Unsolicited “Gifts”: A Qualitative Analysis of Fundraisers #MeToo Experiences

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Executive Summary

Sexual harassment can be a work-related hazard for fundraisers both within and at the boundaries of their organizations. As part of a research study on sexual harassment in the public and nonprofit sectors, leading Ohio State Professors Erynn Beaton and Megan LePere-Schloop have been surveying and interviewing survivors of sexual harassment in order to rigorously investigate the issue in the public service sectors. The purpose of this specific study of fundraisers is to both amplify the unique voices and experiences of survivors of sexual harassment in the fundraising profession and to identify management policies and practices that best suit organizations that fundraise. Special thanks go to the Association for Fundraising Professionals (AFP) Women’s Impact Initiative for being an active and thoughtful partner in conducting this research.

In 2018, AFP Women’s Impact Initiative surveyed 1000 of their member organization’s fundraisers, and from that data reported that sexual harassment was statistically significant for women and gay men. Of the respondents, 25% of women and 7% of men reported being sexually harassed in the field. Furthermore, 65% of those that reported sexual harassment experiences noted that the perpetrator was the donor. Some public and nonprofit organizations heavily rely on their funders to meet their basic operating expenses, which allots donors and board members relative power over the organization and its employees. Thus, pleasing donors is critical for organizational survival and can increase tolerance of inappropriate behavior by donors.

The research question of this study is, “What does sexual harassment look like in the fundraising profession?” If the fundraising profession at large wants to intelligently and compassionately respond to the problem of sexual harassment, it is first important to explore who is perpetrating and experiencing sexual harassment, in what ways donors choose to harass, and when and how sexual harassment has taken place. Through interviewing and qualitative analysis, a nuanced picture of what sexual harassment encompasses for fundraisers is highlighted and used to extrapolate suggested management policies and practices.

An intake survey was circulated via the AFP to encourage participation in interviews. Volunteers participated in semi-structured interviews about their experience with sexual harassment in the context of the fundraising profession. All interviews were recorded, transcribed, and anonymized for content analysis. The findings draw on 28 interviews, 26 from women and 2 from gay men.

Based on the interviews, fundraisers were harassed by donors, board members, and volunteers at organizational events, in donors’ homes, and in 1-on-1 donor-fundraiser interactions. They were given unwanted sexual attention in multiple forms from condescending pet names to propositions for a donation in exchange for sex to unwanted physical touching. Managers discretionary responses were inconsistent, some supportive and others dismissive. The nuance and rich detail in each story are unique to context and represent the need for managers to employ emotionally intelligent responses on a case-by-case basis.

Ten management recommendations were extrapolated from the interview data and are listed below with pros and cons. All of these suggestions would protect fundraisers from harassment but may also make their jobs harder. For each policy or management practice, the organization must weigh the pros and cons of each policy in order to assess what they have capacity to implement in order to reduce sexual harassment of fundraisers.
Acknowledgements

Thank you Dr. Megan LePere-Schloop and Dr. Erynn Beaton for sharing your interview data with me, coaching me to be a stronger researcher, and inviting my perspective into research-related conversations on sexual harassment in the public and nonprofit sectors. I feel prepared to begin my Ph.D. in Public Affairs and enthusiasm for investigating questions in public and nonprofit management through your influence and mentorship.

Thank you to Dr. Hongtao Yi and Daniel Baker for facilitating an enjoyable Public Management Capstone course and learning community. I am walking away from Ohio State with many important lessons and experiences in the writing process from this class.

Special thanks go to the participants of this study for spending the time and emotional energy to share their experiences with sexual harassment in fundraising. I have personally benefitted so much from closely reading and analyzing this collection of interviews and hope others will too.
Introduction

The MeToo social movement has placed the problem of sexual harassment in the public limelight. The Pew Research Center estimated that the hashtag “#MeToo” was used over 19 million times on Twitter alone within one year of the New York Time’s release of the Harvey Weinstein sexual harassment scandal (Anderson & Toor, 2018). Innumerable brave individuals, the majority of whom are women, collectively came forward on social media under the hashtag “#MeToo” to share their stories against the cultural forces of fear, shame, and anxiety that often silence survivors. Tarana Burke (2018), who originally founded the MeToo movement in 2006, seeks to use MeToo to create unity between survivors and their allies by opening up a brave space (Arao & Clemens, 2013) both for survivors to share their stories and for everyone to engage in hard, sincere conversations that end the possibility of future instances of sexual harassment. Burke has since been recognized as a “silence breaker” and a 2017 TIME Magazine Person of the Year (Zacharek, Dockterman, & Edwards, 2017). The MeToo movement draws from both the individualist feminist tradition (Friedan, 1969) where women can create meaningful avenues out of suffering through self-empowerment and the social feminist traditions (Fortunati & Federici, 1972) where women as a class can organize for their shared interest. The influence of feminist traditions on the MeToo movement is clear in the ways survivors of sexual harassment are able to both stand alone in individual narratives while also banding together to end sexual harassment as a specific form of gender and sexuality-based violence.

Problem Definition

The problem my capstone research project seeks to address is sexual harassment in the fundraising profession. Specifically, I ask “What does sexual harassment look like in the fundraising profession?” This is an important question to ask because identifying nuances
underlying sexual harassment has formulation and implementation implications for sexual harassment prevention policies. Fundraising is an essential function of nonprofit sector organizations. Those organizations exist in part due to market failure and to fill the gaps of public and private sector service provision (Weisbrod, 1986). Because most nonprofit organizations, unlike public or private organizations, do not receive funding from tax revenues or other profit-generating mechanisms they must fundraise in order to meet their operating costs. In some nonprofit organizations, there are professionals whose exclusive job is to fundraise, while in others, it may be the case that every nonprofit professional must participate in some capacity in fundraising efforts. The same goes for public organizations that fundraise. Regardless of a professional’s specific job title or sector, fundraisers are vulnerable to sexual harassment as boundary spanners (Alrich & Herker, 1977). Organizational boundaries link the organization to the environment, and since funders are external to the organization fundraisers must bridge the gap and solicit funds as boundary spanners. The power differential between fundraisers and donors, who are relied upon to keep the organization afloat, leaves fundraisers (primarily women fundraisers) vulnerable to sexual harassment.

