “the right time” to disclose, she also experienced mixed feelings about having done so:

I’m glad I told her. I’m glad she knows. But I wish I could have told her a long time ago so things would have been different.

I still have very mixed feelings about telling my mom just after my father’s death, and not having told her before.

Like I said, I’m glad I told her, but sometimes I feel like I should have kept it to myself.

Grace commented on whether or not she would disclose in general, and as she did in both the conversation and interview, spoke about it in a philosophical way:
A slightly slippery slope. But, but, and it’s interesting to… I used to assume a reaction. And it was based on my own deflated self esteem, like “how could you” or “why didn’t you just say no.” You know, I had all the answers to what people would be saying. And to my amazement that’s not what they said. But I also would be very very careful with who I would share it. Because you don’t know. If you feel strong enough, then you do, and if you don’t, you don’t. You know, you start to recognize what your vulnerabilities are. And what’s going to trigger.

Each of the participants alluded to having to tell or needing to tell for their own sake. They each reported that it was important to disclose, but for different reasons that did not always produce positive or satisfying results. Each experienced a build-up to disclosure, consideration of whether or not to tell, mixed feelings about telling, and finally disclosing in some fashion. They all viewed disclosure as something that was necessary, and something that they were glad they had done, even if it had not played out as they wanted, or did not yield the result(s) they hoped for. What is clear from the data however is that breaking the silence, their own silence and that of their brothers, was necessary for them, and that regardless of whether they spoke to their family members about it again or not, the first disclosure was a beginning of recovery for each of the participants.

2. Family Response

a. Linguicism\textsuperscript{23}: Access to Communication Cut Off

One theme appeared only in the ASL interactions (both the conversation and the interviews). This theme is specifically related to the experience of being Deaf and being in the presence of people who, though they have the ability to use ASL (or some form

\textsuperscript{23} The term linguicism was coined by Skutnabb-Kangas in 1988. Linguicism is defined as “the ideologies and structures which are used to legitimate, effectuate and reproduce an unequal division of power and resources (both material and non-material) between groups which are defined on the basis of language” (Skutnabb-Kangas & Phillipson, 1990, p. 110). It is the belief in the inherent superiority of the ability to hear over those who do not and thereby the right to dominance and control of resources and power.
thereof), *choose* instead to speak, using a language that *cannot be heard* by a Deaf person, thereby assertively cutting off communication with the Deaf persons present.\(^{24}\)

Both Bettie’s parents and Pearl’s mother made such choices immediately after learning of the sexual abuse their sons had perpetrated on their daughters. In the conversation Bettie said, “I have no idea what happened after I told them because they started talking to one another.” She elaborated:

> When my mother got home that night, they all gathered around her, at least my dad and sister did; I don’t remember if my brother was there or not. They were speaking to one another – while I stood back, apart from them, watching, trying to figure out what was going on. I saw her face get red and she started crying, hard. What they said to her, I don’t know. I was standing there and my sister turned to me and told me to get out of the room and ordered me to my bedroom.

In her interview Bettie said that the following night the social worker, who did not sign, returned to her house without an interpreter. At first her parents and the social worker were only speaking and then there was some “interpreting.”

> The next night the social worker came back and there was all this talking going on in English. …Then my mother interpreted. She told the social worker she would interpret. That was not what I wanted. I did not want my mother to interpret — to be the mother and the interpreter. But I had no say in it at all; I was powerless. I had no choice in the matter.

In Pearl’s case, she said,

> My mother was talking to my half-sister, [on the phone] but I have no idea what she did or didn’t tell her. (Conversation with Bettie)

> When I told my mother she was on the phone with my half sister. I don’t know if my mom told my half sister what I had just said. They were talking, but I couldn’t catch what she said. And if she did say something to her, I don’t know what it was. (Interview with Aislynn)

\(^{24}\) There are various reasons why one may make a choice such as this. I acknowledge the fact that non-Deaf people who sign, and deaf people who can speak, negotiate and agree upon the act of using a spoken language with Deaf people in their presence on a regular basis. This type of negotiation and agreement is not what I am referring to here.
In my follow-up interviews with all three of the ASL users, each reported that this type of experience is not unusual for them or for others in the community. It is in fact so common that they said it is expected and that when it does not happen, when non-deaf people who sign, regardless of their fluency in ASL, do not switch to speaking English, it often catches them by surprise. This data indicates that this oppressive experience (Tove Skutnabb-Kangas, 1988) is so engrained in Deaf people’s lives as they interact with non-deaf people that it is an accepted, though unwanted, part of life. It is also one of many forms of audism\textsuperscript{25} that Deaf people and their allies are working to bring attention to and eradicate.\textsuperscript{26} Engaging in this type of behavior immediately following disclosure complicates the actual disclosure and compounds the daughter’s experience of the reactions that Bettie’s parents and Pearl’s mother displayed, creating layers of retraumatization for the survivors (see below for more on retraumatization).

Bettie said in both the conversation and the interview that she had had to think long and hard about how she would tell her parents about the first occurrence of sexual abuse, meaning how she could make herself clear about such an issue to people who did not understand her language well (both of her parents are non-deaf, though her mother signs a form of ASL called Signed English and her father only “signs some, but gestures pretty well”). In the interview she said:

So I decided I would tell my father. What you have to remember is that my family had really limited language skills [in ASL]. So I wasn’t sure how I would explain this to my dad. (It’s curious that I chose my dad to tell first, but I did). So I decided I would gesture to him by making a fist and “punching it” towards my vagina. I remember thinking that I hoped that he would understand. …I don’t

\textsuperscript{25} Audism is a term coined by Tom Humphries in 1977 that refers to “the notion that one is superior based on one's ability to hear or behave in the manner of one who hears.”

\textsuperscript{26} Audism was a central topic during the Gallaudet University protests in 1988 and 2006. There has been a dramatic increase of attention to this topic, as evidenced by books, articles, films, web logs (blogs), video web logs (vlogs), and websites on the topic.
remember his response. But I do remember that when [brother’s name] came into the shed where we were, my dad started talking to him and shaking his fist and my brother just stood there, listening, and then fled. …I have no idea [what my dad said to him]. …Then I told my mom, in the same way. And I remember her response. She said she had already “taken care of it.” …I went back to my mom later on and asked what happened, and again she replied that she had “taken care of it.” That was it. Period.

Bettie also stated that communication issues were a concern of hers after the second occurrence (many years later) of abuse. She discussed having told a classmate and an interpreter about the second round of abuse the morning after it occurred. The manner in which Bettie told both the classmate and the interpreter indicated no struggle with communicating the information to them. In my follow-up conversation with Bettie she reported that her parents’ non-fluent ASL skills made it very difficult to consider talking to them about the abuse when she was younger, and even more difficult to consider raising the topic with them now, though she would like to talk about it more.

Pearl said in the conversation and interview that she and her mother communicated freely, both using ASL, in part because her mother grew up with the language (Pearl’s mother is not Deaf, but her mother’s parents are). But when Pearl talked about communicating with her brother, who did not sign very well, she said,

My half-brother saw no reason to have an interpreter there for the family meeting we were about to have [where he and my half-sister would be talking]. We are all part of the family, but he never understood [what communication really meant].

Both Bettie and Pearl’s parents are not Deaf, and they sign to varying degrees. There were also siblings in their households who signed to varying degrees. Both Bettie and Pearl reported feeling powerless when it came to having an interpreter present when they made such a request; they knew that this was not a decision they got to make even though the consequences hit them especially hard. Aislynn grew up in a Deaf family,
where everyone was fluent in the same language (ASL). Despite these differences, Bettie, Pearl, and Aislynn reported “knowing well” the experience of someone else making a unilateral decision about language choice that removes them, and their ability to participate, from the conversation.

It is not that this theme was missing from the data in the English interactions; rather that it could not exist there. This theme is particular to the experience of Deaf people as a linguistic and cultural minority group in the larger society. If the non-deaf women in this study were denied access to discussions, they might or might not know about that denial; but for the Deaf women these denials of access to communication were acted out in front of them (in their faces, quite literally) by people choosing to use a language that is inaccessible to them (Bettie’s mother, father, brother, and sister; Pearl’s mother, half-brother, half-sister). For more on this topic see H-Dirksen Bauman, 2004; Tom Humphries, 1977; Skutnabb-Kangas, 1988; Skutnabb-Kangas and Robert Phillipson, 1990).

b. Retraumatizing Acts by Family Members: Compounding the Injuries

The timing of when the participants in this study disclosed varied from soon after the abuse had occurred to over 30 years later. Regardless of this time difference, or the age of the survivor when she disclosed, the number of times she discussed the abuse with any given family member, or her reasons for disclosing, each of the participants in this study reported responses to disclosure that ranged from rejecting to hostile to overtly negative to non-supportive, all of which they experienced as retraumatizing. Herman (1997) writes that supportive responses to disclosure can “mitigate the impact of the event, while a hostile or negative response may compound the damage and aggravate the
traumatic symptoms” (61).

The negative reactions of family to the abused appeared in a number of forms\textsuperscript{27}, including: blaming the victim; lack of follow through; lack of support and understanding; lack of accountability; denials and justification; fearing for family reputation; and not respecting boundaries that are set. There is a range of types of negative reactions and behaviors, similar in some ways but clearly distinct. They manifest in different ways, send uniformly negative messages to the survivor and the rest of the family, and further injure in different ways. For these reasons teasing out these distinctions is useful, to highlight the insidiousness of denial, operation of power dynamics, and refusal to understand the abuse as abuse.

**Blaming the Victim**

“Blaming the victim” happened in numerous ways, including requiring that the victim/survivor take certain action (go to confession, make a confession, go to counseling because she was at fault, apologize), being the object of the parent’s wrath, questioning what she did not do (why didn’t she beat her brother up), and faulting her (for nearly sending the brother to jail, for her brother’s inability to communicate with her, for her lack of belief in Jesus), all implicitly or explicitly stating that the abuse happened because of what the victim/survivor did:

I had to go to confession, and say that it was my fault. (Bettie)

They sent me to a counselor, a male counselor, who said that since I was older and female and that I worked out on the farm with him [my brother], that I must have encouraged him. (Bettie)

\textsuperscript{27} Linguicism, as described above, also fits in this category as a type of retraumatization for the Deaf women.
Then my parents had the priest over for dinner and after dinner my parents left the room and the priest told my brother to tell me he was sorry. And then I had to tell him I was sorry. (Bettie)

My parents told me and my brother we had to tell them what happened. And then my mother really let me have it. She was furious that I had told other people before I told her. She would not even listen to me when I tried to tell her that I planned on telling them that night. She just lit in to me. (Bettie)

My mom wanted to know why I didn’t hit my brother and beat him up. She has no concept of how powerless I was. (Bettie)

They said I was the cause of my brother almost having to go to jail. (Bettie)

My mother said she wished I had a cochlear implant so I could communicate with him [half-brother]. My own mother said that. And she’s a CODA!\(^{28}\) … That hurt. That really hurt. (Pearl)

My father said, “If you believed in Jesus, you probably wouldn’t need a therapist.” (laughter from both) So you know, that was that. (Grace)

**Lack of Follow Through**

Lack of follow through occurred in at least three instances for Bettie. She never saw the results of the first set of abuse “being taken care of” – there was no explication of what that meant for her, her brother, or the family as a unit, yet there was a clear message that it was not to be discussed again. In Bettie’s case, the abuse happened again years later, leaving her wishing that she had done something differently the first time the abuse occurred. Bettie was told by a teacher at school that she had to do three things, but her parents, though she was sure they knew about these requirements, never told her of them.

I remember my mother’s response. She said, “It has been taken care of.” … When I asked her again what happened, all she would say was “It has been taken care of.” I never saw any results of “it being taken care of.” (Bettie)

I probably should have told the cops after the first time, because my parents didn’t do anything. … Once should have been enough. (Bettie)

\(^{28}\) CODA (meaning “Child Of a Deaf Adult”) is a term used in the Deaf community to refer to a hearing person whose parents were Deaf. CODAs, having grown up in Deaf culture, are expected to understand Deaf values more than would be expected of other non-deaf people.
At school they told me I had to do three things – see a counselor, talk to a priest, and a third thing that I can’t remember. My parents never mentioned these. The only thing they did was get a priest. (Bettie)

Lack of Comprehension and Understanding

The participants touched on several things that demonstrated to them that their family members do not understand the implications of the family members’ own actions and words. Bettie described this as she said she was sent to a man for counseling and help after the abuse, “I had to go to a male priest.” Fran was close to her sister, who was empathetic when she first told her of the abuse, but subsequent to that their relationship suffered because her sister was blaming herself for Fran’s abuse and protecting their parents:

I’m still not close with the sister I used to be really close with. …And it’s not her fault. And yet, maybe she’s still blaming herself.

The sister next to me when I was growing up. She was certainly empathetic when I first told her. But I think I also stirred up a lot of stuff for her that she did not want stirred up. So our relationship went downhill from that point ever since, and still has not ever been repaired. Where we were really close before that. … So her, sole, when she is in need of help, because she’s sick or whatever, my parents are her support mechanism. So she also went into protection mode of my parents.

Grace describes her mother’s reaction, “And my mother felt totally blamed and defensive and went away in tears, and I couldn’t talk to her. …She didn’t understand, but started feeling guilty.” Bettie’s father “supported” her by distracting her so she would forget about the abuse, but he failed to acknowledge the trauma. She said, “My dad wouldn’t discuss the abuse and tried to distract me so I would forget about it. That seemed okay then, but it isn’t okay anymore.” And Fran’s father suggested that she “‘let sleeping dogs lie’ and, which just pissed me off to no end. Like, ‘Don’t you think I’d let them lie if I could? Do you think I’m enjoying this?’”
In response to Aislynn’s question of what kind of response Pearl would have liked from her mother when she disclosed, she responded that she would have liked her to, “Offer to help me now, and peace in the family. Help me with counseling and, I don’t know, just make it easier to be part of the family. And I’d like her to be more supportive.”

When Annette asked Fran in her interview about telling people outside the family and whether or not having told her parents had influenced her decision about telling other people, Fran responded,

If I’d … done it based on that [my parents’ responses], I wouldn’t have told anybody, in some respects (laughter). Though that’s not to say telling other people sometimes I got responses that I hoped for and sometimes I didn’t. So that’s not to say that their [other people outside the family] responses were so much better than my family’s either. So. It was definitely based on the individual.

This data demonstrates family members’ lack of understanding of the abuse, continuing impact of the abuse on the survivors, after effects of the abuse, and what would be useful to the survivors at the time of disclosure and years later.

**Lack of Accountability**

None of the participants indicated that the perpetrator was held accountable by their parents or by other family members. Bettie’s mother explicitly dismissed the seriousness of her son’s actions by minimizing what he was doing, “My mom [said] that my brother was just ‘curious’ and that he didn’t mean anything by it.” Both Pearl and Bettie reported that their parents favored and continue to favor their brothers: Pearl said, “She continues to favor him [half-brother], even though she has two other kids (both girls). He is her oldest son. He was like a ‘gift’ to her.” Bettie agreed and said her parents support and favor her brother still. Bettie also said, “My brother got off scot-free. He got scolded, but that was it.”
The data reveal the lack of attribution of responsibility from the parents, as well as the dismissal of actual abuse having occurred, feeds the shame and guilt that the survivors already have and serves to further prove to her that she is in this alone.

When Annette asked Fran if her brother had acknowledged accountability during the family therapy session her family had, she said, “He did [attempt to take responsibility] but it was just kind of matter of fact like in the tool room. It was like, ‘You’re right. I did it. I’m sorry.’” Fran made a later attempt for a more satisfactory interaction with her brother. She said,

I wrote a letter to my brother and said, “I don’t appreciate the matter of factness. I don’t feel like you really are taking responsibility.” It was very direct, with those types of words. “I don’t think you understand the repercussions to my life because of it.” And he wrote back a response that didn’t work for me. And I proceed—I didn’t talk to him for a while. I just shut off my communication with him.

Regarding her parents, Fran said,

I never thought they took full responsibility. … Nor did anything to really make amends for what had happened. …I had requested they pay for the therapy. And I just felt that was appropriate compensation. They wouldn’t do it.

Again, the family’s lack of understanding that abuse is experienced as ongoing traumatization and the lack of sincerity in efforts to ameliorate or remediate resulted in new trauma to survivors, and minimization and rationalization was experienced by the participants as equivalent to outright denial.

**Denials and Justifications**

Some denials from the family members were explicit, but many are not, as demonstrated below:

I said [to my brother], “Do you have any recollection of what you did to me”, or something to that effect, and he said he did and he was very matter of fact and he kind of, “oh, that happens in all families,” kind of thing. (Fran)
My mom said it was “too late” and then in the next breath said if she had known he would have been in big trouble, but now it was too late. Plus, she wanted details of what happened, which I was not about to give her. Maybe if she were to do something now I’d tell her more. But she won’t. (Pearl)

She acted like she had no conception of how and when it could have happened, how the farm and being out of other people’s sight provided plenty of opportunity. (Pearl)

My mother seems to deny what happened to her grandkids [my half-brother’s kids]. (Pearl)

“I never knew you were so sensitive” and I think she even said, that my other sister was so strong, since my other sister didn’t say anything and I did. And it just really pissed me off. …Because certainly my coping mechanism from the abuse was to build a very strong independent façade. …But when it is – it’s not all façade, but a lot of it is – at that point it was. …And so to me, to be able to expose myself that much was an incredibly strong [thing to do]. (Fran)

And then he raced around these other topics and talking about my sister and how she’s difficult. And oh, he really did take responsibility for the abuse, but really there’s nothing he can do now… And, kind of chased around everything that wasn’t really important to me. (Fran)

**Fearing for Family Reputation**

Survivors who disclose are placed in a double bind because they can only move forward in their own recovery by taking action other members of the family may experience as harmful (i.e., public disclosure) (Herman, 1997). Survivors are asked in essence to choose, and to place loyalty to family – the locus of their victimization – over truth and healing. In doing so, the focus becomes what someone else knows instead of what someone else (the perpetrator) did.

I can imagine her reaction if she knew I was talking about him, she would say, “there you go again, talking about your brother, and that only serves to make this family look bad.” So I say nothing. I don’t know if that’s the right thing to do or not. (Pearl)

Three years ago, my mother had said, “you not going to tell people are you?” And I said maybe I will and maybe I won’t. (Fran)
My mother said, “You know, are you going to tell any of our cousins or aunts and uncles or…” …“You’re not going to tell them are you?” (Fran)

**Not Respecting Boundaries Set**

Participants reported feeling retraumatized when, after disclosure, family members violated boundaries that had been explicitly communicated by them. These violations of boundaries recapitulated the clear violation of boundaries that was the sexual assault(s) itself, and communicated to the survivor that just as her brother had not respected her boundaries, neither would her parent(s).

So, one of the things I had said to my mother, you know she was like, “but I want to help you, how do I support you.” And I said, “Well one thing, I don’t want you to talk about, don’t ask me about my kids.” Because what my mother would do, rather than ask about me, and she knew I was going through therapy dealing with very difficult things, she would always ask about my kids instead. (Fran)

[Pearl reflecting on her own experiences and responding to Bettie talking about feeling culpable]: Parents really have to deal with it in a different way. Not like what you got [referring to Bettie being blamed and having to go to confession]. They have to look at what the brother did. They have to listen to what both of you have to say. And they have to do something about what happened, instead of looking for a scapegoat. They have to see the bigger picture. I can only hope for something like that, but I’m not sure we’ll ever see it happen. (Pearl)

The array of reactions from the family members, what was said and how it was said, demonstrate the various ways that families try to normalize aberrant conduct: by minimizing it, by denying it, by shifting blame to the victim, by using various strategies to try to coerce silence, by believing in a “quick fix” band-aid approach. In fact, the data supports other research showing that the after-effects of trauma are complex and long lasting, and that inartful responses to victims can add to, rather than reduce, their injury. The narratives highlight the failure of the parents to provide support, comfort, and acknowledgement that survivors hope will follow when their family knows what and that
they have suffered. Indeed, the narratives display exactly the opposite response survivors hoped for, when the facts are disclosed.

3. Survivor Response and Reflection

   a. Understanding of the Impact of the Abuse: Consequences and Truths

   “Traumatic events are extraordinary, not because they occur rarely, but rather because they overwhelm the ordinary human adaptations to life.” (Herman, 1997:33).

   The participants in this study narrated their understanding of the impact of the abuse, the adaptations they have made, and the ways in which they have coped. The participants discussed the impact and living with their experience in these ways: the possibility of their sisters being abused; their contradictory feelings about their brothers, their family, the disclosures, and their coping mechanisms; the ways in which the trauma feels always present; coping strategies they have relied upon; continued discomfort they experience; and feelings of self-blame, culpability, and shame.

   Who Else?

   All four of the participants have sisters, and all four of them mentioned in the study that they have and continue to wonder if their sisters suffered at the hands of their brothers as they had.

   I still wonder if my brother abused my other sister and if she just told him to stop. I really have no idea. (Bettie)

   We’re curious to see if she [our other sister] was involved at all. (Fran)

   I wonder if he did something to her too. (Pearl)

   A part of me wants to bring it up with her. But… (Grace)

   The participants’ “wondering” is not simply theoretical. Fran has two sisters, one of whom was sexually abused by another one of their brothers, and Grace said that she
and her twin used to get up early enough to be with their other sister before their father got up because they had walked into their father’s room one time and felt the need to protect their other sister. None of the participants have spoken with the sisters who they suspect may also have been abused about whether or not they were sexually abused; the unspoken pact of silence weighs heavily on these women.

Contradictions

All the participants noted contradictory feelings about their brothers, their family, their disclosures, and their ability to cope. There was never any “one truth” for them.

I just shut off my communication with him. Which was kind of a shame because in some respects he’s kind of the person who gets me the most. In the family. You know, and who I can – his way of being is the most compatible with me. So it was it was hard. (Fran)

He really did screw me over… because of that… And I wouldn’t be who I am without it. (Grace, talking about her brother)

She did the best she could and how could she have [known]. … And how could she have [not know and not done anything]!? (Grace, talking about her mother)

[What’s] strange but very true for me, is that I have no compassion for them [my parents] right now (Fran)

It is such a taboo subject. No one is ever supposed to say the word incest. If you can’t talk about it, you can go on denying it ever exists. Which is why my mom can say that my brother was just “curious” and that he didn’t mean anything by it. (Bettie)

But we’re the ones who had the most fun. You know, at family get togethers. We had the same sense of humor, and all this stuff. So I, that’s, that’s a hard one. (Grace)

I want to go home [to visit my parents], but I don’t want to go home because it never feels safe. (Bettie)
The participants reported a range of contradictory feelings and ideas, holding theses conflicting truths simultaneously. The data suggests that the participants experienced these complex emotions as complicated and tricky to navigate.

**Always Present**

The participants expressed the feeling that their trauma was ever-present in these ways:

It’s like we try to put it in a box, but it’s always right there. (Bettie)

Going back to my parent’s house has never felt safe, and still doesn’t. I wish it did. (Bettie)

He [my brother] always saw me and treated me like a child because he didn’t sign. Even though I was older than him, and still, today, as an adult. (Bettie)

[I still wonder] why he picked me? … Because I was Deaf? Because communication was poor and I would just do what he told me to? (Bettie)

I still have flashbacks (Pearl)

It just hit me. Like a dart in my heart for some reason that was a trigger for me. (Fran)

There are always triggers (Bettie)

It is locked in my mind. Not even my counselor has been able to help me unlock it. But I really don’t want the flashbacks either. (Pearl)

Even now, when I read in a book to my kids, and one of them is sitting up over me, like this (gestures), I freak out. I get scared. I get angry. I can’t take it.” … You know, I told him, when when, it used to be that when I got massages, which I don’t do any more, when people would start to press on me and it would hurt, I couldn’t tell them to stop. And I knew that would kind of floor him, because he’s so used to me telling everybody everything that I, that I, you know like I said, I’m very, I address conflict. But in massages, I couldn’t do it. … I immediately shut down. … And then I go away. And then I ache. (Fran)

We try to make peace, but… (Bettie)
These statements show that survivors are unable to compartmentalize their traumatic experiences; rather the trauma leaks out in otherwise benign situations. The survivors talk about how living with this reality makes the attempts of family members to compartmentalize the abuse or consign it to the past more galling to survivors.

**Coping Strategies**

Grace and Fran talked the most about what they have done to cope with the trauma, which included isolating themselves, doing drugs and drinking, remaining hyper-vigilant, and staying busy, all ways of shutting down and all activities that could be seen as cries for help. Fran described how she went from “good girl to bad girl,” which she sees in retrospect as an attempt to spur people around her into action. She speculated that because she kept her grades up, the rest of her behavior was simply ignored or accepted by her parents.

I was very unhappy; I was drinking a lot. I was the quiet drinker. You know, re-fill the bottle before someone comes home, and that sort of thing. I was, I’ve been an alcoholic all my life. I’m 2 years sober. A little more than 2 years. It took me a long time. I’ve been sober at other times. But this is the longest period of time. And this is the time I finally get it. On a lot of levels and I don’t have to … You know the numbing process and such. (Grace)

I was pretty much stoned from 6th grade …until out of college. Literally, every, single day. And then add alcohol and acid and coke and everything else on top of that.

It all came out in drinking and isolating myself. And, … … … And many other ways. Not knowing how to say no. Being in relationships where I sort of merged, and you know, all kinds of manifestations that I’ve learned are a direct result of all that stuff. (Grace)

But I was very vigilant. Hyper vigilant. (Grace)

When I learned this, that if I just keep spinning, I don’t have to stop and just be with myself. (Fran)
It’s sort of like this constant vigilance somehow. That…Alert. You know, when you said about the somebody in back of you- like that. Sleeping with music on, I couldn’t do for the longest time, because I had to hear if someone was coming in. [That] kind of thing. And now I can do that. It’s lovely. I can even wear earphones at night if I want to listen to music. But staying in the moment has to be one of the hardest things in the world. And I don’t think it’s unusual. I think a lot of people need to be able to do it. But I think it’s harder on some level because we disassociate. I mean how else could we have survived? I mean there were tools that we got very well down pat. And now we have to come back. (Grace)

Because certainly my coping mechanism from the abuse was to build a very strong independent façade. (Fran)

Pearl was grateful that she was away at boarding (Deaf residential) school, which meant her time at home in proximity of her brother was lessened. Bettie just wanted to be old enough to leave home.

I just wanted to get out of there. I was counting the days until I was old enough to leave the house. (Bettie)

Both Bettie and Pearl currently try to avoid their brothers, which means avoiding their families or finding a way to see the rest of their family without their brothers present. Fran had explicitly cut off all communication with her brother and her parents at different times in the past in order to deal with the trauma. Grace spoke about the ease with which she dissociated when she and Fran began their conversation, which she said was a “natural thing to do.” She also said she was able to bring herself back to presence very quickly.

The participants see these coping mechanisms as strategies that they used—some more consciously adopted than others and aware of some more than others (e.g. dissociation)—to survive through the abuse as well as the time after, when traumatic effects continued to be present in their lives. As they talked about and integrated the meaning of the trauma, they reported that they came to recognize and change their own
behaviors that had previously served a purpose of helping them cope with the trauma, but
were now maladaptive.

**Continuing Discomfort**

All four participants expressed unease about being in social situations with their
brothers, even long after the sexual abuse ended. This speaks to the lasting effects of the
abuse and the ways the injury continues to manifest.

