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HOW DO STUDENTS' LIVED EXPERIENCES AFFECT UNSAFE FEELINGS ON UNIVERSITY CAMPUSES

A THESIS APPROVED FOR THE

COLLEGE OF PROFESSIONAL AND CONTINUING STUDIES

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to explore the lived experience of safety, or lack thereof, for students on a university campus. This study utilizes a hermeneutic phenomenological approach of qualitative research design. Six participants were interviewed to understand what influences their perception of safety and to what extent aspects of their identity, media sources, or university policies contributed to those ideas. By examining where ideas surrounding safety originate from, we can gain information about the individual impact of perceived threats and their response as well as the role a university plays in addressing those needs. Utilizing the interpretive-descriptive approach in analyzing participant responses, the lived experience of safety was categorized by two themes. These themes incorporated van Manen's (2014) existential methods which are universal as everyone experiences the world through their relations to others, bodily response, and perception of space, time, and things. The lived experience of safety for the college students interviewed is one of vulnerability and prevention seeking. Aspects of identity such as gender, ethnicity, and sexual orientation influenced participants' perception that they were more exposed to specific threats that targeted their identity. Participants also reported feeling more vulnerable to threat due to their perceived absence of a physical presence from the university in support of their safety. Participants perceiving they were without university support focused more on individual prevention seeking behaviors to ensure their safety needs were met. Implications for university administration are to continue to communicate with their student population about their needs on campus and whether policies enacted address their concerns. Future research could replicate the study with more participants to continue to understand the lived experience of safety as this study does not seek to provide absolutes to the issue of safety on campus. Research could also explore the lived experience

with more participants who are undergraduates, LGBTQ, minorities, or immigrants on a student visa to gain a deeper breadth of knowledge on the diverse populations that come to college.

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Universities have adopted the "in loco parentis" doctrine that gives them the legal authority to act within the students' best interest as a substitute for their absent parent on campus (Chekwa et al., 2013). The educational institution is to ensure the security of its students and will be held legally and socially responsible for any violence perpetrated. Specific laws are in place that requires universities and colleges to record and report the number of violent incidences that occur each year, make them openly available to students and parents, and to note security measures the university is taking to ensure future safety. Even though students who attend college are legal adults, this doctrine gives the university the ability to take actions that address conduct and wellbeing (Fidanza, 2015). Universities must take steps to reduce potential harm while still encouraging their students' holistic health, which includes assessing physical and psychological threats (Mampane, 2018). While this doctrine places added pressure on universities to be held liable for their students, they must balance that responsibility with the idea that higher education is an institution that fosters learning and freedom of expression (Fidanza, 2015).

To support student safety on campus, universities and colleges have taken various approaches to reduce risk and promote overall wellbeing. Policies enacted are to encourage appropriate behaviors, provide awareness, and establish resources should a student be victimized (O'Donnell et al., 2018). Many universities have departments dedicated to proactive and reactive support services for students that can help them to file a complaint or police report, navigate campus after victimization, coordinate with faculty and staff following the incident, provide safe spaces on campus, and assist in any physical or mental health therapies needed

during recovery (Higher Education Mental Health Alliance [HEMHA], n.d.) . Proactively, universities have initiated mandatory training all students must complete upon their first year, including training on consent, sexual harassment and assault, gender-based violence, physical or verbal aggression, and stalking (Gender + Equality Center [GEC], 2020). Colleges have also offered self-defense courses to help students assess environmental threats and effectively respond (Chekwa et al., 2013).

Within Maslow's hierarchy of needs lie five aspects that can only be met once the satisfaction of the need below is accomplished (Lester, 2013). The first aspect is based on physiological motivators that ensure survival, including food, shelter, water, and air (Freitas & Leonard, 2011). Once an individual's physiological needs are satisfied, the next level of needs is securing one's safety (Lester, 2013). Ensuring safety means that the individual can seek the following levels of needs: finding belonging and affection, self-esteem development, and self-actualization, or the desire to leave a positive impact on the world around oneself (Freitas & Leonard, 2011). The last three needs are less influential on an individual than meeting one's physiological and safety requirements (Lester, 2013). An individual's assessment of victimization in the classroom or on campus can create the perspective that they are not safe ("News and Views," 2002). If a student feels they are not safe, they are unable to focus on their intellectual and educational advancement as they must maintain awareness of their surroundings regularly.

Students in higher education institutions seek to gain valuable experience and knowledge to advance their goals of impacting society (Freitas & Leonard, 2011). The education they gain influences their ability to find their place in the world both personally and professionally. The inability to secure or meet survival and safety needs impedes a student's ability to focus and

adequately perform in the classroom. Academic performance becomes challenging to manage as it is associated with the higher needs in Maslow's hierarchy, which relates to the desire to contribute to the betterment of others and that your contribution will be successful. A student's belief that they can positively affect their motivation and performance in the classroom largely contributes to their academic success (Schaeper, 2019). This belief also contributes to their assimilation into the higher education environment. Past and present social experiences continue to sway this belief system, leading to variations in academic performance throughout their time in college.

Graduate students experience higher levels of mental health distress than undergraduate students due to the added constraints on their academic performance (Fox & Savage, 2009). Studies have demonstrated more often that college campus shooters are graduate students. They experience severe restrictions to achieve or the crisis of failing academically and seek violent attacks as an outlet. There are fewer resources available to graduate students who have specific trouble with balancing their assistantships that are conditional on their academic performance. Additionally, both male and female graduate students report high rates of sexual and gendered harassment by faculty, staff, and peers (Rosenthal, Smidt, & Freyd, 2016). If the victim experiences adverse reactions from university personnel they confide in, they may perceive a level of mistrust in the university. This distrust in the university can negatively impact the student's perception of safety on campus and its personnel.

While violence on college campuses is not unique to the 21st century, there is an increase in the types of violence perpetrated with the rise in populations with access to higher education (Chekwa, Thomas Jr., & Jones, 2013). Relationship or dating abuse, sexual harassment or assault, stalking, physical assault, psychological harassment, and attacks targeting specific

marginalized groups are some of the types of violence that can occur on campus. Students from varying backgrounds are now attending college, which increases the potential for victimization to occur. Increased alcohol consumption, which is commonplace in social settings for college students, creates an increase in alcohol-related injuries, attacks, and deaths. Additionally, internet-based attacks via hacking, cyberstalking, and bullying through social media sites can increase victimization while in college. Incidences of bullying can influence the victim's assessment of their situational surroundings, including the campus, as the perpetrator intends to elicit a fear response to their provocation (Shelley et al., 2017). Victims can experience decreased mental health outlook and isolation, seeking out high-risk behaviors, and difficulty managing socially in adulthood.

Higher media coverage of particularly violent and shocking attacks can create the phenomenon of "moral panic" (Schildkraut, Elsass, & Stafford, 2015, p. 91), where individuals will overestimate the likelihood of an event that is contrary to what is accepted in society. Moral panic occurs because the event is so disturbing to the community that it shakes their perception of immunity from adversity. The community's response is one of fear, hostility, and intolerance to the other, and a desire to take measures to halt its potential to reoccur. Moral panic can create an agreement on political issues as the fear of threat unites opposing sides to create a solution that instills social security. The defining quality behind moral panic is the overestimation that the threat is more commonplace and needs a significantly larger resolution. Moral panic increases fear of victimization surrounding the violence that is likely on college campuses such as school shootings, which can make students more reactive to perceived threats.

An individual's susceptibility to moral panic is primarily influenced by their fear of victimization of criminal activity (Schildkraut et al., 2015). This fear has more to do with

physical victimization rather than the victimization of possessions one owns. Shootings at college campuses are not motivated by obtaining an individual's property but by creating harm to their physical safety. So, the subscription to moral panic is understandable and relates to the individual's concern for potential perpetrators and punitive measures intended to intervene on future attacks. Additionally, school shooters have cited their motivations to carry out their attacks were fueled by retaliation of their bullies who personally victimized them. Due to the long-lasting damage bullying can create, universities are pressured to take measures to address its effects and intervene with at-risk students (Shelley et al., 2017). Unfortunately, moral panic can create more divisiveness with individuals who need additional support after engaging in criminal activity on campus (Schildkraut et al., 2015).

Before criminal threats or attacks occur on college campuses, concerning behaviors or actions are often observed by other fellow students who do not report it to the appropriate authorities (Hollister, Scalora, Hoff, & Marquez, 2014). Students may hear their peers make threats of violence to themselves or others or engage in activities that can increase their peer's likelihood of negative consequences. There are many reasons why a student may observe threatening behaviors or actions and neglect to inform anyone, including their peers. Some who have fewer years at that institution may perceive these actions as part of regular college activities and fear retaliation for reporting. Individuals who experience aggressive or physically harmful behaviors say that they did not believe their peer's actions to be as dangerous, nor did they think the individual would follow through on their threat. Victims may also experience guilt and shame that they were attacked and therefore feel they are responsible for the incident. Perpetrators may indicate victims could be discredited should they report the attack to others.

Individuals who engage in illegal activity may fear their report may shine a light on their delinquent actions.

Students who have experienced partner violence may have trouble discussing victimization with appropriate campus authorities for fear that they will be judged, blamed, or get in trouble (Branch et al., 2013). Admitting what occurred may give the university reason to contact their parents or get their partner in trouble. Unfortunately, disclosure to their peers can create added problems with getting help as their peers have little adult experience with how to handle violent relationships. Neither the student nor their peer has much understanding of healthy relationship dynamics nor how to manage partner violence. Abusive relationships can negatively impact the victim's overall wellbeing as well as potentially traumatize their peer who they confide in. Victim perception of support from their peers following incidences of abuse affect how they manage their trauma and outlook. Additionally, whether the student believes the university created relief or additional problems following their trauma alters their view of the campus. Based on their outlook on how the university engaged with them, the student's overall health and future perceptions change.

Lawbreaking students may also believe that they should not report threatening behavior for fear that they will be blamed or held liable because of their conduct (Hollister et al., 2014). Additionally, students who engage in criminal activities have less connection to campus resources and experience higher mistrust levels in authorities. Fewer connections to campus support can cause the student to believe they must endure these behaviors alone. Students who fail to report escalating behavior corresponded to feeling unsafe on campus and mistrust in campus protection. Continued interaction with aggressive students can cause observing students to perceive the campus as less safe and unable to protect its students. Students who experience

violence from romantic relationships can have reservations about disclosing what occurred with campus resources (Branch, Richards, & Dretsch, 2013). Instead, victims often discuss the dynamics of the relationship or attack with peers who are not equipped to appropriately provide pertinent support (Branch et al., 2013).

To avoid possible harassment by university authorities or perceived retaliation following harassment or an attack, students will choose to remain silent (Asquith, Ferfolia, Brady, & Hanckel, 2019). The decision to stay silent is preferred as it allows the individual to remain invisible and not place a potential target on their back by stepping into the spotlight. Universities continue to reinforce their support for students who report threats or attacks. However, interactions or behaviors that precipitate attacks are overlooked by the university administration for being too nuanced or non-indicative of actual violence. Students can interpret this as the university's inability to support targeted behavior towards individuals as well as a culture of complicity. Complicity can make students feel they are specifically vulnerable to violence and harassment, with no ability to prevent it. Students become intimately aware of their threat to safety and its relationship to power structures that allow for it to occur. The classroom and campus can then appear exclusive to students who are less vulnerable to violence and more able to utilize the power structures that exist in the university to their benefit.

Universities promote their endorsement, acceptance, and interest in fostering diversity on campus. However, fostering diversity in its student population requires that institutions take measures to ensure safety for all, which requires the inclusion of individuals who are vulnerable to victimization. Protecting freedom of expression is a fundamental value to universities. However, that freedom must be provided for all. Limiting the voice of vulnerable students does not allow them to engage with their pursuit of educational advancement. Students come to

higher education institutions to learn, grow, and develop into who they will become. However, their ability to reach self-actualization cannot occur if the university does not ensure everyone's safety. Universities are tasked to take continual steps to assess threats to its campus so that their student population can thrive. Institutions can create a culture of inclusivity that can foster learning, belongingness, and connection.