Evidence for Problem Significance

When the MeToo social movement exploded on social media in light of the Harvey Weinstein felony sex crime scandal, it brought with it a moment of punctuated equilibrium (True, Jones, Baumgartner, 1999). Instead of incremental change, the human issue of sexual harassment began to receive mass media attention as survivors of sexual harassment came out under the MeToo twitter hashtag. Many of those stories included workplace traumas. Thus, organizations became motivated to reassess their sexual harassment policies and to ensure that individual employees felt safe coming forward within organizations. Whether this is a result of
genuine care or organizational fears about reputation defamation is unknown. Regardless of the motivation source, workplace sexual harassment has become a socially significant problem that warrants public attention in all areas of professional and personal life. As feminist public affairs scholars inspired by the momentum of the MeToo social movement, Dr. Erynn Beaton and Dr. Megan LePere-Schloop of Ohio State University opened a study on sexual harassment in the public and nonprofit sectors. The resulting data included significant participation from fundraisers - who currently represent 28 of 49 of the total fundraisers interviewed. Hence, this capstone research project focuses on how sexual harassment is experienced by fundraisers.

For two years, the two assistant professors along with their graduate students have conducted interviews with people from the US and Canada, cataloging first person narratives of sexual harassment in the public and nonprofit sectors. I am one of the graduate students tasked with interviewing men who sign up to be interviewed. A major portion of the entire interview dataset will serve as the focus of the analysis. Most of the participants (28 out of 49) have been fundraisers, major gift officers, and development professionals (here forward taken collectively as “fundraisers”) in public or nonprofit organizations who tell a story of being harassed by a donor in their career. In this paper, I respond to calls to address the nonprofit fundraising profession’s sexual harassment problem by considering “the unique structural, cultural, and management issues” (Battaglio & Hall, 2018, p. 336) that shape those organizations. This project aligns with Burke’s (2017) work to substantiate that a person’s experience of sexual harassment is not an isolated instance. Instead, sexual harassment constitutes a pattern of commonly experienced violence that is both a cause and a product of gender- and sexuality-based economic disempowerment, among other systematically oppressive outcomes (Time’s Up, 2018). Given this context, the pertinent research question is, “What does sexual harassment look like in the
nonprofit fundraising profession?” If the fundraising profession at large wants to intelligently respond to the problem of sexual harassment, it is first important to explore who is perpetrating and experiencing sexual harassment, in what ways donors choose to harass, when and how sexual harassment has taken place, and fundraiser’s relationships to their narratives. By mapping sexual harassment narratives for key story elements, I seek to expose a nuanced picture of what sexual harassment encompasses for the fundraisers who participated in this study.

In the following sections, I will provide a literature review on sexual harassment and its intersection with non-profit and public administration literatures. I employ narrative analysis of qualitative interview data, explained further in the methods section, in order to provide my results. I do not offer any hypotheses about the nature of fundraiser’s sexual harassment experiences, as the function of this research not to speculate about individuals’ experiences. Rather, my results and conclusions are grounded in the narratives given by the fundraisers. In the discussion section, I further spell out the nuances of fundraisers’ experiences and why they are important, along with other major themes, and connect them to content in my literature review. In closing, I seek to explore the implications the data analysis has for workplaces where fundraising professionals are employed and I offer ten management recommendations for organizations that engage in fundraising.

**Literature Review**

Sexual harassment is a form of bullying both in and out of the workplace. It becomes a form of conflict that is difficult for managers to mediate because of the confusion and complexity surrounding, “what constitutes acceptable sexual behavior and what are the legitimate boundaries between the convivial and coercive,” (Wilson & Thompson, 2011, p. 62).
Tarana Burke often alludes to the case of “the upstanding person who makes others uncomfortable” (Santiago & Criss, 2017), which maps well on to the story of the generous donors who support an organization with a public service mission, and yet behave in ways that constitute sexually harassing the organizations’ fundraisers. Said simply, donors who are doing a good thing by giving to an organization can also perpetrate bad behavior. Burke is concerned that media attention to sexual harassment homogenizes sexual harassment and serves to bring attention only to its most violent forms. She hopes that the conversation can expand to include the unacceptability of all forms of sexual harassment, including those in gray areas of inappropriateness. In a changing world where women and men can openly name sexual harassment as unwanted, it is important to hear and analyze sexual harassment at the population and the individual levels.

“Organizations affect the economic wellbeing of workers, and hence their dependents,” (Tolbert, Pamela, and Hall, 2009). Thus, experiences of work-based harassment can have a rippling impact on the security a person feels both in their professional role held in their respective organization, and in the personal role of providing for a family. If a person is ostracized due to discriminatory attitudes and treatment then the victimized employee may have to jeopardize their economic wellbeing if they want to challenge discrimination, exit the organization, and/or transition into a new organization.

**Previous Quantitative Analysis**

The Association of Fundraising Professionals (AFP) Women’s Impact Initiative (2018) surveyed 1000 of their member organization’s fundraisers, and from that data reported that 25% of women and 7% of men reported being sexually harassed in the field. Furthermore, 65% of
those that reported sexual harassment experiences noted that the perpetrator was the donor (AFP, 2018). Their report of survey results and recommended best practices is titled “Time’s Up for Sexual Harassment by Donors,” which takes its name from the Time’s Up social movement. The MeToo social movement, as a cultural phenomenon, has resulted in increased practitioner attention to the social relations and policies that normalize sexual harassment (Ozkazanc-Pan, 2019). The Time’s Up social movement initially surfaced to filter the general cause of the MeToo social movement into specifically ending sexual harassment in the workplace. Their mission is for every single person, “to be safe on the job and have equal opportunity for economic success and security” (Time’s Up, 2019). The qualities of the fundraising profession that differentiate it from more traditional office based work will be represented and incorporated in this paper as necessary to continuously explicate the reasons why managing the sexual harassment of fundraisers warrants such specific attention separately from other forms of work-based sexual harassment.