It was a long time before I could be in the same room with him, when he was
alone and I was alone in the same room. You said your father’s workshop. My
father was a silversmith by avocation and he made jewelry and such. And he had a
workshop in the basement. And I remember being down there looking at his work
and my brother and being frightened. Knowing full well we were both adults,
knowing full well nothing else would happen. But you know it, there it is. (Grace)

His presence threatens me. …He has to be in control of everything. …I just don’t
want to be around him. (Pearl)

I like working on the farm when I go home, but I can’t do it, not with him around.
I look at him and I still see it in his eyes. …It just isn’t safe to be around him.
(Bettie)

They also spoke about discomfort being with their family members, because of
the ways in which their family members had responded to knowledge of the abuse. As
previously stated, Bettie wanted to leave home as soon as she was old enough and it is
still discomforting for her to be with her entire family because of their silence about the
sexual assaults and the events of disclosure. Pearl’s visits with her mother and half-sister
are conflicted for her. Fran had “stopped going to family affairs for a while because it all
just felt so fake to me. I felt like I’d been faking it for a long time.” A sentiment echoed
by all of the participants was articulated by Fran, “now I can’t just go be friends and
pretend it didn’t happen. I need to do it on a level that’s really meaningful.” Such
“meaningful level” would include having the family acknowledge and discuss the
contradictions and the realities of the abuse that occurred in the family, and join in an
effort to deal with the effects and implications of that abuse for all members of the
family.

**Self-Blame, Culpability, Shame**

The participants were clear in their understanding of the profound role that shame
and feeling responsible for the abuse has played and continues to play in their lives,
especially the ways in which it is a tool of the abuser to silence them and keep them
silent.

I didn’t tell anyone from school until after we had graduated, because I didn’t
want them to treat me differently. It was different back then. And I didn’t want to be teased about any of it. (Pearl)

I always thought I had done something wrong, and that I was a sinner, even though I tried to tell myself that wasn’t true. (Pearl)

I stopped blaming myself. So that allowed me to tell other people. So I don’t think it was really related to my family. (Fran)

The more I allowed myself to feel the emotions, the more shamed I was. So that the more shamed I was, the more I acted out. (Fran)

How I had taken responsibility for it too. Actually, I’d transferred it more onto me than my brother. That I could have made a choice when I was nine. That I could have made a choice when I was 9 to walk away, to tell somebody, to whatever. And it took 3 years to realize that no I really didn’t have that choice. I really didn’t have the emotional strength to do that. Or capability or tools or whatever. (Fran)

Why shouldn’t I deal with it better. There’s no such thing. I mean, you know, it’s … … … that’s a killer. “How come I can’t do this better? How come? They’re looking alright.” (Grace)

I always thought that I was responsible. I look back at that nine year old and I thought, oh she was strong, she was independent. Because I became that. So I always assumed that I had the choice to stop it, I had the choice to tell somebody. And, actually I ended up going into group therapy. With this woman happened to have a group with other women who were sexually abused. And it was through
that group that I finally shed myself of the responsibility for what happened. (Fran)

I guess I knew I was blaming myself but I didn’t realize the depth that it was occurring at. (Fran)

**Taking Action**

Doing *something*, telling other people about the abuse, working with visualizations, making a decision and following through on it (not seeing her brother, cutting off communication with family members, speaking her truth, etc.), making connections with other types of abuse and trauma, or examining the effects of the abuse on one’s life, has been a way out of the shame, silence, and injuries for the participants.

I’ve started telling more people now. I have nothing to be ashamed about, and it’s important to talk about this so it doesn’t happen to more people. Maybe that’s a pretty lofty goal that I can’t really make happen, but…. What happened, happened. That’s a fact. And maybe this is just the time to start sharing it. I think I’m meant to talk about it. (Pearl)

I told my mom that I don’t trust him anymore, not after what he did after my father died and what he did by trying to sell the land. (Pearl)

One therapist taught me to visualize holding the box [filled with all the abuse and aftermath] in my hand and sending energy to it from my heart down through my arm so that it dissolved into ash and then letting the ash go out into the universe. (Bettie)

You know everybody in my family I have not talked to for a couple of years. …At one time or another. (Fran)

And I won’t see him anymore. (Pearl)

I decided to write a letter. I guess it was addressed, it might have been addressed to my mom and dad. But it was more for me. And I wrote a letter about all the entire life from nine on, and the impact the abuse had on me. And it was pretty gory. Lots of drugs. Lots of sex. Lots of illicit behavior. Illegal behavior. … And I also wrote about the things that I could’ve been that I wasn’t because, and even now the things that I can’t be because of the abuse. (Fran)

I stopped going to family affairs for a while because it all just felt so fake to me. I felt like I’d been faking it for a long time. And I have this image of family
members coming up and greeting me at the door, and just giving me these big kisses at the door. And it just grossed me out. Then I didn’t want anybody to kiss me anymore. I didn’t want anybody to hug me anymore. Where I couldn’t do it anymore. (Fran)

When I heard about the Catholic Priests abusing all those boys, I connected the idea of abuse to my own situation. That’s when I started to realize what happened to me. …I really hadn’t thought about it for so long, 25, 30 years, before that. But it was pretty clear to me. (Pearl)

When I think of [my daughter], I’m much more forgiving of myself. When I think if it would have happened to her. (Grace)

I think as I expressed, the image I get is that I just ripped off the scar. And now I’m really openly bleeding. (Laughter). You know. It sort of took that little cork out of the dam. And it should’ve, I mean as it should have, but I was ill-prepared to deal with the bleeding, if you will. (Grace)

A friend of mine gave me the book [Not Child’s Play]. I couldn’t bring myself to finish it. I know exactly how the women in the book feel; but it just sits in my nightstand drawer, right next to my bed. (Pearl)

So. … It’s so different from you, in terms of confronting. I mean I think, neither good or bad, but I see where my life is – that I am, I’m the secret person. I’m the person who, you know, doesn’t say anything, thinks I can handle it by myself, or, I’m a terrible pers[on]. I’ve worked through that. I like who I am now. But there was very little sort of confrontation (Grace)

Really dug into how it’s impacted my life today. What are the ways of being and the decisions I make, and the physical and emotional and intellectual reactions I have that are really based on this 9 year-old girl … who was just filled with this huge survivor mechanism. Just so many different things I never realized came out in that therapy, whereas I can now make a choice. (Fran)

I didn’t die. And I figured if I didn’t die, that something’s got to be good. You know I was afraid I would do it by accident. And I would be so sad if I’d killed myself really. (Grace)

Each individual act, as described above, provides the survivor a way out of the isolation and self-blame and a way towards integration of her experiences, including present day experiences.
b. For Ourselves and the Larger Community: Gifts of Wounding and Recovery

“To speak publicly about one’s knowledge of atrocities is to invite the stigma that attaches to victims” (Herman, 1997:2). The data show that by speaking both privately and publicly, the participants change the discourse and decline the invitation to be seen as victims or to have the spotlight shone solely upon themselves. Instead, they re-focus the light to shine on the perpetrator and his actions, and the context in which this type of violence occurs. The participants do not allow themselves to be rendered invisible, but instead step up visibly and actively enter the discourse in order to make sense of their own lives and, if possible, help prevent abuse of other girls.

The Necessity of Doing This Work

The participants demonstrate a knowledge that they must do something to understand and integrate their own experience, and that though this is not easy, it is necessary.

I told her, on an impulse. I had to do it, and even if maybe I should not have, I felt so much better once I said it. (Pearl)

Keeping secrets is a very big skill. And, … so that you know, all my life I will be, my patterns will be tuned in to that 4, 5, 6 years with my brother, but the manifestations are less and less, and the crutches I let go of, let go of, and let go of, and by the time I die, I’ll be walking straight (laughter). So I feel like I’m in a very healthy place now. (Grace)

It isn’t until the last couple of years that I really did a lot of work with it. (Fran)

As you know, it’s an ongoing process. (Grace)

After years in therapy. And I’m still in, and I’m in therapy and group, and it continues to be an essential part of my growing. But for some, and through hard hard work, and I will admit it’s some of the hardest I’ve ever worked. (Grace)
And I have moved on to my forgiveness stage, actually for everybody. It doesn’t mean I’m not affected. But, I used to think I’d have to forgive him and forget it. (laughter) But you know, I’m not going to forget it. I mean, I learned from that. (Grace)

You know, in some respects, I want to say yes. I want to give people the freedom to. But I don’t know that it was the actual conversations that changed it. I think the fact that I made the actual decision to do it. It was empowering myself to talk about it. That more changed the way I dealt with the abuse than the outcome of the conversations. (Fran, in response to Annette’s question “Did those conversations [with your family] change the approach with how you dealt with the effects of the abuse?)

The work that the participants see as necessary ranges from disclosing in the first instance and speaking out in general, to figuring out how and what they need to learn about their own ways of thinking and behaving to recover from the effects of surviving abuse.

It Makes Us Who We Are

Although the participants would never have chosen to be sexually abused and although they do not accept it with passivity, they do acknowledge that they, and people in general, have specific experiences and are shaped by those experiences. They show a recognition that having lived with and through abuse has shaped them in ways they view favorably (how they live in the face of the abuse, not that the abuse was ever positive), that it is an integral “part of who they are.”

And I look back, and you know, people ask – one could be asked, would you change anything, and I never know how to answer that question because I wouldn’t be who I am right now. (Grace)

I can’t complain [about all that I’ve been through]. (Pearl)

… I looked at him and I said, “We’re okay.” And that’s all I said. And he looked at me. And had this look on his face; because we really were. I mean I wasn’t angry, I mean he really did screw me over and there are a lot of things that I just do that I don’t want to do that I’ve done because of that and I’m changing. And I wouldn’t be who I am without it. But it was okay. And you know, it’s his now.
That’s his karma. It’s not mine anymore. And I sort of feel sorry for him. How’s he deal with that? How’s he sleep at night? (Grace)

I mean it happened. Nothing’s going to change it. I’m working with it. I’m becoming healthier and healthier and it’s your problem now, kind of thing. And that feels real good. … That feels real good. (Grace)

**We Are Not Alone**

Just as the participants would not have chosen to be abused, neither would they ever wish it on anyone else. Yet it is a truth that they and many others have suffered this type of abuse, and therefore there is a certain relief in knowing that theirs is not an isolated experience.

Everybody has a story. You know, and they want to tell their story. (Grace)

I just remember how relieved, and shocked, I was that I wasn’t the only one [when I read *Not Child’s Play*]. I had always asked myself, “why me?” (Bettie)

It had a huge impact on me [to read other survivor’s stories]. Affirming. It was just affirming to know there were other women out there. It was just so affirming (Fran)

**Speaking Out Makes a Difference**

The importance of knowing and seeing other women’s stories has for these participants been reason enough for all four of the participants to want to do the same for other women. They stated that regardless of the difficulties of speaking out, they know the importance and the benefits of doing so for themselves and for other people, particularly other survivors.

Your voice. (Fran)

Right. And you say it out loud. (Grace)

It’s a mixed bag talking about the abuse. I’m a pretty private person, but at the same time I know that if I hadn’t said anything [to these friends] we never would have talked about it. (Pearl)
I mean I kind of wish I could give more. …Meaning I want to be helpful to the process of this. And I kind of see, I’m hoping this is a small way I can give back, by giving some insight. (Fran)

And it helps to practice talking about it. I mean I don’t go out and tell the world. But I went to lunch once with a woman who I knew was an incest survivor. And we were talking at the table about the book that was coming out. We were sort of trying to get to know each other, what we liked, and…. And I told her about the book, and 4 of us out of 5 had been abused. These are random 2 people from this workplace and 2 people from this workplace. And it’s out there. And Risa’s book was a very big deal for me. And I did a reading. … … … And it was… Nobody threw tomatoes at me or thought I was horrible. But that was a very important disclosure for me to stand up and read this thing. (Grace)

I want to see an end put to this. I would tell kids today that if your brother or anyone abuses you, tell someone right away. Don’t wait. Don’t keep it to yourself. … Which means we have to teach the kids. (Pearl)

In some respects I think it’s part of my temperament to speak out. I think I was doing that, yeah. And in some—however I never did it about the abuse, or things related to the abuse until I stopped blaming myself. …So I didn’t really get my voice about the abuse until I went to therapy and I really figured out how to stop blaming myself. (Fran)

I think it’s never too late to share. And to say it in a way that makes it okay to talk about, that doesn’t make it a big shameful secret. It should be made public. It’s like divorce used to be a forbidden topic, but it isn’t anymore. I think it’s like other topics that used to be taboo; you talk about it and it’s okay to talk about. (Pearl)

The participants’ languaging illuminates the ways in which survivors of sibling sexual abuse find a way to do what they need to do for themselves in order to live with and make sense of the abuse and its lasting consequences in their lives. These tasks of survival and meaning-making require both personal work over time and acknowledging and internalizing that having lived through these experiences has shaped who they have become in complex ways. A moment of liberation occurs when survivors realize that the consequences of surviving trauma are complex and multi-layered, and that their experiences and their healing work provide them with something to offer to others: a
sense of solidarity, the possibility of helping another woman in her healing, and a desire to do something to prevent such abuse in the world. An important act, arising out of that desire, is speaking out. Whether they disclosed to a family member, or to the public in a reading of a written piece about their experience, the participants experienced the act of languaging their experiences as crucial to their healing.

C. Summary

These data provide an opportunity to understand how the participants discussed and narrated, in conversations and interviews, their stories of revealing the fact of sexual assault. The analysis of this data has illuminated their lived experience, their self-understanding, and their co-construction of meaning.

Harvey, 1996, writes about environmental factors, including the “attitudes and behaviors of people who learn about the abuse, and the actions and understandings of family and friends. …and how these are significant in terms of the victim’s recovery, as well as prevailing community attitudes and values, [and] cultural constructs” (8). These sentiments apply to the theme of linguicism as much as they do to the other themes of being an incest survivor in this study. A common thread through all three categories of themes is the participants’ desire for action and change on the part of others, both the perpetrators (again, regarding linguicism as well as sexual abuse) and the bystanders.

In the following chapter, I present my analysis of the language and interactional features of the data, focusing on how the discourse and the narratives change or remain the same according to a change in contextual factors and languages.

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29 As Herman (1992) refers to those who are not the victim or perpetrator, bystanders may be a parent, sibling, friend, or stranger.
Chapter V

Analysis: Talking About Disclosing

Two or three things I know for sure and one of them is that telling the story all the way through is an act of love.

*Dorothy Allison (1995:90)*

A. Introduction

This chapter presents the analysis of discourse and interactional features that appeared in the data in four areas: 1) vocabulary choices related to indexing and naming the perpetrator, oneself, and the abuse experiences; 2) one type of the interactional feature – backchanneling – that occurs to display shared experience; 3) the amount of background the participants provided leading up to the starting point of stories; and, 4) the smoothness\(^{30}\) of one of the tellings and re-tellings (especially noteworthy in the one case of a first time telling and first time retelling).

B. Language and Interactional Features in Stories of Disclosure in Interaction

The participants in this study talked about revealing the fact of sibling sexual assault to one or more of their family members. In the conversations, each had a conversational partner who told her own stories on the same topic. In the interviews, each survivor was the only one in the dyad who was a survivor, and she was guided by the interviewer’s questions. The context of these two situations framed how each woman told her stories and how she interacted with her conversational partner in each situation. This

\(^{30}\) The concept of smoothness (and bumpiness) is used by Fairclough (1989, 1992) to indicate the relative ease with which a receiver grasps the meaning in a text as related to other texts (intertextuality). I refer to a different type of smoothness, whereby the interlocutor produces a text with more or less coherence, organization, repetitions, clarity of time reference, etc.
context guided the participants’ choices about how to tell their stories. Bahktin (1981) states

“But no living word relates to its object in a singular way: between the word and its object, between the word and the speaking subject, there exists an elastic environment… It is precisely in the process of living interaction with this specific environment that the word may be individualized and given stylistic shape” (276).

It is precisely this “environment,” or context, that gives shape to not only the meaning of the words used but also what words are not used.

In the first section below, I examine the vocabulary, or referring expressions, used by the participants. Words hold within them an ideology and history, thereby denying terms an objective or neutral stance (Bahktin, 1981; Fairclough, 1989). The data show the importance of context and the collaboration between the interlocutors in arriving at referring terms for the perpetrators, themselves, and the experience.

In the second section, I examine the interactive feature of backchanneling used for the purpose of displaying a shared identity. Again, the roles of context and collaboration between the interlocutors are seen in this data. Likewise, the meaning of non-verbal devices is shaped by the specific environment in which they are used. The data show that the meaning attributed to backchanneling devices varies, and that the same behavior conveys different meanings dependent on context. Backchanneling behaviors used to display identity shared by both interlocutors (survivor identity and Deaf identity), were not different in kind from other backchannels; the nuance of meaning emerged from the context.

In the third section, I examine the amount and type of talk that leads up to the

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31 The “choices” by speakers may be conscious or sub-conscious choices – that is not the focus of this analysis. However, the analysis does presuppose that choices in any interaction are based on the contextual factors as described above.
beginning of the narratives. The focus is on the difference between the two languages in the amount of background the interlocutor provides prior to the beginning of her narrative.

In the fourth section, I examine in greater depth one narrative from one of the participants, due to its unique and serendipitous nature: a first-time-told and first-time-retold narrative. This narrative, like the others in this study, meets Linde’s (1993) criteria for expanded reportability, and is clearly not a “throw away” story (Polyani, 1981). The analysis of how the quality of the telling changes from the first time it is told to the first time it is retold provides a look at a highly reportable first time told and retold narrative.

1. Referencing and Indexing: The Perpetrators, Survivors, Experience

Herman, 1997, writes that sharing one’s traumatic experience is necessary to make sense of that experience. Among the many issues to consider in this act of sharing is word choice: what vocabulary might speakers employ when talking about childhood sexual abuse? Are there words that can convey the entirety of what they experienced? What is the person who instigated the act called? What is the person upon whom the act was perpetrated called? Are there words that capture and convey what occurred, and what constitutes “the experience” that one is trying to convey – is it simply an isolated act, or is it a constellation of experiences and ways of being which do not end with the end of the sexual assault, but become a part of the fabric of the survivor’s life?

The available vocabulary options to discuss the topic of childhood sexual abuse are limited and inadequate in many respects. In the Preliminary Considerations section I explained my choice of terms; why I have used perpetrators, survivors, incest, sexual abuse, and disclosure/s. Schiffrin (2006) reminds us that the speaker’s acts of referencing
and indexing inscribe and relate to meanings on many levels. In this section, I examine vocabulary indexing three concepts that are related in complex ways: they interact on linguistic and social levels that must be viewed in the individual, social and political contexts in which they are used (Herman, 1997; Schiffrin, 1994). I explore how the participants in this study refer to and index: a) the perpetrator, b) themselves, and c) the experience.

To frame the discussion and examples below, I begin with the participant’s responses to my questions regarding these issues in our follow-up interviews. None of the participants felt that there were accurate terms in either ASL or English to capture or describe their experience of sexual abuse and its aftermath. What they call “the experience” includes (verbal and non-verbal) pressure, offers, coercion, promises, and threats from the perpetrator; sexual acts; shame, self-blame, and feelings of culpability and lack of trust; coping mechanisms; disclosures; and other people’s reactions and responses post-disclosure. Likewise, they reported feeling that there are no adequate terms in either language to describe the perpetrators or themselves. No one could articulate precisely why they found available terms deficient, but they did report “they just don’t fit,” and “I’m not a survivor; something terrible was done to me and I have to live with it, but nothing captures what that is like.” The participants took different stances on the degree to which they would or would not use any particular word. One participant would not use the word molest or molestation because “the yuckiness factor is just too high.” One would not use sexual assault because of connotations of force and of a one-time occurrence. All of the participants reported that the terms incest and sexual abuse do not encompass what the experience means for them.
a. Vocabulary: The Perpetrator

i. English

Throughout the conversation and interview Fran and Grace both referred to the perpetrator as *my brother* or with a pronoun (*he, him, his*), regardless of what they were saying about him (indexing, naming, attributing responsibility, etc.). They both used *my brother* when referring to their own brother numerous times (Fran 15 times in the conversation and 23 times in the interview, Grace 11 times in the conversation and 8 times in the interview.) They also used *brother* when referring to the other person’s brother in the conversation (Fran once, Grace twice).

The exception to this pattern was when they used the words *abusing, abuser, and perp* (perpetrator). In the beginning of the conversation, Fran hesitated the first time either of them mentioned her brother, *i.e.*, the first time either of them had to choose a way to name the perpetrator. Fran hesitated around what she would call her brother, and put stress on the word *the*, which would immediately precede whatever word choice she would then make. Her *the* both indexed the perpetrating brother and communicated hesitation or uncertainty about what to call him (*because he was the… he was the… …*), at which time Grace suggested *perp*. Fran then said *the ... ... abusing, yes, abuser, thank you, the perp*.

Fran used *the abusing, abuser and perp* once each (and Grace used *perp* once, all in one exchange in the first 63 seconds of the conversation (of which the first 22 seconds were negotiation of who would begin). These ways of referring to the perpetrators did not appear in the conversation again. In addition, Fran used her brother’s name once during the conversation, when she was reporting what she had said when she told her sister,
[name] abused me, and Grace used her brother’s name once when she was talking about trying to find out if her oldest sister was abused by someone else in the family and she says, But I thought I could bring it up in the context of my, me and [name].

In Grace’s interview, she referred to her brother as the perp once (and by name once), contrasting him to herself in terms of how her parents might think of her when she told them about the incest (... I think there was fear in telling them how awful they’d think I was. (laughter) As opposed to the perp.). She also used my brother and pronouns. In her interview, Grace did not discuss talking with her brother, but mentioned her brother several times. (And... it was my brother: Of course this is brother sister incest; Mom was stunned that my brother...; Mom couldn’t talk to my brother for a long time; And I also felt a slight betrayal of my brother: Of betraying my brother.)

In Fran’s interview she did not use perp or abuser, but only my brother and pronouns. Fran included her brother as one of the people in her family with whom she had had conversations about the incest, and she talked about him much more than Grace did about her brother.

When interviewing Grace, Annette did not use any terms to refer directly to, or name, the perpetrator throughout the interview. She asked questions that included: So my understanding is that you’ve told one or more of your family members about the incest that occurred. ... Without telling me their names, you can tell me in terms of their
relationships to you, who was it that you told?; So for that conversation that you had, when you disclosed to your parents...; and Oh, did talking with your parents change whether you talked with other people about the incest?

With Fran, Annette used each of the following once: your brother, the brother, another brother, and the same brother. Though Annette asked Fran the same basic questions that she had asked Grace (So it is my understanding that you have told one or more of your family members about the incest that occurred. ... Without telling me their names, you can sort of refer to their relationship to you. Who did you tell?), Fran provided responses that shaped the content of the interview in a different way than Grace’s. Fran’s prior mention of her brother provided a basis for Annette to ask about that brother, in a way that did not occur in Grace’s interview.

In summary, in English, these participants indexed the perpetrator in five ways: numerous uses of pronouns and brother (the, my, your, etc.); three uses of perp; and one usage of abuser, abusing, and each of the brother’s names.

ii. ASL

In ASL, Pearl and Bettie used pronouns (lexicalized with PRO-1 or by incorporation in TWO-OF-US or incorporation of eye gaze and spatial reference, H-E, H-I-M, and directionality of verbs in TOUCH-to-me) and BROTHER throughout their conversation and interviews to index the perpetrator. In addition, Bettie used the following linguistic resources:

- The brother’s name by fingerspelling it (once in the conversation; multiple times in the interview)

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32 The system of indicating pronouns and referents in ASL is vastly more complex and relational than in English. See Swabey, 2002.
• The brother’s name by using his name sign (13 times in the conversation; 14 times in the interview)
• A signifier indicating which sibling he is in the order of siblings (four-on-hand-point-to-third-one ++; three-on-hand-point-to-first) (5 times in the conversation; 4 times in the interview)

Pearl used these linguistic resources in addition to those listed above:

• The brother’s name by fingerspelling it (1 time in the conversation; 14 times in the interview)
• A signifier indicating which sibling he is in the order of siblings (four-on-hand-point-to-third-one ++; three-on-hand-point-to-first) (2 times in the conversation; 2 times in the interview)

Unlike Fran and Grace, who had used names to identify “the brother” only once each, both Bettie and Pearl used their brother’s names and/or name signs frequently. When asked about this, they reported that they thought it was usual and that it added to the clarity of their discourse, and that they knew that I would not use the names in reporting the study.

The ASL interviewer, Aislynn, also used pronouns and BROTHER throughout both interviews, but did not use names or name signs. Like Annette in the English interviews, she did not use terms to refer directly to or to name the perpetrator in either interview.

In summary, in ASL, these participants indicated the perpetrator in six ways: numerous uses of pronouns and BROTHER; use of the brother’s name by fingerspelling
his name or using his name sign; and a signifier indicating which sibling is being referenced.

On the surface, the ASL users employed a greater variety of linguistic resources to index the perpetrator than did the English users. Whether this means there is a greater variety available in ASL than English cannot be determined in this study. The English users had the option of using their brother’s name, and did so only once each. Whether this reflects a linguistic or personal practice also cannot be determined in this study. What is of significance here is identifying the ways in which the perpetrator was indexed, and the dissatisfaction the participants expressed with the language options that are available for that purpose.

b. Vocabulary: Themselves/The Survivors

Each of the four participants referred to herself with pronouns or in the first person throughout the conversations and interviews. They did not use nouns to index themselves (i.e. survivor; victim).

i. ASL

In ASL, Bettie and Pearl indexed themselves through the use of pronouns (lexicalized with PRO-1, MYSELF or by incorporation in TWO-OF-US or incorporation of eye gaze and spatial reference, and directionality of verbs in TOUCH-to-me). Only once in their conversation did either of them use a noun to index herself. Bettie described herself as being a GOOD GIRL who could not lie and therefore had to tell her parents what happened. In her interview, Pearl used three terms: SAME ME; V-I-C-T-I-M, and GOOD PERSON. SAME ME was used to index herself as a survivor by saying that she did not want anyone else to go through what she had gone through. She used V-I-C-T-I-M
to index herself during the period she had previously been in an abusive relationship, but
did not use this term in reference to being a survivor of incest. As the interview was
winding down, immediately following Aislynn’s comment that Pearl has been through a
great deal and was a strong woman in light of all, Pearl used GOOD PERSON to
characterize herself.

ii. English

In English, Fran and Grace indexed themselves in two ways: through the use of
pronouns (me, I) and the phrases *I was abused* or *my brother abused me*. Neither used the
terms *survivor* or *victim* as a way to identify herself. In their conversation, they did use
*victim* one time, and a form of *survivor* three times, as described below.

Fran used the term *victim* in constructed dialogue that she reported having had
with her mother. She was reporting that she had asked her mother to “abide by” one rule,
which her mother violated. She used the term not to refer to herself nor as a label for
herself, but to point out that notwithstanding that she was the one who had been abused,
she was the only one taking responsibility in the present. Her point was that another,
specifically her mother, should have been taking responsibility but was instead “playing
the victim”.

Fran:        I asked you not to do that. That’s the only rule I asked you,
you know the only thing I’ve asked you to abide by, and you can’t do it.
You’re not dealing with this. You know.        
How come – I’m the one that’s the *victim* here,
and I’m the one that got abused,
and yet I’m the only one taking responsibility here and making things happen.
And blah blah blah.”

Neither Fran nor Grace used the term *survivor* to refer to herself, but it did appear
three times in their conversation in the following ways: once in reference to being *filled*
with this huge survivor mechanism (Fran); once to refer to a woman she knew who was
an incest survivor (Grace), and once in reference to coping, I mean how else could we
have survived? I mean there were tools that we got very well down pat. (Grace).