For this master's thesis, I examine the concept of safety for university students on a college campus. Safety can be defined in many ways given the ethnicity, race, gender, religion, sexual orientation, education, socioeconomic status, and age of an individual. How an individual forms their own ideas of safety and what outside forces influences that can give insight into some of the decision-making skills one develops. Concepts surrounding safety can impact how an individual will function on a daily basis as well as in various settings and events. Examining university students provides a different perspective on the subject surrounding safety as the population of individuals who attend come from many different backgrounds and perspectives. Attending a university provides a wealth of new people, opportunities, and settings for students to navigate. Through a student's time at a university, the people and experiences they encounter can further influence how safety is defined, maintained, and impacted.

Learning the traits attributed to a student's idea of safety can help illuminate the levels of perceived threat an individual experiences. I explore if concepts surrounding safety are influenced by media sources, authority figures, university standards, or incidences that occurred. Examining where ideas surrounding safety originate from can provide information about how that individual is impacted by perceived threats and their response. Understanding the influences and originations of safety perceptions can help to answer the following question: What is the lived experience of safety, or lack thereof, for students on a university campus?

My interest in answering this question is to understand the role a university plays in supporting student safety and if its role adequately addresses these needs. Furthermore, I seek to understand if a student's perceptions of their own threat of safety are accurately interpreting the likelihood of threat.

I will start with a literature review in the next chapter, which includes the influence of identity on interpretations of safety and the factors that affect our perception of safety be they media, or university administration policies on safety. In chapter three, I will give a summary of my methodology and why its structure in approach is best suited to understanding the experiences of safety on campus. I will end with my findings and discussion, with some recommendations of how to go forward.

In Summary

Universities are tasked as substitute parents while students are on campus so they must balance the protection of the students and freedom to flourish. Understanding how safety affects students as experienced can help identify ways that their needs are not sufficiently met. This study will contribute to existing research on student perceptions of campus safety by examining the lived experience behind it. Lived experiences can provide rich, detailed information about safety that can illuminate what is taken for granted when it is not threatened. The purpose of this research is to understand what influences perception, definition, and threat to safety. Understanding the context surrounding safety can help us to learn the nature of the phenomenon and an individual's place in it.

CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

Research about college students' perception of safety on campus has explored how the perception of safety is influenced by gender, sexual orientation, and ethnicity. Examining specific populations that previous researchers have interviewed provides an understanding of future research that those who are most impacted by safety are most vulnerable and threatened. The power structures in place marginalize vulnerable populations while protecting dominant groups. What is missing in the current literature is how students' identities influence what they perceive as safety or lack thereof. Identity encompasses all aspects of an individual that make them who they uniquely are (Bergh & Erling, 2005). It includes background, experiences, ethnicity, disability, sexual orientation, class, gender, and individual, cultural, and societal values. All these aspects create the lens that we view the world from, and they influence our assessment of threats.

Because identity is a difficult concept to encapsulate, we must first understand how identity is formed. We do not merely emerge as our complete identity overnight (Bergh & Erling, 2005). Instead, identity is developed over time through pivotal experiences and relationships with others. Components of our identity are not compartmentalized but instead intersect and interact with one another, given the context of different life events. Identity formation is influenced by our values, attitudes, and interests and whether those value systems meet acceptance or resistance. Recognition can help an individual to explore those value systems further and find fellowship with like-minded peers. Resistance can cause an individual to change, hide, or vocalize those value systems. Specific moments in identity formation can become significant memories that begin to define the individual. Previous instances of hostility

and violence related to one's identity can also become a future reference for situational awareness of threats likely to occur.

Specifically focusing on the interaction of student identities help us to learn about the lived experience of safety. Lived experiences encompass all facets that contribute to what the phenomenon is in that present moment (van Manen, 2014). Safety is a living, breathing experience that occurs in everyday life and is continually influenced by the lens of individual identity. Threat to safety on campus is also impacted by external influences such as university policies and response to incidents, media sources, and their ability to inflate or accurately depict attacks. Even if the likelihood of a violent attack is low, depending on the nature of the attack and if an individual's identity drove the attack can create a culture of fear in that environment (Asquith et al., 2019). That culture of fear can heighten the unsafe view of campus and the perception of the university's ability to protect its student population. This study can help universities to understand how their actions are being perceived and what they can do to continue to endorse and promote a safe campus for all. I will start with the factors that affect identity formation and its effects on perception of safety. I will then move into discussing the effects of media and campus policies on perception of safety on campus.

Influence of Identity on Interpretations of Safety

Identity Formation.

Identity formation is the mental construction of who an individual is through the development of personality and specific characteristics or qualities they become known for (Bergh & Erling, 2005). Narrative identity is the basis for identity formation and is influenced by both experiences and the meaning derived from them (Singer, Blagov, Berry, & Oost, 2012). It is driven by long-term goals and scripts for the self that feed into our character's

autobiographical version. Significant life memories coordinate with our scripts for the self that creates the phases of our lifetime. New events alter the trajectory of the narrative script in our autobiographical story. Short-term goals serve the self that is currently in development, and that self's experiences could eventually become incorporated into the overall holistic self. The integral self can assess its autobiographical memories to help further define areas of one's choices or long-term goals. Adolescents can categorize memories into those that further reinforce continuity with the long-term self and those that are outliers. Individual memories can mark specific changes in behavior, thought process, or action. "Self-defining memories" (Singer et al., 2012, p. 572) mark the individual's penultimate battles with themselves, situations, or others as well as pervasive insecurities.

Identity formation is comprised of the evaluation and reconsideration of commitments starting in early adolescence (Klimstra et al., 2010). Early to mid-adolescents continually re-evaluate and reconsider their duties to aspects of the world around them from their relationships to education. Because adolescents in middle and high school do not have as much ability to make individual choices about education, little identity formation occurs until college. In late adolescence, one possesses more autonomy and agency over what their educational commitments look like. So, identity formation is first engaged through a reconsideration of relationships and later contributed to by education. Relationships are an open domain for review of commitments as adolescents are evaluating their current sense of self against their childhood personality. Adolescents who struggle to balance their obligations to the self against society and their parents' desires may fluctuate between agreement and disagreement in different circumstances on any given day. The variety of options in relationship dynamics early to mid-

adolescence has influences ever-changing friendships, romantic engagements, and gender role development.

Another factor that affects identify formation is social media. The high prevalence of social media use in everyday life from business or personal networking opportunities has influenced how adolescents form their sense of self (Cole-Turner, 2019). With a continual feedback loop indicating what aspects of an individual are desirable or appealing, people develop an elective identity online and in-person. Social media creates the urge to view oneself as a brand that others will want to engage with so, aspects of identity are heightened or dismissed based on their ability to fit in with the person's brand. Branding the self has originated out of the notion that we are the owners of our own company, the company of you, incorporated. To make that brand more successful, you must sell yourself to others for their approval and potential external rewards. In the notion of being your brand, this means that adolescents are consistently re-evaluating and reconsidering the self. The self must always be updated to keep up with external influences.

An individual's branded identity is self-reflective; however, it is based more on how well you know what your viewers like or dislike and how to adjust flexibly (Cole-Turner, 2019). Online viewers hold nothing back in deeming what is permissible, likable, and valuable to them about a profile instantaneously via likes, comments, and comparisons to similar accounts. Your bullies and peers can reach you before you have left your bed to start the day and can continue to do so even after you have gone to sleep that night. What one likes and believe about oneself does not carry as much weighted value as what others like and believe. Social media has also decreased the self's contextual development, based on layers of relationships with friends, employers, co-workers, teachers, and parents. Individuals no longer can maintain levels of their

identity and corresponding interactions because of the lack of boundaries between all their layered relationships. This loss of boundaries can place strain on adolescents to be their full selves with all people.

Through online platforms, users can integrate or separate aspects of their identity based on how they wish to represent themselves and their culture. However, whether an individual separates parts of themselves online, their experiences in the real world do not allow for this compartmentalization in identities. The inseparable, intertwined nature of identities and their influence on our multi-layered interaction with the world is known as intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1991). Social media has become a tool in intersectional identity development because it influences how our identity is presented to everyone, regardless of contextual relationship. The interaction between facets of our identity, such as race, gender, sexual orientation, class, or disability, help to form our internal dialogue, perception, and engagement with the world (Crenshaw, 1991; Miller, 2018). Some view this interaction as beneficial and supportive as it reinforces layers of identity (Miller, 2018). However, others may perceive the interaction between their identities to be in opposition to each other, which creates disruption and conflict within the self.

Interaction Between Identity and Safety

Increases in diverse populations on university campuses can lead to a rise in racially charged violence against that minority (Stotzer & Hossellman, 2012). Some institutions have reservations about prioritizing the recruitment of diverse students as they believe the research is inconclusive regarding the benefits to the university. However, more universities see the benefits to the university help to advance the mission of higher education in that it fosters understanding, interest in individual civic duty to society and expands the scope of cultural and

general knowledge. At universities where there are smaller populations of specific minority groups, there are higher incidences of racial attacks as there is little fear by the majority of retaliation. However, campuses where the population of minority groups is higher, racial attacks with physical threats of violence are smaller while non-violent attacks increase. Non-violent attacks can still impact feeling safe as they can take place throughout their tenure at the institution.

Different populations of students experience safety differently that others on a university campus. Cara S. Muffini (2018) examined the experiences of safety for Asian American and international Asian students on a university campus. Asian Americans and international Asian students are commonly stereotyped as exceptional students who are unlikely to cause incidence (Muffini, 2018). Due to positive associations with appropriate behavior, both groups are less likely to receive support or focus on their experiences in college. However, this means that rates of violent or negative incidences against these groups may not be addressed. It can also mean that both groups can be victimized with little change made within the university setting to help protect them. The results of the study found that Asian Americans and international Asian students were more likely to receive verbal threats which lead to feelings that they were not safe on campus. Both groups reported feeling the least safe on campus at night with Asian Americans reporting more negative experiences with verbal harassment and fear of threat at night. The student responses demonstrate that even positive stereotyping can affect the perception of safety and the ability to receive support.

Kelly and Torres (2006) analyzed the perceptions and experiences of safety for undergraduate and graduate female students. Violent incidences and university response to those attacks influence women's perceptions of a safe campus (Kelly & Torres, 2006). It is also

important to understand the subtle harassment and dangers female students face which contributes to their overall perception of a safe campus. Perceived dangers can alter the behavior and actions taken by female students on campus as well as their response to harassment. Female students' fears of a threat to their safety focused on unwanted sexual contact through verbal, physical or visual means. One aspect that influenced the fear of safety for female students is the culture surrounding women that enforces worrying about harm coming to them. This culture contributes to women perceiving their environment and those in it to be potential threats to their physical and psychological health.

Students who identify as homosexual experience risks related to assault, negative impacts to mental health, and adverse consequences to a student's academic performance at a potentially higher rate due to their sexual orientation (Reed, Prado, Matsumoto, & Amaro, 2010). Lesbian, gay, and bisexual students may potentially be more likely to use alcohol or drugs to help cope with the adversity they experience on or from the campus. Reed, Prato, Matsumoto, and Amaro (2010) found that lesbian, gay, and bisexual students do experience greater risks to safety when paired with alcohol and drug use than heterosexual students. Lesbian, gay, and bisexual students demonstrated an increase in perceptions of safety and the fear of threat on campus. The increase in perceived threat to safety led to higher stress rates as well as thoughts that they were unwelcome and unsupported on campus. An increase in experiences where safety is threatened in these populations increases the risk of self-harm, poor mental health, and dangers associated with repeat alcohol and drug use.