**Definitions and Theories of Sexual Harassment**

The U.S. EEOC defines sexual harassment as “unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal or physical harassment of a sexual nature” (EEOC, 2018). Both the U.S. EEOC and the study’s participant experiences demonstrate, “both victim and the harasser can be either a woman or a man, and the victim and harasser can be the same sex” (EEOC, 2018). If someone wanted to file a sexual harassment claim with the EEOC, she or he would have to present a claim meeting the relevant criteria for “the commission [to] issu[e] a “right to sue” letter. She [or he] would then have the recourse of hiring an attorney who could pursue legal action on her behalf,” (Hunsaker, 2010, p. 59). The legal definition includes both “quid pro quo” sexual harassment and “hostile workplace” sexual harassment. Quid pro quo
harassment is when someone requires sexual contact in exchange for an employment related item or action. In the case of fundraising, this would be when a donor propositions a fundraiser as a prerequisite to giving a major gift.

RAINN (Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network), the nation's largest anti-sexual violence organization, clarifies the U.S EEOC’s definition of “hostile workplace” sexual harassment further by noting that sexual harassment does not necessarily need to be directed at a certain individual (2020). For instance, if someone repeatedly makes unwelcome comments about female bodies as a group, that is a form of sexual harassment. Sexual harassment law does not cover one-time off-hand comments or teasing, but these behaviors can still produce negative effects, and threaten the perceived sense of safety or job performance of employees.

Drawing from critical race theory’s analyses of anti-discrimination law, the presence of law and law reform efforts are not always useful and often continue to fail to deliver meaningful change to the impacted group. Alan Freeman’s (1996) critique of the “perpetrator perspective” of laws that prohibit race-based discrimination is also helpful to see the limits of sex-based anti-discrimination law. Discrimination law frames the harms of sexism (racism, etc.) in a perpetrator/victim dyad where the perpetrator irrationally hates people based on an (race/gender) identity and subsequently harms the person because of that hatred. This is problematic because it obscures the nuanced way that oppression operates; only perpetrators that act through hatred and intention to harm are successfully seen in law and convicted. With sexual harassment that takes place in organizational contexts, there are other professionals that have the power to exacerbate or reduce the conflict. Naming a perpetrator’s intention to harm becomes further complicated in sexual harassment prevention law because most perpetrators of sexual harassment have a sexual orientation towards women or men, and both love and have harmed people of that sex.
From a feminist theoretical perspective, acts of sexual harassment are aggression-driven assertions of domination that seek to reinforce a gender-based system of order where males as a group are dominant with respect to women and other sexual minorities as group (Tinkler & Zhao, 2019). Sexual harassment has also been shown to be a more frequent and pertinent issue in stereotypically masculine dominated work settings such as military and police organizations (Fitzgerald, Drasgow, Hulin, Gelfand, & Magley, 1997). The influence of gender as a relevant sociocultural category in sexual harassment is more clearly isolated in contra-power instances of sexual harassment where the person experiencing harassment has higher power in an organization than the perpetrator (Rospenda, Richman, & Nawryn, 1998).

In terms of organizational theories, sexual harassment was originally conceptualized as a matter enabled by hierarchies in organizational power (Tangri, Burt, Johnson, 1982). The role of gender in enabling organizational sexual harassment was clarified within this frame (MacKinnon, 1979). In studies of contra-power sexual harassment, findings indicate that increased authority does not protect women from sexual harassment, but rather increases their prospects of harassment given their increased number of connections as managers to male subordinates (Rospenda et al, 1998). But, regardless of the masculine or feminine nature of an organization or the behavior and status of any given woman, some research shows that sexual harassment, “is motivated primarily by sexual desire and, therefore, is directed at women who meet feminine ideals, and (b) it is motivated primarily by a desire to punish gender-role deviants and, therefore, is directed at women who violate feminine ideals,” (Berdahl, 2007, p. 425). On this basis, there is little power in the hands of an individual woman to adjust her behavior to protect herself. Organizational sexual harassment policies become relevant to women’s and other gender minorities’ workplace safety.
Sexual Harassment Policy in the Fundraising Profession

Organizations have the option of providing their own comprehensive sexual harassment prevention policies and institutional processes. In the “Time’s Up” report issued by the AFP Women’s Impact Initiative, the organization provides a policy template that their member organizations can choose to adopt and customize to their own specific needs (2018). The report specifically states that, “donors are subject to the same disciplinary actions as other members of the [Organization Name] community,” (AFP, 2018, p. 12) along with delineating the reporting and disciplinary processes. Any donor found to have harassed an employee will no longer have the right to, “Provide financial support to [Organization Name], Attend [Organization Name]’s events, and Serve as a board member, volunteer, contractor, or any role that would constitute a continued relationship with [Organization Name],” (AFP, 2018, p. 12). The policy template sends a clear message that there will be zero tolerance for sexual harassment by effectively explaining that if a donor is found to be harassing a fundraiser, the donor has no path to redemption or recourse. Sexual harassment is, on paper, unacceptable to the point the donor cannot even fund the nonprofit’s activities. This element, among others, brings into question the disconnect between policy, the experiences of fundraisers who have been sexually harassed by a donor, and the responses managers have issued to reported instances of sexual harassment.

As has been researched in the public policy process where managers who write a policy infrequently overlap with the street-level bureaucrats who implement them (Peter & Jenkins, 2005), the administrative fundraising professionals at the AFP who formulated and wrote a sexual harassment policy are likely not the same people who are implementing it in every adopting organization. This results in the possibility of an implementation gap where the realized outcome is less than what was initially desired (Pressman & Wildavsky, 1973, O’Toole, 2000).
where only some sexual harassment is reported, and of those cases only some donations from sexual harassers are rejected. Another possible outcome is that goal displacement may be taking place where the implementation of objectives is different than the original intent (Hupe, 2011), and donations from sexual harassers are knowingly accepted and concerns of the fundraiser are actively swept aside. While the AFP report (2018) acknowledges the process of backward mapping (Elmore, 1979), noting organizations should tailor their policies to best customize the template to their specific workplace culture, this also constitutes a drift from the original mission and intent of the policymakers. This can result in policy failure (Bovens & Hart, 1996) where “failure” is a judgment about circumstances in which people do not agree upon what constitutes a failure/success. For instance, different organizations (and people) might have different levels of tolerance and exercise their discretion about punishing donors differently when it comes to sexual harassment.