The only time either Fran or Grace used the term sexually abused was when one
of them described a group she was in with other women who were sexually abused.

Of note is Fran’s and Grace’s use of we towards the end of the conversation. For
most of the conversation, we was used in an unmarked manner. However, beginning at 1
hour, 3 minutes, Grace started to speak more philosophically and said, We’re not horrible
people. She did not say explicitly who she was referring to with this we, but it can be
inferred that she was talking about “we who have this experience,” meaning survivors,
and including herself and Fran within that group. She used we in this way seven more
times over the next 13 minutes: We must be gentle with ourselves; But I think it’s harder
on some level because we disassociate; I mean how else could we have survived; I mean
there were tools that we got very well down pat; And now we have to come back; We are
brave women; We should be proud of ourselves; We will forge ahead.

The only use of a noun to describe the participant in either of Annette’s interviews
was in her interview of Grace. The interviewer, Annette, used the word survivor once at
the beginning of the interview, as she began to describe her background, the interviewers
are not survivors. Annette did not describe herself in this way in her second interview,
with Fran. Prior to all of the interviews, I reminded the participants that the interviewers
were not survivors.

The participants apparently did not feel a need to explicitly index themselves as
survivors, because that identity was the focus of, and a required precondition for, their
interactions. The one time that Annette used survivor; it was in relation to Grace holding that identity and Annette not holding it. The identity of being a survivor was an inherent contextual factor that did not need to be explicitly referenced through vocabulary choices (though, as noted below in section (2), it was repeatedly indexed through backchanneling).

c. Vocabulary: The Experience

In this section I present how the participants indexed and referred to the abuse by noting the vocabulary they used. In addition, I examine whether attribution of responsibility is present in the linguistic choices they made by applying the framework of Coates and Wade, 2004. By using this framework, I analyze and show how the data falls into three categories: 1) zero attribution of perpetrator responsibility; 2) mitigating or removing perpetrator responsibility; and 3) assigning perpetrator responsibility and indexing consequences of the abuse.

In their study of sexual assault trial judgments, Coates and Wade (2004) found that linguistic devices served four purposes in obscuring perpetrator responsibility: concealing the violence that occurred; mitigating the perpetrators’ responsibility; concealing the victim’s resistance; and blaming or pathologizing the victims. Coates and Wade (2004) analyzed linguistic resources that obscure or mitigate perpetrator responsibility, and they argue that language use that “mutualizes violent behavior implies that the victim is at least partly to blame and inevitably conceals the fact that violent behavior is unilateral and solely the responsibility of the offender” (501). They also argue that whether responsibility is attributed to an offender depends only partly on the nature of his or her actions (i.e., even where his culpability is clear, speakers may use linguistic
resources that reduce or eliminate his responsibility). Therefore, the degree to which a speaker attributes responsibility to a perpetrator in discourse about the perpetrator or about what he did may not have any correlation to the degree of responsibility the perpetrator actually had in the real world. Coates and Wade (2004) looked at how perpetrator responsibility was mitigated or obscured by the linguistic resources used by judges in criminal cases. In addition, in her analysis of the language used in studies of men battering women in 11 professional journals across four disciplines, Sharon Lamb (1991) cites use of passive voice, nominalization, and diffuse terminology as linguistic choices that obscure the attribution of responsibility. Though the data that Coates and Wade (2004) and Lamb (1991) analyzed is very different in its particulars from the data in this study, the question of how responsibility is attributed or removed by linguistic choices is an important one, and this study adds another dimension to the available literature on that question.

The linguistic resources the participants used in each language were similar in both settings (the conversations and their interviews), so I distinguish resources by language, not context.

i. ASL

Table 4
Attribution of perpetrator responsibility: ASL
(* = most frequently used terms)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Zero attribution of perpetrator responsibility</th>
<th>Mitigating or removing perpetrator responsibility</th>
<th>Assigning perpetrator responsibility or indexing consequences of the abuse</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

^33 Note that the difference in the number of items appearing in Table 4 and Table 5 does not indicate that English has more lexical resources than ASL for this or any other topic. The difference is a reflection of the inherent problems of attempting to capture a visual language on paper.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>HAPPEN* #DID*</th>
<th>Agentless descriptions that conceal who did what to whom:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Eye-gaze* (i.e., AGE... UNTIL TEENAGER, STOP; OUT B-A-R-N)</td>
<td>THAT SITUATION TOUCH EXPERIENCE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRO-1-index-to-finger-with emphasis #IT</td>
<td>Mutualizing terms:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SOMETHING DO SOMETHING S-U-B-J-E-C-T TOUCH (citational form) PAST SMALL-AGE #DID SOMETHING MORE THAN THAT GO FAR</td>
<td>TWO-OF-US, HAPPEN*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>BROTHER HAPPEN, TWO-OF-US, HAPPEN</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>TWO-OF-YOU HAPPEN</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>GOT #HURT WITH BROTHER</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Minimizing and dismissing what happened:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>CURIOUS PLAY</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responsibility attributed:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P-E-S-T* TOUCH* TOUCH-2-handed + directionality*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WRONG+eyegaze</td>
<td>TOUCH-TO-ME</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eye-gaze (indexing brother)*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#DID TO ME SOMETHING TO ME TOUCH-2handed-directional-to-me M-O-L-E-S-T I-N-C-E-S-T VAGINA, PUNCH BROTHER #HURT</td>
<td>NOT FIRST TIME. HAPPEN SECOND TIME</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>TOUCH ME MAN, TOUCH (2 hd)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>PRO-1 HURT ME</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>OVER MY BOUNDARY</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consequences:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ME GOOD GIRL, CAN’T SECRET</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FORGET AND FORGIVE THAT “CLIP OF TIME” HAPPEN ONCE, FINISH MIND LOCK DARK SECRET STAND FOR SELF</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Pearl and Bettie use several lexical items (#DID, P-E-S-T, HAPPEN) to index the experience as well as several non-lexical linguistic resources, including eye gaze,
pronoun incorporation, and directionality. Once the participants established the topic, the majority of ways of referencing the experience were non-lexical (see Laurie Swabey, 2002 for more on this topic). When the participant changed topics she often used a lexical item again to index the experience. The participants used lexical items for emphasis as well.

Though it is beyond the scope of this project to determine the part of speech of the ASL lexical items, I wish to make note of the participants’ use of the term P-E-S-T. This lexical item is a verb in ASL, whereas its counterpart noun is P-E-S-T-E-R (personal communication, MJ Bienvenu, June 26, 2007). The part of speech is important for interlocutors to recognize in order to use the language in a grammatically appropriate way. Second language users of any language must be vigilant not to overlay their first language grammar on other languages, whether they are receivers or producers of the communication.

ii. English

Table 5
Attribution of perpetrator responsibility: English
(* = most frequently used terms)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Zero attribution of perpetrator responsibility</th>
<th>Mitigating or removing perpetrator responsibility</th>
<th>Assigning perpetrator responsibility or indexing consequences of the abuse</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The abuse *</td>
<td>Agentless descriptions that conceal who did what to whom:</td>
<td>Responsibility attributed:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The actual abuse</td>
<td>Abused *</td>
<td>Abused by *</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My abuse</td>
<td>Was abused *</td>
<td>Abused me *</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self abuse (meaning drug and alcohol use due to the sexual abuse)</td>
<td>Got abused *</td>
<td>What you did to me</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>That past experience</td>
<td>Women who were sexually abused</td>
<td>What he did</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The topic</td>
<td>4 of us out of 5 had been abused</td>
<td>“You really fucked me up”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>This occurrence</td>
<td></td>
<td>He really did screw me over</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The situation</td>
<td></td>
<td>I think I blamed my mother more</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

"Would wake my sister,"
Incest
The incest
Time period of the incest
This time period
Brother-sister incest
It *
I will always have reactions to it
It will always be a pain in my life
I just want it out in case you find out
If it would have happened to her
Because of that
This
This thing
It’s out there
It happened
What happened *
Nothing had ever happened to her
What happened to her
What happened a long time ago
With what had happened
What happens in our lives.
“That happens to a lot of people”
“Oh, that happens in all families “
He would never have done that with me
I will go to my grave with that pain

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Mutualizing terms:</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>That 4, 5, or 6 years with my brother</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The brother I’d actually had incest with</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The possibility of what was going on with me and my brother</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We’re curious to see if she was involved at all</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>She had no idea about either of us</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>But I thought I could bring it up in the context of my me and [brother’s name]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Consequences:</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>My process of going from good child to bad child</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The hurt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The secret</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Your damage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primacy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It’s your deepest place</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speaking the words</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>About the book that was coming out</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“That you don’t understand the impact”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The impact of the abuse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The whole cycle of it</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manifestations that I’ve learned are a direct result of all that stuff</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Minimizing and dismissing what happened:</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“Like it wasn’t abnormal”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Just experimentation”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“It was just kids being kids”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In English, the ways in which the participants named, described, or indexed the abuse appeared in the form of nouns (the abuse, your hurt), noun phrases (what happened, your damage), pronouns (it), verbs (abused), and verb phrases (abused by; got abused). The most frequent terms used were forms of: the abuse, it, was abused, and what happened.
In her interview of Grace, Annette used the clinical term trauma (trauma experiences, traumatic experiences, PTSD) when she described her background for Grace. Grace used post traumatic people when she referred to what Annette does (Like you work with post traumatic people and stuff). These were the only occurrences of any clinical terms in the interactions.

All of the participants reported feeling dissatisfied with the linguistic/vocabulary options at their disposal. In the follow up conversations with me, each participant noted that because this topic is taboo and people do not freely talk about it, we should not expect adequate words to describe it to exist in the lexicon. They also attributed the lack of acceptable terms to the fact that sibling incest in particular is often dismissed or downplayed, and that because it is violence within the family, it is even more difficult to find terms to describe and encompass it. Fran said, “I hate all the phrases. Every time I say the words, I’m just not comfortable with them.” After a long pause she continued, “I mean I guess the phrase I use now is ‘sexually abused by’ my brother.” She did not like the word incest because she wants a verb to show the action of what her brother did. She also said that part of the problem is that:

“Words aren’t enough. When you’re telling it to somebody who hasn’t been there, they have no concept. …What’s really behind it and all the repercussions and exponentiated actions that happen. …At least sexually abused sounds nasty enough so somebody will get that it wasn’t fun. …One of the concepts of the language that is missing [has to do with] he set the bait, he reeled it in, he enticed me. …Sexual abuse doesn’t get to it. …There’s no word.”

In summary, in this section I presented examples and analysis of how the participants indexed the perpetrator, themselves as survivors, and the abuse experience. In all three sections, the data showed the role context plays in the choices interlocutors made. These choices appeared in two ways: as usage of particular linguistic resources,
and as failure to use particular resources (e.g., survivor) because they were understood by the co-conversant to be contextual factors that need not be explicitly indexed.

2. Backchanneling and Shared Experience: “I know your pain; I’m in your shoes.”

Research has shown that backchanneling is displayed by a variety of devices, including sentences, phrases, lexical items, paralinguistic devices, laughter, gestures, and other non-verbal behaviors (Cutrone, 2005; Duncan and Fiske, 1977; Fries, 1952; Maynard, 1979; Yngve, 1970). Backchannels serve a variety of functions in interactions (Cutrone, 2005; Maynard, 1979; Yngve, 1970), including helping interactions run smoothly (Harvey Sacks, Schegloff & Jefferson, 1974). The data in this study reveals an additional function that backchanneling can play: indexing a shared identity, by communicating “I know your pain/I am in your shoes.” Backchanneling in this way appears to be directly related to a contextual factor in the interaction: a shared experience between the interlocutors. This particular function of backchanneling has not been identified previously in the literature.

The two types of shared experience represented in the data are: having experienced sexual assault, and having grown up Deaf. The data includes examples of a variety of forms of backchannels that serve the function of displaying shared identity, including (ASL examples are glossed in capital letters; all categories apply to both languages):

- Sentences (Oh good! I was waiting for the punch line. I was hoping you were angry; I understand the question; SAME++. MY MOTHER, PROTECT SON. SAME++.)
- Lexical items (RIGHT; YES; SUPPORT; Oh my; Right; Jiminy)
- Gestures (putting one’s hand over on her chest as if grieving; extending one’s open hand as if waiting for something)
- Paralinguistic devices and prosody (shown through stress, intonation, pitch, pausing, volume, and rhythm, such as Ohhhh)
- Laughter, and other non-verbal behaviors including non-manual signals in ASL and English (raise of the eyebrows, tilt of the head, widening of the eyes).

Any given backchannel appeared with one or more of these forms, often incorporating several backchannel devices into one (e.g., a lexical item with laughter and raise of the eyebrows).

The backchannels with this function of displaying identity occur in all three sets of data; below are examples, followed by discussion. Examples from the conversations and follow-up conversations, where the shared experience is that of being an incest survivor, follow. The backchannel is bolded and non-verbal information is also italicized.

a. **Shared Experience: Incest Survivor**

   i. **Fran & Grace Conversation – English**

   Fran produced more non-verbal than verbal backchannels than did Grace. When Grace first began to tell her stories, she talked uninterrupted for 2 minutes, 2 seconds, at which point Fran asked a clarifying question, to which Grace responded, and then continued. During the time Grace spoke, Fran produced 18 distinct head nods. Apart from these nods, Fran was sitting still, without other body or facial movement. As confirmed by Fran, none of these backchannels produced by her were for the purpose of displaying
or communicating shared identity. Grace then continued for another 5 minutes, 20 seconds without any verbal interruptions, until Fran uttered an audible *Uh-huh* along with non-verbal cues. During this second period, Fran produced 49 head nods and 6 smiles. I view this as establishing a baseline for Fran’s usual backchanneling style in this interaction. In the follow-up conversation with Fran, I showed her examples of these nods, as compared to the distinctive backchannels discussed below, and she confirmed that small subtle head nods were part of her usual style. Again, none of these backchannels were for the purpose of indexing or communicating shared identity. Instead, they functioned to facilitate the interaction running smoothly (Sacks et al., 1974).

Multiple times during Grace’s discourse, Fran produced backchannels different from these baseline head nods and smiles. I examine two examples here. These distinctive backchannels serve the function of indexing “I know your pain/I am in your shoes.” The first example of this type of backchannel (at 5 minutes, 20 seconds) followed Grace talking about being sober and “finally getting it.” She said “You know, the numbing process and such,” at which time Fran nodded, as she had been doing, and also turned her head slightly to one side, pursed her lips, and continued her nod until Grace begins to speak again.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grace:</th>
<th>You know, the numbing process and such.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fran:</td>
<td>(head nod, head tilt slightly to one side, pursed lips, continued head nod until Grace speaks again)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The second example followed Grace having been talking about her relationship with her mother, that her mother raised four children, and how “She did the best she could and how could she have [known]. … And how could she have [not known and not done anything]?” Fran began backchanneling after Grace uttered the word “could” the second
time. Her backchanneling took the form of a faster, shorter nodding of her head; closing of her eyes; uttering *uh-huh*; opening her eyes wide; raising her eyebrows; and tilting her head slightly; followed by a more emphatic nodding continuing until Grace had finished saying, “I mean they exist at the same time, and you know, that’s not going to change.” In addition to the features described above, timing is an additional aspect of this form of backchannel: Fran produced the backchannel continuously until Grace had finished her discourse about the meaning of what she had just said.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grace:</th>
<th>She did the best she could and how could she have [known]. … … And how could=</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fran:</td>
<td><em>(faster, shorter head nodding closing eyes, uttering <em>uh-huh</em>, opening eyes wide, raising her eyebrows, and tilting her head slightly, followed by a more emphatic head nodding)</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Grace  | =she have [not know and not done anything]?

These two instances exemplify what Fran continued to do throughout her conversation with Grace. In several other instances, Fran modified her usual nodding and sometimes smiling, consistently at points in the discourse where Grace was saying or had just said something to which Fran could relate because of their shared status as survivors. Fran confirmed this during our follow-up conversation.

Fran also produced examples of verbal backchannels, including:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grace:</th>
<th>I like who I am now. But there was very little confrontation. … … … … … … …</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fran:</td>
<td><strong>But you didn’t let it be a secret either. (eyes widen, head tilted down, head shaking, smiling)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grace:</td>
<td>No I didn’t.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

What is most notable here is the contrast in behaviors, however slight, that marks the difference in the meaning of the backchanneling. The fact that the contrast is slight is in fact significant, and shows the possibility of subtlety in backchanneling devices. In addition, we see that a variety of forms of backchanneling behaviors are used, demonstrating that any particular form of backchannel can be used for a variety of
functions and that its meaning lies not in the isolated behavior(s), but in its connection to what is happening in the conversation within the larger context.

Grace, in turn, produced backchannels with the same meaning/function ("I know your pain; I’m in your shoes"), and often produced them as a combination of lexical items (sometimes as full sentences) along with non-verbal features (changes in prosody, laughter, gestures, head and facial movement). Grace’s backchannels were, in contrast to Fran’s, less subtle. However, Grace was consistent in both the type and manner of production of backchannels throughout her conversation with Fran. Her baseline was higher than Fran’s, but internally consistent.

| Fran:  | So… I think the first person I told that was officially a family member, well actually the first person I told was, said something to, was my brother. But I don’t know if that that counts because he was the [ … he was the … …[ =
| Grace: | [Wow! [Perp (short laugh, head back)]
| Fran:  | Yes, abuser, thank you, the perp. = [abusing, |

This data suggests that backchanneling serving this function is distinct from backchanneling to convey ongoing engagement in the conversation, but that some awareness of an interlocutor’s “baseline” is necessary before it becomes distinctive.

**ii. Bettie & Pearl Conversation – ASL**

Bettie and Pearl were similar to Fran and Grace in backchanneling to display their identity and understanding as survivors. They both produced verbal and non-verbal
backchannels. In ASL the baseline for non-verbal backchanneling starts at a level that is comparatively “higher” than that of English; the lack of non-verbal backchanneling in ASL may indicate inattention, non-responsiveness, or anger (personal communication, MJ Bienvenu, July 24, 2007). However, the data indicates that in both languages it is a matter of recognizing the interlocutor’s “usual” amount of non-verbal displays and then noting the form of backchannels and their function.

Examples of verbal backchanneling from Bettie include:

*Pearl:* I’m still angry at my brother and what he did. Even after all this time, I don’t want to be around him. I wish I could forget what happened, but I can’t; it’s imprinted on me.
*Bettie:* They [our brothers] leave us with scars for life. (This is followed by pursed lips).

*Pearl:* After my father’s death I could see things more clearly, and I thought [my mother] needed to see how things were for herself because of what [my brother] had done. And I was so stirred up about what he did to me.
*Bettie:* (head nodding, tight lips, side of mouth raised) It’s no wonder, after all that has been bottled up all this time.

Bettie also had examples of only non-verbal backchanneling, including:

*Pearl:* My mom continues to protect and defend my brother…
*Bettie:* (sigh and raised eyebrows)

Another example of non-verbal backchanneling from Bettie began when Pearl started to list the places where the incest “could have” happened, as she is narrating her response to her mother’s question wanting to know where and how this could have happened. Pearl explains that it happened all over the place, anywhere out of sight, and she begins with the barn. Bettie’s backchanneling starts here and lasts for 19 seconds.
Pearl: I told her it happened in the barn=
Bettie: (slight raise of the side of mouth, slight head nod to increasing head nodding – continuing until the end of the discourse below)
Pearl: =that that was one of the places, and she wanted to know when it could have happened. I told her it happened when she wasn’t home, when she was at work, when dad was out working. I told her it happened in the barn, it happened when we were out “playing,” and that there were other places too – it happened all over the place. In the closet, really anywhere out of sight. He always found a way.

Examples from Pearl include both verbal and non-verbal backchanneling as well:

Bettie: I wish he wasn’t my brother … [ 
Pearl: [Exactly! 
Bettie: =but as much as it sucks, the fact of the matter is that he is my brother. 
Pearl: (tight lips, gesture of the hand open and up, nodding) Right. 

Bettie: My mom wants me to forgive and [forget. Just forgive and forget. 
Pearl: [(raising of one side of mouth, squinting eyes) It’s the same thing with my mom. 

Both Pearl and Bettie provide more detail about the actual abuse than Fran and Grace did. During the time this detail is being provided, there is less backchanneling, from both of the ASL users. Once the ASL users begin to talk about how their families have dealt with the knowledge of the son’s abuse, their own feelings about this, and how it is to be around their brother now, the amount of backchanneling increases greatly. This pattern confirms that this type of backchanneling functions to convey understanding arising from shared identity. Because the details of how the abuse happened are individual for each woman, backchanneling to convey “I know your pain/I am in your shoes” decreases when that particular information is being conveyed. When the interlocutor begins talking about experiences after and in response to the abuse, backchanneling serving this function occurs. It is the shared experience as survivors that
elicits this type of backchanneling. Though the particulars of the abuse were individual the characteristics of experience post-abuse and post-disclosure share similarities, and backchanneling allows the participants to demonstrate their understanding of what the other is going through (or has gone through). This was true for the English speakers as well.

Similar backchanneling behavior was also exhibited in the follow-up conversations that participants had with me. The examples that follow occurred prior to me discussing backchanneling with the participants. In all four follow-up conversations, I also used similar backchanneling devices that displayed shared survivor identity.

In my follow-up conversation with Pearl, we did not stray far from the questions I had prepared to ask her and she did not ask me about my personal history or story, although I offered her (and each of the participants) the opportunity to ask me anything they wished. Therefore there was not a lot of opportunity for displays of shared survivor identity through backchanneling devices in my follow-up conversation with Pearl, although the knowledge of our shared identity was a part of the context. The other three participants asked me questions about my own history and story to varying degrees. This allowed for opportunities for backchanneling from the participant and from me that displayed our shared identity. This indicates that both shared identity, and an opportunity for display of it, are required for backchanneling serving this function to appear.

An example in my conversation with Pearl is when she reiterates what she has said in both the conversation and interview about her mother’s response to Pearl’s

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34 That I was producing backchanneling with this function was not apparent to me when it was occurring. There was a brief period of time during each follow-up conversation when the participant and I were aware of our backchanneling because it was the topic of conversation.
disclosure. This is in response to my question regarding whether she has spoken to her mother since her initial disclosure.

Pearl: My mother said it was “too late” at that point.
Risa: (eyes close, lips purse, pause before proceeding, eye gaze away from Pearl and then back to her)

Examples of backchanneling displaying shared survivor status during my follow-up with Fran include when I asked her about why she made the disclosures to her family, and she began by explaining why she talked to her brother who perpetrated the abuse:

Fran: And I think at the time I was still definitely blaming myself for it [the brother’s abuse of her]
Risa: Uh-uh (slight nod of the head, slow close and open of eyes)
Fran: And I wanted to see if there was any opening to get rid of some of that guilt.
Risa: (slight nodding of the head) Yes. (nodding continues, tightening of lips)

As Fran was ending her discussion of why she made her disclosures to her family and what she hoped to gain from them, she said to me, “You look knowing.” This led to her asking me about my story and there were numerous instances of backchanneling that displayed our shared survivor status from Fran as I spoke.

Risa: And, and what I did for a couple of years was I, I, because my brother said “well yeah, but” and “you know, it wasn’t that bad” =
Fran: (increased nodding)
Risa: = and “if it had actually happened mom would have woken up because she was such a light sleeper.”
Fran: (nodding, smiling =
Risa: You know, all that kind of stuff.
Fran: = continued nodding and smiling) huh-uh

Examples during my follow-up with Grace include:

Grace: It was a, it was a good, I thought … … I can’t think of the word. Enjoyment isn’t quite it. But it was a good time.
Risa: (head nodding, tight smile) huh-uh (head nodding, tight smile)
After asking Grace about vocabulary use, I began to explain that I was analyzing vocabulary in the study, and when I mentioned looking at how the participants discussed the perpetrator of the abuse, that simple mention of how to discuss that person became an opportunity for displaying shared identity:

Risa: One of the things that I’m looking at is vocabulary. For naming ourselves, naming the perp[
Grace: (laughter, raising the shoulders, squinting eyes)

In my follow-up conversation with Bettie, she talked about her how her parents have dealt with their knowledge of the abuse and said:

Bettie: It’s the same thing every time. If I bring up anything from our past, they [my parents] don’t want to go there. They always say “leave the past in the past”
Risa: (emphatic head nod, mouth shaped as “oo”)

Bettie also asked me about my own disclosures to family in our follow-up conversation. I told her that my brother and I had different recollections of the specifics of his abuse and that for many years after I talked with him about this I tried to “convince” him of what I remembered. Bettie began nodding her head and pursed her lips.

Each of the participants (and I, when I was participating in the follow-up conversations) exhibited backchanneling behaviors that functioned to display our shared status as sexual abuse survivors. These behaviors were both verbal and non-verbal and at times a combination of the two.

b. Shared Experience: Deaf Person

In addition to the experience of incest shared by all four of the participants, the Deaf participants also share an experience of being Deaf (i.e., being members of a linguistic and cultural minority). The experience of being Deaf in a non-deaf society, and especially in non-deaf families were topics that Bettie and Pearl brought into their
conversation, and it was at these times that they exhibited backchanneling behaviors to show “I know your pain; I’m in your shoes.” These same topics also came up in the follow-up conversations, but in examining the data I found that, as would be expected, I did not exhibit this backchanneling behavior when discussing the topic of “communication issues”\textsuperscript{35} with Bettie, Pearl, or Aislynn (because I do not share identity with Deaf women).

Displays of shared identity as Deaf people arose around questioning of whether something (i.e., the incest, or dismissing a Deaf person’s comments) occurred because the participant is Deaf, around having hearing family members interpret for intense conversations while also being a participant in the conversation, and around how the family’s choice to use English meant that the participants did not know what the family talked about after they learned of the abuse. Backchanneling behaviors to convey shared identity occurred in all three of the ASL interactions, the conversation and both interviews.

i. Bettie & Pearl Conversation – ASL

Bettie and Pearl have experience with their hearing family members interpreting for them in situations where the family member is also a participant. This is demonstrated in the example below where Bettie talked about her mother “interpreting”\textsuperscript{36} the night that the social worker came to the house without an interpreter to discuss what the family had learned the previous night. Bettie stated that she wanted an actual interpreter and wished

\textsuperscript{35} I use “communication issues” in quotes here because this term does not capture the meaning and import of these discussions. Unless you are a person who has had experiences that attach to using a minority language in a majority culture, it is difficult to comprehend the gravity and depth of the issues that attach. Therefore, I use this phrase as a way of referencing an experience and phenomena that encompasses much more than I am prepared to undertake in this study. See Charlotte Baker-Shenk, 1985; Harlan Lane, 1992; Skutnabb-Kangas 1988; Skutnabb-Kangas & Phillipson, 1990.

\textsuperscript{36} I place “interpreting” in quotation marks here because Bettie used them as a way to convey the deficient quality of interpretation done by her mother.
her mother would have remained in her role as mother. Bettie described what occurred
during this conversation:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bettie:</th>
<th>While she was “interpreting” my mother would lose it, she would just start sobbing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pearl:</td>
<td>(squinting one eye, pursed lips, nodding of head)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

...  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bettie:</th>
<th>I was utterly powerless</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pearl:</td>
<td>(nodding of head, pursed lips)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Both Bettie and Pearl posed the rhetorical question of whether the fact that they
were Deaf and the rest of the family was not Deaf was a reason for the family’s lack or
support of them and/or a reason that the abuse had been perpetrated on them. In each
instance, there is backchanneling that serves to display shared identity as Deaf people. An
example includes:

| Pearl:  | None of my family members showed any support for me. Did that have anything to |
|---------| do with me being Deaf? |
| Bettie: | (change from nodding to shaking head) |

This was followed by Pearl stating that her mother announced at one point that
she wished Pearl had a cochlear implant, to which Bettie responded with a simultaneous
sharp drop of her head, widening of her eyes, and raising of her eyebrows as soon as
Pearl uttered “cochlear implant.”