Influence of Media Sources on Perceptions of Safety

Increases in social interest in crime can be partially blamed by higher media coverage of violent crimes throughout movies, television programs, and news syndicates (Intravia, Wolff,

Paez, & Gibbs, 2017). Higher viewership in destructive or severe programming can negatively enhance underlying concerns and anxieties of victimization by criminal activity. That fear can, in turn, create distrust in other people within their communities or the world. Social media is a platform where audiences can easily absorb content, including news stories, regularly, which means it can serve as an influence in potentially increasing fear of crime. Individuals who are between 18-49 primarily use social media to obtain news content rather than older audiences who receive news stories through television or radio. Social media provides a rare opportunity for individuals to interact with stories they watch or read in real-time with others who may have similar viewpoints.

Interaction with like-minded audiences can reinforce continuing stories of fear against perceived threats, which can increase hypervigilance (Intravia et al., 2017). Interpersonal relationships developed in these social media groups can then hold more influence and credibility over the news stories they chose to circulate. Professional, credible news sources are perceived as less trustworthy as the stories they circulate do not always fall in line with the stories social media groups pursue. The use of social media platforms can negatively impact psychological health, which can increase fear of potential threats as they continue to interact with one another. Adults age 18-29 are at higher risk of increases in fear due to social media use as they spend more time using these platforms, which are highly effective in impacting their perception of the world. One study found that college students who do feel safe and have no experience with criminal threats are more susceptible to social media's influence on their fear of violence.

The consumption of news content impacts individuals differently due to their perceived pertinence to their personal life (Weber, 2014; Callanan, 2012). News stories that are received as

relevant to the individual's experiences or engagement with others will demand prioritization of attention to similar reports (Weber, 2014). Prioritization of potential threats is hardwired into our survival as it can help one to avoid instances that could increase personal harm. An individual's identity can impact the pertinence of news stories in society as this could increase or decrease the likelihood an attack could affect their livelihood. News content that an individual has more familiarity with can influence the level of interest they will have to follow up on updates or similar events. Social identity tied to that report will then lead the individual to circulate and discuss that threat with their community. Whether news reports of threats or threatening behavior is accurate does not negate the real emotional responses it sparks (Gerbaudo, 2018). Social identities tied to politics can elicit the urge to project a more prominent, visceral reaction to perceived threats to their community.

When media sources report on violent incidences, viewers may find these events particularly upsetting because the circumstances of that attack create the feeling that it could quickly happen to them (Callanan, 2012). This uncomfortable feeling can amplify our understanding of how likely that incident occurs in everyday life. Cultivation theory is the idea that what viewers consume through media sources is believed as the accurate representation of that threat in the real world (Weitzer & Kubrin, 2004; Jamieson, & Romer, 2014; Callanan, 2012). Higher views of media coverage on violence perpetrated in the local community or country can alter the individual's belief about the likelihood of inevitability that another event will occur and cause personal harm (Weitzer & Kubrin, 2004). Fear of victimization can be particularly influential with populations that experience lower rates of attack, such as the elderly and women. Local media coverage can increase fear of threat in audiences more than national media outlets (Weitzer & Kubrin, 2004; Jamieson, & Romer, 2014). Cultivation theory does not

have a universal response and does vary between ethnicities (Weitzer & Kubrin, 2004; Callanan, 2012). White audiences report they are more likely to have their perception of the world around them influenced by their own beliefs about victimization likelihood (Weitzer & Kubrin, 2004). Black audiences are affected by both media consumption and the risk of victimization.

Increased media coverage surrounding violent attacks on and off school campuses can increase viewers perceptions about the likelihood they will experience a similar incident (Chapin, 2008). Understanding how media coverage influences adolescents can provide valuable information about the accuracy of their own perceptions of threat. Adolescents make determinations about the applicability of the information to themselves through third-person perception and optimism bias. Third-person perception is to view media influences affecting others while the individual remains less affected. Optimism bias ties to third-person perception in that the individual believes they are unlikely to experience risks to health than other individuals. This provides the background behind why adolescents believe that violent incidences can happen at other schools or to other individuals but not their own school or themselves. Third-person perception and optimism bias can contribute to students engaging in higher-risk behaviors without understanding the potential danger they are in.

Influence of University Administration Policies on Safety

Following the shootings at Virginia Tech and Northern Illinois University, university and state officials began to formulate plans to mitigate the likelihood that a similar incident could occur on other campuses (Kyle, Schafer, Burruss, & Giblin, 2017). Many of these plans looked at how to increase support for students that are perceived to be potentially at-risk for violent behaviors. This created a shift in higher education as the institution was not only responsible for administering and fostering the education and free-thinking common to universities, but to

ensure students, faculty, and staff are kept safe and informed of safety precautions. Policies and procedures enacted on college campuses are designed to prevent as many violent incidences on campus as well as respond effectively should an attack occur. Some of these policies can create tension for students, faculty, and staff as they can negatively impact the environment of free speech and thought that universities seek to encourage. However, monitoring changes in language used, behavior, academic performance, or interpersonal interactions can alert instructors to at-risk students (Sutton, 2017).

Examining what influences students' perceptions about safety policies implemented on campus can provide insight on the effectiveness and ability to support the population they intend to protect (Schafer, Lee, Burruss, & Giblin, 2018). Students may be influenced by their experience with victimization, the ability to potentially defend one's self against a threat, fears of criminal activity, and perceived risk of experiencing that activity as a victim. Influences on students can impact their perspectives on access to the university by limiting acceptance for individuals with a felony or misconduct record and the removal of concerning students from campus. The responsibility of reporting concerning behavior from students, faculty, or counseling personnel can be influenced by student perceptions. Lastly, student experiences can influence comfortability with the permit to carry firearms on campus from faculty and students.

To support students' concerns surrounding classroom and campus safety, some universities have adopted the use of trigger warnings and safe spaces (Byron, 2017). There is a backlash from university and non-university affiliated groups stating that these requests are stifling the ability for free thought to occur in the classroom. Their notion against supporting trigger warnings and safe spaces is that it creates the standard that a student can avoid what they do not like, agree, or are comfortable with in the classroom. However, these groups miss the

need behind the movement for trigger warnings and safe spaces as they are designed to help students who have experienced trauma to safely engage with their educational environment. An instructor or university administrator cannot account for all aspects of triggering content. However, acknowledging that an individual's path in processing their trauma can impact their ability to take part in their education is a vital step in making course content accessible. This acknowledgment can also aid in removing the stigma surrounding trauma that they are a nuisance and must endure this burden alone.

In response to student demands for change to increase safety on university campuses, the installation and upkeep of blue-light emergency phones are commonplace on colleges worldwide (Ellcessor, 2019). The idea behind them is to demonstrate a physical support system, for primarily women, who perceive a threat and need assistance or who have been victimized and need emergent aid. However, their usefulness in physically reducing victimization and supporting trauma shows little footing. Due to their continued maintenance, increased installation, and system upgrade, it is difficult to determine when they were first installed on campuses and student reception to their use. What blue-light emergency phones have done is to demonstrate universities are taking steps to increase the feeling of safety rather than actual safety. Increasing the feeling of safety helps recruit prospective students and their parents but does little to support the students who are attending that college and in need of concrete resources.

The safety of students on university campuses, particularly for women, can impede their ability to advance in their education and career (Ledwitz-Rigby, 1993). While the layout of the campus induces little anxiety for fear of victimization, that anxiety increases significantly when female students are on campus at night. As students advance in their education, responsibilities

incurred may call for extended hours on campus when their likelihood of victimization is increased. Extended hours, lack of daylight, and minimal security or staff nearby set the stage for female students to be placed at significant risk. Multiple committees on college campuses have been tasked to regularly assess progress in ensuring student safety measures are being addressed, including tasking staff with initiatives for women's safety and welfare on campus. While some students report feeling the safety measures taken on campus have improved their feeling safe, there are several tactics they are not aware of, which can influence their knowledge of resources (Baker & Boland, 2011). This lack of knowledge can impact a student's desire to report victimization due to fears it will not be supported or assisted by the university.

In Summary

The current literature helps us to examine how safety is perceived and understood based on an individual's identity, such as their gender, ethnicity, and sexual orientation. Each of these aspects of identity can increase an individual's likelihood of attack by those who seek to prey upon marginalized groups. We also understand how media sources can help influence the perception of the likelihood that an attack will happen to us personally as well as the campus we are on. Media reporting can create more fear about the probability of an event or increase the idea that they are personally impervious to harm. Following violent campus-wide attacks on campuses in the nation, other universities have taken safeguards to support the student population. However, the ability for those safeguards to be viewed as useful in their goal is not promising. This study brings all three elements together to understand the phenomenon of safety on campus by exploring how identity, media reporting, and university policies interact. Qualitative research is utilized as a means of exploring as it primarily focuses on the subjective nature of the problem.

CHAPTER THREE

Methodology

The intention behind qualitative research is to seek understanding behind the meaning associated with a problem people face based on common experience, social groups, or background (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Contrary to quantitative research, qualitative research does not hope to gain an absolute, objective answer to the question. Understanding comes from learning the subjective nature behind an individual's perceptions and how that can contribute to the individual's connotations assigned to the event. Characteristics of qualitative research are to ascertain raw data in the setting the problem occurs, design and conduct the study themselves without utilizing devices that originate from another researcher, and analyze data in a manner that provides a distinct picture that encompasses all facets of meaning that includes context, the perspective or biases of the researcher, and any thematic elements that emerge through inductive and reductive reasoning. The problems qualitative research embarks upon are not readily understood through numbers or surveys but through giving voice to those that need to be known. In this chapter we will explore the approach to qualitative research that will be utilized in conducting the study, how that approach will serve as a guide to analyze data and answer the research question, the structure of the study including sampling selection, the participants, interview setting and protocols, and the manner data was collected and examined.

Phenomenological Qualitative Research

Phenomenological qualitative research desires to examine the complete living, breathing experience behind a common phenomenon found in the real world (van Manen, 1997/2016). Phenomenon's researchers may explore events that so commonly occur that the individual will not consciously think about it when it is occurring as it can become automatic to experience.

These automatic experiences of life are explored to find the meaning behind these behaviors exhibited and what commonalities are experienced by others in the event. The principle idea behind phenomenology is to question what the experience of that phenomenon is like before the individual reflects on that moment and assigns classifications or analysis to it. Analyzing meaning behind a lived phenomenon does not provide means to solve the problems that arise in the event but rather to learn how to be more thoughtful and conscious of the experience by others (van Manen, 1997/2016; van Manen, 2014). The result of exploring the context behind a lived experience provides the audience the ability to recall and contemplate on their experiences with the phenomenon in a meaningful way (van Manen, 1997/2016).

Reconnecting with the innate qualities of the phenomenon as it is experienced places one in contact with the world as it is lived in the present (van Manen, 1997/2016). Phenomenological writing calls for the researcher to reflect and recapture the experience through text which encompasses both phenomenology and hermeneutics. Phenomenology dives into gaining meaning of the experience to provide a descriptive analysis of the event and hermeneutics interprets that event to discover meaning integrated into it. The researcher explores the heart of the event to understand the nature and distinctness of it so that she can make sense of it through textual activity. Textual activity is at the core of human science research, which continues to ask the question, why do we, as people, experience life and the world the way we do. Phenomenology falls into this area of research as it seeks to find the very essence of an experience as it enters our conscious mind.

Hermeneutic phenomenology is a subset methodology within phenomenology that seeks to understand the influences and forces that contribute to the described living moment (van Manen, 2014). The purpose of this research is to understand the external and internal

contributors that impact perceptions to safety or threat to it. Safety in the real world is not experienced in a vacuum where only one factor contributed to the experience of that phenomenon. Many influences interact and intersect to create the perception, reaction, and processing of safety. Because the researcher intends to explore how these forces impact the living experience of safety, hermeneutic phenomenology is most applicable to utilize in guiding this study. This methodology ensures the researcher not only captures the descriptive elements of the lived moment but utilizes an interpretive lens to present the data. The findings of this research seek to not only present what is challenging to demonstrate, safety as experienced in the present, but interpret that experience through their historical, societal, and developmental contexts.

Hermeneutic phenomenology.