There is no research available about the nature of sexual harassment in the fundraising profession, and little available about sexual harassment in the public or nonprofit sector generally, especially in comparisons to the streams of literature coming from business. Furthermore, most sexual harassment research assumes harassment occurs in a supervisor-harasses-subordinate configuration that is within the traditional bounds of organizational roles (Lee & Greenlaw, 2000). This limits the applicability of sexual harassment research to the nonprofit fundraising profession, given the unique structuring of boards, volunteers, fundraisers and other employees, and donors in terms of who is truly within the bounds of and has power in an organization. Given that fundraisers often have one foot in and one foot out of their organization when they are developing relationships with donors, their interactions would constitute boundary spanning (Adams, 1976). Past research substantiates that sexual harassment
does also take place across third party type organizational relationships, (Gettman & Gelfand, 2007).

Nonprofits heavily rely on their funders to meet their basic operating expenses, which allots donors and board members relative power over the organization and its employees (Ostrander, 2007). Thus, pleasing donors becomes imperative for nonprofit organizations in order to survive. This is true of both when nonprofits attempt to pay attention to optimizing expense ratios that indicate supporting their organization via donation is effective (Okten & Weisbrod, 2000), as well as soft-skills related matters where fundraisers tolerate poor donor-fundraiser interactions. Some rely so heavily on donors that, especially in the case of small nonprofits, all their funding may come from a single donor, (National Counsel of Nonprofits, 2019). At the organizational level, the reduced agency of nonprofit organizations under these conditions creates concerns over their abilities to implement effective sexual harassment prevention policy and practices.

At the interpersonal level, it is important to remember that most survivors of sexual harassment are women. Research shows that women tend to embody organizational commitment and impression management in ways that, while are important personal strengths and assets to an organization, subject them to further subordination (Calás & Smircich, 1989). This means that women as a group tend to be socialized to think of themselves within their social networks as responsible for caring for others and upkeeping good relationships within important organizational interpersonal networks, (Gillian, 1982). This stereotypically feminine strength is an obvious asset to organizations that require good relationship management and effective teamwork to meet their missions (Goleman, 2002). But it also indicates that women as a group have been socialized to be willing to sacrifice their own wellbeing for the sake of others and their
organizations. This has complex implications for the implicit bias a manager may have towards women who have been harassed by a donor, and especially in the case where the organization relies exclusively on a donor to operate and where harming that relationship has heavy consequences.

As the MeToo social movement was beginning to take popular social media by storm, the Chronicle of Philanthropy released an article sharing expert-backed advice on how to protect fundraisers from sexual harassment, (Sandoval, 2017). They note that younger employees are more likely to dismiss abnormal behavior because they are, “trying to prove themselves, and it is all about landing that big gift,” (Sandoval, 2017, p. 3). The vulnerability produced by youth coupled with identifying as a woman is highly representative of the sample of participants in this study. The author suggests a similar policy practice to that advocated in the AFP provided policy template (2018), that no gift is worth sacrificing one’s personal safety and managers should make clear that it is okay to approach them for help. As will be demonstrated through this study’s interview data, it is not always the case that managers are perceived as approachable or that the rejection of a gift seems plausible.

In contrast to young fundraiser’s attitudes on big gifts, the mentality that nonprofits must close on all gifts possible at all costs is not necessarily supported by indicators of nonprofit effectiveness. Some nonprofit organizations “spend excessive portions of their resources on fundraising,” (Rose-Ackerman, 1982, p. 193). As previously mentioned, donors often take stock of expense ratios to see the effectiveness of their donation dollars (Okten & Weisbrod, 2000). Especially in the case of organizations that engage in excessive fundraising, ending relationships with donors who are sexually harassing their fundraisers might be good for business. The same is not able to be said for organizations that do not fall in this category and are at the crossroad of
resource dependency with a donor. Thus, the economic imperative to continue a bad donor-fundraiser relationship is ideally outweighed by harms to the individual fundraiser or potential harm to the organization’s reputation. This notion will be explored again in the analysis of interview data.

**Stakeholder Analysis: Relevance, Roles, and Management Practices**

Analyzing the stakeholders within the issue of sexual harassment is helpful in creating an understanding of how to go about mitigating the issue (Bryson, 2004). Identifying stakeholders’ roles and relevance help inform future recommendations and result in effective coalition building. In terms of the sexual harassment of fundraisers, stakeholders include survivors of sexual harassment (fundraisers), perpetrators of sexual harassment (donors), organization managers, the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (U.S. EEOC), proponents of the MeToo social movement, the media, potential donors, and engaged citizens. Each of them has varying levels of power to influence and interest in seeing organizational change take place as a result of the MeToo social movement. Table 1 below categorizes the stakeholders on those axes of who has interest and power in controlling or changing norms on sexual harassment in organizations. Table 2 lists the preferences of all parties except the low-power low-interest groups, who could be thought of as relevant onlookers with unclear positive or negative preferences.
### Table 1: Relevance of Stakeholders

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>INTEREST</th>
<th>Subjects</th>
<th>Players</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(high)</td>
<td>Survivors</td>
<td>U.S. EEOC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>MeToo Social Movement</td>
<td>Organization Board Members</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(low)</td>
<td>Crowd</td>
<td>Context Setters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Citizenry, Media,</td>
<td>Perpetrators</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Potential Donors</td>
<td>Managers</td>
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</table>

#### Categorization of Stakeholders

- (low)-----------------------POWER-----------------------(high)

### Table 2: Roles of Stakeholders

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stakeholder</th>
<th>Role and Preference</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>U.S. EEOC</td>
<td>Set a sexual harassment prevention policy agenda within the values of the executive and maintain consistency within sexual harassment legal precedents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Board Members</td>
<td>Keep the reputation of their organization intact</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Perpetrators  Receive no consequences for giving unwanted sexual attention

Managers  Reduce conflict, solicit significant donations, and keep their employees safe

Survivors  Work without fear of sexual harassment, receive justice/closure if harassed

MeToo Movement  End sexual harassment in all facets of professional and personal life