There are numerous occurrences throughout their conversation where Pearl and
Bettie raised issues that impact their lives because of being Deaf. This occurred in each of
their interviews as well. Though this was not the central issue in either the conversations
or the interviews, the data indicates that one’s status of being Deaf (i.e., a member of a
linguistic and cultural minority) is a locus of oppression that is referenced in relation to
the main topic of conversation, and queried as a possible reason for abusive behavior
being directed towards oneself.
ii. Pearl’s Interview – ASL

In Pearl’s interview she talked about telling her family that she wanted an actual interpreter for the family meeting they were going to have. She described the implications of having her half-sister interpret:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pearl: My half-sister used to be an interpreter, which is fine, but</th>
<th>Aislynn: [but with a family issue]</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>like this (squinty eyes, head tilted)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Pearl continued by saying that she tried to remind her family that there was no way her half-sister could play both roles (interpreter and participant in the family conversation), that it was too difficult and that there would be gaps in interpreting content and emotions of the family meeting. As soon as Pearl began to describe her argument to her family, Aislynn’s backchanneling began, and continued until Pearl was done with her argument. Aislynn’s backchanneling appeared in the form of quicker, shorter head nodding, tilted head, and pursed lips that were pulled back in a smile. Aislynn, a Deaf woman who is not a survivor of sexual abuse, performed backchanneling behavior indicating shared identity, when the topic was related to struggles as a Deaf person in a hearing environment.

iii. Bettie’s Interview – ASL

In her interview with Bettie, Aislynn employed backchanneling for the purpose of displaying her shared Deaf identity as illustrated in the following example. Bettie began to explain that her family signs a little bit but not very well, at which point Aislynn pursed her lips and continued to do so as Bettie went on to say they do not sign well enough for any “real” communication, at which time Aislynn nodded and said, “only in a limited fashion.” As in Pearl’s interview, Aislynn consistently changed her
backchanneling devices to indicate understanding when Bettie brought up the subject of being Deaf.

All four of the participants and the Deaf interviewer reported no surprise when I showed them examples of, and discussed with them, the function of their backchanneling behaviors, in order to verify the meaning that each had intended. Each of them reported being unaware of having conveyed this information while they were interacting in the conversations and interviews, but all smiled and nodded their heads knowingly when shown this behavior.

In summary, this data demonstrates the use of backchannel devices as a display of identity, (as incest survivors and/or as Deaf people) that functions to index (as participants put it): “I totally get what you are saying; I know your pain; I am in your shoes.” The form that this type of backchanneling takes varies; interlocutors have the choice to employ verbal and non-verbal behaviors, as they do with other functions of backchanneling. The data in this study showed that the display of the backchanneling was dependent on interlocutors’ change in linguistic and/or interactive behaviors; the meaning was relative to the individual’s other linguistic usage. The data also showed that some interlocutors are more or less subtle in their backchanneling devices (e.g., Grace was less subtle than Fran). These findings have implications for language teaching, language acquisition, cross-cultural interactions, and interpreting in situations in which the interpreter does or does not share an experience (a contextual factor) with the interlocutors, and are discussed in chapter 5.
3. Before the Stories: Background

The starting point of a narrative will differ according to the context in which it occurs and the genre of narrative (Reissman, 1993). Each participant shared at least one disclosure story about telling her parent(s), though the parents were not always the first member(s) of their family told, nor was telling the parents the first narrative presented in this data for each of the participants.

The narratives in this study are what Reissman (1993) refers to as “topic-centered narratives (snapshots of past events that are linked thematically)” (18). The data in this study do not conform to the orderliness (Mishler, 2006) of performed, practiced, or repeatedly retold narratives (Bauman, 1986). The narratives arise as a part of the interaction through subtle shifts in the conversation that are negotiated and accomplished in tandem by the interlocutors (Sacks, Schegloff, Jefferson, 1974), are locally occasioned (Sacks, 1992) and sequentially implicative (Jefferson, 1978).

In this study, each participant expected to provide at least one narrative of disclosure. How the participants arrived at those narratives, specifically, how much background was provided prior to beginning the narrative, is the focus of this section. Therefore, a definition of what constitutes entrance talk, or the beginning of the narrative, is necessary in order to demarcate entry into the narrative from the background that led up to it. Entrance into the narratives in this data was marked by the following: the use of past tense; naming of the person(s) the participant had disclosed to and was about to focus on in her discourse; a statement that she told the named person (see above Table 1 for examples); and an explanation of what happened in the disclosure. In addition, the

37 Researchers differ greatly on what marks entry into (and exit) from a narrative. For more treatment on this subject see for example Jefferson, 1979; Labov, 1972; Mishler, 1986; Reissman, 1991.
38 This was not a requirement for participation—the relevant criterion was “told a family member”. 
sharing of post-disclosure events in the data consistently appeared after entry into the narratives in both the conversations and the interviews for three of the participants. For these three participants, no information about post-disclosure events appears in any data set prior to the first mention of disclosure. Pearl was the exception to this; in her interview she briefly mentions two post-disclosure events, and then returns to providing further background information prior to entry into her narrative. In their narratives all four participants discussed to whom they disclosed, how they disclosed, what they said (as much as they could remember), what their parents’ responses and reactions were, what their own responses and reactions were to what happened in the disclosure, and what happened after the disclosure. This was true in the conversations and the interviews.

Prior to entry into the narratives, the participants provided background information that I have examined in terms of their propositional content. Below is an example of background (propositions) in lines 1-8 that occur prior to entrance into a narrative, and entry into the narrative begins at line 9:

Grace:
1. I was abused by my brother from about five years to about 11 or 12.
2. And I’m a twin, I have a girl twin, [name],
3. and my brother and [another] sister.
4. My brother’s the oldest.
5. I grew up in [statename].
6. I moved away when I just turned 18.
7. And started acting out.
8. And fortunately there were enough people around to notice.
9. And I called my parents and that was the first time I confronted them with what…

In this section, I examine the amount of background information that leads up to the participants’ entry into their first narrative of telling a family member, comparing in both settings and across languages.
The data show that the English (Fran and Grace) and the ASL (Bettie and Pearl) stories have substantially different amounts of background information provided prior to the beginning of the story. The speakers in English consistently provided less background information prior to entry into their narratives; both Fran and Grace (English), in their narratives throughout the conversations, and their interviews, provided less background. In the ASL narratives, more background information preceded entry into the narratives; both Bettie and Pearl (ASL), in their narratives throughout the conversations, and their interviews, provided substantially more background.

I analyzed the amount of background across languages by noting (counting) and comparing the propositions that were mentioned as background information, and comparing the amount of time devoted to background prior to entry into the story (this measurement includes pauses of 2 seconds or more and I note when there is interaction during this time). A transcription of the data would be a misleading way to analyze amount of background in comparing these two languages, because the amount of space taken up in a transcription is not an equal measurement across languages. Table 2 shows the amount of background preceding the first narrative for each participant, as measured by time and number of propositions discussed:
Table 2: Elapsed time and number of propositions providing background information preceding entry into first narrative

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>ASL</th>
<th>English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bettie</td>
<td>Pearl</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Conversations</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time elapsed:</td>
<td>1 min. 23 sec.</td>
<td>10 min. 58 sec.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of propositions:</td>
<td>11 propositions</td>
<td>107 propositions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Interviews</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time elapsed:</td>
<td>2 min. 42 sec.</td>
<td>11 min. 50 sec.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of propositions:</td>
<td>16 propositions</td>
<td>91 propositions</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Below, I provide data examples from each participant’s background information leading up to her story. Due to the length of the data for some of the participants, I summarize the propositions in order to compare the data here. The complete data (tables showing the propositions) for the participants can be found in Appendix A.

These examples are from the conversations.

Table 3: Summary of background leading up to first narrative in conversations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>ASL</th>
<th>English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bettie</td>
<td>Pearl</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 propositions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 min. 23 sec. (All propositions listed here)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Betty says when her parents married, where they moved, and how old her dad was; that there were 4 children, 2 boys and 2 girls, and what order they were in; that the 3rd child was the brother, that he abused her during 2 different time periods and what ages they were; how she learned about</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>107 propositions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 min. 58 sec. (Only the first 25 propositions listed here)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Betty says her brother is really her half-brother, his age, her age, the differences in their ages; she wonders if he abused her half sister, which bothers her; she isn’t sure when the abuse stopped, but knows it was when he left home; she is glad she lived in a dorm away from home, or it could</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 propositions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13 sec. (All propositions listed here)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fran says she does not always remember things, her memory is fuzzy, and that it has been a while since she talked about this.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 propositions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>38 sec. (All propositions listed here)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grace says what age she was when her brother abused her, that she has two other sisters, one is a twin, where she grew up; when she moved out, that she started acting out, and that she was fortunate that other people noticed and did something.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
“bad touch” at school, but did not think it applied to her, until her brother abused her again, at which time she knew she had to tell someone.

have been a whole different story and a lot more; they lived on a farm, he could do anything he wanted because no one could see him; she lists some of what he did; no one would know since they couldn’t see him; she did not want to work with him, just like Bettie; she could not tell her parents, she had to keep it to herself, if she told her dad he might kill him and end up in jail, and she would lose her father, which she was not going to chance, her dad made her feel safer, she could not chance losing him; she did tell her dorm supervisor, she was like a second mother to her, they were close, she was stunned, she swore her to secrecy; no one in the family knew, only the dorm supervisor; prior to telling her mom, she told her partner a long time ago…

| Of the four participants, Fran (English) provided the briefest amount of background information prior to beginning her narrative; she commented on deficits in her memory and how long it has been since she has talked about this. Grace (English) provided the next briefest amount of background information prior to beginning her narrative; she provided her age when she was being abused, described the family constellation, stated where she grew up and when she moved, and that she started acting |
|---|---|---|
|  |  |  |
out but was fortunate that people noticed and did something (what led up to the disclosure).

Bettie (ASL) provided the second longest amount of background leading up to her narrative. Bettie began with background information about her parents, and then described her family constellation (in more detail than Grace had), stated when she was abused and that it occurred in two different time periods, and described how she learned that what her brother did was not okay and that she had to tell someone (what led up to the disclosure).

Both Grace (English) and Bettie (ASL) included similar propositions, although Bettie provided more detail about her age when she was abused, about the family constellation, and about what led up to the disclosure than Grace did, and in both the conversation and interview Bettie took at least twice as much time as Grace did. Fran included family constellation information along with when the abuse took place and what led up to her disclosure within her narrative rather than as background information.

Pearl (ASL) provided the longest amount of background leading up to her narrative. Like Grace and Bettie, she described the family constellation (early on in the background, and later as well), the time period of the abuse (later in the background), and what led up to the disclosure (still later in the background). However, Pearl included many more propositions than the other three participants. She also provided far more detail and repeated herself numerous times. This data captures the first time she had ever told her story about disclosing to her mother (i.e., first-time-told story). (See the following section for more discussion on this).
In their interviews, which occurred subsequent to the conversations, each participant followed the same pattern with regard to duration and number of propositions provided in background that she had established in the earlier conversation (see Appendix A for a tables showing the propositions in the interviews). Accordingly, as in the conversations the non-deaf participants provided substantially less background than did the Deaf participants in their interviews. However, three of the four participants took a longer amount of time for background information, and included more propositions (by number), in their interviews than in their respective conversations. Pearl (ASL) was the exception; the amount of time she devoted to background in her interview was nominally different, and the number of propositions decreased slightly. Two factors may account for this. As previously noted, Pearl’s narrative in the conversation was the first time she had talked about having disclosed to her mother, and as is shown in the following section, the background in her second telling (in her interview) is more cohesive. Another reason may be the way in which I determined the propositions. Her discourse is more cohesive in the interview, as she made clearer the relationship among ideas she presented, therefore producing possibly a smaller number of distinct propositions. She also is less repetitive in her interview than she is in her conversation.

Of the four participants, three of them told more than one story of disclosure to a family member in their conversations and interviews. Pearl (ASL) told only one, (disclosing to her mother), which she told in both her conversation and interview, but that is her only family disclosure story. Fran (English) and Grace (English) each told multiple family disclosure stories, and a cursory analysis of the background leading up to those narratives shows similar amounts of time and number of propositions as compared with
the background leading up to their first narratives (analyzed above). Bettie (ASL) is the only participant who had more than one occasion to disclose; her brother abused her during two separate time periods, and she disclosed both times. Because of this I also looked at the background leading up to Bettie’s second recounting of her disclosure (when she was a teenager), and found that the background leading up to this narrative was longer than that leading up to her first disclosure narratives.

Even more striking was the background Bettie provided leading up to her second narrative. The background leading up to Bettie’s second narrative in her conversation lasted 3 minutes, 45 seconds, and in her interview it lasted 9 minutes, 55 seconds. The actual disclosures (and occurrences of abuse) were separated by several years. The first occurred when she was in elementary school, and the second when she was in high school. Bettie said that she remembers less of what happened after the first disclosure than the second disclosure, and that the second disclosure had a much larger impact on her because of what happened during and after that disclosure. In addition to her background leading up to the narratives in the conversation and interview being longer for her second disclosure story, the actual narratives of Bettie’s second disclosure are considerably longer than her first disclosure narratives.

In addition, each participant reported in the follow-up conversations that the manner in which they told stories, including the manner in which they led up to them, in both their conversation and interview, was typical for them. It was during my follow-up conversation with Pearl that she revealed to me she had never told her disclosure story to anyone prior to her conversation with Bettie.

Examples from the background leading up to the second narratives are not included here.
In summary, the data shows that the ASL interlocutors, Bettie and Pearl produced substantially more background information leading up to their narratives than did the English interlocutors, Fran and Grace. This occurred in both the conversations and interviews. In addition, the background that Bettie (ASL) provided leading up to her second disclosure is substantially greater than any of the English examples, as well as being greater than the amount she provided leading up to her first narrative.

In this study entry into narrative was marked by the following: the use of the past tense, naming of the person(s) the participant had disclosed the incest to and was about to focus on in her discourse, a statement that she had told the named person, followed by an explanation of what had happened in that disclosure and post-disclosure events. Possible factors that account for this difference are: the type of narratives – ones that focus on the present and the future as well as the past; the intensity, the topic and the taboo nature of the topic; the fact that these are disclosure stories; or that any of the contextual factors influence this feature.

4. Smoothness in Background: First-Time-Told—First-Time-Retold

Bettie, Fran, and Grace had all told their disclosure stories to other people previous to their conversations in this study. Pearl had not, and she did not tell hers again until her interview in this study. When I asked Pearl whether she recalled any differences in how she told her story in the conversation and interview, she immediately stated that because the conversation was her first time telling her story of disclosing to her mother, she noticed differences when she retold her disclosure story in the interview. She reported that she thought the second telling was “smoother” and had greater clarity. In her words: “Of course the one in the interview is smoother, that was not my first time telling this
“Smother” was the word Pearl used to characterize her re-telling, as well as “clearer” and “It wasn’t my first time telling [in the interview] so I could judge more of what I wanted to say and how to say it.”

As noted in the previous section, the background leading up to Pearl’s talking about disclosure to her mother in the conversation and in the interview lasted roughly the same amount of time and involved roughly the same topics. However, there are differences that contribute to the “smoothness” or coherence of the discourse: the way the discourse was delivered, how information was or was not framed, and whether the discourse was cohesive.

a. Framing: When and Why

Pearl’s discourse in the conversation leaves one with the feeling that numerous topics have been discussed, but that Pearl did not tie them together and rambled for some time prior to discussing her disclosure to her mother. Pearl shared many individual pieces of information, but did not explicate how they related to one another. She repeated several topics a number of times, providing no new information nor expressing or implying the relationship between these topics. The background information Pearl supplied did not reveal the impetus for her disclosure to her mother. Pearl shared that she and her half brother had had several fights and arguments, but did not share information to confirm whether those conflicts prompted her to disclose the abuse to her mother.

Pearl structured her discourse in her interview, her first-time-retelling, such that from the beginning, the listener knows when (a: after her father’s death) and why she disclosed (b: with her father gone she felt like she had no support); and a second reason why she disclosed (c: the things her half brother was doing led up to her disclosing to her
mother). This information provided a framework for inferencing the importance and relationship of the information that followed.

At the beginning of her interview, in response to Aislynn’s questions, Pearl said that she had told her mother about the abuse, that she had done so a few months prior to the interview, and that she disclosed to her mother following her father’s death. Pearl had not provided these three pieces of information in her conversation prior to entry into narrative. Although in the conversation these three details can be inferred as Pearl got closer to producing the actual disclosure story, they could not be confirmed until she had begun and ended her disclosure narrative. At the very beginning of the disclosure narrative in the conversation, Pearl stated that she told her mother (THAT NIGHT. SPEAK-UP TO MY MOM). Not until the end of that narrative did she say when and why she disclosed (after her father’s death, on an impulse because of the recent events in her life):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pearl:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>THAT PAST STORY, PAST #OCT. IMAGINE. OPEN-to.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ME CONFIDENTIAL TO SMALL.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ME THINK ME KEEP SECRET UNTIL BURY.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BUT FATHER DIE, PAST #OCT, THAT CHANGE MY LIFE.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TELL, FINISH.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

b. Why No Prior Disclosure

In the conversation Pearl said that she did not feel that she could tell her parents about being abused by her brother, because of what she feared her father would have done, the consequence of which would have meant risking the loss of her father if she had disclosed. She made this point five times in the background information in the conversation (n-s), (ee, jj, kk), (rr, ss), (nnn, qqq) and (bbbb).

In the interview, in contrast, Pearl structured her discourse enough to share that she had thought that she would not ever disclose, and would take the “dark secret” with
her to her grave (n), that not seeing her half brother frequently had seemed to her to be a reason for her not to disclose (s), and that she did not want to think about what her father would have done had he known and she preferred to just “take it on the chin” (t).

c. **Factors Leading up to Disclosure**

Early in the interview, Pearl said she was unhappy about her brother’s attempts to control things on the farm (where she grew up) and also about her mother’s decisions (f, h). She revisited this topic several more times (v, nn, tt, and yy, ccc), and stated in (ddd) that she was fed up with her brother’s behavior. Immediately following this she said she has not seen or talked to him since that day (the day she disclosed to her mother). In contrast, in the conversation, Pearl first had mentioned her brother trying to make decisions about and take control of the farm (xxx), however neither this nor several subsequent mentions (zzz, bbbb, eeee, gggg) linked this behavior by her brother to her decision to disclose. Not until immediately prior to entry into her narrative in the conversation did Pearl clarify the relationship between her brother’s conduct and her decision to disclose to her mother (ccccc).

d. **“That Night”**

In the conversation, Pearl used the phrase THAT NIGHT four times, beginning at 9 minutes, 8 seconds into the background, and again three more times within one minute of actually stating that she disclosed to her mother THAT NIGHT, thus elucidating the meaning of THAT NIGHT:

Pearl: OPEN-movement-to. FINALLY OPEN THAT NIGHT. SPEAK-UP TO MY MOM. THAT NIGHT. I-N-C-E-S-T.

In the previous four occurrences of this phrase, Pearl did not mark THAT NIGHT as having any significance or relationship to her disclosure. It was simply a time signifier
of “a generic time period” and did not necessarily mean that she was talking about the same night each time she used the phrase. She did nothing either verbal or non-verbal to indicate that THAT NIGHT referred to the night she had disclosed to her mother. Throughout this portion of the conversation, the listener could infer that the events of THAT NIGHT are relevant in some way, but exactly how they are relevant (i.e., that they are the events that led up to her decision to disclose) was never stated or implied. At the entry point of her narrative, Pearl finally provided the meaning of THAT NIGHT by embedding it in her statement of “this is when I disclosed”, thus confirming the relevance of this phrase.

In contrast, in her interview, Pearl used this same phrase, THAT NIGHT, for the first time at 2 minutes, 15 seconds into the background section (w). She used it in response to the interviewer’s question asking her to tell her what Pearl could recall about what she had done and what had happened when she disclosed to her mother. A translation of Pearl’s ASL discourse is “I remember that my half brother and I fought over the littlest things.” Pearl used THAT NIGHT to frame that she was talking about events that led up to the disclosure, in response to having been asked by the interviewer about what had happened on the day she disclosed. This information was embedded in the interaction between Pearl and Aislynn (the interviewer), and the use of the phrase THAT NIGHT takes on clarity in the interview that it lacked in the conversation.

e. Arguments With Her Brother

In the interview Pearl used time markers to explicate the chronology of events. She began by saying that she had disclosed to her mother after her father died (a). This information did not appear in the conversation until after entry into the narrative (i.e., not
as background). Even when Pearl did discuss having argued frequently with her brother just after her father died (xxx), she did not in the conversation relate this to her decision about disclosure. In the interview, in contrast, she noted the arguments that she had with her brother as precipitating factors in her decision to disclose to her mother. In (x) she talked about “one of the fights” (about her father’s dog), and later said in (dd) that they had already had two big fights that week and that this was the third, and the last straw (ee).

Notwithstanding that Pearl generally did not provide time markers in her conversation, she did relate the events leading up to disclosure in basically chronological order. However, in the conversation, she did not indicate that she was relating events chronologically, so her conversational partner did not have any way of knowing this (they had never met before). Comparison of the information Pearl provided, and in what order, between the conversation and the interview, revealed that Pearl had in fact, on first-telling in the conversation, structured her discourse roughly chronologically. I also verified this information with Pearl.

In summary, Pearl’s telling is particularly interesting because it is a first time telling and a subsequent first time retelling. Herman (1997) states that survivors’ first accounts of their trauma may be repetitious and may be a list and review of the events that led up to the trauma, lacking imagery and a sense of what occurred. Consistent with Herman, the background leading up to Pearl’s first narrative of disclosure to her mother lacks cohesion, is repetitious, does not elucidate the relationship between ideas being narrated, lacks chronological time markers, and does not elucidate the cause and effect relationship between the items shared.
Pearl reported that she was happy just to “get the story out the first time,” which then made it easier to share the second time. She also reported that she was very glad to be able to tell it more than once. This self-report confirmed what Herman (1997) reports: that the opportunity to speak about traumatic events in a safe space is one of the four steps to recovery. Pearl’s data constitute a first time telling of her story, and a first time retelling. In my review of the literature I did not find that the research on retellings includes data of this type. The opportunity to analyze a story on its first telling is significant.

D. Summary

These data provided a window on how the meaning is co-constructed in context. The participants discussed and narrated their lived experiences, in conversations and interviews, providing an abundance of rich data suitable for analysis per the research questions of this study:

1) How do the participants talk about revealing the fact of the sexual assault to their families?

2) How does the discourse and the narrative change or remain the same according to a change in contextual factors?

By examining how much background the participant provided and how “smooth” were the tellings (which was especially noteworthy in the one case of a first time telling and first time retelling), I analyzed how discourse and features preceding entry into narratives changed or remained the same across languages and contexts. By examining backchanneling behavior that appeared at specific times in the interaction, I analyzed how the contextual factor of shared experience and identity were communicated through
backchanneling. By examining the vocabulary choices the participants made when discussing the perpetrator, themselves, and the abuse experience, I highlighted the choices they made in the language and discourse features they employed.

In the following chapter, I discuss and highlight implications and conclusions of this study.
Chapter VI

Discussion and Conclusions

*The necessity of poetry [and stories] has to be stated over and over, but only to those who have reason to fear [their] power, or those who still believe that language is “only words” and that an old language is good enough for our descriptions of the world we are trying to transform.*


A. Introduction

As Schiffrin (2003) noted, the voices of Holocaust survivors were silenced because they had no public venue in which to tell their stories. Anna Wieviorka said, “Victims are certainly beyond words, and yet, dispossessed of everything, words are all they have left. Words which will be the sole trace of an existence” (1994:25, as cited in Schiffrin, 2003:87). Like the Holocaust survivors who told their stories in Schiffrin’s work, the participants in this study have brought forth their stories of living through and with life-altering trauma, breaking silence to make their words and their worlds visible. They have affirmed the importance of the opportunity to do so, and they have done so in both ASL (an oppressed and little studied language) and English.

In this concluding chapter I discuss the intersections among seemingly disparate phenomena – change in context, discourse and interactions in two separate languages (ASL and English), disclosure stories of sibling sexual abuse survivors, and the teaching and practice of interpreting – by discussing the implications of these findings for methodology, theory, and application. I have divided the discussion in this fashion for clarity, but these are not distinct and exclusive subcategories. They are reflexive and overlapping. For example the theoretical lens of a researcher impacts study design, and study design influences theory. Implications for trauma studies turn on the survivors’
language usage, which is true for sociolinguistic implications as well. With the caveat that this categorization is permeable, I have divided the discussion that follows into three parts: implications for methodology, implications for theory, and implications for applications. This is followed by a discussion of future research, and concluding thoughts.

**B. Implications for Methodology: Research Design**

Aspects of design of this study, including its focus on ASL and on sibling sexual abuse, its use of video cameras for data collection, the participants’ trust and investment in the research, and employing a feminist analysis, each reveal implications for methodology and are discussed below.

1. **Focus: What and Who Gets Studied**

The design of a study determines the focus and inclusion or exclusion of perspective and analysis (Patton, 2002; Reinharz, 1992). Each aspect of the study has consequences, including the theoretical constructs, methodology, choice of participants, choice of topic, and data gathering methods. The feminist backdrop upon which this study rests is significant. Assuming a feminist perspective guided the choice of topic as a credible topic of study (disclosure stories of sibling sexual abuse in the family) and the focus on ASL as an important language to study (an oppressed language). This study has significance simply because of its focus on women who were sexually assaulted as children and on the experiences of Deaf women. Each time the language and lives of Deaf people are inserted into the public discourse, their lives, words, and worlds are validated. This is equally true for incest survivors. A study of both of these groups makes the statement: your lives and your words are important enough to look at, to study, and to
take seriously. As the data demonstrated, survivors live on a daily basis with shame, secrecy, self-blame, feelings of culpability, and ambivalence about whether or not to speak about their experiences. An exploration that touches on what it means to have experienced, coped with, lived with, and be living with incest in one’s own body, family, and society is immensely significant for survivors and to the field of trauma studies. The participants reported that an invitation and offer of a place to tell their often overlooked stories – those of both Deaf women and incest survivors and especially the even more understudied sibling incest survivors – was immeasurably significant.

2. Techniques of Data Collection: Usefulness of Video Recordings

Decisions regarding the manner of data collection necessarily impact what data will be available for analysis by the researcher. The use of video cameras in this study allowed capture of the visual and non-verbal information communicated by the interlocutors. Significantly, the data revealed that visual and non-verbal information was as important to full understanding of the spoken language interactions as it was for the signed language interactions.

Researchers typically use audio recorders for study of spoken language interactions. The argument against the use of video recording has been that audio-only recording is less intrusive. In this study the participants reported being aware of the recording devices, but also reported that they did not believe they had changed their behavior because of the recording devices. I therefore challenge the common wisdom about audio-recording spoken language interactions of discourse use, because of this study’s overwhelming evidence that non-verbal and non-vocal behaviors are crucial aspects of linguistic interactions, which cannot be captured on audiotape. This study
suggests the decision to use only audio recording unnecessarily restricts the scope of data that can be collected and results in the loss of data that is crucial to understanding of meaning and meaning-making.