Hermeneutic phenomenology was initially introduced to approach the lived experience of a phenomenon through an interpretive lens (van Manen, 2014). The means of interpretation focuses more on the account of the phenomenon through texts rather than a primary focus on the lived experience. An analytical approach could be utilized in reviewing literature on the phenomenon studied to derive the essential meaning of the event. Literature examined by researchers should be approached with complete openness to its perspective of the phenomenon and maintaining its historical value to the study of the event. Additionally, the period and its relevant perspective must be accounted for, if it is used, as it will provide a window into how the phenomenon has changed over time. The historical value of these texts can become a means to apply their knowledge to one's life and our own temporal significance to the phenomenon. A researcher's study of the phenomenon will continue to change as their place in history will alter their interpretation of past texts.

Van Manen's approach to hermeneutic phenomenology does not focus all efforts on historical texts. Rather, his focus is on the interpretation of the fundamental essence of the lived experience and what forms or systems support its existence (van Manen, 2014). Many forms of phenomenology have an interpretive and analytical element for exploring the nature of the lived experience. However, hermeneutics does not always have a phenomenological perspective as analytical perspectives can significantly deviate away from the essence of an event. Van Manen's hermeneutic phenomenology requires the researcher to forgo any assumptions about the phenomenon that could cloud one's ability to see it as it is experienced. Any reflections on the event must occur without one's judgment, expectation, or explanation interfering. Approaching the phenomenon this way helps the researcher to reflect on the material so that any analysis made is expressive, relatable, and comprehensive.

Van Manen's hermeneutic phenomenology explores phenomenology more deeply and closely as it approaches the research from a fully realized description of the event (van Manen, 1997/2016). The researcher takes a more active role in understanding the inner workings of the phenomenon rather than focusing on the theoretical and surface levels of the methodology. Hermeneutic phenomenology is the descriptive and interpretive study of being in the world as a human and how that humanness influences the meaning of that experience. Researchers embarking into this approach search for the context surrounding what it is like to be a human in the world experiencing that event. The search will also include the historical, political, psychological, and sociological contexts that contribute to that experience as an individual in the present period we exist. Understanding these experiences on such a rich level allows the researcher to become more aware of who we are as an individual as well as the nature of experience.

Hermeneutic phenomenology seeks to interpret and illustrate the most common experiences as they are in the real world (van Manen, 1997/2016). It has no interest in understanding the phenomenon outside of its natural setting as that does not help us to understand the event as it is. The researcher must be conscious and receptive to the nuances surrounding the commonness of the phenomenon to prevent oneself from missing the innate connections to the living, breathing encounter. This methodology aims to voice what is difficult to grasp or explain about how the phenomenon is known and experienced. Expressing this type of content is challenging as language can have its limits of encompassing all that is expressed or felt in a moment. Often, the phenomenon is described through the use of anecdotes or narratives as they help the reader to relate to that which is arduous to define in concrete constructs.

The use of anecdotes in hermeneutic writing is a potent and persuasive means to bring attention to that which is naturally assumed (van Manen, 1997/2016; van Manen, 2014)). Anecdotes can also lead the researcher and reader to fixate on the event studied and reflect on how it relates to our own experiences. The use of anecdotes can help the reader to engage with the experience as if it were brand new which can compel them to reevaluate their perspective on the subject. Anecdotes, when used appropriately in hermeneutic phenomenology, can provide a bridge between the non-conscious understanding of the experience as it is and the reflection that occurs thereafter (van Manen, 1997/2016). The process of reflective writing reorients the perspective of the phenomenon back to itself and its place in the world. Reflective writing is an exercise in the theory of knowledge as it illustrates how we know what we know. A descriptive-interpretive recollection "is validated by lived experience and it validates lived experience" (van Manen, 1997/2016, p.27). This type of recollection seeks to illustrate and characterize an

account of the phenomenon while fully maintaining the contextual factors that impact the individuals' discussion of the subject.

Identifying Phenomenological Themes

Most of qualitative research utilizes thematic analysis to understand the research in question, however, phenomenology does not use it in the same manner or to reach the same means (van Manen, 1997/2016). Outside of phenomenology, themes are a repetitive aspect of data surrounding the study subject that can be quantified and automated. They help to solidify the researcher's idea about the concept due to frequency of their appearance. However, phenomenological themes are not based on quantity a phrase or instance occurs in the data. Phenomenological themes are the perspective of the individual and are not a complete picture of all the possibilities that exist in the lived experience. The researcher must search for both what is fundamental to the experience as a whole and the components that contribute to the whole. Themes are utilized to identify specific conditions that comprise the phenomenon and assist in answering the research question. In this instance, phenomenological themes help to answer what is the lived experience of safety, or lack thereof, for students on campus.

Finding themes within phenomenology is a task that requires creativity and complex thought as the elements of a phenomenon are intricate and subtle (van Manen, 2014). Programs developed to code themes from quantitative and qualitative data are ill-equipped for the task of discovering thematic elements in phenomenology as these details are lost. What one would find if these programs were used would be a surface level analysis of the phenomenon and a departure from the elements hidden within. Phenomenological themes are glimpses into meaning-making structures that provide all encompassing features of the moment studied. The raw data is examined as a whole, selectively, and detailed to fill in the gaps of what is known and

unknown about the event. The selective and detailed approaches identify valuable content that reveals the phenomenon with a clarity that could get lost when only viewing the data. Both help to develop our understanding and awareness of what makes the phenomenon what it is.

Van Manen (2014) offers a frame of reference to help analyze collected data so that any interpretations made center the living moments of the phenomenon. We are not seeking out the opinions on that experience with safety as these distance us from the moment as it occurred in the present. We seek to step into that moment as it takes place before we reflect on it and determine our rationalizations. Details were obtained from participants that gave a picture into the living, breathing essence of safety on campus. To maintain orientation to pre-reflective experiences, van Manen employs the use of existential methods to guide inquiry into the phenomenon so that the experience is accessible to all. The existential methods are broken into five categories of experience: relationality (lived self-other), corporeality (lived body), spatiality (lived space), temporality (lived time), and materiality (lived things). These methods are noted as existential as everyone experiences the world through their relations to others, their body, space, time, and things. Van Manen later added technology (lived cyborg relations) to the existential methods as our continually-evolving use of technology impacts how we experience and engage with others and the world.

Relationality (lived self-other).

Relationality acts as a guide in understanding how oneself and others interact and engage with one another in association to the phenomenon experienced (van Manen, 2014). In the present moment of the phenomenon, how are our connections to others impacted? Relationality seeks to understand how people are connected to each other in that phenomenon. How is contact involved or related to that phenomenon? The experience of safety for college students on

campus can be examined for the existing relational qualities as we often experience feeling unsafe or threatened in response to another person. Or we may feel safer with another individual due to their relationship to us such as a parent, friend, or mentor. Our relationships with others impact our perception of safety and how it is felt. The relationality of ourselves in connection to another person who is in physical proximity to us can initiate a response of threat or comfort. An individual could evaluate their safety on campus in relation to contact with university administration, campus security, or their instructors.

Corporeality (lived body).

Corporeality acts as a guide in understanding how the body is in association to the phenomenon experienced (van Manen, 2014). In the present moment of the phenomenon, is the body experienced as an object or subject? Corporeality seeks to understand how we are aware of our bodies in that phenomenon. Do we become aware of our physical bodies at a certain moment with respect to the experience of safety? The experience of safety for college students on campus can be examined for the bodily response to feeling threat or security. The bodily experience of safety can incorporate one's conscious and unconscious thoughts, feelings, and physical expressions. The perception of the body may be experienced differently as the individual who is in fear as opposed to inciting fear or spectating. Experiencing threat to safety can create a sensation in the body where our senses are significantly heightened, and we are excitable. When one feels unsafe, they become more aware of their body as the object of the attack which influences their perception of safety and what actions may be taken.

Spatiality (lived space).

Spatiality acts as a guide in understanding how space is associated to the phenomenon experienced (van Manen, 2014). In the present moment of the phenomenon, how is our

perception of physical space impacted? Spatiality seeks to understand how people experience interior versus exterior properties of space in that phenomenon. How does space impact an individual and how does an individual impact space? The experience of safety for college students on campus can be examined for the spatial qualities in feeling threat or security. When an individual feels unsafe, the landscape of a campus or the layout of a classroom can manifest differently. Or spatiality can be experienced as non-physical space such as the distance created between our internal world and the external world. When safety is threatened, the landscape of our mind is not shared with others and can differ from the physical landscape that exists before us. Differences between the interior space of a building could be experienced differently from the exterior space of that same facility. For instance, students may perceive safety differently when they are outside of their dorm building versus inside.

Temporality (lived time).

Temporality acts as a guide in understanding how time is associated to the phenomenon experienced (van Manen, 2014). In the present moment of the phenomenon, how is physical time impacted? Temporality seeks to understand how time changes in the course of that phenomenon. The experience of safety for college students on campus can be examined for the changes in how objective and subjective time is felt. Objectively, the passing of time does not change whether we will it to or not. One hour will still constitute 60 minutes. However, subjective, or lived, time can make one hour feel as if it flew by as quickly as a minute or drag on as slow several hours. A student experiencing threat to safety could perceive the ten minute walk to their car to take significantly longer. Objectively, the ten minutes it took to walk to their parking space is the same whether they are scared or not, but that walk could feel like the longest ten minutes of your life. Time of day can also change the experience of a phenomenon.

Walking a routine path during the day can feel vastly different from walking the same path at night.

Materiality (lived things).

Materiality acts as a guide in understanding how things are associated to the phenomenon experienced (van Manen, 2014). In the present moment of the phenomenon, how are things impacted by the lived experience? Materiality seeks to understand how things are connected to ourselves in that phenomenon. The experience of safety for college students on campus can be examined for the material things we use as an extension of ourselves when threatened. How is a student's phone or defensive tool incorporated into the lived essence of that instance of feeling unsafe? Our phone could change from being a way to distract ourselves when bored to a rescue aid to call for help. Car keys could change from their primary use to secure and start a vehicle to becoming a weapon to ward off an attacker. Materiality can also encompass objects that are larger and difficult to capture such as the atmosphere of an environment. For instance, campuses can experience a change to the general atmosphere after a political event in the country or a racially motivated incident.

Technology (lived cyborg relations).

Technology and our relation to it acts as a guide in understanding how technology is, in any of its forms, associated to the phenomenon experienced (van Manen, 2014). In the present moment of the phenomenon, how is technology impacted by the lived experience? Lived cyborg relations seeks to understand how technology is connected to ourselves in that phenomenon. As technology continues to advance, it impacts how we interact and engage with it in our daily lives. The experience of safety for college students on campus can be examined for the influence of technology we use as an extension of ourselves when threatened. Technology can also be

examined for the ways it is taken for granted when we feel safe as people can forget its ability to be used as a toolkit to support us. In some instances, keeping up with technology can be burdensome as there is always a new software update, application to download, or notification to respond. There is a technique to using technology in our personal, educational, and professional lives as it can be felt as an extension of oneself. Students may perceive they are always lost or vulnerable if they do not have their smartphone or some type of technology on them. Technology can also shape our viewpoint of reality and give us power over what can be used for our benefit.

Reflexivity

Once a researcher determines a methodological approach to the study in question, they must be aware of their relationship to the study subject. Reflexivity is the critical acknowledgement of the researcher's experience, understanding, and perceptions about the phenomenon in question (van Manen, 1997/2016; Schwandt, 2015). While the researcher cannot completely ignore or block out their own background with the phenomenon, it is important that they address their primary interest and views towards the research question (van Manen, 1997/2016). Continual reflection on one's interest and perspective can be kept in check during research by maintaining field notes throughout the process (van Manen, 1997/2016; Schwandt, 2015). Doing so can reduce the likelihood that her perspective will hinder the research and analysis' ability to speak for itself. The relationship the researcher has to the subject should not be hidden and remain transparent as it further validates the findings of the research. Reflexivity is also a way for the reader to understand how the researcher is connected to the framework, background, and relevance of the phenomenon.