Previous efforts to manage sexual harassment have come directly from the U.S. EEOC and are also at the discretion of any given organization’s management personnel. The U.S. EEOC is the governmental organization tasked with overseeing the enforcement of non-discrimination laws (Berg, 1964). They enforce the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which prohibits discrimination in private conduct including public accommodations, governmental services, and education. More specifically, Title VII prohibits employment discrimination based on race, sex, color, religion and national origin. It is the protection on the basis of sex that the U.S. EEOC provides workplace protections for people to be free from sexual harassment (EEOC, 2020). Settlements for approved claims are typically financial damages, but the survivor may also choose to bring criminal charges in a criminal court. Other than these legal protections and the accountability organizations have to the federal government, managers are left without any other legal guidelines to respond to sexual harassment or mitigate its future repetition. It is up to organizations to decide what sexual harassment prevention policies or practices to implement.
Methods & Data

In order to answer the research question, “What does sexual harassment look like in the nonprofit fundraising profession?” qualitative data in the form of narratives were collected via interviews with fundraisers. A total of 28 interviews were conducted with fundraisers who have experienced sexual harassment in the context of fundraising, 26 from women and 2 from gay men. All but one of the participants reported being harassed by men. Approval from the Ohio State Institutional Review Board was obtained to protect participants, and measures of care were taken in developing our interview intake form in order to ensure the participants felt comfortable being contacted and interviewed. In order to assess fundraisers’ experiences of sexual harassment in the fundraising profession, the narratives were analyzed for the presence of and flow of narrative elements including characters, plot, setting, conflict, and resolution.

Interviewees were recruited using a snowball method, which involved using the AFP network and our professional and personal networks to identify participants, and then asking those participants to assist in recruitment. Using this method makes it possible to identify participants who might have rich narratives. This was the most viable recruitment method because the level of disclosure required to produce accounts rests on a high level of trust between the researcher and interviewee. Therefore, we began with our personal networks and our participant pool expanded from there. Our collective positionalities as two graduate students and two junior faculty biased who comprises our networks and who was in our participant pool (Creswell, 2018, p. 159). The sample is not replicable, and findings will be specific to this participant pool. The transferability of findings may be limited based on the unique characteristics of the participants’ experiences.
Also due to the highly personal nature of the desired narratives, it was difficult for some participants to share their personal story and relive their experiences. Therefore, the research team prepared and utilized a semi-structured interview protocol (Appendix 1) that included all of the details that we assumed would be important to create both richness in data and clear concepts for analysis. These included descriptions of the individual’s professional life, descriptions of the perpetrator, what led up to the incident, how they felt, presence and reactions of bystanders, choosing to report the incident to an authority, and so on. The way an individual chose to tell their narrative when prompted, and the gravity with which individuals devoted time and vivid description to different parts of their experiences with sexual harassment was also considered a point of informative data. Many of our interviewees asked questions about the safety of their stories and the anonymity of their interview transcripts. Participants were careful to not name other people and organizations despite our reassurance that they could speak without censorship. While this made transcribing and anonymizing transcripts easier, it was an interesting point of commonality and speaks to the persistent stigma of speaking out about sexual harassment.

Ultimately, we interviewed 28 individuals, representing people from a diversity of ages, races, and professional backgrounds. The interviews were collected between May of 2018 through December of 2019. When we conducted interviews, we did not clarify our identities to the participants beyond our researcher affiliation with Ohio State University. Even so, our interviewees often spoke with reference to a shared understanding of the world and assumed shared identity positionalities. This is because we matched interviewer and interviewee gender to increase rapport. For example, a male interviewee shared a story that took place in a men’s locker room, discussing it in a way that assumed long standing shared experience with the dynamics of that space. Many of the female interviewees referred to a shared understanding of
experiencing certain treatment as a woman at work. We consistently presented ourselves to all
interviewees with the same interview guide and approach of care towards the participant telling a
potentially traumatic story. Along with reassurance from the Ohio State IRB, we sought to
present ourselves as professional interviewers and researchers, and also as people with whom it
is safe to share a sexual harassment story without having to face any negative consequences.

Transcripts of the interviews were uploaded into the qualitative coding software NVivo
for content analysis. Due to the grounded nature of this study, I did not seek to confirm or deny a
hypothesis or speculate about the nature of fundraisers’ individual experiences. A narrative
coding method was employed in order to code interviews for literary elements to capture
different levels of the fundraisers’ experiences. Narrative coding is one of many literary
qualitative coding methods, a set of approaches that use relatively simple and clear filtering
mechanisms, allowing the researcher to home in on specific components of the data and
representative properties of the narratives (Saldana, 2016, p. 145). The following table outlines
the variable story elements we coded for in the interview data.

Table 1: Narrative Codes and Definitions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Narrative Code</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Characters</strong></td>
<td>People relevant to the story/stories</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Conflict</strong></td>
<td>Struggles between opposing forces</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Plot</strong></td>
<td>Storyline of the sexual harassment experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Resolution</strong></td>
<td>How the sexual harassment experience resolves</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Setting</strong></td>
<td>Location of the sexual harassment experience(s)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
This method is the best fit for this data because highlighting these literary elements can expose the underlying commonalities that have made sexual harassment permissible in fundraisers’ professional settings. Limitations of this method are that it is not possible to make population level claims about fundraisers who have been sexually harassed. Rather, diving deeply into these 28 fundraisers experiences allows the results to reflect the detail-rich narratives that get at the heart of the problem, and motivate future quantitative and qualitative studies of sexual harassment in fundraising.

**Results and Discussion**

In the following section, I lay out findings based on each narrative code. Major characters in the interviewees’ sexual harassment narratives included managers and other bystanders, confirming the idea that harassment is not limited to a perpetrator/victim dyad. Settings included public places such as bars and restaurants, events in hotels and at conferences, and in the perpetrator’s homes when fundraisers were invited to communicate with the donor there. Coding for plot showed that sexual harassment takes multiple forms from lewd comments to sexual intimidation to unwanted sexual contact. Conflict took on multiple dimensions, with managers, co-workers, and bystanders sometimes supporting or sometimes further harming the fundraiser beyond the perpetrator’s actions. Fundraisers found resolution in a variety of ways from choosing or not choosing to report. Some have become more active in preventing sexual harassment, while some have left fundraising altogether.