The number and placement of the cameras in this study was also significant. Although initially I had planned on using two cameras for the English interactions, both to shoot the entire scene (one as a backup), I decided instead to use three cameras because that is what I would use in the ASL interactions. This decision allowed for data to be collected that would not have been available in the absence of close up shots of each English interlocutor. In fact, without this close-up record, I would not have obtained the data that led to the findings on backchanneling and display of identity in both languages, and indeed may not have been able to discern the import of this behavior in ASL. As C. Goodwin (1987) and M. H. Goodwin (1980) discussed, and have shown in their research repeatedly, video recording of human interactions allows for the capture, and therefore the analysis, of linguistic and paralinguistic behaviors within interaction as activities that display meaning-laden social actions and movement among participants. Use of video recorders rather than audio recorders in spoken language interactions, and the use of multiple close-up and full scene shots, allows for a fuller and more nuanced picture of the talk in interaction.

3. Participants: Who Volunteers and Why

Study design includes decisions of who will be studied and how their participation will be solicited. The decisions arise from the researcher’s theoretical lens and also determine the nature of the volunteers’ participation (Reinharz, 1992). Because this study

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40 I am not suggesting that audio-taping is never appropriate. If a researcher is examining only an aspect of vocal linguistic usage, for example variation in pronunciation, audio recording may be a viable choice.
was conducted with a feminist framework, the participants were incorporated as agents, not objects of study. In addition, I chose to study people from within communities of which I am a member. Because of these decisions, the participants who volunteered for this study reported that they did so because they knew of my background and community affiliation (specifically, being a survivor of sibling sexual abuse and a long time ASL/English interpreter and interpreter educator). They also reported that they volunteered because they wanted to give back to the community of survivors (both the ASL and English users) and to the Deaf community (the ASL users). There had been earlier concern from the Gallaudet IRB (Institutional Review Board) that I would be unable to find enough participants due to the “taboo” nature of the proposed area of inquiry. In fact, this concern was not borne out. I had many more people volunteer to participate than I needed for the study. How a researcher conceptualizes participation, and the researcher’s affiliation and self-disclosure to potential participants, impact the participants’ choices in volunteering to “be studied.”

4. **Theoretical Lens**

The use of a feminist lens as a theoretical framework also has implications for how the data is understood and analyzed. As Herman and Hirschman (1981) noted in their study of fathers who had committed sexual assault on their daughters, their ability to understand the phenomenon under study as it occurred in the context in a patriarchal society, had a profound impact on their work. The same is true for this study with its dual focus on sibling assault survivors and ASL/Deaf women: one must understand the experiences of abuse survivors and ASL users as they occur in the context of a patriarchal society and the oppression of minority peoples and languages; both sexism and audism
frame the experiences of the participants. The phenomena and impact of linguicism on the Deaf women could have been rendered invisible, and therefore absent, in this study if the researcher did not have a lens through which to view and understand Deaf culture as a linguistic and cultural minority.

5. **Complexity**

The complicated design of this study is in large part responsible for the richness of data it uncovered. The application of these findings to the study of trauma in general, and sibling sexual abuse in particular, is plain: these are stories of disclosure of sibling sexual assault survivors, and I have conducted a thematic analysis and situated my analysis in the fields of trauma and incest studies. This work adds to the variety and complexity of work in those fields.

The application to the teaching and practice of interpreting may seem less obvious, but is nonetheless as significant. I explicate this point further below on page 182. The complex study design, collecting linguistic and interactional data in two languages with calibrated changes in context, allowed comparison across languages (ASL and English), across contexts (conversation and interview), and across participant background (sexual abuse survivor and lack of sexual abuse history).

6. **First-Time-Tellings: How to Elicit**

This study suggests the richness of studying first-time-tellings and suggests approaches to methodology and study design that may elicit them. Although the fact that collecting Pearl’s telling as a first time telling was serendipitous in this study, and may have been due to the “unspeakable” nature of the topic, researchers can design studies more likely to elicit first-time-tellings and retellings by focusing on topics which are
taboo and about which participants may have never told a story before. Providing specificity about what topic to discuss also may increase the likelihood of obtaining a first telling. Labov’s work with life and death stories (1974) suggests this approach as a strategy to elicit first-time-tellings.

This study also underscores the utility of using follow-up interviews and conversations in study design (see Patton, 2002; Reinharz, 1992). These tools provide researchers with the opportunity to ask questions that arise from analyzing the data and allow the participants to speak about the data in their own words. This adds an invaluable dimension to the data, without which the data, and therefore the findings, appear incomplete. (See Ochs and Capps work on agoraphobia, 1994, 1995; 2001; Hamilton’s work on Alzheimer’s, 1994, 1996; Schiffrin’s work on Holocaust survivors, 2002).

C. Implications for Theory

The findings of this study have implications for theory in the fields of sociolinguistics, trauma, and interpreting. In this section I discuss the implications for theory for sociolinguistics and trauma. Because the implications for theory and the implications for application are so intertwined with regard to interpreting, I reserve discussion of implications for theory in interpretation for the following section on implications for application. Likewise, the treatment of some of the implications for sociolinguistic and trauma theory further are elaborated in the section on implications for application.

1. Sociolinguistic Theory

The data and analysis in this study underscore the sociolinguistic notion that meaning is co-constructed and contextually grounded, and that context is not only an
essential aspect of how meaning is made (intended and understood), but is in fact what allows entrance into meaning-making on numerous levels. This corroborates the work of C. Goodwin, Mishler, Schegloff, and Schiffrin. The concept of “contextual factors” encompasses a myriad of factors including: the occasion for the interaction; the setting; the purpose of the interaction; the people involved; the relationships among the people, their goals in the interaction, their background knowledge and shared knowledge, their roles and status; the power dynamics among them; and a long list of other aspects. These factors are reflexive (Heritage, 1984) and are not static (C. Goodwin, 1987) and therefore must be considered as a dynamic set of factors constantly at play with one another. Some dimensions of sociolinguistic theory need further development are discussed below.

a. Linguicism and Audism

The phenomena of linguicism and audism appeared in both the ASL conversation and interviews. Neither phenomenon was addressed or discussed by name; rather, the interlocutor needed to bring an understanding of these modes of oppression to the table to understand what was being communicated. Linguicism and audism appeared in the actions of the family members’ immediate responses to disclosure, in both of the Deaf participant’s families. The family members reacted to disclosure by affirmatively excluding and linguistically abandoning the participant. When the system in which the sexual assaults occurred (the family) was confronted with the abuse, one of the reactions took the form of making the particular linguistic choice of moving out of the language of the survivor, into a language to which she had no access.

This study demonstrated that audism and linguicism are not only experienced in relation to traumatic situations nor limited to interaction in non-deaf families. The ASL

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41 These concepts have been defined previously. See pages 84 and 86.
interviewer, who was raised in a Deaf family, and who had no rape or other sexual abuse history, showed her understanding of these phenomena in her backchanneling behaviors in both interviews when the study participants reported having been linguistically cut-off from participation in the interactions by their family members switching into English. However, her backchanneling displayed more than simply understanding; it displayed her identity as someone who has experienced the same phenomenon. The ASL interviewer reported in our follow-up conversation that she grew up in a Deaf family, but had extended family members and friends who used English as their primary language and knew how to use ASL. She reported that regardless of the fact that these non-deaf people were able to use ASL, there were many occasions on which they would speak English in interactions that included her and/or other Deaf family members and friends. All three Deaf participants reported in their follow-up conversations with me that these behaviors are not limited to any specific type of interaction or limited to family members, but in fact occurred and continue to occur across a wide spectrum of situations, and the effect is the same: when people choose to speak in their presence, the act of switching languages excludes them from participation thereby removing from them their agency and ability to interact. The implications for sociolinguistic theory include how the experience of a user of an oppressed language may be reflected in the discourse use, topics, and focus.

These findings underscore again how central a researcher’s theoretical framework is to understanding the data. Had I not brought an understanding of Deaf Culture, linguicism, and audist behaviors to this data, I would have missed the significance of aspects of the data. I further discuss these phenomena as they relate to the practice and teaching of interpreting (see page 191) and as they relate to trauma and retraumatization.
b. Vocabulary to Index The Perpetrator, Oneself, and The Experience

In order to narrate one’s experience and enter into a conversation on any topic, one must have the linguistic means to do so: specifically, one needs vocabulary with which to name and reference who and what one wishes to discuss. Justine Coupland and Angie Williams (2002) argue that, “those who control the production of text control the operation of ideology” (422). Each of the participants was dissatisfied with the linguistic choices at her disposal for talking about her experience, and for indexing herself and the perpetrator in relation to that experience. Taboo subjects, including the topic of sexual assault, have a smaller repertoire of available linguistic choices than non-taboo subjects (Trinch, 2001a). Coates, Janet Beavin Bavelas and James Gibson (1994) state, “…while there are interpretive repertoires for stranger rape and consensual sex, there is virtually no accurate vocabulary or narrative structure for the more common cases in which the assailant is not a stranger to the victim” (189). Trinch (2001a) reports what Ullmann (1996) described as reasons for “linguistic taboo” on the topic of sexual assault: “fear, religious restriction and superstitions; delicate matters, unpleasant topics, or criminal acts; acts that violate a sense of decency and propriety and sexual references” (cited in Trinch, 2001a:573). Regardless of the fact that there is a problematic repertoire that lacks accurate vocabulary, and that there are reasons for a linguistic taboo, people nevertheless do manage to discuss sexual assaults perpetrated by known assailants.

The data in this study show how people speak about this socially charged topic, notwithstanding dissatisfaction with the available linguistic resources. I examined three categories of languaging choices: how the participants indexed and referred to the
perpetrator, to themselves, and to the experience of abuse and its aftermath. Trinch (2001a) argues that taking the context into account will often clarify non-distinctive and facially ambiguous terms. Because participants in this study operated in the “social context” of discourse on the topic of disclosure of sexual abuse, their use of “non-distinctive” language conveyed their meaning. This data validates the findings of Trinch, and what Bucholtz and Hall (2004) note, that “for language to carry sociocultural meanings, it need not be distinctive only to certain people or only for a certain situation, as long as the social context is not stripped away” (480). The contextual factors of shared experience in the conversations, and of volunteering to be a participant in this study with its particular area of focus, clarified the meaning of the terms chosen, and served as a reason why those terms could be understood.

The data showed that the participants used “non-distinctive” (Bucholtz and Hall) vocabulary to index the perpetrator. There were no special names reserved to index the perpetrator; he was indexed for the most part with pronouns, his name (or name sign in ASL), an ASL signifier, or variations of brother in both languages and across both contexts. For the most part, the participants did not use vocabulary that, outside of the social context of the conversations and interviews, would have indexed the brother’s action as the perpetrator. (The exception to this was when the English users used the word perp twice in their conversation and when one of them used it once in her interview.)

The participants did not need to label the perpetrator as such, precisely because in the context in which the conversations occurred references to “brother” or “he” carried the implicit information that the referenced person was the perpetrator. Indeed, in the context of her conversation with Grace (in English), Fran had to add information when
discussing another brother to clarify that he was not her perpetrator. This shows how strongly context had assigned added meaning to the term “brother.”

The data also raise a question as to whether interlocutors hesitated about how and whether to name the perpetrator as such, because the violence had occurred within the family, and because there are only limited and cumbersome linguistic resources available (Coates and Wade, 2004; Herman, 1997) (See below for further discussion).

The data showed that the participants’ indexing of themselves was similarly non-distinctive; they used pronouns and phrases that indexed them (in ASL: TWO-OF-US, TOUCH-TO-directionality-indicated; in English: I was abused, my brother abused me). None of the participants made reference to themselves as survivors or used distinctive vocabulary to index themselves in this fashion in either language or in either context. They do not need to say who they are in that way.

However, one participant (Grace, using English), used the pronoun we to index and display a larger survivor identity when she included not just herself and Fran (her conversational partner) but also other survivors who have had this experience, within the meaning of some of her remarks. The use of we in this way was neither distinct when taken out of context, nor ambiguous when analyzed in context, thus underscoring the importance of understanding (inferring) meaning in context.

The identity or status of the participants as survivors was a precondition for participating in the study. Without knowing this crucial contextual factor – the background of the interlocutor – the meaning of the talk is obscured.
c. Backchanneling – Display of Shared Identity

This study uncovered a function of backchanneling based on shared identity that had not previously been reported or explicated in the literature. The data showed a particular meaning being demonstrated by backchannel behaviors (on the order of “I know your pain/I’m in your shoes”). The data showed that these backchanneling behaviors were produced contemporaneously with, and in immediate response to, the conversational partner saying something about an experience shared in common (being incest survivors or Deaf persons). The data showed a marked, albeit sometimes subtle, difference from each participant’s usual backchanneling behaviors when backchanneling serving this distinctive function was being produced. This was indicated by the participant changing what she had just been doing, by adding or stressing a behavior, or by producing different behaviors than had been present at other times when they were displaying backchanneling that did not serve this function. The distinctive backchanneling occurred multiple times for each relevant participant (i.e. each who had a shared experience, meaning all except the non-deaf interviewer), and was verified by each of the participants, and by the Deaf interview-participant, when asked about their backchanneling behaviors in the follow-up conversations. This type of backchanneling did not occur when the members of a dyad did not share either experience (being a survivor or being Deaf).

Specifically, when two Deaf women talked (the ASL conversation) about disclosing about incest, each produced backchannels in this fashion both when the topic being discussed by the other related to the experience of being Deaf and when it related to having experienced and disclosing about incest. In contrast, when two Deaf women
talked (the ASL interviews) about disclosing about incest, where one was not a survivor, each produced this type of backchannel behavior *only* when the topic being discussed was about being Deaf. The data shows that this occurred because the interviewer shared the experience of being Deaf but not the experience of being an incest survivor.

Likewise, the two non-deaf survivors each produced this type of backchanneling when the other was talking about the experience of being a survivor and disclosing about the incest and did not when that was not the topic. Because the non-deaf interviewer did not share the experiences of childhood sexual abuse with the participants she interviewed (by design of the study), neither she nor either participant produced this type of backchanneling in the English interviews. The complex study design allowed comparison of a context in which interlocutors shared two oppressed identities (the ASL conversation), a context in which they shared one (the ASL interviews), and a context in which they shared none (the English interviews) relevant to the topics of the discourse. The ability to compare usages across context in this manner validates the distinctive function of the backchanneling behavior depending upon a context of shared or disparate identity.

“Identities are seen not as merely represented in discourse, but rather performed, enacted and embodied through a variety of linguistic and non-linguistic means” (Anna de Fina, Schiffrin, & Bamberg, 2006). I conclude that this type of backchanneling is not an artifact of ASL language or culture, nor of English language or culture, because it crossed both languages and contexts. I further conclude that this backchanneling was for the purpose of displaying shared identity because the data showed that where the participants in a dyad shared one experience but not another, backchanneling of this type occurred
when the shared experience was being discussed and not when the non-shared experience was being discussed.

The data further showed that the participants used a variety of different backchannel behaviors that performed the same function; there is no one-to-one correspondence between a particular behavior and its meaning. Examples of backchanneling behaviors produced that served this distinctive function include: nodding of the head; increasing the intensity and speed of head nodding; tilting of the head; widening of the eyes; laughing; pursing the lips; shaking the head; and interjecting words or sentences. Note that many of these behaviors were also used to serve other identified functions of backchanneling (to indicate agreement, understanding, etc.). The difference was a matter of degree of intensity in comparison with other usage when the backchanneling was to display shared identity, for example by amplifying a behavior already being performed (nodding the head more vigorously), or by adding another behavior.

The use of a multiplicity of behaviors to carry the same or similar meaning also shows that the meaning of a backchannel is not indicated by the isolated behavior(s) performed, but instead that it is displayed, and must be understood, in the context of the preceding and contemporaneous discourse and interaction, as well as by larger contextual factors, namely shared experience between interlocutors. If, as this data showed, backchannel forms or types can take on different meanings depending on the conversation within the context, then Maynard’s (1997) distillation of the functions of backchanneling into six categories may not be sufficiently descriptive or informative.
The data also shows that the participants displayed their identities (by backchanneling) when they were “listening” to other people’s stories, as well as when they were the ones telling their stories. The fact that the Deaf survivors in the study displayed both the survivor identity and their Deaf identity by producing this type of backchanneling behavior, corroborates the literature on multiplicity or plurality of identities, and on identities being “situated and accomplished within social interaction” (Riessman, 2001:701) (Bucholtz and Hall, 2004; Eckert, 2000; Kristin Langellier, 2001; Mishler 2004; Schiffrin 2006).

d. Background Leading up to Narratives

Traditionally, background information has been studied within story boundaries (Labov, 1972, 1997, 2001; Norrick, 1997, 1998). Norrick (1998) suggests that additional research would focus on distinguishing background from other content such as action, dialogue, and evaluation, and on analyzing the amount of these areas of content in each retelling. The data in this study suggests that, at least in the case of narratives on a highly emotional, identity-shaping topic like having experienced childhood sexual abuse, looking only within traditional story boundaries misses crucial information.

In fact, my choice of how to mark “entry” was somewhat problematic because so much of the information Labov (1972) would have identified as being within the story boundaries, in this data seemed to precede entry into the narrative. The one consistent marker in this data showing that entry into narrative had definitively occurred was the provision of information about what had occurred post-disclosure with the family member. (I therefore used that marker for purposes of evaluating background as
This data suggests that story boundaries may be less distinct than prior research assumed.

In this study, I looked at the topics included in background information and the time spent providing that information, before entry into narrative, compared across two languages: ASL and English. The data show that the two ASL users, Bettie and Pearl, provided substantially more background than the two English users, Fran and Grace, measured both by the amount of time devoted to giving background, and by number of topics discussed, prior to entry into the narrative. The difference in amount of background between ASL and English was significant, as shown in Table 4, page 143. This was true regardless of context (in both the conversations and interviews).

In both ASL and English, interlocutors also provided background information after entry into the narrative. The type of background information provided within story boundaries was similar in both languages: ages of siblings, location of disclosure, relationship among people, etc.

These findings suggest that the fact that the ASL users provided so much more background can be explained by a linguistic and cultural difference. Background information of the type that Bettie and Pearl provided is required structural information that precedes entry into narratives in ASL (personal communication, MJ Bienvenu, June 26, 2007). There have been no studies to date on this phenomenon, though this is a well-agreed upon way of constructing stories by native users and when it is absent, “the story just isn’t quite right” (personal communication, MJ Bienvenu, June 26, 2007).
e. Smoothness – First-Time-Told and First-Time-Retold

The data in this study included one set of narratives that represented the first time the narrator had told the story (in her conversation) and the first time she had retold the story (in the interview). Mishler (2004) states that people narrate their lives according to contextual factors (occasion, audience, and reason for the telling), and therefore the retellings are often quite different from one another depending on these contextual factors (Norrick, 1998; Polanyi, 1981; Schiffrin, 1996, 1998, 2003). The literature does not include first time tellings of narratives in naturally occurring conversation. This data provides a unique opportunity to compare a first time telling and first time retelling of a narrative by analyzing the cohesiveness of the background that led up to both tellings.

The data in this study show that on first time re-telling, the interlocutor’s story was “smoother” as compared to the first time it was told. This finding validates the literature that has discussed smoothness in non-first time told narratives and suggested that cohesiveness becomes tighter with more tellings. In addition, this data presents an exemplar of what a non-smooth narrative looks like; the presence of a re-telling that included much of the same information provides a point of comparison.

The data showed that a “non-smooth” first-time telling was characterized by the following factors:

- a lack of framing
- repetitiveness
- failure to elucidate the relationship between ideas, including cause and effect relationships
- failure to provide sufficient information to permit the listener to draw
appropriate inferences (i.e., vagueness and ambiguity)

- failure to provide time markers.

This is the first time these specific characteristics of a non-smooth first time telling have been identified and analyzed in ASL.

2. Trauma Theory

This study has implications for how trauma is conceptualized in general, and for understanding the dynamics of sibling sexual abuse. This study suggests that disclosure is crucial for survivors to understand and integrate their experiences. It also suggests that disclosure is crucial in order for the families, perpetrators, and bystanders to understand the nature and effects of trauma on the survivor as well as on their own participation (intentional or unintentional) and responses to the trauma, so that they also can integrate the experience in their own lives. Disclosure is the opening for such opportunities. The participants in this study reported that notions of accountability, naming oneself and thereby naming and speaking of one’s experience, and of transformation through the act of speaking out were central issues in their experience. This corroborates and adds to the work of Herman, D. E. Russell, Trinch, and others in the fields of trauma and incest.

a. Accountability

Herman (1997) states, “It is very tempting to take the side of the perpetrator. All the perpetrator asks is that the bystander do nothing. He appeals to the universal desire to see, hear, and speak no evil. The victim, on the contrary, asks the bystander to share the burden of pain” (Herman, 1997:7). Not holding the perpetrator accountable and not establishing repercussions for the perpetrator’s behavior are both seen by survivors as
“taking sides” with the perpetrator (Coates and Wade, 2004; Herman, 1997; Trinch, 2001a).

In my examination of how the participants indexed the abuse experience itself, I applied Coates and Wade’s (2004) framework to analyze how linguistic choices indexed responsibility regarding the abuse. In my analysis, three categories emerged: 1) zero attribution of perpetrator responsibility (by nominalizing and use of existential constructions); 2) mitigating or removing perpetrator responsibility; and 3) assigning perpetrator responsibility and indexing consequences of the abuse. This data shows interlocutors minimizing or removing responsibility from the perpetrator in a less formal context than that studied by Coates and Wade (i.e., not a criminal proceeding), and in conversation (as opposed to written discourse as in Lamb, 1991). The data also show this minimization being done by the “victim” rather than by a third party non-participant, as in the other two studies cited. The data show that even in a context where the co-conversant shared the experience, interlocutors still employed linguistic resources that minimized the responsibility of the perpetrator. Similarly, in the interviews, which participants experienced as “safe” (as reported in the follow-up interviews), they used language that minimized the perpetrator’s responsibility.

The findings of this study accord with Coates and Wade’s conclusions about systematic societal obfuscation of intra-family and sexual violence. The data show the ways in which people to whom these experiences occur internalize the systematic societal minimization of sexual abuse, and reflect it, whether consciously or unconsciously, in their language choices. I argue that the minimizing language choices by survivors are sometimes unconscious, and are sometimes an artifact of the inadequacy of the available
linguistic resources, for example when Fran (English) struggled around how to language the first mention of her perpetrator-brother in the interaction. I also suspect that where a person falls on the spectrum from unconscious identification with minimizing language to conscious and frustrated use of that language because no better alternative exists, correlates with where the person is on the spectrum of recovery identified by Herman (1997).

The data demonstrates that in the course of disclosures by survivors to their families, the family shifts away the focus from what the perpetrator did and the effects of his actions on the victim/survivor, onto concerns about what someone else (outside the immediate family) will know, which is given precedence. Negative reactions to disclosure, denials, justifications and minimizations of the perpetrator’s actions, and worry about how the family and brother will be seen by others outside the immediate family, are all responses that mitigate or entirely remove responsibility of abuse from the perpetrator.

Coates and Wade (2004) point out,

“How we account for the actions of perpetrators and victims of violence has far reaching implications. …fundamental constructs as the nature of the events (e.g. violent versus sexual), the cause of the events (e.g. deliberate versus accidental (sic)), the character of the offender (e.g. good versus bad), and the character of the victim (e.g. passive versus active) are constructed within the account of the crime” (503).

They analyzed how linguistic devices – passive and agentless grammatical constructions, euphemisms, mutualizing and eroticizing terms – are “used to [represent and] misrepresent actions in order to: conceal violence, obscure and mitigate perpetrators’ responsibility, conceal victims’ resistance, and blame or pathologize victims” (503). The data in this study corroborates the findings of Coates and Wade and demonstrates that
survivors used these linguistic devices on their own behalf, as well as in reporting the dialogue of their family members. The affirmative use, and the absence of use, of these linguistic devices functioned to place or remove attribution of responsibility to responsible parties.

Herman notes “Remembering and telling the truth about terrible events are prerequisites both for the restoration of the social order and for the healing of individual victims” (1997:1). The data shows that healing for survivors will be promoted when families hold brothers accountable for their past actions, open their hearts to their daughters, and stop shaming and retraumatizing them. Attributing responsibility to perpetrators is a fundamental component of eradicating sexual abuse (Herman, 1997).

Herman (1997) writes that “holding traumatic reality in consciousness” (9) cannot be done in isolation, but requires the involvement of friends, family, and others, as well as of political movements. These supports allow understanding of and connections to the social context, and allow alliances to be formed between those traumatized and the bystanders. Herman further states, “The most powerful determinant of psychological harm is the character of the traumatic event itself. Individual personality characteristics count for little in the face of overwhelming events. … [when there is] “physical, psychological and moral violation of the person” (57). Sibling sexual abuse further complicates the trauma, because it occurs within the boundaries of the family, making unsafe that space where people most expect and seek security. If the family is the most basic place for developing relationships and trust and a sense of oneself (see Herman (1997) especially chapter 3), then trauma within that space, and especially violence from

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42 While I recognize that larger societal and political forces play on the perpetrators as well as survivors, I do not examine how those forces may propel perpetrators towards abusing. (See Herman, 1997; D. E. Russell, 1986.)
a sibling not interrupted or even noticed by parents, fundamentally impacts the survivor’s sense of safety in the world.

b. Naming

As stated previously, the data showed the participants’ dissatisfaction and frustration with available linguistic resources for describing or naming their experience or themselves in relation to their experiences (hence, the cumbersome way of even writing about this). And yet, in order to proceed, participants were required to choose some way of languaging their experiences. The language choices they made, even in awareness of their inadequacy, nonetheless do index something about how they see themselves, how they situate themselves in relation to other people, to experiences, and to their understanding of their experiences.

This study supports the profound significance of naming and defining oneself and one’s experience, of speaking out on one’s own behalf, and of the very act of deciding to do these things: that is, of the power that resides in self-determination and choice. If victimized and oppressed people do not define themselves and their experience, they will be defined by others, to their detriment (Collins, 2000). Just as speaking out threatens any system of oppression, so does defining and naming oneself and one’s experience (Bosmajian, 1983; Lorde, 1984). Survivors who speak up are dangerous and threaten the social architecture of incest. The act of speaking empowered each of the participants and has become a lens through which they are each able to scrutinize and integrate their experiences. The participants saw speaking out as having given them not only the opportunity but also the responsibility of holding seemingly conflicting truths simultaneously: shaky ground and instability as they encounter new territory alongside a
sense of freedom and possibility as they reclaim agency.

c. **Power of Speaking Out – Transforming Silence**

“Storytelling can be a powerful way of introducing the human element into the dialogue. It can transform. Storytelling can often become the only experience vivid enough to cause some participants to recognize the reality of others’ problems and pain” (Harold Saunders, 1999:275). The participants in this study tell their stories and by doing so they allow us to see their lived experience, their self-understanding, and their co-construction of meaning. The themes that emerged are concerned not only with the past, but also with the present and the future. This accords with Lawrence Langer’s (1991) finding that language used in what he calls testimonies embeds the interlocutors’ memories and reflections of experiences in ways that are “concerned less with a past than with a sense of that past in the present” (Schiffrin, 2003:88).

Studies on rape show that when the survivor and the perpetrator come from the same community, some people, even those closest to the rape victim, may be more supportive to the perpetrator, and the victim may have to leave her social world (Herman 1997). In the case of brothers perpetrating sexual abuse on their sisters, the family stands in the stead of the community. How do parents reconcile the fact that one of their children perpetrated a heinous crime on another one of their children? How do they reconcile the fact that one of their children was victimized by another one of their children? Sometimes, they respond, implicitly or explicitly, by supporting the perpetrator and thereby silencing the survivor.