The researcher of this study has attended the university both as an undergraduate and current graduate student. She shares many of the same experiences as the participants due to her continued contact with the campus observed. Through the process of the study, the researcher considers her own experiences with the phenomenon and questions how they are connected to the issues observed in the participants (van Manen, 2014). The data obtained provide a window to understand the phenomenon through her own experiences (van Manen, 1997/2016; van Manen, 2014). Hermeneutic phenomenology requires obtaining a significant amount of textual and structural data from participants which can be exhaustive (van Manen, 2014). The time required to obtain such detailed content will lend itself to having smaller numbers of participants in the study.

Before recruitment of participants could take place, the University of Oklahoma's Institutional Review Board (IRB) approved the study. All study documents and procedures were reviewed and approved by the IRB. Doing so ensured the study and its involvement of participants is ethical and protects the welfare of the participants. The researcher and faculty sponsors submitted proof that the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI) was completed and all parties passed. The researcher's application to the IRB included information provided to participants about the benefits and risks to participation as well as resources for additional support should the participant need it.

Sample Selection

Participants were recruited through criterion sampling. Criterion sampling denotes that any participants who are interviewed have had either direct or indirect experience and contact with the phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Interviewing participants who have not had perceived issues with safety on a college campus are not recruited as they cannot provide the

textual account of conceptualizing safety. Individuals who perceive issues to the threat of their safety can give detailed descriptions of what safety looks like, the experience as it is in the present moment, and how it is defined. Recruitment for the study was done through the university's mass email communication available to faculty and administration, flyers posted in various buildings on campus where students of varying majors, stations, and backgrounds attend, and word of mouth. Information about the study stated the subject of study was about the lived experience of safety on campus and participation of individuals was requested if they had any perceived issues with lack thereof.

While attending the university as a graduate student, I also work for the university in the Accessibility and Disability Resource Center (ADRC). At the ADRC, I work directly and indirectly with all students with disabilities who are either currently or previously registered to receive accessible services and support. For ethical reasons, students who are or have been registered with the ADRC at any time were excluded from participation in the study. While I do not have any direct influence over the students' status at the university, student perception about the ADRC's connection to campus can give the impression that I do have impact. Additionally, as I work in a position of authority and supervision over the students at the ADRC, any student may feel compelled to participate as to not receive any perceived retaliation over their status as a registered student. Lastly, the researcher must exclude ADRC students as the researcher has access to their confidential information regarding their disability and needs. While the researcher would never utilize this information, exclusion ensures the privacy and welfare of the students is protected from any perceived breach of this confidentiality.

Research Participation Inclusion Criteria

In phenomenology, recruitment of participants should be done with care to safeguard participants involved in the study have themselves experienced the phenomenon and understand their experience (van Manen, 2014). The researcher's interest in the subject stems from their own experience with the phenomenon, which provides a mutual understanding between them and their participants. Sharing common ground can establish rapport and trust between the researcher and participant which can allow the participant to fully engage in the process of detailing the lived experience of safety on a college campus. Inclusion criteria requested that students have perceived issues with safety on the university's campus, willingness to participate and discuss their experiences, be at least 18 years old, and a current undergraduate or graduate student at the university's Norman campus. Because students who attend a larger university campus can come from many different backgrounds, statuses, perspectives, and ideologies, recruitment of the campus' students ensured a variety of unique experiences with the phenomenon. Participants were informed throughout the recruitment and interview process that involvement in the study was voluntary. The researcher also communicated to participants that they could omit answers and leave the study at any time.

Description of Participants

The six students who participated volunteered to do so after receiving news about the study via a mass email sent to all students on the Norman campus, viewing flyers posted in various buildings, or hearing about it. All met the inclusion criteria and had an interest in the study because of perceptions of threat to safety. Five participants are graduate students with three of those students in their doctoral program. One participant is an undergraduate senior. Four participants identified as female, one male, one abstained, and four reported as cisgender.

Due to the different educational programs of the participants, their ages ranged from twenty-one to forty. Five of the participants identify as White, and one participant identified as Asian Indian. Of the six participants, only two reported having a disability. One student reported being a first-generation college student, and all stated they were regular users of social media. No participants held an open-carry or concealed-carry gun permit.

Interview Setting

The interview process in hermeneutic phenomenology is to probe and collect stories, anecdotes, and materials from the participant that help to reveal the pre-reflective process of a phenomenon so that is can be more thoroughly understood (van Manen, 2014). The aim behind this phenomenological study is to create a conversational exploration into the meaning-making experiences associated with the phenomenon of feeling unsafe on a college campus as a student. The nature of discussing what an individual associates with safety can lend itself to discussing sensitive and deeply personal instances, which can include events where the student was not safe on campus. Because of this, participants had the option of selecting an interview space where they felt most comfortable. Two participants left this up to the researcher; so a private space was identified on campus that would allow the student to speak freely. Due to the social distancing requirements of COVID-19, the remaining interviews were rescheduled to take place online via Zoom. Most of the interviewees were contacted via student email accounts to make arrangements. However, a small number who knew the researcher personally contacted her via phone to set up an interview time.

Many participants were most familiar with campus and felt comfortable meeting for interviews there. However, only two were able to do so due to campus closure. Due to the potentially delicate nature behind discussing safety on campus, interviews were set up during the

day at a day and time that best suited the interviewee. As a result, inconvenience to the participant was reduced aside from the time allotted for the interview. At the start of the interview, participants were given the Informed Consent approved by the IRB and the procedures were explained. All participants were reminded that their participation in the interview was completely voluntary and they could stop the interview or elect to not answer questions at any point in time with no negative consequences. Participants were also encouraged to ask questions at any point during the interview. All participants were asked the same questions with additional clarification questions asked as needed.

Following the interview questions asked by the researcher, participants were asked to complete a short questionnaire. Once the questionnaire was completed to the participants' comfortability, they were given a post-interview informational sheet providing information about the nature of the study and campus resources should they need any support following the discussion of such personal information. Interviewees were encouraged to answer the questions in any order they choose to allow for time to think about their responses as well as allow the participant to engage as they were comfortable. The interviews were semi-structured which allowed for more depth and context surrounding the essence of the lived experience (van Manen, 2014). Participants could answer the questions in any manner they saw fit which could include descriptions or perceptions of an event, anecdotes, or narratives. For the participants who gave permission, interviews were audio recorded. With all interviews, the researcher typed short-hand notes.

Data Collection Methods

The data collection methods include interviews where the researcher was sensitive and aware of body language, pauses in thought when participants contemplated their answers, tone,

and inflection (van Manen, 2014). Where permission was granted to audio record, these recordings were transcribed and reviewed for continuity (Creswell & Poth, 2018). For both interviews where audio recording was and was not allowed, the researcher reviewed the transcripts multiple times for the emergence of themes to occur while interpreting the data as a composite of the experience (van Manen, 1997/2016; van Manen, 2014). Descriptions of the experience and corresponding themes arose as the researcher maintains orientation to the experience behind the lived phenomenon (van Manen, 1997/2016). Phenomenology's aim is to focus on the descriptive interpretation of the lived experience before the individual places their own reflections, explanations, or justifications to the moment (van Manen, 1997/2016; van Manen, 2014). Interpretation of the data occur as the researcher reflects upon their own understanding of the phenomenon (van Manen, 2014).

When the researcher asks clarifying questions surrounding a participant's account of the experience, it can help the participant to provide additional details that they had not considered when first scrutinizing their own experience. The interviews consisted of the researcher asking participants what the living experience of safety is like for a student on a college campus in as much detail as participants were comfortable disclosing. Reminding participants that their interpretation of the question and answer provides a way for them to maintain openness to the experience of the lived phenomenon. Orientation towards openness in the interview process helped participants explore their own experiences in a meaningful way without fear that their answers needed to fit specific criteria. Because the researcher is a student at the same university as the participants, she understands campus culture as well as the events and jargon used by current students. This assisted participants to further explore their experiences without having to stop and clarify their references. Field notes were maintained throughout the process of research

where the researcher could note any observations witnessed on campus or during the interviews. Lastly, the researcher engaged in reflective writing to discover and expand upon the lived experience of the participants' recollections.

Interview Protocol

The questions selected in Appendix A are necessary for the researcher to examine and interpret the meanings behind the lived experience of safety on a college campus and how the lack thereof is experienced. The researcher seeks to answer the research question as stated in chapter one by exploring the nature of the lived experience through the participants' answers to interview questions. The research question is; what is the lived experience of safety, or lack thereof, for students on a university campus? Maintaining orientation to the research question helps the researcher remain open to additional interview questions that could emerge so that complex, thorough data material can be obtained (van Manen, 2014). These additional questions created an added depth of interpretation of meaning-making material for the researcher. The aim of the researcher is to keep the participant as close to the experience as possible so that the lived aspects surrounding it can be realized.

Data Analysis

Phenomenological themes will emerge from the data obtained from interview transcriptions. The use of reflexivity helps the researcher to maintain her perspective as to ensure it does not limit or lead the data unintentionally away from its essence. Based on van Manen's approach, the researcher will analyze the data through the holistic, or universal, approach and the highlighted, or selective, approach (van Manen, 1997/2016; van Manen, 2014). In the holistic approach, the researcher reviews the audio recordings, transcriptions, and field notes to find a complete description of the experienced as if it were captured in the moment as is.

The holistic approach is the textual connection to snapping a photograph of a moment in time (van Manen, 2014). In the highlighted approach, the researcher analyzes the data with a selective lens to gather meaning that could be interpreted to provide the details behind the experience (van Manen, 1997/2016; van Manen, 2014). Specific statements or expressions could help to illuminate the phenomenon analyzed to discover meaning-making associations that the researcher will describe and decipher. Both approaches provide a rich, detailed understanding of the lived moment as is in its natural setting.

Reflection

Hermeneutic phenomenology notes that one's prejudices about a lived experience are not only important for processing the phenomenon under study but are not to be removed from the process via bracketing (van Manen, 2014). One's prejudices help them to orient themselves to the phenomenon explored while assisting in fully realizing the experience as it occurs. The researcher must take care to be aware of one's prejudices and acknowledge them upfront to prevent their later influence to sway data by ignoring them. Researchers must be forthcoming what biases, opinions, assumptions, and understandings they bring to the research (van Manen, 1997/2016). As a student at the university, the researcher shares similar experiences with some of the participants and can use her own experiences to interpret any meaning-making descriptions that are shared in the interview process. Throughout the process of descriptive-interpretation, the researcher returns to the original transcriptions to ensure accuracy of the lived moment was accurately captured (van Manen, 2014).

The researcher repeatedly listens to the audio recordings, rereads her field notes and transcriptions, and engages in reflective writing exercises. Repeatedly engaging with the data material assists in finding elemental themes as well as supporting details that corroborate the

phenomenon (van Manen, 1997/2016; van Manen, 2014). This method of examining data is known as immersion and is central to discovering meaning behind participants' experiences as they are in the moment. Exploring the essence of a phenomenon should be analyzed in a way that allows the fundamental elements of the experience to present themselves as openly as possible with minimal constraints (van Manen, 1997/2006). Doing so allows the reader to understand and relate the phenomenon to their experiences in a way they had not known previously. Phenomenological analysis and illustration give voice to that which is often difficult, if not impossible, to completely capture so that others can relate.

To accomplish this, the researcher must engage in van Manen's philosophical methods of the epoché and reduction. The epoché is the ability to temporarily arrest our ability to take fundamental aspects of a phenomenon or experience for granted (van Manen, 2014). Often, the subject phenomenological research embarks upon is one that occurs so frequently that many will forget they are commonly unaware of the experience consciously. The concept of safety can be taken for granted when we experience its presence, or a lack of threat to it, in the space where we regularly interact. The researcher must engage in the epoché to see the experience as if it were brand new to her. Hermeneutic epoché calls for the researcher to arrest our interpretation of the phenomenon and our interest in the investigation while clarifying their aspects as to release their influence on the data. Reconnecting to the openness of an experience as if it has occurred for the first time also places the researcher and their data in direct contact with the world as it is lived.