**Characters**

Out of the 28 interviews, the of perpetrators of sexual harassment were either board members, donors, or volunteers. The harassers are people who do not hold the same level of commitment to the organization as do true employees of a nonprofit organization. Volunteers are
recruited to assist with service delivery on certain occasions, while donors and board members tend to oversee and fund operations. This could be tricky for survivors of sexual harassment seeking help from managers, since a supervising manager likely does not have legitimate authority over these groups. Most fundraisers who participated in our study qualify as an employee of their respective organizations. Thus, a majority of fundraisers were harassed in an instance of working at the boundaries of the organization, with some also noting experiences within their organizations. Some interviews included more than one instance of sexual harassment across their fundraising career. The participants noted their own experiences of sexual harassment as well as those reported to them by colleagues or those where they were a bystander to a sexual harassment situation.

Some of the participants who reported their experience with sexual harassment shared the instance with their direct manager. Most participants who did so tended to feel more comfortable sharing their experience with a female manager or assumed that female managers would be less tolerant of sexual harassment. The latter was not always the case and is likely grounded in stereotypes that female managers are more apt to provide a competent response to sexual harassment.

Managers provided both supportive and unsupportive responses. In one instance where a fundraiser was sexually harassed with verbal comments by a volunteer photographer, the manager stepped in as soon the harassment was reported. She called the photographer to let him know his behavior was unacceptable, he would no longer be allowed to interact with the woman he harassed, and that any future contact or calls to the organization would be directed to her, the manager. She also placed a note in his file that this person was not to be left alone with any staff members. He was not removed from his volunteer position, but his engagements were limited. In
another instance, a woman who worked in advancement at a public university was sexually harassed in a one-on-one meeting in a dean’s office. She filed a formal report with Human Resources and an eight-month long investigation ensued, resulting in no charges. This led to the woman completely changing her career path away from universities, specifically saying that, “I've lost complete confidence in the system and the procedures and how sexist the university and academy is largely.” She also said the sexual harassment investigation had a severe and negative impact on her mental health, especially since she was simultaneously trying to maintain calm in her private life in supporting her PhD candidate husband and son with a cognitive disability.

Given that the interviews come from fundraisers who are also survivors of sexual harassment, the survivor is often the central character in the narratives of their experiences. Each person approached the start of her or his story from a unique perspective. Many opened by saying that the experience she or he had was not “that bad” or felt the need to clarify that the experience with sexual harassment did not rise to the level of rape or forcible penetration. This might be a coping mechanism or a result of some forms of sexual harassment being socially acceptable. Yet, each person delved into an often abhorrent story where she or he received unwanted sexual attention in the form of verbal, emotional, or physical harassment while doing their job. Not everyone reported her or his experience to a manager, and the impacts those experiences had on the fundraisers varied from the fundraiser sharing precautions she or he now takes to staying away from fundraising responsibilities in future jobs taken after the incident.

*Settings: Public Places, Events, and Perpetrator Homes*
Another common feature of the participants’ narratives was that much harassment tended to take place outside of a traditional office or workplace setting. These settings tended to be restaurants and/or bars, and in some cases the donor’s home. For the fundraisers, the setting can be an indicator of increased donor power and likelihood of sexual harassment. For instance, an upper-level fundraising manager at a large nonprofit who was interviewed recounted an experience where a board member asked to meet at a restaurant, rather than at the large nonprofit’s office. She said, *You just get a feeling when someone says, "Let's go to a public place."* In her story, she said she attempted to keep the interaction as professional as possible by wearing a “*business suit*” and coming prepared to talk about the project the board member was proposing. When they got to the restaurant the board member opened their conversation by making uncomfortable comments about the fundraisers outfit, then “*He sat down beside me at the table, and during the course of our conversation, he was touching my leg. I had to keep on moving him away but he continued.*”

In an example of an instance that took place in the donor’s home, a young male fundraiser for a private university was matched to a elderly male potential donor who was rumored to have a substantial estate. The donor began to ask the fundraiser to do abnormal tasks for him, such as assist him with picking up his prescriptions from the pharmacy, and offered to give the fundraiser a key to his house. The fundraiser declined these tasks and key at first and reported the behavior to his direct supervisor. He told his manager he was uncomfortable with the donor’s attempts to become personally close to him. The manager disregarded the fundraisers concerns and encouraged him to run errands for the potential donor. The next time the fundraiser interacted with the potential donor, he was asked to go pick up groceries for him. “*When I got back to his place, he was in sweatpants and was sitting in his recliner masturbating. I was totally*
disgusted.” The manager still did not intervene and made him pick this potential donor up for the private university’s new president inauguration event the next day. At the event, the potential donor asked the fundraiser to push his wheelchair to the restroom. When they got near the door the fundraiser recounted the donor saying, "I'll take you in there," and he says "I'll make out with you. [laughs]". I was like, "That's disgusting." I said, "You need to stop," Here the manager did not intervene, and the fundraiser was harassed once more at a public event.

**Conflict with the Manager, the Organization, and one’s Self**

The presence of conflict, a clash between two different parties’ interests, is apparent in the sexual harassment narratives supplied by the participants. There is a mismatch in interests and a creation of conflict when the perpetrators interest in giving a fundraiser sexual attention is unwanted by the fundraiser. The conflict is not exclusively between a perpetrator and survivor. It can ripple out to include managers, the organization, and even cause the fundraiser to battle with her- or himself.

In an example where the survivor of sexual harassment avoided conflict with most parties other than the perpetrator, a participant told a story where he was sexually harassed at a bar while fundraising for a political candidate endorsed by his 501c4 organization. The candidate’s spouse “threw their hands in my pants in the middle of the bar in front of a lot of people” and groped the fundraiser’s genitals while making “insulting” verbal comments. The fundraiser did not report the instance to anyone at his nonprofit organization but has come together with other people who have been harassed by that person and has decided to bring criminal charges in a court. He is the only participant that noted taking legal action. He said that in his organization and others like it, “As far as I know, none of these organizations have any policies or procedures
I'm aware of for these situations,” and so he did not bother with reporting to anyone or creating conflict within his organization.

Another participant, who previously worked as an administrator at a nonprofit religion-based high school, noted an experience where she was in conflict with her direct manager. She and multiple other women in a shared office space noted feeling uncomfortable when one of their male colleagues would stream porn on his computer while at work. It happened on multiple occasions, but they collectively felt like it was not worth speaking up because they believed their boss would not have imposed consequences. When her direct boss was absent from the office, the participant decided to go to the top of the organization and reported the problem to the principal. She described the principal as a “rule follower”. The participant also noted that her colleagues thanked her for strategically reporting the issue. One of her colleagues said, “we know that if you had gone to Chris,” who was my boss, "that that guy would still be here." The principal subsequently fired the employee.