The data bear out the exact opposite of the notion that telling one’s story is harmful to a survivor, and the data corroborate much of the literature on the topic of
trauma: that speaking of one’s experience and hearing others speak of it are ways to integrate it and cope with its negative effects (Bass, 2006; Harvey et al., 2000; Herman, 1997; Trinch, 2001a; Tyagi, 2001). In the context of a society that wants to maintain silence, silence may take a number of unexpected or even unconscious forms. In her review and analysis of the literature on social reactions to childhood sexual abuse disclosures, Ullman (2003) states, “Disclosure and support may be helpful to survivors in the long run, even if stress and anxiety result from telling others in the short-run” (113), and that there is “clear evidence show[ing] that negative social reactions are harmful to survivors’ well-being” (90). She also states that not disclosing, even if the survivor wants to not disclose, has been shown to be harmful to the survivor in the long term. Trinch (2001b) looked at how victim-survivors may perceive a ‘second assault’ committed upon them by the institutions they interact with around the abuse and the language used by other people talking about their experiences. As this data shows, well-meaning but misguided family members may wish to hold on to the notion that “the past is in the past” or “if you don’t talk about it, all will be fine.” Statements such as these may be made by the family thinking they serve the well-being of the survivor, but the result – silencing the survivor – is actually harmful to her.

The data in this study corroborated Trinch’s finding: the participants reported feeling retraumatized in numerous ways after having disclosed to family members. The data support Trinch’s findings that even when “others don’t use overt negative judgments, they also usually do not perform actively in the role of advocate” (2001b:481).
Mishler (2005) writes about the discourse of medicine and about interrupting “the voice of medicine” when it functions to remove agency from those seeking health care. He emphasizes the “special and deep significance of the use of ordinary language; and proposes the empowerment of patients as the route to change…” (438). Interrupting the analogous discourse of shame that serves to silence survivors and to dismiss their experience is also a “route to change”. The themes communicated by the participants in this study support the notion that speaking up about their experiences interrupts the social structures that they experience as blocking their path to healing.

Each of the participants chose to disclose to her family because silence was no longer felt to be a viable option for her. Each chose to participate in this study because she came to see that remaining silent was a choice and came to recognize the possibility of speaking out. Whereas the participants’ initial disclosure(s) may have been personal and individual, with integration of their experiences arises a commitment to action, first by verbalizing their experiences and then by taking some further pro-active action. For each of the participants, the reason for deciding to participate in this study included using their participation as a means to offer something to others. The data underscores how this transformation is felt as a necessary trajectory by the participants, how it is vitally necessary to claim the space to commit to the use and power of language. The data corroborates Lorde’s words, “And [speaking out] is never without fear – of visibility, of the harsh light of scrutiny and perhaps judgment, of pain, of death. But we have lived through all of those already, in silence, except death” (43). In response to Fran’s reminder that she had not let the abuse remain a secret, Grace accepts the reminder and states, “No I didn’t…. I mean I, and you know, I didn’t die.”
The women in this study are agents rather than objects of inquiry (see Herman 1997; Reinharz, 1992; D. E. Russell, 1986). Through their experiences of telling, survivors learn how to transform their lives and they learn both that they can and how they can begin to talk about their experience. It is not easy, but not saying anything is harder, and that becomes clear to them. Beginning to speak, breaking silence, is an act of taking the perpetrator’s tool of silence away from him.

D. Implications for Application

This study was designed to be applicable to the field of interpreting (the practice and teaching of interpretation) and to the field of trauma and incest. Previously, I have discussed theoretical implications in the fields of sociolinguistics and trauma; below I discuss the theoretical and practical implications of this study to the field of interpretation, and the implications for application to the field of trauma, specifically related to childhood sexual abuse.

1. Implications for Theory and Application to Interpreting and Teaching Interpretation

“In order to interpret, one first must understand” (Seleskovitch, 1978). Interpretation is fundamentally about understanding and conveying meaning (Hatim and Mason, 1990). Therefore, the interpreter must know how to discern where meaning in an interaction lies. This study shows how dependent meaning is on contextual factors and how understanding those factors can provide an avenue towards fully understanding the discourse of the interlocutors. Because meaning resides in context (which includes who the interlocutors are, and what experiences, knowledge, and identities they bring to the interaction), interpreters must seek to learn and understand these contextual factors in
order to interpret effectively. This study demonstrates the importance of the interplay between context, who the interlocutors are, the expectations interlocutors bring to an interaction, and the discourse used by the interlocutors. Interpreters must take into consideration all of these factors, none of which alone can provide the meaning interpreters need for understanding.

Below, I discuss the implications of this study to the theory and practice of interpreting and teaching interpretation by discussing the following: conceptualization of the task of interpreting; understanding and shared experience; preparation; language differences; and teaching interpretation.

a. Conceptualization of Interpreting: Context and Co-Construction of Meaning

This study corroborates the sociolinguistic notion that meaning is co-constructed and dependent upon the context in which it occurs (C. Goodwin, 1987; Mishler, 1986, 2004; Schegloff, 1997; and Schiffrin, 1996, 1998, 2003). The implications for interpreting theory and practice rest on how the interpreter (and teacher of interpretation) conceptualizes the task of interpretation, and specifically on at what level s/he believes meaning is located. If an interpreter’s understanding of meaning is that it lies in words or phrases, s/he will fail to account for the words and phrases as intended by the interlocutors to be understood within the context. This study shows that interlocutors choose their words and phrases according to the contextual factors of the interaction; underscoring the reflexive nature of meaning and context (Heritage, 1984; C. Goodwin, 1987).

Incorporating this fundamental notion that meaning is co-constructed in context
into the conceptualization of the task of interpreting, in order to learn how to convey meaning of one language and culture effectively in another language and culture, is essential. The interpreter must take into consideration numerous background factors before beginning to construct meaning: the setting of the interaction; who the participants are and what their roles, relationships, and goals are in the interaction; and the power dynamics among the participants – i.e., the context and all of its components. The interpreter’s own background, experience, and willingness to enter into sometimes complicated personal territory will affect his/her ability to do this in each particular interpreting situation.

As professionals who work in the Deaf community⁴³, it is incumbent upon interpreters to understand the ecological context in which Deaf people live⁴⁴ in order to understand the historical, social, and political contexts from which Deaf persons’ experiences and discourse stem. It is equally important for interpreters to understand those same contexts as they relate to the other interlocutors in interpreted interactions. At a minimum, this involves knowing about and understanding the topics that might be expected to arise in discourse, as well as actions and reactions that might ensue. The data in this study provide interpreters with knowledge in the areas of: how vocabulary and indexing are used when the participants share certain salient characteristics and the conversation is focused on discourse related to those shared characteristics; how backchanneling can be used to signal shared identity with both verbal and non-verbal cues; how the structure of ASL and English differ when interlocutors are leading up to a

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⁴³ I do not suggest that the Deaf community is monolithic but that the experience of linguicism is a common experience of D/deaf people.
⁴⁴ This holds true for all “communities” in which interpreters work, including those based on race, class, sexual orientation, gender, religion, and other cultural ways of identifying. This applies equally to non-deaf people and their cultures and communities.
narrative; and, how cohesiveness may or may not appear in discourse depending on the frequency with which a story has already been told.

b. Understanding and Shared Experience

The notion that shared experience is a part of contextual factors impacting language usage has implications for teachers and learners of languages, and for interpreters. Speakers/users of any given language must be able to differentiate further than Maynard’s 1997 categories allow (or encourage). A conversant must be able not only to allow the other speaker to continue, but must know how to do it in a polite way, a submissive way, a power-grabbing way, etc. Likewise, an interlocutor must be able to differentiate between offering a correction and requesting clarification in the myriad ways that are possible. Teachers and learners of languages must be able to distinguish between these various acts in order to be able to discuss, teach, and put them to use in interactions. It could be said that learners will do this in an intuitive or unconscious way in a manner similar to that of native speakers, but the studies of second language acquisition suggests that is not the case, because second language adult learners need to learn about the language as a part of learning the language.

For interpreters specifically, this study has an equally important application in comprehending and producing the meaning intended in backchanneling devices, especially the usage newly identified here to communicate shared identity. Obviously, interpreters must understand the meaning of backchannel information in order to be able to convey it. If they do not recognize the meaning conveyed by the behavior, they may miss an important aspect of the total information being conveyed in the interaction, resulting in a reduced quality and effectiveness of interpretation. Without adequate
knowledge of the interlocutors as individuals, and the relationships between those for whom they interpret, interpreters may miss the meaning that is intended by speakers. This underscores the necessity of proper and complete preparation for all interpreting assignments, which includes learning about the linguistic and interactional styles of the individuals involved, and learning about the relationships among those for whom they are interpreting, as well as information about the content. However important the content is in any interaction, the content is understood through the lens of the interlocutors and their relationships.

The backchanneling devices that participants used were sometimes verbal, sometimes non-verbal, and sometimes a combination of the two. Interpreters must recognize that such non-verbal (and in English non-vocal) behaviors can hold crucial meaning in an interaction, and must attend to such information, or they will miss part of the interaction they are charged with conveying. This fact has practical implications for where interpreters physically locate themselves in relation to both the Deaf and non-deaf interlocutors. There are obvious linguistic reasons why the interpreter must have a clear sightline to the Deaf person(s) in an interaction, or else linguistic information will be missed; however, this study suggests that if the interpreter cannot see someone using spoken language, the interpreter may miss crucial backchanneling information. This data demonstrates the importance of the interpreter having clear sightlines and using them for each person in a face-to-face interaction where non-verbal backchanneling will occur.

It is worth asking whether interpreters will be able to sufficiently understand the contextual role of a particular shared experience if they do not also share the particular experience. As a teacher of interpreters, I am particularly interested in examining whether
and how interpreters can be taught cues to watch for if they do not share the experience of the interlocutors, so they will, at minimum, be aware that they may be missing some of the information that is being communicated. Certainly, the interpreters who hear do not have the shared experience of having their access of communication cut off. Though those interpreters who hear and who are raised with ASL and grow up in the Deaf community (CODAs) are likely to have a greater understanding of this experience of linguicism, they would not have experienced it first hand. Can similar experiences that are comparably fraught provide that understanding (i.e., having been raped by a stranger or being a war survivor)? Is there a continuum of how close in degree one experience is to another that makes it “close enough” to not only understand and therefore share the common experience, but if it is not the same type of experience, does the question of appropriation arise? While it is true that anything can arise in an interpreted situation, and interpreters face the unexpected on a regular basis, every interpreter has an ethical obligation to make a professional decision about their ability to effectively carry out the task of interpreting in any particular situation. This includes determining whether they are qualified for any given assignment based on their language and interpretation skills, as well as determining if there are professional or personal factors that might influence their work in a negative fashion or rise to the level of a conflict of interest.

**c. Preparation by Interpreters**

Interpreters must recognize to carry out their task of conveying the meaning intended by interlocutors, they must conduct preparation to understand the interaction and the discourse used by the interlocutors. Interpreters must be also be sensitive to the fact

45 Appropriation of another’s experience is beyond the scope of this project, but in light of discussion of what constitutes shared experience and who is authorized to determine that, the issue of appropriation cannot be ignored. See Collins, 2000; Lorde, 1984 for more on this topic.
that they cannot expect to know everything, and they must recognize this with a humility that then can lead them towards discovery of meaning. This may include realizing they do not understand the meaning, which it is equally important for interpreters to recognize, so they can seek clarification, or convey their limitations to the interlocutors. This study provides a broader picture of which contextual factors may be central to meaning.

Interpreters must prepare for interpreting assignments in order to determine in advance where gaps in their knowledge may lie, and to form some expectations about what to look for in the actual interaction while they are interpreting. Preparation serves many functions. “Content preparation” refers to gathering background topic information: What are the interlocutors planning to discuss and what experiences with that topic might they have? This study both provides lived experience data that interpreters can access to increase their general knowledge base about trauma and its impacts, and data suggesting they must learn to watch for subtler cues in interaction around fraught topics. Interpreters also must prepare by gathering contextual information, from logistics of the setting (where interaction will occur, conditions present there, etc.), to historical information from prior interactions, to what interlocutors expect will be discussed, and more.

For interpreters, the implications of having or not having particular knowledge may be of great consequence. In this case, a pronoun that had been used by a survivor in an unmarked way (“we” referring to the two participants in the conversation), showing no special status and not indicating identity, suddenly began to be used for the purpose of indicating their shared membership in a larger group of survivors. The meaning intended by the speaker would have been lost had this change in the scope of the pronoun “we” not been understood. This suggests that interpreters must be aware of the interlocutors’
individual background and identity, as well as their shared identity, in order to fully understand the possible meanings intended in an example such as this. This study highlights the crucial importance for interpreters to gather as much contextual information as possible in preparation and to pay attention to the ways in which they construct their understanding of the discourse that is produced in light of the context.

The study also affords interpreters the opportunity to expand their knowledge base about the specific topic of discourse about childhood sexual abuse, and the more general topic of how trauma survivors language their experiences. In addition, interpreters can glean useful information about how, in terms of linguistic structure and discourse use, people construct discourse on fraught subjects.

d. Understanding Language Differences

i. Structural Differences

This study exposed structural differences between ASL and English. To the extent that providing much more background preceding entry into narrative in ASL, compared to English, is a linguistic and/or cultural phenomenon, this fact has implications for teaching and learning both languages, and for interpreters working with this language pair. For interpreters, it speaks to the structure of talk that they might expect to constitute entry into a narrative and information provided leading up to “the story,” what linguistic cues and information they must attend to, and how they will understand the function of that information. Interpreters must also consider how they will create an interpreted rendition in a form appropriate to the linguistic structure of the receiver’s language, in terms of how background information may be expected to be distributed throughout, or communicated at the beginning of the story.
In simultaneous interpreting, and many consecutive interpreting environments, the interpreter will not be able to restructure the interlocutor’s entire discourse to coincide with the expected linguistic structure of the language into which s/he is interpreting. Yet, the interpreter must find ways to transfer the effect of what the large amount (in ASL) or the dearth of (in English) background accomplishes in the discourse. This can be done by framing the information in such a way that ASL users can contextualize the interpreted information in the narrative and so that the English users can make sense of the background information as it appears earlier than they would normally expect it.

**ii. Cohesiveness in a Second Language**

The data in this study show the non-cohesiveness of a first-time-told narrative in ASL. Interpreters may find themselves in interpreting situations in which a narrative is being told for the first time. Understanding how “at sea” an interlocutor may feel relating such a story, and how the narrative is linguistically constructed, can help the interpreter perform the task of interpreting more effectively. The interpreter must be able to recognize non-cohesive discourse and understand the import of it in order to convey the meaning behind it. Interpreters also must be able to understand and convey non-cohesive discourse in each language in which they are working.

Producing a non-cohesive interpretation is not necessarily inappropriate; it may be appropriate in the circumstances of the interpreted interaction, but an interpreter must only do so knowingly, and after having determined that doing so will produce an equivalent interpretation. An interpreter is not simply a “pass through” for confusion. Whether production of non-cohesive discourse is appropriate will depend on contextual factors outside the scope of this work. The important point is that understanding the
markers of a first-time telling gives interpreters a tool and leaves them less “at-sea” with non-cohesive discourse.

This information can also prove useful in helping interpreters recognize non-cohesiveness in their own use of discourse, especially in their second language. It may also help an interpreter to recognize when the interpreting process has become overwhelming (for whatever reason), or when the interpreting process is breaking down and the interpreter’s own production has become unintentionally non-cohesive. In short, knowledge of particular characteristics of non-cohesive discourse may prove helpful both in understanding and conveying target message, and in interpreter self-evaluation.

iii. Linguicism and Audism

Interpreters and teachers of interpretation must understand the concepts and effects of linguicism and audism. These topics may arise as the subject of discourse, and/or audist behaviors may appear, during interpreted interactions. As in any other interpreted interaction, interpreters must be able to understand the meaning that is present to be able to convey it. This study showed that the Deaf women were stripped of their power and agency not only when they were sexually assaulted as children, but again as adults when they disclosed to their families when their families cut off communication by switching from ASL to English. The acts of removing these Deaf women’s power and agency during disclosure occurred as a linguistic act. The same behavior may occur in interpreted interactions; thus, the interpreter must be able to recognize the effect of the discourse and interpret it accurately.

Interpreters and teachers must be sensitized to the impact for Deaf people of being deprived of agency because of someone else’s decision to move to a language that is not
and cannot be accessible to a Deaf person. Interpreters and teachers must recognize the possibility that they (and other professionals) may perpetuate linguicism and audism even inadvertently, and work to understand the interaction between linguicism, audism, and other types of trauma. Implications of linguicism and audism, as they appeared in this study, are discussed further as they apply to sociolinguistic theory (see page 162) and applications to trauma (see page 195).

e. Teaching Interpretation

What has been said about the theory and practical applicability of this study to interpreting above applies equally to the teaching of interpretation. Experienced interpreters may be able to take this information and use it directly; less experienced and new interpreters may require guidance to understand the implications of what has been discussed for their own interpreting work. What is essential for educators of interpreters is having a coherent philosophical approach, the ability to convey that philosophical approach to students, and the full incorporation of that throughout the scope of an interpreting program and curriculum.

This study underscores the fundamental importance of context and co-construction of meaning. It confirms what others have long discussed: that the meaning conveyed by an interlocutor is not limited to the words that person uses. An understanding such as this is essential to an educator’s conceptualization of the task of interpretation, of what is required of the interpreter, and of how to teach interpretation. This suggests a series of concerns that need to be incorporated in any curriculum of teaching interpretation.

First, curriculum must coalesce around the centrality of the significance of context
in order to understand meaning. Teachers need to routinely provide learning opportunities in which students understand how the context in which interaction and discourse organically occur becomes the norm, and therefore students come to expect an analysis of contextual factors as instrumental in gaining an understanding of the discourse that the interlocutors use. Exercises that isolate discourse may be incorporated to teach how interpreters may handle situations in which discourse occurs out of context, and what strategies they may choose to employ in such instances.

In building a curriculum that focuses on this fundamental principle that meaning organically arises out of context, and cannot be separated from context, teaching preparation becomes central in the teaching of interpreting. If educators take seriously the notion that context is sensitive, then it follows that in order to understand the meaning in context, one must learn as much as possible about these contextual factors prior to entering an interaction. The findings of this study suggest that the task of interpreting is likely to be compromised if performed without proper preparation; preparation is precisely about gathering as much “information” as possible to maximize understanding of meaning – meaning that does not reside merely in the words or paragraphs, but resides in the relationship of the discourse that is used to the factors that bring meaning to bear on it, namely, who the participants are, their relationship to one another, their relationship and background in terms of the topic, and reasons for the interaction. Just as there are layers of meaning, there are layers of what constitutes preparation, and these are dependent on one another. General knowledge, experience, and background may be considered as a type of preparation, one that interpreters build throughout their career and are constantly striving to expand. This list includes:
- Knowledge and understanding of the larger context in which an interaction will occur, which may relate to both the setting (possible non-exclusive settings include and may overlap: educational, medical, political, legal) and how it is situated historically and ecologically (e.g. “at an educational institution for the purpose of …”).

- Knowledge and understanding of the participants and the goals that they bring to the situation: why are they there and what do they hope to get from this interaction?

- Knowledge and understanding of the participants’ relationships to one another: what are the power dynamics at play in the interaction?

- Knowledge and understanding of the participants’ background knowledge and status related to the interaction and topic.

- Knowledge of the logistics of the situation within the context of the factors listed above: in light of the power dynamics, the type of setting and situation, etc., where will the interpreter wish to be located, how will sightlines be utilized, what will the lighting be, etc.

- Knowledge and understanding of the specific content to be discussed in the interaction: topic, focus, purpose of the discourse, vocabulary, manner of delivery, etc.

The chance of understanding content, and meaning, of discourse increases occurs when preparation is undertaken in these ways.

In addition to understanding as much as possible, interpreters must also be taught that they are in fact walking in to interactions that by definition are the business and lives
of other people; these interactions do not originate with the interpreters and are not for the purpose of the interpreters. Therefore, interpreters must realize that preparation is so crucial precisely because as outsiders to the interaction, they are guaranteed to not understand some part of it on some level. They therefore must constantly strive to recognize where their understanding is lacking, in order to be accountable for their own limits, and to be accountable to the participants so the participants can make decisions on their own behalf.

This study offers teachers of interpretation a more nuanced appreciation of how one conceptualizes the meaning of context, where meaning lies, and how an interpreter can gain access to the meaning in a particular interaction.

2. Application for Trauma and Incest

The application of this study for the fields of trauma in general, and specifically trauma related to childhood sexual abuse and incest overlaps with the theoretical implications discussed above. Below, I discuss implications in terms of the linguicism and audism that were central to the experiences of the Deaf participants, the role that shame and secrets play in the lived experience of sexual abuse, the importance of disclosure to thriving after trauma, and the ubiquity of resistance.

a. Linguicism and Audism

This study revealed that Deaf study participants experienced an additional trauma and retraumatization46 in the act of disclosing, caused by their families’ choice to switch languages and assertively remove the Deaf women from the conversation. The existence of linguicism and audism as layers of trauma requires that professionals understand these

46 The degree to which the experiences of linguicism and audism amplified or exacerbated the Deaf women’s trauma from sexual abuse was not studied quantitatively.
concepts, and the behaviors that may arise out of them, in order to work effectively with people who have experienced them. Specifically, without bringing to work with Deaf communities an understanding of the ways that language- and culture-based oppression may be enacted in the lives of Deaf people, professionals may miss a full comprehension of their trauma. Likewise, the impact of behavior arising from linguicism and audism, and its ramifications (trauma and retraumatization of victims who are attempting to disclose, expose their abusers, and seek help), must be understood and integrated in the creation of therapeutic applications and theoretical constructs.

This study parses out certain layers of distinguishing factors for trauma survivors: brothers were the perpetrators of sexual abuse on girls as children, some of whom were hearing and some of whom were Deaf. There are many more distinguishing factors that can be laid bare, and it is in those intersections of other distinguishing factors that we can learn more specifically about trauma that affects some groups of people and not others. This study revealed particulars about how language can be used as a tool of oppression and experienced as traumatizing or retraumatizing by those whose agency is stripped of them by such action.

b. **Role of Shame and Secrets**

Coates and Wade (2004), Herman (1997), and D. E. Russell (1986) are just a few who have written about and studied the cycle of silence and shame that perpetuates sexual abuse. The data in this study demonstrate that shame is at the core of survivors’ silence and is what costs survivors their voices. It is as though someone has constructed a well-oiled machine operating on this premise: that because no one noticed or paid attention to what was happening to the survivor as a child, and because the survivors
could not speak up (or speak up loudly enough) to get someone to see what was happening during the time the abuse was happening, and because their minds, emotions or bodies may have appreciated some of the attention they received during the abuse, survivors feel culpable to some degree in their own victimization. This feeling of culpability or collusion shrouds survivors in shame that prevents them from speaking up even after the abuse has ended. It is also as if, within families and society, there is implicit agreement to remain silent about such abuse and assaults, so that no one must acknowledge that it occurred and continues to occur, nor that it is (mostly) the boys who are doing something to other people (mostly girls), and so that no one will have to admit to knowing that a brother is sexually assaulting his sister. What parent or other sibling wants to deal explicitly with that sort of family dynamic? If a family and a society can leave this in the mental category of “experimentation” or “child’s play,” then no one need act to break the cycle, nor speak up about anything or intervene. By agreeing to cast this behavior as mutual and innocent, by refusing to see that it is one person (the brother) doing harm to another (the sister), the moral imperative to intervene can be averted.

Reinharz (1992) provides examples of the use of feminist theory to provide an explanation for understanding the data and implications of studies. She cites a Judith Herman and Lisa Hirschman (1981) study of incest where they state that “a frankly feminist perspective [male supremacy/female oppression] offers the best explanation of the existing data” because otherwise one cannot understand why the vast majority of perpetrators (uncles, older brothers, stepfathers, and fathers) are male, and why the majority of victims (nieces, younger sisters, and daughters are female” (cited in Reinharz, 1992:249).
“Two truths coexist; where both hell and hope lie in the palm of my hand” (Sebold, 1999:243). This sentiment is echoed in the themes that emerged in the participants’ discourse. They are acutely aware of both the wounding they carry as a result of their experiences, and the gifts that alchemically arise as they survive and work to heal their wounds. All four participants talked about the power of speaking up, whether publicly or privately. Trinch (2001a:605) reports that Berman (1998:44-45) found that Javanese women talked, through letters but not in person, about having been raped. These Javanese women had a keen awareness of the risks involved in talking about rape face-to-face, therefore they exercised their agency by choosing to speak up in ways that fit for them.

The data in this study reveals that shame as a tool of silencing is as fragile as the seeded flowers of a dandelion: it will shatter into a million pieces and come untethered from its hold in an instant with just a slight touch, a puff of air. Shame is not vanquished in a stroke by disclosing, but the survivor’s stance in relationship to it changes fundamentally when she breaks silence. This has been echoed in the words of the participants, and corroborates the work of Berman (1998), Herman (1997), Lorde (1984), Sebold (1999), among many others.

The data in this study shows that not only are survivors not doomed to sadness, upset, mistrust, shame, and silence, but that they are agents of change and transformation. By speaking of the abuse, they act to remove their shame and to integrate their experience. By using discourse in the way they have, survivors have transformed texts about victimization into texts about action, movement, and change, for themselves and for others (Coupland and Williams, 2002).
c. Importance of Disclosure in Thriving After Trauma

The participants in this study indicate that they want understanding on several levels. As Nancy Bereano (1984) stated when introducing the writings of Audre Lorde, “Understanding, figuring out and piecing together, the moving from one place to the next, provides connections…. Movement is intentional and life-sustaining” (10). Lorde (1984) offers, “What understanding begins to do is to make knowledge available for use, and that’s the urgency, that’s the push, that’s the drive” (109). The participants want to understand their own experience in order to integrate it and live fully. They want their family members to understand the implications of their having been abused and having been abused within the family, both on the survivor and on the family itself. They want the family to do something once the family member has knowledge of what their brother did. The desired doing differs between the study participants; no “one size fits all” approach works. What the study participants reported they wanted the family to do also changes over time for each person. The participants report that what they want their family to do is in part formed and colored by the family’s reaction and responses to the first disclosure. Bettie wanted to bring up the subject of her experiences again with her family, but had received a clear implicit message from her parents that she should not discuss the abuse again, and was told so in as many words (“It’s been taken care of” repeated to her each time she asked.) So she stopped asking. (She has however, since participating in the study, indicated that she is trying to find a way to broach the subject with her parents again, and intends to do so at some point).

The ways in which the four participants disclosed demonstrates that there is no single way to tell, no single age at which to tell, and no single way to determine what
content will be told or how it will be told. The data show that how one discloses and what
is said is perhaps not as important as the fact and act of disclosing; the act of disclosing
itself – of verbalizing one’s experience, of not keeping it secret any longer, and of having
others know what happened – is key. Disclosing to friends and intimates who are not
family-of-origin members is important as well, and yet the data show that it lacks a
crucial component that is satisfied only through telling one’s family members. Pearl’s
data shows this most clearly. She reported how she had told friends previously, but it was
not until after telling her mother and talking about that disclosure that she has understood
the benefits for herself of that disclosure and more generally has understood the benefits
of speaking out for herself and for other women and girls.