Reduction is the process of getting to the heart of the experience once one's biases, presumptions, and understandings of a phenomenon kept in account through the epoché (van Manen, 2014). Reducing other influences that contribute to our processing of an event help us to get back to the original experience as it happened. As an event occurs, the process of reflection,

assumption, clarification, and analysis occur so quickly that capturing our experience in the present becomes difficult. The more common an experience is, the easier it is to disengage with the event and immediately jump to our thoughts on what just occurred (van Manen, 1997/2016). Reduction is a fundamental process within phenomenology that assists the researcher to identify the structures that encapsulate the event under study (van Manen, 2014). Hermeneutic reduction calls for the researcher to maintain complete openness to the phenomenon to keep oneself from naturally distancing by allowing individual presumptions about the event to enter the mind.

Artifacts.

Throughout the process of obtaining data, the researcher maintains audio files, transcripts, field notes, interview documents, and reflective writing drafts. However, the researcher's field notes are not included in the presentation of the data as they primarily serve as a means for the researcher to reflect upon the material. Information obtained from the data sample is analyzed to discover thematic elements that illuminate commonalities, differences, and answers to our phenomenological question. Uncovering themes from the data help the researcher to explore phenomenological descriptive-interpretations that can provide meaning and clarification behind the lived moment (van Manen, 1997/2016; van Manen, 2014). Descriptions of the phenomenon as lived can originate from transcripts, anecdotes shared, reflections, and conversations (van Manen, 1997/2016). Data gathered can help lead the researcher to uncover how a participant experiences safety on campus. Following the hermeneutic framework, the researcher must take care to reflect on all data analyzed to ensure personal influences do not infiltrate the data initially observed. The researcher can accomplish this by continually reflecting upon personal experience with the phenomenon and assessing the comparisons and differences among the participants' perspectives (van Manen, 1997/2016; van Manen, 2014).

In Summary

Qualitative research aims to provide a more in-depth understanding of the meaning individuals assign to problems that occur in the real world. The results obtained do not offer absolute, one-size-fits-all, answers as the data collected is subjective. As an approach to qualitative research, phenomenology aims to capture a snapshot into the lived moment behind a commonplace event or problem. Hermeneutic phenomenology continues further by approaching the ordinariness of a phenomenon in its natural setting, as if new, so that the data obtained illustrates a complete, descriptive interpretation. The researcher's interest helps to provide the audience with an orientation to the motivations behind researching safety as well as expanding her background of understanding. Themes discovered in data help to answer the research question of what the lived experience of safety is, or lack thereof, for students on a college campus. While the results found do not give an account for all possibilities experienced, it can open the door to understanding what influences contribute to safety in the present at this moment in our collective history.

CHAPTER FOUR

Research Findings

Analyzing the data obtained from the interview questions listed in Appendix A, this chapter will review the results, discuss how they answer the research question, and determine any implications for future research. Once the interviews concluded, the participants' responses were then transcribed and presented based on the researcher's interpretive analysis to fully illustrate the lived experience of safety for university students. Safety, or lack thereof, is a phenomenon all individuals have experience, knowledge, and understanding of as attaining individual safety is a function of survival. Entering new surroundings, such as a college campus, furthers individual experience as one interacts and connects with many people from all walks of life (Chekwa et al., 2013). The analysis of data allows the researcher to encapsulate this experience at this present moment in our history while maintaining previous occurrences in our collective history that influence the present-day experience of safety (van Manen, 2014).

Providing detailed, descriptive interpretations of the data permit this experience of student safety to be accessible to others. Accessibility of the data allows others to gain a sense of what is taken for granted with respect to safety, how it is experienced when threatened, and the ability for outside forces to influence it positively and negatively. The researcher reviews participant transcripts to find any pre-reflective accounts of their experiences with safety or threat to it. Using van Manen's (2014) existential inquiry for interpretive analysis, we can examine the material based on universal qualities to lived experience. Existential inquiry considers the data from the perspective of: relationality (lived self as it relates to others), corporeality (lived body), spatiality (lived space), temporality (lived time), and materiality (lived things). Life experienced through our relationships to others, our bodies, the spaces we interact

with, time, and things that engage with the phenomenon provide context behind how an experience is experienced. These five existential elements are accessible to all as they are experienced by all.

To provide a window into the specific perspective of each participant, the researcher created vignettes which include basic demographic information, class rank, and any other aspects of identity the participant perceives to influence their safety. Vignettes help to introduce the reader to the background of the participant so that their viewpoint and how it came to be is understood and recognized (van Manen, 2014). Through the presentation of findings, quotes or anecdotes are used as they can capture that which is difficult to summarize. Summations are beneficial, however, the experiential accounts related to safety can get lost in translation and their intended impact is weakened. The intention behind this research is to give students, who have had their safety threatened on campus, a voice and an opportunity to have their experiences heard. The six participants interviewed had different personalities and backgrounds but shared a desire to improve student safety while attaining their educational goals. All six recognized that threats to safety can inhibit the ability to achieve their desired goals while in college and how that may influence their connections to others.

Presentation of Findings Through Phenomenological Narratives

Laila

Laila is a 34 year old, Asian Indian, female doctoral student who is attending the university on a student visa. Throughout her doctoral program, she also teaches undergraduate level courses related to subjects on gender identities, race, and crime. This is her first experience not only being in Oklahoma but living in the south. Her first experience with higher education and adjusting to American culture was during her master's program in New York. Upon

completion of her masters, she moved back home for several years before coming to OU to complete her doctorate. Her primary knowledge of American people prior to coming for her master's program was through movies. Movies set the foundation for how she expected her experience to be, including fears of attack for being an immigrant and a minority.

Relationality (lived self-other).

When issues related to racism occur in the country or at the university, Laila discussed her concerns for how she navigates the campus in relation to the people. She reported when incidences of racism occur, she worries when she sees groups of people that represent those who would attack her. She states,

"I know the freedom of speech gives you like, all the options. Anybody could come and talk and do whatever they want. But having members of Ku Klux Klan on south oval or guys like standing and shouting at women that you're going to rot in hell and all that, that makes me very uncomfortable. And especially with the idea, okay, they're talking and they can do something too."

"When the first black face incident happened on campus…that's when my opinions about what people around me changed and how people are acting changed. I would [be] like much more careful during those times when the first black face incident happened through the sorority girls. And then they say two days later a guy walk though the whole campus…that did have an effect on me and I'm sure it had [an] effect on other people as well [in] how they're moving around campus."

"…I feel uncomfortable like when there's like a group of white people. I feel very uncomfortable moving around them because I don't know how they would react, and, again, it's Oklahoma."

Her experiences in her home country influence her apprehensiveness with people in any space as she reports public harassment is very common, specifically for women. However, she has heightened sensitivity to the potential attacks that could come from men on campus. She states,

"I feel like just being a female walking around on campus, I'm like very careful where to walk and how; which places to go and I prefer when there's more people…but if it's like a group of people standing, just especially if they're guys, I'm going, yeah, if they're walking I'll be fine. If they [are] standing, I'll be like, man, I'm gonna change my path, I'm not going to go near…because I feel like if they're stationary they might be planning."

Spatiality (lived space).

Laila discussed how her education and the programs she has sought out have helped to advance her knowledge about what constitutes as a safe or unsafe space. Because of this knowledge, Laila constantly assesses her surroundings for signals that indicate it may be a threat to her. She states,

"If [an] area is high crime, my opinion might change about that area. I'll be more careful or I'll avoid that area. But if I don't know about it, I'll just walk through it and not even think about it."

Her knowledge of how safe an area is impacts her ability to move around campus. She states,

"So like walking around even on campus sometimes scares me. I feel like [the] university is not doing [a] good job with lights. Lighting up the campus more…it's still a pretty dark campus in the nighttime. So it's like, I don't know if I want to walk through it…I would rather walk on the road because I know there [are] cars going on."

"I make sure I'm walking in places where there's more chances that somebody is watching…[if] there's a guardian watching you, you'll be much safer. That's why not going on south oval [and] going on a main road helps."

Corporeality (lived body).

Through Laila's experiences, she reports it initiated changes both mentally and physically. She states,

"I walk always being ready if I get attacked, what I'm gonna do…ever since I started my school at OU I just stopped wearing heels or any uncomfortable shoes because I feel like if I'm in an uncomfortable shoe, I couldn't run."

Laila is an actively involved student on many campus committees, which gives her access to information about current threats to campus safety. She reports experiencing difficulty managing her access to this content and its ability to ease her concerns for threat. Laila states,

"Sometimes I feel like very confident knowing all those resources and everything. And I feel like okay, I can deal with these things. But on the other times, I'll be like, okay, I don't know…I would just get really paranoid about things and I'm like, I don't know what I'm gonna do with them. And I have cop friends, so it gets even worse because they tell me stories from their cases and I'm like, don't tell me!"

Technology (lived cyborg relations).

Laila's increased access to information through her social commitments on campus both help and hurt her feelings of safety on campus as she can connect to it anytime through her phone or computer. She states,

"these things, like, they do help you in some sense, but they scared me even more too. I feel like it creates fear. But they're telling you things [about] how to take care of yourself too.

…I know a couple of my friends who are not involved [and] they don't get [this] information until I'm, like, telling them, oh, this is the thing to be careful about. …that's the one thing I'm thinking but I feel like I keep on telling them at a lot of times, like, be careful about things. What could go wrong or what information is available or what resources there are. So I feel like that being involved on campus has helped."

In her spare time, Laila watches crime shows to add to her knowledge about criminal activity. She notes how these shows can be helpful, however, they can make her more worried for potential threats. She states,

"I feel like TV [or] any kind of media has a huge effect on how you see people. …I think these shows, a little bit, help me to be careful and making, like, good decisions."

Anna

Anna is a 21 year old, white, female undergraduate senior. She reports her perception of threat to safety was nonexistent as she was ignorant to any issues that could come up. Much of how she carried herself on campus was under the assumption that no harm could come to her nor would anyone want to do so. It was only after the end of a difficult relationship and receiving subsequent university resources that she became aware to her lack of awareness. That experience changed how she navigated campus as well as her intentions for her future. Her perceptions of safety are equally mixed with the tumultuous end of her relationship and its aftermath as well as resuming previous assumptions of safety.

Relationality (lived self-other).

While attending the university, Anna discloses her perceptions of safety were relatively limited as she "lived in ignorant bliss". She attributes this to her experiences in high school where she felt "they did value safety…we had an officer on our campus". However, coming to

OU, she realized this would be different as "you have, like, thousands of people coming from all over the place". Recognizing this difference, her perceptions of safety did not change as she felt "always somewhat safe". It was only at the end of a challenging relationship with another student where her safety was immediately threatened that her perceptions changed. She states,

"This past person I was with, we were kind of at the peak of things being really bad…he told me there's a new law passing in Oklahoma in November and anybody over the age of 21 [can] carry a gun. He said he was going to buy a gun and I just remember my heart like sank into my stomach and I knew I can't be with this person…I feel like I'm just really anxious in my own way because I just know I could possibly, possibly cross, cross paths. Oh my gosh, what's happening? …I do feel like I might run into him and I just don't want to."

In discussing her fears of running into this individual, the student stammered several times and experienced confusion at her difficulty in speaking about it. When we later discussed the change in gun laws in the state, Anna stated shortly after, there was an event across from campus. She states,

"You know, just when that first like whatever was first passed, there was that guy around campus corner just walking with like two AK-47s on his shoulder…just because you know, just trying to be all pompous about the fact that…[he] can do it. And it's like we know you can do it but like just you doing it with that motivation behind it. It's like, I don't really trust you with those guns…I have no idea who you are…and such a close vicinity [to] so many people…everybody is forced basically to put just a bunch of blind faith in you not to go on a shooting spree. And I'm not, I don't feel comfortable doing that."