“When he was let go, my boss called our team in of about 10 or 11 people. It was not a, "Oh, my gosh. I'm so sorry that this happened. We're a Catholic school." It was, "Don't you dare talk about this. A man's reputation is at stake." And we're like, “He did this to himself, so why should we care about his reputation?” It was more of a, "You better watch what you're putting on your computers." Again, we're like, "You want to look at our computers, go ahead. We have nothing to hide.” [laughs]”

The participant’s manager’s response confirmed the women’s collective instinct that reporting to him would not have resulted in consequences as outlined by the organization’s policies. This particular example highlights both the way sexual harassment claims are often silenced by
managers that do not recognize the gravity of harm and also the discretionary power that
managers have to respond to sexual harassment claims. Here, the participant had a higher power
organizational leader to reach out to, but this is not always the case in other organizational
settings.

In an interview where a woman participant was harassed by other women, the participant
highlighted how her organization reinforced her sexual harassment. The participant told us a
story about a time when she was volunteering at a church-based nonprofit organization to assist
with rebuilding homes destroyed by a hurricane. While she was bent over fixing a porch, other
female volunteers took “a picture of my butt.” Then at a subsequent organizational seminar the
photo was used in the slide presentation.

“I look, and they have this PowerPoint. They say, "What to wear." They show this
picture, and it's a picture of me. No one else could tell in there, but it was a picture of my
butt. [laughs] It was my butt crack and my jeans. I was completely horrified.”

Here the participant was unaware that the photo was taken without her consent and was further
harassed in an organizational setting. The person who put together and presented the slides was
also female and the participant noted feeling confused by this as well. While this example is one
of the few where sexual harassment did not take place explicitly at the boundaries of the
organization, the added dimension of female-on-female sexual harassment highlights the
subjective and unpredictable nature of determining who in an organization will and will not
protect a survivor.
In the previously discussed example where a male participant described being sexually harassed by an elderly male donor, the organization was also a source of conflict along with the manager. When the fundraiser reported the sexual harassment, he was told that he was going to be unassigned from the donor and the private university would pause its active engagement with the donor. Later, he found out that this was not true. The organization sent a letter to the donor apologizing for the misunderstanding and continued to pursue him for donations. At the end of the interview, the participant smiled and informed us that, “they didn’t get a single cent out of him.”

In the cases of conflict fundraisers had within themselves, the participants focused on weighing their interests to stand up for themselves or others over keeping quiet and maintaining peace at their workplaces. For example, a senior legislative aide told us a story about feeling uncomfortable at fundraising events for elected officials. She noted being asked by the organizers to wear provocative clothing and multiple instances of unwanted sexual attention and touching in her job both out in the field as a fundraiser and in interactions with certain legislators. These experiences inspired her to want to speak out and make change in sexual harassment policy. She said,

“I want to move up, and I love my job, but I will continue to run into these people on Cap Square constantly, and I don't want to be known as the "troublemaker." The gaps in our administrative policy and in the way that we report things, it leaves something to be desired.”

Here, advocating for policy or management strategies that reduce or prevent sexual harassment is termed trouble making. Multiple women who were inspired to take action, motivated by the
MeToo movement or other personal experiences, used this term and discussed the repercussions reporting would have on their professional advancement. Some noted waiting to get places of high enough organizational power to make change or tempering their approach by finding allies in an organization. While there was no single way a person resolved this internal conflict, the management alternatives provided in the conclusion of this paper seek to serve as measures professionals can use to make incremental change in sexual harassment prevention.

**Resolutions: Coping Mechanisms**

Each individual person resolved their situation in a way that was meaningful to her or him personally. Some people sought counselling or confided in friends. As discussed above, others became active in preventing sexual harassment in their organizations through enacting policy change or supporting other people who have experienced sexual harassment. Some left the fundraising professional altogether. A majority incorporated different protective strategies or coping tactics into their lives order to ensure their personal safety on the job.

For example, a woman who works in a prison recounted implementing advice she received from another woman. "Inmates sometimes will purposely flash me. I had learned from this nurse, female nurse, she said, 'You know? That happens to me. I just have comeback one-liners.'" While some of these coping mechanisms are perceived as helpful by the participants, they are not necessarily ideal for everyone and they carry controversy. A common example, which many women pointed to, was choosing to dress more conservatively to makes themselves feel safe. But in a counter example, a woman who works at a nonprofit that assists refugees was asked to dress more conservatively by her boss to avoid being perceived as sexual.
“There was a time when my boss, legit, the director, she legit took me. She's like, ‘Let's go shopping. If you can't find some clothes, let's go shopping.' I was just like, ‘OK.’ Maybe I'll get some stuff.”

Here the participant followed up and noted she did not have the option to feel comfortable in her own style and felt forced to conform to her supervisor’s demands. She would not have otherwise changed her dress. Coping mechanisms and what makes certain individuals feel better, depends from person to person. In other interviews with many other fundraisers, they noted dressing more conservatively as a way they tried to keep themselves safe and avoid sexual comments from potential harassers.

**Conclusion**

Sexual harassment is a problem that is not unique to the fundraising profession, but the experiences shared by fundraisers show how working as a fundraiser can make a person more vulnerable to sexual harassment. Taken together, working with donors in isolated settings where the donor’s donation size has a significant impact on a person’s professional advancement opportunities can become fertile ground for sexual harassment. The problem is exacerbated by the different forms of conflict that reporting sexual harassment can create. While sexual harassment is a widespread cultural problem that organizations are interested in solving, there are potential practices available from the analysis of individual stories that could mitigate or prevent future instances of sexual harassment.