The participants underscored their deep internal need to disclose, to have family
members know about the sexual abuse, and to be understood. They returned to this theme
repeatedly throughout their discourse and interaction. Their discourse shows that there is
a force to the telling, and in the telling, and that telling is an action that is transformative.

The participants’ words and sentiments are echoed by Alice Sebold (1999), who
writes in her memoir Lucky about her need to have her father understand that there is
more to rape than the actual sexual act; she needed for him to find a way to wrap his
mind around the fact that she was not in some way culpable for the assault perpetrated
upon her. Her father could not understand how the rapist had succeeded in raping Sebold
if he was no longer brandishing a weapon while he was sexually assaulting her, and why
she had not tried to get away. The poignant dialogue in her memoir about this was:

“I don’t know why you didn’t try to get away,” he said.
“I did.”
“But how could he have raped you unless you let him?”
“That would be like saying I wanted it to happen.”

201
“But he didn’t have the knife in the tunnel.”
“Dad,’ I said, “think about this. Wouldn’t it be physically impossible to rape and beat me while holding a knife the whole time?”
He thought for a second and then seemed to agree.
“So most women who are raped,” I said, “even if there was a weapon, when the rape is going on, the weapon is not there in her face. He overpowered me, Dad. He beat me up. I couldn’t want something like that, it’s impossible.
When I look back on myself in that room I don’t understand how I could have been so patient. All I can think is that his ignorance was inconceivable to me. I was shocked by it but I had a desperate need for him to understand.” (59).

It is not difficult to imagine how much more inconceivable sibling sexual abuse is to the parent of both perpetrator and victim, heightening the need of the survivor to explain and make herself understood.

How one deals with childhood sexual abuse, and what strategies one deploys, changes over time (L. M. DiPalma, 1994, cited in Oaksford & Frude, 2003; Oaksford & Frude, 2003) and may depend on one’s particular evolution over time (Oaksford & Frude, 2003). The data in this study shows that reactions of family members to disclosure, their action or inaction, and their understanding of the abuse and its after effects, may also change over time. It is a process for the survivors and also for the families and the perpetrators. Disclosures, changes in the power dynamics within the family, changes in the relationships within the family, the parents’ and perpetrator’s ability to face and really deal with the abuse, take many shapes and forms. One cannot plan out how it will go or what shape it will take. There is no pre-set structure for disclosure and one (survivor, perpetrator, parent, other sibling, bystander outside the family) cannot attempt to impose a pre-set structure on this process because it is dependent on the responses of other people.
d. Ubiquity of Resistance

“The fundamental stages of recovery are establishing safety, reconstructing the trauma story, and restoring the connection between survivors and their community” (Herman, 1997:3). This study allowed for the disclosure story, which is arguably part of the trauma story, to be told. It also allowed for a connection between survivors in building their community. Community building is an act of reducing one’s sense of isolation and instead finding commonality and a way out of isolation. All four participants discussed the importance of finding community in the conversations with one another, in their interviews, and in their follow-up conversations with me. They listed sharing their stories with friends and understanding family members, finding and reading (or not reading, but having in her possession) the book Not Child’s Play: An Anthology of Brother-Sister Incest, and taking part in this study as community building activities.

There is a certain irony that is not lost on me as I do this work: this is a linguistic analysis of talk about an act that feeds on not having talk generated about it – not putting into words and not publicly discussing the act. Perhaps simply the act of speaking and writing is resistance; it is certainly action on the study participants’ part. The same can be said about conceiving this study and writing this dissertation. The participants’ unequivocal desire to be part of this study and have their “voices heard” is demonstration of agency and resistance. May their work, and mine, help dismantle this structure of abuse.
E. Recommendations for Future Research

This study is a beginning, certainly not an ending point, and offers ideas for many future research projects. The design, focus, and findings in this study could be investigated further by designing studies that explore:

- The experience of additional survivors talking to one another in various configurations: small group interactions, presentations or lectures, clinical settings, etc., to investigate the language use and themes that emerge from a larger corpus of data;
- The experience of survivors talking to non-survivors in various configurations: small group interactions, presentations or lectures, clinical settings, etc., to investigate the language use and themes that emerge from a larger corpus of data;
- The experience of parents, perpetrators, and bystanders talking about sibling sexual abuse and disclosures, to investigate language use, interactions, and themes that emerge. This study would provide data from the perspective of other involved parties of sibling sexual abuse;
- Similar changes in contexts with a discussion of different topics, to examine the impact of the contextual changes;
- How these same study participants backchannel in different contexts and with other conversational partners, to compare the participants’ behaviors across contexts;
• Attribution or mitigation of responsibility to the responsible party through linguistic constructions, to further expand on the work of Coates and Wade (2004), Lamb (1991) and the findings of this study;

• Entry and exit points of narratives of disclosure of traumatic experiences, to further explicate the characteristics of disclosure narratives; and,

• The work of interpreters interpreting disclosure stories about sibling sexual abuse to examine the impact of their background, experience, and knowledge of the topics and their discourse and language on the effectiveness of their interpretations.

The role of shared experience as a contextual factor can be considered in additional research. Is this a contextual factor that researchers inquire about and note? If, as it did in this study, it carries such import, should it be considered as a contextual factor when researching how people use language? Further research could be conducted with participants discussing the same and different topics, while noting whether they had a common shared experience, to see whether they used backchanneling behaviors to index shared identity and/or experience in other contexts and with other conversational partners. I suspect that they would do so, because the data in this study was so striking and clear.

This study raises provocative questions about how an interpreter’s knowledge base, comfort level, and understanding of “taboo” subjects affect the interpretations s/he construct and her/his comportment in interaction. Future research in this general area

47 Though not within the scope of this project, it would be interesting to analyze further how the discourse does and does not attribute responsibility and promotes or removes agency (see Coates and Wade, 2004, for their analysis of judge’s use of language for these acts).
could examine: what constitutes a taboo subject for some interpreters but not others; what type of preparation interpreters conduct when they agree to interpret interactions that they know will include taboo topics; and the discourse of the interlocutors in each language as compared to the discourse of the interpreter in interactions with taboo topics. More specific research could focus on these questions in the area of sibling sexual abuse and disclosure stories. Such studies would supplement this study’s findings about how the interactions and discourse proceeded. The way the narrators in this study speak about their experiences and the discourse strategies they employ can add to this body of research.

The question of resilience is one that logically emerges in a study such as this, especially in light of the themes that were illuminated. Can analysis of resilience be applied to this data in a new study? Can it be seen in the stories as told and retold, or examined if these study participants had the opportunity to retell their stories again; would themes of resiliency arise? Tonya Edmond, Wendy Auslander, Diane Elze, Sharon Bowland (2006) found in their study of resilience in sexually abused adolescent girls in the foster care system that “In essence, an African American girl’s socialization process involves learning how to deal with racial injustice through which she gains experience, knowledge, and skills that help her cope with other adversities in life” (23). Would the findings of Edmond et al. (2006) apply to members of other oppressed minority groups based on other identities (Deaf, lesbian, particular racial identity)?

The subject matter of sibling sexual abuse needs further study. Further research could study other involved parties in intra-family violence: the perpetrators, the parents, and the family as a unit. I encourage other researchers to take up this topic as an area of
study; the more that light is shone on this subject, the less “verboten” and taboo it will become to discuss it leading to more knowledge and action.

F. Concluding Thoughts

This study was designed to examine the intersections among changes in context, discourse, and interactions in two languages (ASL and English), by looking at disclosure stories of sibling sexual abuse survivors. My intention was both to focus on the specifics of these two languages (ASL and English) and this type of trauma (sibling sexual abuse), and to provide an opportunity to examine the constructs of context, narratives, discourse and interactions as applicable to analysis in other languages, contexts, and with other topics.

The overarching conclusion of this study is that context has immense and profound impacts on what people say, on how they say it, and on how it is understood; in essence, on how meaning is co-constructed. In looking at how discourse was affected – changed or not changed – across calibrated differences in contextual factors, this study illuminates both how exquisitely sensitive to context discourse is, and how subtle the behaviors of interlocutors affected by contextual changes can be.

This study also illuminated the necessity for attention to study design and the import of the choices of the researcher in study design and methodology. Who will the participants be and how will they know that they have an opportunity to volunteer to be a part of a study? How will the data be captured and preserved, and what are the implications of those decisions? In a linguistics study of any kind, what will the specified topic of discussion be, and will a topic be chosen because of convenience or motivated by other factors? How is theory and application relevant to both academic communities and
to organizations and activists?

I conclude the reporting of this study and extension of its findings with a challenge for researchers, interpreters, and family members, professionals, and bystanders related to trauma:

- I challenge researchers to consciously consider the implications of each choice we make when conceiving of and constructing a study.

- I challenge interpreters (of any language) to learn about and understand the communities and cultures and languages with which we work on a deeper level than we have considered before, and to respect the differences in the languages we use rather than of attempting to collapse or gloss over those differences especially when one of those languages is a minority language (e.g., ASL).

- I challenge interpreters to conceptualize the task of interpreting interactions as one that requires considering and understanding the role and centrality of context, and of how meaning is being constructed in real time by the interlocutors as they move through their interaction. I urge interpreters to think deeply about how our preparation, understanding, and grasp of the sensibilities of the situation as a whole affect the lives of the people for whom we interpret.

- I challenge family members of survivors, professionals working with survivors, and bystanders to consider whether merely acknowledging the negative impact of a traumatic experience on its survivor is ever sufficient. I urge that we examine carefully what our responses (including non-responses)
have been, and what they may be in the future. I propose that family members,
professionals, and bystanders look at the ramifications for the survivor of the
family members’ responses, to see what action(s) they can take to support the
survivor. Furthermore, I propose that a similar approach be applied to
examining responses to the perpetrator and his culpability, and to the family as
a whole. Herman (1997) writes that the survivor must share the traumatic
experience with others in order to restore her/his sense of a meaningful world.
She continues that in order for restoration to occur, four responses are required
by those closest to the survivor and by the larger community: 1) public
acknowledgement of the traumatic event, 2) some form of community action,
3) assigning responsibility for the harm, and 4) repairing the injury.
Recognition and restitution must go beyond the survivor if society is to
address the systemic injustice that supports this type of violence, and to work
towards eradicating it.

For Bettie and Pearl to talk to one another in ASL, and for Grace and Fran to talk
to one another in English, and then for each of them to participate in interviews were
“just what we did for this study” (Grace). Living with the aftermath of childhood sexual
assault experiences is simply a fact of life for Bettie, Fran, Grace, and Pearl, as it is for
any person who lives with a past trauma. These four women are not unique as language
users or narrators or trauma survivors. This study has made visible how they constructed
themselves and their experiences through language use and in interactions, making
visible their words and thereby, their worlds.
References


Schiffrin, Deborah. (2006). From linguistic reference to social reality, (pp. 103-133). In de Fina, Anna, Schiffrin, Deborah and Bamburg, Michael (Eds.), Discourse and Identity. New York: Cambridge University Press.


## Appendix A

### Background Information Leading up to the First Narrative – Each Participant

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Background Information Provided by Fran (English)</th>
<th>13 seconds; 3 propositions (Conversation)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. It’s been a while since I’ve talked about this</td>
<td>b. I don’t always remember things</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. My memories of this are fuzzy</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>50 seconds; 11 propositions (Interview)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. First I told my sister who is next oldest than me</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. She is four and half years older</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. Then I told my oldest sister</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. She is 6 years older</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e. Then I told my parents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f. Then I told my brothers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>g. Well that’s not quite right, since one of my brothers knew, obviously</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>h. This I remembered in my conversation for this study</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>i. I talked to my brother first</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>j. I brought it up with my brother</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>k. Lastly, I talked to a cousin</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Background Information Provided by Grace (English)</th>
<th>38 seconds; 8 propositions (Conversation)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. My brother abused me from when I was 5-12</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. I’m a twin and my twin is a girl</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. I have another sister</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. My brother is the oldest</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e. I grew up in the Midwest</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f. I moved away when I was just 18</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>g. I started acting out</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>h. Fortunately there were people who noticed and did something</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| 1 minute, 5 seconds; 10 topics (Interview)         |
a. My parents were the first people I told
b. I was acting out
c. I told them when at the end of a very difficult acting out time
d. I was living in X town
e. They came to where I was living
f. I had just turned 18
g. I had not told anyone when the incest was going on
h. Because I was acting out, I was involved in a church, though I wasn’t a member
i. The pastoral counselor of the church saw me and felt it was necessary to call my parents
j. It was really necessary!

Background Information Provided by Bettie (ASL)

1 minute 32 seconds (including 9 seconds of starting a narrative and then discontinuing it); 11 propositions
(Conversation)

a. Her parents married and bought a farm when her dad was 27 years old.
b. They had four children
c. The two girls who were the oldest and two boys who were the youngest
d. It was the third child who was the brother
e. He abused her during two different time periods, once when she was seven and again when she was 15 and her brother was 13.

(For 9 seconds: She then says that she told her mother and then immediately says she needs to fill in more background information.)

f. At school they taught the children about “bad touch”
g. This was the first time she had heard about it, and where she learned about it
h. They said if it happened to you, you needed to tell a parent or adult
i. She wasn’t sure it applied to her when she first learned about it
j. The next time it happened, she knew it did apply to her
k. She knew then that she had to tell someone

2 minutes 42 seconds (including 36 seconds of interaction); 16 propositions

Interview

a. Her brother abused her twice during two different time periods
b. Her brother is two years younger than she
c. The first time she was in 2nd grade and the second time she was 15
d. She isn’t sure what age she was, but knows it was 2nd grade
e. She spends some time trying to figure out what the ages were
f. She doesn’t remember the specifics of the first time, though remembers clearly what grade she was in
g. She remembers that she did not have any idea whether or not doing what her
brother told her to do was “normal” or not, but she did it because she was taught to do what she was told
h. At school they taught the children about “bad touch”
i. They explain the others were not allowed to touch certain places
j. Learning about this made her sit up and pay attention

(5 seconds: The interviewer asks her if it was a Deaf school, to which she responds that it was not, but that it was a Deaf program with teachers who signed.)
k. She learned about this in ASL, or sign
l. She tried to deny to herself that “bad touch” is what was happening to her
m. The next time it happened, she knew it did apply to her
n. She knew then that she had to tell someone

(31 seconds: The interviewer seeks clarification about which time Bettie is referring to, and in Bettie’s response she again says it is the first time when she is in second grade, and though she does not remember specifics about timing and when she learned about “bad touch”, but she learned about it and thought about it and then it happened again.)
o. They said if you were touched in a “wrong place,” you needed to tell a parent or adult and explain what happened
p. So it happened again and she connected it back to what she had learned in school

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Background Information Provided by Pearl (ASL)</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10 minutes, 58 seconds; 107 propositions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Conversation)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. Her brother was actually her half brother from her mom’s first marriage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. He is 47, 7 years older than her</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. Her half sister is 43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. She wonders if he “did something” to her sister too, but doesn’t know</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e. It bothers her that he might have</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f. She’s not sure exactly when it stopped, but he was a teenager, when he left home</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>g. She’s glad she lived in the dorm at school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>h. If she hadn’t lived in the dorm, she thinks it would have been a “different story” and a whole lot more</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>i. They lived on a farm, too</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>j. He could do anything he wanted without anyone knowing because of all the far reaching, unexposed places on the farm and in the country</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>k. She lists some of his acts – touching, blow job, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>l. No one would know because no one could see him</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>m. She did not want to work with her brother, just like Bettie</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n. She could not tell her parents; she had to keep it to herself</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o. If she told her dad, he would have done something to her half-brother, like shot</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
him
p. If her father shot him, he would go to jail, and she would lose him
q. She was not about to chance that
r. Her dad made her feel safer
s. She could not chance telling her dad
t. The one person she did tell was her dorm supervisor
u. They were close; the supervisor was like a second mother to her
v. The supervisor was stunned
w. She swore her to secrecy
x. No one in the family knew at that point; only the dorm supervisor
y. Prior to telling her mother, her partner was the only other one she told
z. She starts to say that when she told her mother – then she switches topics
aa. She says that her parents, well really her dad, owned a farm, just like Bettie
bb. She was born and grew up on the farm and really liked that
cc. She worked on the farm with her father
dd. When she was working with her father and her brother was there, she was hyper-
vigilant and uncomfortable
e. She wanted her dad to know what was going on
ff. Her father didn’t like the half brother either; they seemed to have a personality
conflict
gg. Her mother was over protective with her and other people
hh. She told her to stay away from other men, and not to trust them
ii. But she never said anything about her own son
jj. Her son was the one who abused her
kk. She starts to say more about her “mothers own son” but stops mid-sentence
ll. She questions why her mother would put so much emphasis on other men
outside of the house

(Bettie offers that maybe her mother had some inkling about what was going on, or
knew, or was trying to deny it or not think about it.) (2 seconds with overlap)

mm. Pearl responds that her mother did not know until this past October, which is
when she told her mother
nn. She gives an example, by way of a narrative (1 minute 26 seconds), of how her
mother would react: Pearl had a friend who lived next door, an older guy, the age
of her father maybe, who she played cards with and who had a travel trailer in
the yard (There is negotiation between Bettie and Pearl about whether this is an
RV or a pop-up or simply a trailer that is pulled – it is the latter). She wanted to
get her sister back for something and so she locked her sister out of the trailer
while she and Earl were playing cards. Earl never touched her; he never did
anything to her. But her mother blamed Earl for locking the trailer and she
suspected that he did something, when in fact she had locked the trailer and he
never touched her, ever. Her mother jumped to conclusions, but about the wrong
person.

oo. She reiterates that Earl never touched her
pp. She told her mother that if Earl had done anything, she would have told her
But her half-brother did do something and she never told her mother

In retrospect, she should have told her mother about her brother, but she couldn’t because of what would have happened to her father

She repeats that she did not tell her mother because her father would have done something, maybe shot him, and then she would have lost her father because he would have been put in jail for killing her brother, or at least hurting him.

She reiterates that her mother told her not to trust people outside of the home, and if they did anything to her, she must tell her

Again, she mentions that her mother never included her brother in any of that

But she feels like her mother was over protective of her about other people

(Bettie asks if her family is Deaf – 2 seconds. Pearl’s response to this takes 14 seconds, and then she returns to what she was saying with the equivalent of “So…” Her response includes ww-xx below).

She says her mother is a CODA, and her mother’s parents are both Deaf

Her mother signs ASL fluently, and her father signed but he wasn’t fluent

So, her mother would tell her to watch out for all these things

She wonders if her mother said these things to her half sister too, but she doesn’t know if she did

She, definitely heard about it over and over again

She was really happy that she went to the residential Deaf school and got to stay in the dorm

That meant she was there 9 months out of the year, except for brief visits during the year, because her brother abused her many times during the times she was home

And it went on until her father kicked him out

She was really glad when that happened

(Bettie asks how old she was. 1 second)

She says he was 17 or 18, no 17, which would put her at 11 when her dad kicked him out

Her mother blamed her for that

Her mother even told her she blamed her for it

Which she couldn’t understand since she didn’t even live there full time, but lived at school most of the time

Her mother blamed Pearl anyway because of how her mother coddled her half brother

This only made Pearl angry because her mother had two daughters in addition to her son

But the son was the favored one, which only served to make Pearl more angry

Her brother threatened her and told her not to tell either of their parents

This, in addition to her being afraid her father would do something, kept her quiet.

She was glad when her dad kicked him out
ppp. She can’t remember why he got kicked out
qqq. But all of that is why she never told her parents
rrr. But, if they knew, maybe the brother would have been kicked out sooner
sss. Either way, once he was gone, she was really happy about it
ttt. She is still angry at her brother
uuu. She can not forget, even though she wants to; it just sticks with her
vvv. She blames her mother
www. She is really angry about how her mother favors and protects him
xxx. Just after her father died, she and her brother fought a lot, some of it physical,
because her brother was trying to make decisions about and take control of the
farm
yyy. She couldn’t believe he would do this, especially after what he had done to her
[all those years before]
zzz. She did not think it was right of him in light of her mother’s grief and
vulnerability from having just lost her husband
aaaa. They were married for nearly 42 years and now all of sudden he was gone
bbbb. Her brother was insensitive to their mother’s grief and her own grief, and this
only made her more angry
cccc. In addition, the preacher was trying to run things
dddd. But her anger really was at her brother

(Bettie says that her brother is very similar in terms of controlling things. 2 seconds)

eeee. She was really angry because this was her father who died and not his, and now
it was too late to tell her father about what her brother did
ffff. She wanted her father to know and to understand, and wished for this because he
might have made things different
gggg. She starts to say that recently she…, and then she says that she and her brother
fought that night over little things and blamed each other for starting it
hhhh. Her mother told them both to leave one another alone, and she felt like her
mother was again taking sides
iiii. She felt like she never got any support, and wondered if her being Deaf had
anything to do with that.
jjjj. She says her mother told her she wished Pearl had a cochlear implant so she
could communicate with everyone else
kkkk. Her sister signs very well and works as an interpreter, but her brother, who can
sign, doesn’t sign great
llll. But that is not reason for her mother to have said that
mmmmm. All of this only made her feel more alone and unsupported
nnnn. Plus, she is the youngest, and the last her father’s family
oooo. She thinks her brother and sister may have asked her mother for something
from her father’s estate, but she knows that her mother will divide it evenly
among the three of them; not that she really cares
pppp. She comes back to the fact that this was her father, not theirs, and she needs
him for her to feel safe.
qqqq. She says she was really without support at that point, though she had friends
who she was close to and who she got support from
rrrr. She was always independent and knew she could take care of herself, but she was still disappointed that she didn’t get support from her family
ssss. She loves her mother, but she was really hurt by what was going on, especially the cochlear implant comment
tttt. The continued favoring of her brother just served to make her more angry
uuuu. She begins to say that she told her mother… and then she adds that on that night she and her brother argued and fought, and she told him to leave at one point
vvvv. She was surprised that she told him to leave, but attributes it to that being only a week, or really only two days, after her father was buried
wwww. That argument was about her brother being angry that her father’s dog had jumped up on his $20,000 car
xxxx. She was taking care of the dog because no one else was after her father died, and she had no way of knowing that her brother had driven up, or was even coming over
yyyy. He made a huge deal over the car, while she got angry at him for not doing anything
zzzz. Her mother just stood there and was of no help or support, and that’s when she told the two of them to leave each other alone
aaaaa. Later that night her mother was on the phone with her brother, when she told her mother to just hang up and stop playing games with him – her mother was mad at him when she was on the phone, but wouldn’t tell Pearl why
bbbb. Pearl started to say something, saying she wished her father was alive and had shot the brother, and that she needed him to keep her safe from the brother, and that her father never did like him, but now he’s gone, and maybe someday her mother would see for herself.
cccc. She says she was really angry because of what he had done, and that was it.

11 minutes, 50 seconds; 91 propositions
(Interview)

a. She disclosed [to her mother] after her father died
b. With her father gone she felt like she had no more support
c. Her mother always defended her half brother
d. She explains the she was her father’s only child, and that the other two were her mother’s kids from her mother’s first marriage

(Aislynn asks for clarification of which children were born of which father – 3 seconds)
e. She says there were three of them altogether
f. Her half-brother was taking control of her mother’s life and the farm after her father’s death
g. The farm is big – she guesses about 500 acres
h. She reiterates that she felt like her half-brother was trying to take over and was giving her mother a hard time
i. She wasn’t going to have any of that and she wanted to take care of and help out her
mother
j. Her mother was vulnerable and sad due to her father’s recent death
k. She felt like her brother was not being sensitive to her mother or her
l. Because of what he was doing, that is what led up to her disclosing to her mother
m. Her mother asked her questions, to which she said she did not want to talk about it
n. She never thought she would disclose; she thought she would take the “dark secret” with her to her grave

(Note: The information in (m) what happened after the disclosure, and (n) a comment on having disclosed, appears to be “in conflict” with the criteria I am using for background information. However, Pearl returned to providing background information as opposed to telling what happened when she disclosed (1 minute, 3 seconds into the background). This occurs again at 5 minutes and 9 seconds into the background – see (yy) and (zz) below)

(Aislynn encourages her to say what happened “that day” when she disclosed, and also asks if that means she had had kept it to herself all these many years. Pearl’s response is in (o). 3 seconds)

o. Yes, it has been many many years, and she has been trying to forget about it all these years
p. This is why she doesn’t see her half-brother much, and has not seen him much over the years
q. The fact that he is 7 years older than she, was in the army for 7 years meant they were not in a lot of contact
r. The lack of contact was actually good
s. And, not seeing her half-brother much was a reason not to disclose to her parents
t. She doesn’t want to think about what her father would have done if he knew, and she preferred to just “take it on the chin”

(Aislynn clarifies as to whether Pearl has two half brothers or one half brother and one half sister, and whether it was both of them or more the half brother who showed a lack of sensitivity [after her father died]. 12 seconds)

u. She says she has a half brother and a half sister
v. It was her half brother who was not sensitive, much more than anything her half sister did. Her half brother wanted to be in control and was trying to convince her mother to do all sorts of things, which made her really uncomfortable

(Aislynn asks if seeing her half brother trying to take control is what made her feel really uncomfortable and that is what prompted her to disclose. She asked her if she would talk about what she remembered from that day and the disclosure. 10 seconds)

w. She remembers “that night” and how she and her half brother fought over little things
x. One of the fights was about her father’s dog, a Blue Heeler
y. She was taking care of the dog, who had been penned up and needed exercise since her father wasn’t there to take care of the dog
z. She had no idea that her half brother was coming over, but he drove up out of the blue, with his wife
aa. She did not see this, but all of a sudden he was there and was mad because the dog had jumped up on his $20,000 car
bb. All he cared about was the damage to the car, and she thought that was ridiculous in light of what her mother was going through
c. They started to fight, and her mother told them to stop
d. They had already had one of two big fights that week, since her father’s death, and this was the third
e. This was the last straw
ff. She was getting blamed for something she had no control over – that the dog was out and jumped on his car when she had no idea he was coming over
gg. She was mad that he was upsetting her mother
hh. She has a fierce protective streak when it comes to her mother, and she was mad at him
ii. She flipped him off, and he responded the same way, and they were ready to physically fight
jj. All of a sudden he gave her mother his key to the farm and some other things

(Aislynn clarifies who gives who the key and other things. 2 seconds)

kk. Her mother just stood there
ll. At that time her mother still did not know what was really going on
mm. Her half brother and wife left, and she felt good about that, but also hurt
nn. He was doing the same thing he always did, which is why her father disliked him so much
oo. Her father had a really hard time with him, and now she understood why
pp. Even though her father did not know about the abuse, he did his best for her
qq. She tried to put the events of the afternoon behind her
rr. That night her mother got a call from her half brother, [name]
s. When she found out who was on the phone she asked why he was calling and asked her mother to hang up
t. She told her mother to tell him to stop playing games with her [mother], that he needs to grow up and stop acting like a big baby
uu. Her mother said something about some email
vv. She told her mother to tell her half brother that they both wanted an apology for what he did that afternoon
ww. She was not talking about an apology for anything else prior to that
xx. Her mother said no, and that was all it took
yy. That is when she decided to stand-up for herself and tell her mother
zz. She said that her brother had done something to her, that he was a P-E-S-T, and her mother deserved to know

(Note: This is the second occurrence of a statement of the disclosure (see (m) and (n))
above) that appears to be “in conflict” with the criteria I am using for background information. Again, Pearl returned to providing background information prior to telling what happened when she disclosed.)

aaa. She remembers who her mother was actually on the phone with; it was her half sister
bbb. Her mother had told her half brother not to come to the house because she did not want the two of us around one another again
ccc. But she was not the one instigating things, he was – he was the one trying to take over immediately after her father died
ddd. She was fed up with his behavior
eee. She has not seen or talked to him since that day

(She begins to talk about events post-disclosure at this point, but she still has not discussed the disclosure itself, which she does do later on.)

fff. Her mother and half sister came to her house for Thanksgiving
ggg. It was easy for them to meet half way (at her house), instead of have her sister drive five hours
hhh. Her sister, and she, had to work the following day (her mother is retired)
iii. It was her mother’s first holiday alone
jjj. She did not go to be with them for Christmas, which was a good choice
kkk. She did not plan on talking about her half-brother, but her mother mentioned how he was busy renovating the house
lll. Normally, she would have offered to help with that type of project, but that was before and this was now
mmm. She was not going to do anything until he apologized for what happened after the dog and car incident
nnn. That is what was the last straw for her, and that is what prompted her to tell her mother about the incest
ooo. At Christmas she stayed home and her mother spent the time with [name], her half-sister’s ex-husband
ppp. She really likes him, and he has remained a part of the family
qqq. He has always been there to help out, even when her father was dying
rrr. Her half-brother pales in comparison to the ex-brother-in-law since he does nothing
sss. Her half-brother treats the ex-brother-in-law poorly, and is probably just jealous of him
ttt. He is like a second son to her mother
uuu. He and Pearl even look alike, which is not the case with Pearl and her half-brother
vvv. She is close to the ex-brother-in-law, and he is very respectful towards their family and still goes to check up on her mother now that her father is gone.
www. Unlike the half-brother who gets angry and is of no help
ccc. Her half-brother’s problems are his own, but it is hard to watch when they effect her mother
yyy. She says she lost her train of thought and why she was talking about the ex-brother-in-law, and then remembers it had to do with Christmas
zzz. Back to Christmas – she stayed home with friends, took care of other people’s pets, which she always does, and had time to herself which she needed.

aaaa. Her half sister had wanted her to come for Christmas, but she also understood.

bbbb. Her half sister told her that her half brother asked if Pearl was mad at him, to which the half sister said she told him he would have to ask Pearl himself and she was not getting in the middle of that.

cccc. Pearl was happy to hear that, but was not going to hold her breath for him to say something to her, which she and her half sister agreed was unlikely to happen.

dddd. She is still angry at him for the ways he has hurt her and her mother.

eeee. The car and the dog incident was the last straw.

ffff. On top of that, her brother wanted to have a family meeting the afternoon her father was buried.

gggg. They argued a great deal during that meeting because he kept trying to take control of things, though her mother did nothing except tell the two of them to calm down.

hhhh. They nearly got into a physical fight because Pearl wanted an interpreter for the meeting and her brother did not, he wanted her half sister to interpret.

iiii. Then her mother said that she wished Pearl had a cochlear implant so she could communicate with her half brother.

jjjj. Pearl was stunned and hurt that her own mother would say such a thing.

kkkk. Even though her mother was a CODA (the mother’s parents were Deaf), she had the gall to say such a thing, which showed that she really did not accept Pearl for who she was.

llll. At that point she felt like she had no support from any of her family members and she really was not seen as a full family member when they were all together.

mmmm. Things cooled down and her half brother agreed to learn more sign language and she agreed that their contact would be via email, but she also sensed that nothing would change, as this was just a repeat of previous agreements. Plus, she really had no desire to be closer to her half brother.