Corporeality (lived body).

When asked about her definitions of safety, Anna stated it related to, "knowing that, I

don't feel like I look over my shoulder or something, I guess." She later discussed what occurs when she is on campus in the moment. She states,

"If it is late at night, I do kind of find myself like walking quicker…just shift – more shifty, I feel. But when it's during the day, I really just keep my eyes on the ground, very much, and just walk where I'm going and I don't have any concern in the world, basically. …the only thing that's different [at night] is definitely walking faster. I feel like I have my head up. I'm actually looking at my surroundings. Just trying to, physically, be more aware of what's going on and mentally aware. So just in case something weird happened, I'd go."

Anna reported the texts to students about potential threats influence her as they typically will indicate to avoid an area or if an incident occurs. She states,

"you know, and you get those texts, it's like, avoid this area, this person has like a loaded weapon or like gunshots around here and then you see everybody talking about it. And it does for sure kind of make you a little, like, more stressed about it, I guess. Or just paranoid about it."

Materiality (lived things).

To promote her safety, Anna spent time discussing the tools she keeps on her that would stave off a potential attacker. These items she always keeps on her person, and she showed each of them to the researcher as she discussed them. The first protective item she discloses she does not currently have it due to problems with use at the correct time. However, she states,

"I had this little, it was one of those little alarm things…you know, you pull the string, and it sets off this really loud…on my backpack…alarm. So my mom gave it to me and she said, you know, put it on your backpack. And if it's at night…and something starts to happen, you pull the string and it sets off the alarm and then they know if people are around or hear that then they can come, you know, help you."

After describing its usefulness, Anna states, "I do kind of want to keep it on, like, around. You know, something on the fly or on my person." She then shows me two other protective devices kept on her keys, which stay in her hands. One is pepper spray and the other is a set of brass knuckles disguised as a decorative keychain. She states,

"on my keys, I've got pepper spray, and these things right here. Technically, these are actually illegal in Oklahoma, but it looks so much like a keychain that nothing's ever happened…I like to just keep it in my pocket, but I do pick up my keys and hold it by the pepper spray. I'm ready to rock like…I don't need to do anything if someone comes up, all I need is, just a, yeah."

Technology (lived cyborg relations).

In discussing the text alerts students receive on campus, Anna talked about her fears after receiving one that was related to a sexual assault that occurred the week prior to our interview. She states,

"I think just the other, last week, maybe, there was an OU warning that went out that said a rapist was on campus. And that there was a reported rape incident right near the student union and, you know, I immediately thought, holy cow. That's just like – like was it inside the student union? Was it outside? Like, did they drag her in somewhere? Or him? I don't know but, you know that does kind of, again, just adds to that fear of, I don't [want] to be out on campus at night because something like that could happen where, you know, no one's around me and someone can – something could easily happen."

"…you know, you see a lot of the coverage of shootings on college campuses and high school campuses and, and that's scary especially when, you also get texts from OUPD. And I follow OU students and other people on social media, you know. And you get those texts, it's

like, avoid this area, this person has, like, a loaded weapon, or, like, gunshots around here. And you see everybody talking about it and it does, for sure, kind of make you a little, like, more stressed about it, I guess, or just paranoid about it."

Anna later discussed how the prevalence of school shooting incidences and the media coverage of it help her to "normalize" it as a potential threat to her safety. She states,

"…we all just kind of normalize it and, you know, it becomes easy to just, you know, like I said, another school shooting. You know, you don't really think about the consequences of that, you know, real people died. Real people are really hurt by that and those students that made it out are traumatized and that's not something that people talk about on social media. And so I think that's why it becomes really easy to just normalize those things and not really feel like I need to change paths. I guess, it happens so much but it has to happen."

Collette

Collette is a 36 year old, white, female master's student who identifies as an individual with a disability. While attending OU in undergrad, she was involved with her sorority and lived in the house during that time. Upon finishing her degree, she began working in her given career path before returning to OU to obtain her master's degree. Collette works full time while attending school. She states her experiences of going to a small high school did not prepare her for how different college would be on such a large campus. While in her sorority, the house had issues with a peeping tom and the sorority's response to the threat as well as her knowledge from high school shaped her perceptions of safety on campus.

Relationality (lived self-other).

In describing her perspective of safety, Collette discusses how the environment in high school shaped what she viewed as the institution prioritizing guardianship. She states,

"In high school, you're very controlled. You're very watched, and you feel like some, some authority figure has always got an eye out…there aren't as many places for people to be out of sight. …whereas at OU, there aren't a lot of visual signs of someone looking out for your safety. You don't see a lot of police officers, like, you know, campus resource officers just walking around making sure everybody's okay. You don't see people, like you don't have to have ID badges to get into certain buildings, that kind of thing."

During her time in her sorority, the members became aware of a peeping tom trying to enter the house. Collette reports that a "buddy system" was implemented so that girls were "really never going in the parking lot in the back of the house by yourself in the dark." She reports it changed how the girls interacted with each other as they, "all stopped helping each other in and out of the doors. Like, if you know if you were going in the door and you put in the code and there's someone behind you, that you didn't know, like you would hurry inside and close it."

After receiving a text alert that a violent incident occurred near her class, she implemented the buddy system. Collette states,

"One of my friends from class I know parks on the street…and then, in class, I just asked him if I can walk with him out of class. Like if you'd wait for me and walk with me to my car."

She reports her concerns for safety relate to, "being a female would be the main one. Just feeling like a target for sexual assault in addition to any other regular physical safety concerns…if you think about what makes you feel safe, you know, having a proactive approach and presence in my visual representations of university community that is proactively guarding your safety in all of those ways."

Spatiality (lived space).

During Collette's discussion of the peeping tom, she focuses on the physical layout of getting into the house safely. She states,

"When I would drive into the parking lot, like, I would do a lap and make sure no one was in the parking lot before I parked and got out to, you know, make myself feel safer that [it] was okay to get out of the car. Anytime there was any person in a car, if I couldn't see and identify that person, that did not make me feel safe. Like I would wait until I was very far away from them or they were gone out of their car before I would get out of my car."

Later she then discusses the layout of campus and parking following receiving the text about a violent incident that occurred nearby. She states,

"I had to go to class that night and I usually park in the union parking garage and I was really scared to go to class and park in the garage after I heard about that incident. I actually ended up kind of circling the block enough so that I could park on the street."

Walking to her classes that occur at night, she considers the use of the blue lights on campus and what resources they could provide her, if threatened. She states,

"When I walk by the blue lights, I think the blue lights are intended to make you feel safer. But when I walk by the blue lights, I think, if I needed help right now, like, how quickly would someone actually get here. It's just a light. It's not a person, you know, it's not a safe space. It's not like a booth I could jump in and protect me from an attacker or something. You know, I don't. It doesn't seem to actually offer anything other than light."

Technology (lived cyborg relations).

Collette continues to explore her feelings of safety in relation to the text alerts sent to students by OUPD. She states,

"You know, it's interesting because I think the OU safety alert text messages can sometimes make me feel less safe because, like, when you get the ones that say, you know, suspect on the, you know, corner of Lindsay and Jenkins and, you know, it's [an] ongoing situation or something. Like everybody kind of gets nervous and stressed out and they don't really know what's going on. And then it usually gets resolved [but] they don't do a great job of following up and kind of explaining what happened to kind of ease everybody's mind about it. Oh, it was, you know, [a] mistake, it was just somebody jogging or something. And so those, I think make people feel less safe because we're aware there could be an issue and then we aren't really told that it wasn't as bad as we thought or whatever."

She later references the technology of the blue light boxes and their effectiveness with certain types of threats. She states,

"it was sold to as, like, if you ever feel unsafe walking home from that test, you use the blue light to request someone to come walk with you. So, it was more of like a proactive choice on your part, you know, in this situation I would like someone to come walk with me. So, it wasn't really an emergency help. It was really more just if you wanted someone to be there with you to walk home to prevent those safety incidences, you can do that. And, I mean, I've never tried it. I don't know how you can use it. I'm safe walking, but I never stopped to call and say, you know, I'll wait here."

Natalie

Natalie is a 40 year old, white, master's student who identifies as a cisgender woman with a disability. Upon obtaining her undergraduate degree from another university, she worked for several years in her given career path before working on campus in IT. Through this position, she supervises other students in managing the help desk. Natalie describes herself as a

non-traditional student as she is currently working full time while attending school. Outside of her work and school obligations, she provides support on campus through OU Advocates at the Gender and Equality Center. Through her advocacy, she connects students with appropriate resources should they face any type of violence on or off campus. Her experiences working with students through OU Advocates and IT have shaped how she views campus safety.

Relationality (lived self-other).

As we discuss safety and her experiences, Natalie discloses a significant factor into her perception of the subject as she endured a traumatic event in her childhood due to her father who was an alcoholic. She reports this changed how she behaved with other people and her viewpoint on how to stay safe. She states,

"I can very much go into like quiet mode or I'm just sort of observing everything around me and I'm not really interacting. I try to, like, blend back into the background…it's more of like an observance thing rather than I don't want to be seen, I guess. …a classic thing that kids of alcoholics do where the oldest one usually takes on a lot of like adult parenting responsibilities…but I kind of like, mother hen everybody and sort of like make sure I know where everyone is at all times. And like gather them together if I feel like everybody's kind of too spread out."

Natalie later discusses how her and other women she knows share experiences when they have been threatened. She states,

"See my friends and I just kind of talked about before where we think maybe it's women are more acutely aware of bodily harm and violence happening to them and the statistics of it are much higher. Considerably higher than they are for men and so we think maybe it's just, we're interested in it in general as, you know, women because it's just something we think about

more."

When asked what made her conscious that someone might do her harm, she states,

"If they're paying attention to me at all, like that would be something…and if I noticed that somebody does more of a, like, a glance than you normally would do or whatever that I'll make, I don't know. I heard somewhere one time or something like making eye contact with someone so that they know you're aware of them will sometimes deter people from, you know, trying to mug you or accost you."

Corporeality (lived body).

As we discuss Natalie's views on her own safety on campus, she reports that being a non-traditional student as she works full time at the university while attending has given her more access to information than others would normally have. This information and her experiences have made her keenly aware of perceived threats. She states,

"I'm a little paranoid just because I am more aware of what happens on campus…and I learned in my early twenties to be more conscious of my surroundings and that, you know, that there are, you need to be more careful. You need to be prepared and you need to be mindful when you're, even if you're a man, in certain situations. Just be aware of your surroundings and especially once the sun goes down, like, things can happen."

She later describes some of the ways that she will assess people on campus. She states,

"I'm careful and I pay attention to what's going on around me. But I also don't think that, that man walking by me on the street is going to attack me. I just, like, kind of make eye contact and keep an eye on him, just in case. Or if someone is behind, I am a little more like, who is this person behind me and I'll like turn and like look. …I'll just sort of like glance but like back, sideways. Like maybe I'm looking at something [else]."

"I think, other people might think I'm a little paranoid but I feel like it's just practical. Everybody should be aware of what's going on around them and, like, not. I don't talk on my cell phone because I heard one time that's a bad idea. Like if I'm walking by myself, and I'm not sure about the area, and it's like, you know, nighttime. …but I won't talk on my cell phone, I won't be looking at anything. I have my bags in such a way that if somebody like grabbed me, my, my hands and my arms would be free in a way that I could, in some way, like defend myself or push people away."

Materiality (lived things).

Early into our interview, Natalie quickly describes the tools she keeps ensuring her safety, if it is threatened as well as thinking through how the use of those tools could harm her in the process. She states,

"If you want to get around places safely, you just need to, you know, take precautions and be aware and all that good stuff. …you learn self-defense, then, pepper spray, and I have [a] thing on my keychain that is like [an] ergonomic like thing that you could defend yourself. Mine kind of looks like a shank. …it feels like I could have a better grip on something like that in my hand and hurt myself less than I would [with] the thing and my fingers. So that's why I went with the, basically, the shank rather than the brass knuckles with pointy ears on it."