The ten management recommendations extrapolated from the interviews include the following: First, consider assigning two or more fundraisers to a donor. A pro of this policy is that no fundraiser will be isolated with a potential harasser. A con of this policy is increased
workload and time commitment for fundraisers. Second, consider matching for gender and/or opposite sexual orientation. A pro of this policy is that it can eliminate some potential sexual desire-based harassment. A con of this policy is that it can reduce donations made based on flirtatious advances and violate fundraisers privacy to ask for sexual orientation information. Third, consider implementing a system for actively communicating the time and place of out of office fundraiser-donor engagements, especially if those meetings are one-on-one. A pro of this policy is improved teamwork and sense of safety for fundraisers. A con of this policy is increased regulation and supervision of fundraisers. Fourth, consider limiting meetings with donors to places or spaces where other people are present, or minimizing donor engagements in their private residences. A pro of this policy is that it can decrease the perpetrators power over the fundraiser. A con of this policy is that other spaces may be less conducive to fundraising with a person. Fifth, consider providing sexual harassment prevention trainings specifically for fundraisers that using donor/volunteer examples. A pro of this policy is that it opens a space for fundraisers to be aware of and discuss these types of sexual harassment experiences. A con of this policy is increased time and resources spent on training.

Sixth, managers should consider modelling empowering bystander responses when possible, so that other members of the organization feel comfortable speaking up about or reporting sexual harassment. A pro of this management policy is that it will build a community of trust among fundraisers. A con of this policy is personality-based differences and disagreements about the approach are inevitable and will need to be addressed. Seventh, consider formulating or revisiting standing sexual harassment policy and implementing a policy that includes donors, board members, and volunteers. A pro of this policy is that there will be set guidelines available to address potential sexual harassment claims on these bases. A con of this
policy is increased conflict with donors, board members, or volunteers who do not consent to the ratification of a sexual harassment prevention policy that includes them. Eighth, consider requiring board members to complete a sexual harassment training. A pro of this policy is that it will prioritize membership to board members who share a sentiment that sexual harassment is unwelcome. A con of this policy is difficulties with garnering board participation and alternative or online modules might need to be made available for the person to complete at their convenience. Ninth, consider removing alcohol from fundraising events, and/or ensure that fundraisers are not consuming alcohol during engagements with donors. A pro of this policy is that it can professionalize fundraisers’ interactions with outside parties as well as limit inappropriate behaviors that are excused through the presence of alcohol. A con of this policy is reduced donor participation in events. The tenth and final recommendation is to consider managers explicitly communicating to their fundraisers (and all staff) that the organization is willing to turn down donations if the donor is acting inappropriately. A pro of this policy is prioritizing the physical and mental wellness of the fundraiser. A con of this policy is that it might not be financially viable for the organization to end a relationship with a donor, especially at small nonprofits that rely on a small set of individual donors.

It is important to note that each of these practices have pros and cons. All of these suggestions would protect fundraisers from harassment, but it may make their jobs harder in many cases. Also, many nonprofit organizations do not have the capacity to put these sorts of policies in place. Ultimately, some of these practices could lead to decreased donations. These are just some of the disadvantages. Each organization would need to weigh the pros and cons that are specific to that organization to determine if these practices are appropriate for them. Considerations like size/budget, number of fundraisers, and types of events held, among others,
would affect the appropriateness of different protective measures. Some advantages and
disadvantages of each practice are provided so that organizations can quickly evaluate whether it
makes sense for them or not. This ties back to concerns in the literature about effective policy
implementation. If an organization cannot reasonably take on a certain policy recommendation, it
may be wise to adjust as needed from the ground up.

As the MeToo movement starts to lose media saliency, and news cycles move on to the next
social problems, it is imperative for managers and organizations to act now and to act wisely.
This study was limited in scope and ability to represent all individual sexual harassment
survivors, as individuals may have personal barriers to participation and we have limited
capacity to solicit interviews. This creates limitations for the transferability of our finds.
Regardless, this study gives voice to many individuals who rightfully feared retaliation and
meets our purpose of anonymously amplifying those voices with the goal of creating a
substantial social change that results in reduced rates of sexual harassment. This paper is a
snapshot of what sexual harassment looks like and is not representative of every fundraiser who
has experience sexual harassment, but it can hopefully serve as a starting point and conversation
starter for nonprofits everywhere that utilize fundraising to advance their missions.
References


Appendix

Appendix 1: Interview Guide

1. Tell me about your background and career path. (Or questions to ease into the interview)
   - Why did you decide to work in the public/nonprofit sector?
2. Have you ever helped develop or revise organizational policies, practices, or trainings intended to protect people from sexual harassment?
   - Tell me what happened with as much detail as you can provide.
     i. When and where did this occur? (year, org name/size, tenure, etc.)
     ii. What was the impetus for this initiative? What was the process like?
     iii. Who else was involved?
     iv. What were the main challenges or decisions you faced?
     v. Do you feel the initiative was successful? How so?
3. Have you ever advised or supported a counterpart after they experienced sexual harassment?
   - Tell me what happened with as much detail as you can provide.
     i. When and where did this occur? (year, org name/size, tenure, etc.)
     ii. What was your response to the disclosure? What advice did you give?
     iii. Did the individual formally report the incident?
4. Have you ever observed an instance of sexual harassment?
   - Tell me what happened with as much detail as you can provide.
     i. When and where did this occur? (year, org name/size, tenure, etc.)
     ii. How did you respond in the moment? Later?
5. Have you ever managed a situation when someone formally reported sexual harassment?
   - Tell me what happened with as much detail as you can provide.
     i. When and where did this occur? (year, org name/size, tenure, etc.)
     ii. How did you handle the situation? What was the process?
     iii. Who else did you involve in the matter?
     iv. What was the outcome of the situation?
     v. How do you feel this may have impacted the organization or employees?
6. Have you ever personally experienced sexual harassment?
   (If yes, take each experience individually and ask the following questions)
Tell me what happened with as much detail as you can provide.
   i. When and where did this occur? (year, org name/size, room, age, etc.)
   ii. Who was the aggressor? How well did you know them?
   iii. Were there any bystanders that observed all or parts of the encounter?
   iv. What circumstances led up to the encounter or encounters?
   v. How long ago did this occur? Was it early or late in your career?
   vi. How did the encounter make you feel at the time of its occurrence?

Did you tell anyone afterward? (friend, partner, colleague)
   i. What did it feel like to confide in someone? How did they respond?

Did you report it to the organization? If so:
   i. Tell me how that process went. How did you report? (formal process? HR?)
   ii. How did the process make you feel?
   iii. What was the outcome of the process? How did it affect you and/or them?

(circle back above to cover additional experiences if warranted)

7. How has this/these experience(s) influenced you and/or your career?

8. Is there anything else you want to add that we didn’t cover?