(Aislynn asks how they communicated, which they discuss for 24 seconds, after which Aislynn focuses on “that night” and asks Pearl to tell her about her disclosure to her mother. This takes 18 seconds and leads into the beginning of Pearl’s disclosure narrative.)
APPENDIX B

PDE: Letters of Introduction to Study Participants and Interviewer-Participants

Letter of Introduction to Study Participants

[DATE]

Dear [NAME OF POTENTIAL PARTICIPANT]:

My name is Risa Shaw and I am a doctoral student at Union Institute & University. My dissertation advisor is Dr. Susan Amussen. In partial fulfillment of the requirements of the doctoral program, I am conducting a research project. The project will look at women talking about having told one or more of their family members that they were sexually abused by their brother as a child. I will look at one conversation in ASL between two women, and one conversation in English between two women. The women will be talking about telling their family about the incest, not about the actual sexual abuse. In addition, each of these four women will be individually interviewed by a researcher on the same topic. Finally, I will interview/talk with each of participant individually.

In order to complete my study, I would appreciate your time and assistance by helping me to locate participants for the study, or participating in the study if you meet the criteria and are interested in participating. The criteria includes:

1. Be a native speaker of ASL if you are Deaf, or of English if you are not deaf
2. Be female
3. Have been previously sexually assaulted as a child by your bother
4. Have talked with one or more family members about the sexual assault
5. Currently have a support network upon which you can and will rely before, during and after participation in this study. (Please see the Informed Consent for explanation).

Participants’ identity will be kept confidential and no identifying information will be used in the reporting of this study. Participants will be involved in three conversations/interviews, on three different occasions, each lasting approximately 1-1.5 hours which may extend over a three-month period of time. The conversations and interviews will occur in the fall of 2006. Participation and sharing these experiences may bring insight and understanding to the area of childhood sexual assault, talking with family members about the incest, how the nature of conversations and interviews are similar and different, and how this applies to the field of interpretation.

Enclosed with this letter is an “Informed Consent and Videotape Release Form” which details the procedures and expectations for participating in the study. If you have any questions about this study, please feel free to contact me or the faculty sponsor at the telephone number or email listed below.
Thank you in advance for giving consideration to this matter.

Risa Shaw
Primary Researcher
(202) 651-5982 phone/VP
Risa.Shaw@TUI.edu

Susan Amussen, Ph.D.
Core Advisor
Union Institute & University
Susan.Amussen@TUI.edu
Letter of Introduction to Interviewer-Participants

[DATE]

Dear [NAME OF POTENTIAL PARTICIPANT]:

My name is Risa Shaw and I am a doctoral student at Union Institute & University. My dissertation advisor is Dr. Susan Amussen. In partial fulfillment of the requirements of the doctoral program, I am conducting a research project. The project will look at women talking about having told one or more of their family members that they that they were sexually abused by their brother as a child. I will look at one conversation in ASL between two women, and one conversation in English between two women. The women will be talking about telling their family about the incest, not about the actual sexual abuse. In addition, each of these four women will be individually interviewed by a researcher on the same topic. Finally, I will interview/talk with each of participant individually.

In order to complete my study, I would appreciate your time and assistance by participating in the study as an interviewer who would individually interview the two women who held a conversation in [YOUR LANGUAGE]. Participation would mean that you would be conducting two interviews and later participating in a third conversation/interview with me. The interviews you conduct and the one you have with me would occur on two different occasions, each lasting approximately 1-1.5 hours, totaling approximately 4-5 hours of your time which may extend over a three-month period of time. The conversations and interviews will occur in the fall of 2006. I understand that your schedule is probably very busy. Please know however, that your participation and sharing your experiences may bring insight and understanding to the area of childhood sexual assault, talking with family members about the incest, how the nature of conversations and interviews are similar and different, and how this applies to the field of interpretation.

Enclosed with this letter is an “Informed Consent and Videotape Release Form” which details the procedures and expectations if you decide to become involved in my research. If you have any questions about this study, please feel free to contact me or the faculty sponsor at the telephone number or email listed below.

Thank you in advance for giving consideration to this matter.

Risa Shaw
Primary Researcher
(202) 651-5982 phone/VP
Risa.Shaw@TUI.edu

Susan Amussen, Ph.D.
Core Advisor
Union Institute & University
Susan.Amussen@TUI.edu
APPENDIX C

Informed Consent Form

Videotape Release Form

Confidentiality Form

Informed Consent Form – Study Participants

Prospective Research Participant: Read this consent form carefully. Ask as many questions as you like before you decide whether you want to participate in this research study. You are free to ask questions at any time before, during, or after your participation in this research.

You are being asked to participate in a research study designed to look at the language and discourse use of women talking about having told one or more of their family members that they were sexually abused by their brother as a child. This study includes looking at conversations and interviews in American Sign Language (ASL) and in English and looking at the stories that women tell about talking to their families.

As a participant in this study, I, _____________________________, am consenting to be a volunteer in this study. I understand this study involves three conversations/interviews of approximately 1-1.5 hours each, all of which will be conducted in my native language and will be videotaped.

I understand that I will be asked to have a conversation with another woman who also experienced incest as a child, and then I will take part in an interview with an interviewer doing research on the subject, and then I will take part in a conversation/interview with the principal researcher, Risa Shaw, of this study. I will have an opportunity to review my videotapes prior to my conversation/interview with Risa Shaw. I understand the duration of my participation may extend over a three-month period, in which I will take part in 3 conversations, each lasting approximately 1-1.5 hours.

I understand that for the conversation with the other woman who also experienced childhood sexual assault by her brother, we are being asked to talk about having told one or more members of our families about the incest, not the actual sexual abuse. We may wish to talk about the incest, or other things, but we are not being asked to discuss the incest itself.

I understand that my identity will be kept confidential. If data from this study are used in a publication, I understand that a pseudonym will replace my actual name, and other identifying information will not be used. However, any records or data obtained as
a result of my participation in this study may be inspected by the persons conducting this study and/or Union Institute & University’s Institutional Review Board, provided that such inspectors are legally obligated to protect any identifiable information from public disclosure, except where disclosure is otherwise required by law or a court of competent jurisdiction. These records will be kept private in so far as permitted by law. All data will be kept in a secure place to which only Risa Shaw has access.

I understand that confidentiality is important to all of the participants in this study and I agree to keep the other participants’ identity confidential. I will not share, disclose, or release names or any other identifying information of any of the other participants.

I understand that I will be asked to sign a confidentiality agreement in order to be told who the woman with whom I will converse is so that I may determine if there is any conflict of interest or discomfort for me to participate in such a conversation with her. Then I will be told the other woman’s name. I may decline to participate based on this information with no prejudice or penalty. The other woman will also be asked to sign a confidentiality agreement in order to be told my name so that she may determine if there is a conflict of interest or discomfort for her to participate in such a conversation with me.

I understand that my participation is completely voluntary, and I may withdraw from or refuse to participate in the study at any time without any penalty or prejudice. I understand that I may withdraw from this project by contacting the researcher (Risa Shaw) researcher, and that once I inform her of my decision to withdraw she will stop analyzing any data she collected from me. In addition, she will destroy my videotape(s) immediately if she has not published anything from my data. If she has published information from my data, a journal or publisher might require her to hold onto the materials for three years after publication. If that is the case, she will destroy my videotape(s) at the end of that three year period. I understand that I will not receive any financial compensation for my participation in this research. However if any travel is required, my travel expenses will be paid.

I understand that there are potential risks that I may face by participating in this study. Potential risks and recommendations for dealing with those risks:

a. Emotional reaction – there is a risk of feeling upset, overwhelmed, triggered, confused, etc. by participating in this study. I understand that I agree to discuss my participation in this study with someone in my support network (e.g. therapist, counselor, clergy, doctor, support groups, or 12 step program, etc.) before, during, and after my participation in the study. Attached are general suggestions and resources and a guide that specifically addresses recommendations for Deaf people (prepared by the Gallaudet Research Institute). In the event that I experience any emotional discomfort during a data collection conversation or interview, I have the option to stop, to not respond or to discontinue my participation in the study.

b. Revealing criminal behavior – there is a risk of revealing information that will be required to be reported to the authorities. I understand that if I reveal any information regarding past or current abuse to children or elders that requires
the researcher to report such information in accordance with state and federal statutes, the researcher must do so.

I understand that there are potential benefits that I, and others, may gain by participating in this study. Potential benefits from this study include:

a. The opportunity to speak about and from my own experience
b. Increased self-knowledge, empowerment, catharsis
c. Realization of being a member of a larger community
d. Increased knowledge and understanding of the experience of survivors and victimization and the subject of childhood sexual assault in general, and specifically, sibling sexual assault
e. Contribution to the creation of a body of knowledge about linguistic and discourse patterns in ASL and in English when talking about revealing to family members the fact that incest occurred
f. Contribution to the knowledge regarding what interpreters must consider (learn, know, focus on) to create successful interpretations

I have read and understand this consent form, and I volunteer to participate in this research study. I understand that I will receive a copy of this form. I voluntarily choose to participate. I understand that my consent does not take away any legal rights in the case of negligence or other legal fault of anyone who is involved in this study. I further understand that nothing in this consent form is intended to replace any applicable federal, state, or local laws.

I understand that this research is being conducted by Risa Shaw (the principal investigator) as part of the requirements for a doctoral degree at Union Institute & University. Any questions about the project or my participation will be answered by her to my satisfaction at any time. If I have any questions, I may contact Risa Shaw by email at Risa.Shaw@TUI.edu or by telephone at 202-651-5982. I may also contact her Advisor, Dr. Susan Amussen by email at Susan.Amussen@TUI.edu.

This project has been reviewed and approved by Union Institute & University’s Institutional Review Board and Gallaudet University’s Institutional Review Board. Questions concerning your rights as a participant in this research may be addressed to the Graduate College, UI&U, 404 E. McMillan Street, Cincinnati, Ohio 45202-1925, 800-486-3116, IRB@TUI.edu, and/or the Graduate School and Professional Programs, HMB S416, Gallaudet University, 800 Florida Avenue, NE, Washington D.C., 200021-3695, 202-651-5400 v/tty.

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Risa Shaw (Principal Researcher) Date
Informed Consent Form – Interviewer-Participants

Prospective Research Participant: Read this consent form carefully. Ask as many questions as you like before you decide whether you want to participate in this research study. You are free to ask questions at any time before, during, or after your participation in this research.

You are being asked to participate in a research study designed to look at the language and discourse use of women talking about having told their family members that they experienced incest as a child. This study includes looking at conversations and interviews in American Sign Language (ASL) and in English and looking at the stories that women tell about talking to their families.

As a participant in this study, I, ____________________________, am consenting to be a volunteer in this study. I understand this study involves three conversations/interviews of approximately 1 hour each, all of which will be conducted in my native language and will be videotaped.

I understand that I will be asked to conduct two separate interviews with women who were sexually abused by their brothers as children, and that the focus of our interview will be centered on them having talked with family members about the fact that the incest occurred, and then I will take part in a conversation/interview with the principal researcher of this study, Risa Shaw. I will have an opportunity to review my videotapes prior to my conversation/interview with Risa Shaw. Prior to conducting the interviews, Risa Shaw will provide me with guidelines and potential questions for the interviews. I understand the duration of my participation will be approximately 4-5 hours spread over a period of up to three-months.

I understand that my identity will be kept confidential. If data from this study are used in a publication, I understand that a pseudonym will replace my actual name, and other identifying information will not be used. However, any records or data obtained as a result of my participation in this study may be inspected by the persons conducting this study and/or Union Institute & University’s Institutional Review Board, provided that such inspectors are legally obligated to protect any identifiable information from public disclosure, except where disclosure is otherwise required by law or a court of competent jurisdiction. These records will be kept private in so far as permitted by law. All data will be kept in a secure place to which only Risa Shaw has access.

I understand that confidentiality is important to all of the participants in this study and I agree to keep the other participants’ identity confidential. I will not share, disclose, or release names of any other identifying information of any of the other participants.

I understand that my participation is completely voluntary, and I may withdraw from or refuse to participate in the study at any time without any penalty or prejudice. I understand that I may withdraw from this project by contacting the researcher (Risa Shaw) researcher, and that once I inform her of my decision to withdraw she will stop
analyzing any data she collected from me. In addition, she will destroy my videotape(s) immediately if she has not published anything from my data. If she has published information from my data, a journal or publisher might require her to hold onto the materials for three years after publication. If that is the case, she will destroy my videotape(s) at the end of that three year period. I understand that I will not receive any financial compensation for my participation in this research. However if any travel is required, my expenses will be paid.

I understand that there are potential risks that I may face by participating in this study. Potential risks and recommendations for dealing with those risks:

a. Emotional reaction – there is a risk of feeling upset, overwhelmed, triggered, confused, etc. by participating in this study. I understand that it is strongly recommend that I discuss my participation in this study with someone in my support network (e.g. therapist, counselor, clergy, doctor, support groups, or 12 step program, etc.) before, during, and after my participation in the study. Attached are general suggestions and resources and a guide that specifically addresses recommendations for Deaf people (prepared by the Gallaudet Research Institute). In the event that I experience any emotional discomfort during a data collection conversation or interview, I have the option to stop, to not respond or to discontinue my participation in the study.

b. Revealing criminal behavior – there is a risk of revealing information that will be required be reported to the authorities. I understand that if I reveal any information regarding past or current abuse to children or elders that requires the researcher to report such information in accordance with state and federal statutes, the researcher must do so.

I understand that there are potential benefits that I, and others, may gain by participating in this study. Potential benefits from this study include:

a. The opportunity to speak about and from my own experience
b. Increased self-knowledge, empowerment, catharsis
c. Realization of being a member of a larger community
d. Increased knowledge and understanding of the experience of survivors and victimization and the subject of childhood sexual assault, in general and specifically, sibling sexual assault
e. Contribution to the creation of a body of knowledge about linguistic and discourse patterns in ASL and in English when talking about revealing to family members the fact that incest occurred
f. Contribution to the knowledge regarding what interpreters must consider (learn, know, focus on) to create successful interpretations

I have read and understand this consent form, and I volunteer to participate in this research study. I understand that I will receive a copy of this form. I voluntarily choose to participate. I understand that my consent does not take away any legal rights in the case of negligence or other legal fault of anyone who is involved in this study. I further understand that nothing in this consent form is intended to replace any applicable federal, state, or local laws.
I understand that this research is being conducted by Risa Shaw (the principal investigator) as part of the requirements for a doctoral degree at Union Institute & University. Any questions about the project or my participation will be answered to my satisfaction at any time. If I have any questions, I may contact Risa Shaw by email at Risa.Shaw@TUI.edu or by telephone at 202-651-5982. I may also contact her Advisor, Dr. Susan Amussen by email at Susan.Amussen@TUI.edu.

This project has been reviewed and approved by Union Institute & University’s Institutional Review Board and Gallaudet University’s Institutional Review Board. Questions concerning your rights as a participant in this research may be addressed to the Graduate College, UI&U, 404 E. McMillan Street, Cincinnati, Ohio 45202-1925, 800-486-3116, IRB@TUI.edu, and/or the Graduate School and Professional Programs, HMB S416, Gallaudet University, 800 Florida Avenue, NE, Washington D.C., 200021-3695, 202-651-5400 v/tty.

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Videotape Release Form

I, ______________________________, agree to be videotaped as part of my participation in the study, *Narratives and Linguistic Use in Discussions of Childhood Sexual Assault* conducted by Risa Shaw. I understand that the videotapes will not have my name on them and will only use my chosen pseudonym for identification purposes. I understand that the videotapes and any transcription will be kept in a secure, locked location to which only Risa Shaw will have access. The videotapes will be kept for the minimum three-year period, as required by the Union Institute & University IRB requirements. Information collected as part of the study will be used in the compilation of Risa Shaw’s dissertation as well as in other publications. No part of the original videotaped interviews or conversations will be published. Any demonstration or publication of the language use will be done by having a linguistic assistant replicate the language use.

I understand that my participation in this project is completely voluntary, and I may withdraw from or refuse to participate in the study at any time without any penalty or prejudice.

I grant the researcher, Risa Shaw, a doctoral student at Union Institute & University in the field of Sociolinguistics, permission to videotape me during participation in the interviews and conversations. I understand that participants’ approval must be renewed annually. I also understand that I will receive a copy of this signed Videotape Release Form for my records.

I grant the researcher, Risa Shaw, permission to retain my videotapes for a maximum of 12 years. I understand that I may request that my videotapes be destroyed after the three-year minimum period of time required by the Union Institute and University IRB requirements.

______________________________  ___________________________________
Participant’s Printed Name                  Signature

______________________________
Date

______________________________  ___________________________________
Risa Shaw (Principal Researcher)                  Date
Confidentiality Form

I understand that confidentiality is important to all of the participants in this study and I agree to keep the other participants' identity confidential. I will not share, disclose, or release names of any other identifying information of any of the other participants.

Specifically, I understand that in order for me to determine whether there is a conflict of interest or simply discomfort on my part to participate in a conversation with another woman, I must be told her name. In order for that to happen, I, ________________, consent to keep her name confidential whether I participate in the conversation and this study or not.

I understand that I may decline to participate based on this information with no prejudice or penalty.

I also grant Risa Shaw, the right to inform the woman with whom I may converse after she signs such a confidentiality agreement so that she can make a determination as to whether she has a conflict of interest or any discomfort conversing with me in this study.

The other woman will also be asked to sign a confidentiality agreement in order to be told my name so that she may determine if there is a conflict of interest or discomfort for her to participate in such a conversation with me.

I have read and understand this consent form, and hereby agree to the above terms.

I understand that this research is being conducted by Risa Shaw (the principal investigator) as part of the requirements for a doctoral degree at Union Institute & University. Any questions about the project or my participation will be answered by her to my satisfaction at any time. If I have any questions, I may contact Risa Shaw by email at Risa.Shaw@TUI.edu or by telephone at 202-651-5982. I may also contact her Advisor, Dr. Susan Amussen by email at Susan.Amussen@TUI.edu.

This project has been reviewed and approved by Union Institute & University’s Institutional Review Board and Gallaudet University’s Institutional Review Board. Questions concerning your rights as a participant in this research may be addressed to the Graduate College, UI&U, 404 E. McMillan Street, Cincinnati, Ohio 45202-1925, 800-486-3116, IRB@TUI.edu, and/or the Graduate School and Professional Programs, HMB S416, Gallaudet University, 800 Florida Avenue, NE, Washington D.C., 200021-3695, 202-651-5400 v/tty.

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APPENDIX D
Confidentiality Agreement (for Linguistic Assistant)

As an assistant in the study Narratives and Linguistic Use in Discussions of Childhood Sexual Assault, I, ______________________________, agree to keep all information about the identity of the participants and the contents and nature of their conversations/interviews confidential. This includes the names of the participants, and all other identifying information about them. It would be both unethical and illegal for me to disclose any identifying information, and action may be taken against me if I violate this agreement.

I understand that this study is designed to look at the language and discourse use of women talking about having told their family members that they experienced incest as a child. This study includes looking at conversations and interviews in American Sign Language (ASL) and in English and looking at the stories that women tell about talking to their families. I have been asked to be involved in the identification and verification of linguistic features of the participants in this study.

I have read and understand this Confidentiality Agreement and agree to abide by it. I understand that I will receive a copy of this form.

I understand that this research is being conducted by Risa Shaw (the principal investigator) as part of the requirements for a doctoral degree at Union Institute & University. Any questions about the project or my participation will be answered to my satisfaction at any time. If I have any questions, I may contact Risa Shaw by email at Risa.Shaw@TUI.edu or by telephone at 202-651-5982. I may also contact her Advisor, Dr. Susan Amussen by email at Susan.Amussen@TUI.edu.

___________________________________
Assistant’s Printed Name

___________________________________
Signature

______________________________
Date

___________________________________
Risa Shaw (Principal Researcher)

______________________________
Date
APPENDIX E
Preliminary Interview Questions

Using a pre-determined outline of open-ended questions, the interview will be semi-structured. This is to ensure a basic line of inquiry is followed for all interviews, and to allow for the interviewer to raise additional questions and follow up on questions as they become relevant.

The preliminary list of questions for the interviews (guide for the interviewers) will include the following:

- Describe the reasons for the interview (that the interviewer is researching the topic of sibling incest, specifically to gather information regarding telling one or more family members about the fact that the incest occurred).
- State that if the participant does not wish to answer any questions or wishes to stop the interview at any time, she needs only to say so.
- Ask if the interviewee has any questions at this point.
- Have you told any one or more of your family members about the incest that occurred, correct?
- Who have you told? (Identify by relationships, not names)
- Was there anyone else there when you talked to them? If so, what relationship were they to you? Did you request that they be present, and if so, why?
- Was it a face-to-face conversation? If not, how did it take place?
- Who initiated the conversation? If it was you, how did you decide when and who you wanted to talk to?
- Were there other factors involved in your decision to talk with your [FAMILY MEMBER] about this?
- Please tell me about the conversation(s).
- Was the experience/conversation how you anticipated it?
- How did your [FAMILY MEMBER] respond to your disclosure?
- Have you talked with them again about it? If so, who initiated that conversation(s)?
- Have you continued to talk with your [FAMILY MEMBER] about the effects of
the incest since your first conversation? If so, who initiates these conversations?

- Did talking with your [FAMILY MEMBER] change whether you talk with other people about having been sexually abused? If so, how?

- Has talking with your [FAMILY MEMBER] changed how you deal with the effects of the incest? If so, how?

- Would you like to add to anything you have already said?

- Is there anything else you want to say now about this?

- Thank the interviewee and remind her that you will respect her confidentiality.
APPENDIX F

Union Institute & University Institutional Review Board Approval

September 19, 2006

Ms. Rosa Shaw
404 Circle Avenue
Takoma Park, MD 20912

Re: IRB 00250 Narratives and Linguistic Use in Discussions of Childhood Sexual Assault

Dear Ms. Shaw:

I am pleased to advise you that the study, as proposed, has IRB approval. IRB approval will be from September 18, 2006, through September 17, 2007.

As you conduct your study, please keep in mind the following:

- The IRB reserves the right to review your study as part of its continuing review process. Continuing reviews are typically scheduled in advance. However, the IRB may choose, under certain conditions, not to announce a continuing review.
- If you wish to make any substantive changes to the study, you should request IRB approval of your changes well in advance of starting your study.
- If you need additional time to complete your study, including analysis of the data and writing of the findings, please contact the IRB Coordinator at least one month in advance to request an extension. A Request for Extension is available on the IRB Web site.
- If any of your subjects should have an adverse experience as a result of participating in your study, you should suspend the study and notify the IRB Coordinator immediately.
- Finally, please notify the IRB Coordinator when you have concluded your study and completed the data analysis and writing of the findings.

On behalf of the IRB, I wish you success with your study and a satisfactory conclusion to your doctoral program. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions or concerns.

Sincerely yours,

Mary Ginn, Ph.D.
Coordinator
Institutional Review Board

c: Dr. Susan Amussen
Dr. Larry Preston
Appendix G

Gallaudet University Institutional Review Board Approval

MEMORANDUM

DATE: October 16, 2006

TO: Risa Shaw
Gallaudet University
Department of Interpretation
KCC Room 3119
Washington, DC 20002

FROM: David R. Penna, Ph.D., Chairperson
Institutional Review Board (IRB)

RE: "Narratives and Linguistic Use in Discussions of Childhood Sexual Assault"

After a Full Board Review, the IRB has approved your above-named research project. The approval date is 10/16/2006, which reflects the date of your review.

The IRB considers only the issue of research risk to subjects: approval is solely a declaration of the absence of, or adequate control of research risk. Approval does not guarantee either the quality of the research or access to subjects.

Please notify the Board if your research project changes in any way human subjects are utilized. All advertisements and recruitment materials must be approved by the IRB prior to being used.

Researchers are also required by federal regulations to have yearly renewal of the IRB approval for continuing projects. Your approval will be up for renewal one year from the date of your Full Board Review. Please make timely submission of request for renewal or prompt notification of project termination.

If you have any questions regarding this project, contact Dr. David Penna, IRB Chair, at 202-651-5929 (v/tty) or E-mail (David.Penna@gallaudet.edu). The current approval is effective through 10/16/2007.

Good luck with your study!