Technology (lived cyborg relations).

Natalie talks about her roles as a student, advocate for students in need, and staff member. Because of her role as an advocate, she must keep a separate phone on her to answer at any time should a student call that number for help. As a result, she hears first-hand about instances where students have been threatened in real time, which affects her perception of threat to safety. She states,

"I'm not paranoid, but because I know statistics and things about what happens on our campus. …I mean, maybe I am a little paranoid just because I am more aware of what happens on campus. But – but I do think that OUPD does make an effort to make our campus safe. …so overall it's probably more of a, it's as safe as any college campus is, kind of thing, rather than OU is worse than any other university."

"…[it's] the 24-hour, like, telephone number that if a student is sexually or physically assaulted or they're experiencing stalking or, you know, even if it's not something that is currently happening, but they had something happen in the past, like they could call the hotline. …they can call the phone number and one of us is always carrying the telephone."

Chris

Chris is a 30 year old, white doctoral student who identifies as a cisgender gay man. He attended the university for his undergraduate and master's degrees and is currently in his doctoral program. While working on his doctorate studies, he also teaches undergraduate level courses on social justice which will involve the discussion of race, gender identities, and sexuality. Chris is from Oklahoma but came from a small, rural town where any differences in sexual orientation or gender identity were met with harassment and inflexibility. Upon coming to OU, he embraced his sexuality which helped him to further define who he is. Experiences from his hometown and previous collegiate years shape how he views safety and the likelihood of threat to personal safety.

Relationality (lived self-other).

As we begin to talk about safety, Chris notes that safety wasn't a pressing concern for him until, "much later in life when I was coming to terms with my own sexual orientation." Prior to this point, his sexuality was not at the "center of who [he] was because [he] had just

blocked it out of [his] mind. But then, when it was centered in [his] life, then, safety became more of an issue." He then describes one of the instances that made him feel most threatened while on campus because of his identity. He states,

"I was with friends and a group of guys start calling us faggots and queers and things like that. Just being really aggressive and threatening. Of course, being in it I felt unsafe. So that experience has certainly shaped the way I interact and move and navigate spaces on campus. …I'm a little more cautious about who I disclose my sexual orientation to now, when I shouldn't feel that way."

To Chris, disclosure could provide an opportunity for others to potentially harm him. He later describes an incident with an instructor that occurred while he was a student. He states,

"I disclosed to a colleague several years ago and last fall, when I was shadowing her as a student…to get from the library to the gymnasium, we had to walk through a closet…as we're walking through the closet, she says to me, this is a closet, you're very familiar with this type of space. And then, we kept walking to the gym and then we're in the gym and we're both taking photos of students working with kids on their project. And in front of the kids, in front of her students, she says, all right, so are you ready to go back in the closet? …and they [the instructor] just thought it was a joke the whole time. Like they didn't see anything wrong with it."

"When it's a sexual minority, or gender minority, exposed there is more backlash. …for whatever reason because sexual orientation and gender identity are not assumed, they're not seen. So when they are made visible, it causes issues again. It makes no sense to me."

Corporeality (lived body).

After describing both incidences, I asked Chris how he experienced the event where homophobic slurs were yelled at him. He stated,

"It was painful, it was dehumanizing, it was disgusting. And had I not been strong emotionally, mentally, spiritually, it would have devastated me to my core. And yet, in that moment, all of the awful, terrible memories of me having to deal with homophobic slurs throughout elementary school, middle school and high school…all of those memories came rushing back …I felt threatened. I felt like my life was threatened and I needed safety from my institution."

While describing his experience in the moment, Chris appears upset and angered thinking about that instance. The researcher later asks about his experience, in the moment, with the incident that occurred with his instructor in the gym. He states,

"The students faces were like, oh my gosh, just surprised. And I can tell they're bothered by it and I'll tell you, I was bothered by it. I was embarrassed. I was angry and felt unsafe."

When he later asked why she made that comment, the instructor remarks they were joking. The notion that that instance was a joke makes Chris visibly frustrated.

"So now I have to, like, have this constant dialogue within myself. What can I expose? Why can I not expose? If I were to expose, if I were to expose something, how much of it could I actually expose without being accused of x, y, z."

Spatiality (lived space).

The researcher asked earlier about how he perceives safety on campus. He states,

"As a student, I want to make sure that I'm learning in a classroom environment from a professor or instructor who is affirming of all of my identities. I also want to walk around campus and, on campus, knowing that I'm in the presence of good people and other students who aren't going to take away my voice or make me feel disempowered or dehumanized. …safety, in terms of the institution having your back."

Because of his dual roles as a student and instructor, Chris perceives inconsistencies from the university in providing appropriate support to students who are threatened. He states,

"We should all be recommending the Institutional Equity Office and others but we can't because it just seems like, and feels like, Institutional Equity Office protects the institution before it actually protects the victims."

In the incident where homophobic slurs were yelled, Chris did note that "the institution fully protected me and fully reprimanded those guys. However, based on my other experiences, the institution has not consistently provided me with safety and has not consistently provided everyone with safety. …based on what my friends, who are also students, have said to me, like, they've made reports of sexual harassment. Things like that, that were swept under the rug because the perpetrator of that were people in positions of power and authority and they were all protected and the students were not. So that certainly has impacted how I view safety on campus and I know that's not unique to OU. It's an issue that is a reality on every college and university campus in the country."

Technology (lived cyborg relations).

Chris discusses when he felt the institution protected him, that it was handled quite quickly following an email he sent to university administration about the incident. He states,

"That night, I went home and emailed President Boren, Clark Stroud, Kelly Damphouse, and several others. They forwarded my email to Institutional Equity who reached out to me first thing Monday morning. This happened on Friday night. [they] reached out to me first thing Monday morning, [and] they had it all resolved by that Thursday."

While Chris appeared content with the quick support provided in that instance, he reported his frustrations that these resources are not made more visibly available for others. He

states,

"I think these resources should be readily available to every individual on campus. I think they should be advertised to every individual on campus and it's not something that we should be hunting or searching for when we need them the most as sometimes, depending on the circumstances, we need them immediately. And these things cannot be, you know, you cannot wait for it."

Kristen

Kristen is a 36 year old, white, female cisgender doctoral student. Upon obtaining her master's degree from another university, she worked for several years in her given career field before deciding to further advance her education. Kristen previously worked for the university which gave her access to understanding how the institution works beyond the classroom. Based upon her peers' experiences with threat to safety, she learned about different resources available to help them. The varied responses her peers have received has influenced how safe she perceives the campus to be and the likelihood that consistent, applicable support will be provided.

Relationality (lived self-other).

Due to her experience with security officers at her high school campus, Kristen notes the first influence to her perceived safety on campus is in the form of visible security. However, she has doubts that they could enforce safety from harm. She states,

"I think the ability to rely on the university police department [and] knowing that you could do that is important. I wouldn't say I feel like everyone can do that. There are some policies in place that make the police department less, maybe, friendly towards certain minorities. And yeah, I would, if I needed help, I would contact Norman PD. I wouldn't

actually use the university police department. So it's kind of taught me that like, I don't know how much you can rely on a university police department."

Due to her roles both as a student and as an employee at the university, she has referred peers to resources available on campus. However, the support provided has been mixed which impacts her perception that the campus aids all who are threatened. She states,

"With mental health emergencies, I've seen the counseling program work really well and I've seen it not work so well. So it's kind of, like, up in the air as to how beneficial that program is. Like it all feels like luck. Like did you call on the right people's shifts on the right day?"

On campus, her perceptions of other students and faculty have changed based on the viewpoint that their threatening behavior is not prevented or impeded. Specifically, in relation to any racist incidences that have occurred on campus or online. She states,

"Just seeing what students, the way students still think. The way students still act. The way faculty behave [and] just seeing that widespread and not seeing like a huge, like, oh, I'm sorry coming out of it. You know, like, they just kind of have like a very, I can get away with anything attitude about it. And that tells me that the checks that should be in place to stop those things from happening are pretty loose."

Corporeality (lived body).

As we discuss aspects of Kristen that she feels make her more vulnerable to feeling unsafe, she discusses her small stature being the biggest issue. She states,

"I'm a small woman, like, I mean as far as physical safety? Of course it impacts how I view safety on campus. …I mean, if I'm in the wrong place at the wrong time, I am physically unsafe."

The researcher asked what she experiences or how she behaves when she feels unsafe

walking on campus. She states,

"I just get hyperaware and, like, I won't talk on my phone but I have it handy. I used to do the key thing, like, where you hold the key in your hand and your knuckles. I don't know if it'll do anything. …just mostly, just being hyperaware and maybe finding a different path if I could. Sometimes I will be on the phone, just to, like, have someone on the phone. But, like, I'm not talking to them. They're not talking to me. We'll just be like, hey, just be on the phone while I walk to my car. Just hyperaware and hypervigilant."

As she discusses the physical layout of the campus, she references both the blue lights stationed throughout campus, running, and what she does should she feel unsafe. She states,

"There was some like weird feeling of safety with the blue boxes. …I always felt more safe running on campus when it was crowded. …and if I ever felt like, just not right, like either I pass someone walking by themselves looking kind of drunk, like a male or something like that. I would just, like I said earlier, be hyper aware and like kind of try to spot the next blue box in case I needed it."

Spatiality (lived space).

When the subject of gun safety on college campuses arose, Kristen discussed how the prevalence of media stories on the subject negatively impacted her feelings of safety. Specifically, in this area of the country, she felt that it could happen for any reason at any time. She states,

"I definitely feel like if you sit in a classroom that's discussing a particular topic that people in this area of the country don't like people discussing, I think someone could come in and cause a problem at any time."

In the conversation of physical safety, Kristen described what types of spaces made her

feel unsafe. She states,

"I think anywhere that people, like, dark, isolated spaces. …I would say if it's dark, if it's [an] isolated building that no one's in. Unless people are in all of those spaces, I feel unsafe."

Kristen later references these perceived safe spaces when it comes to her running routine on campus. She states,

"Sometimes, I'd even run in the street. Instead of running on the sidewalk. Sometimes I felt a little safer on the street because, you know, cars are safer than random people. It just felt, like, easier to get away and like a bigger space."

Technology (lived cyborg relations).

Kristen references her somewhat safe feelings about the technology of the blue light boxes and the idea behind mask-wearing during the current COVID pandemic. She states,

"there was some, like, weird feeling of safety with the blue light boxes. But I don't even know. It might be, like, the masks with this pandemic, like, people are going to think that they're very protected going out in masks and they're actually not really. Like, I feel like that's how some of those things can actually contribute to even less safety because you feel like you have this ability to get help immediately and really, like, you don't."

Towards the end of our interview, Kristen discussed her frustrations with the text alerts sent following a sexual assault on campus. She is working on a campaign to get the language used that promotes avoiding assault changed and due to her complaints on social media, the university is working with her. She states,

"You know about my involvement in getting the language changed on our, how to avoid a rape text? This all started because I posted a, kind of, snarky thing on Instagram and tagged a bunch of entities at OU. OU Congress and OU Advocates responded. So OU Congress has their

website and OU Advocates have really stepped up and I was communicating with OUPD and the OU PR marking relations director. …and so OU Congress wants to turn it into a student body resolution. What do we want to change this to, what do we want to resolve?"

Emerging Themes

Identifying themes in the participant responses does not exhaust all the possible lived experiences of safety for college students on campus. Experiences with safety on college campuses can vary widely based on individual backgrounds and beliefs, the collective makeup of its student population, and the culture of the university, including the region of the country and city it resides. What themes aim to accomplish is to help encapsulate that moment for these individuals in its most essential essence so that it is relatable to others while answering the research question. This study aimed to understand what the lived experience of safety, or lack thereof, is for students on a university campus. Two principal themes arose that give insight into the experiences of the participants, answer the research question, and provide more details about the living, breathing phenomenon of safety. These themes are: (a) vulnerability and the threat of exposure, and (b) prevention seeking. The themes that emerge from the interviews illuminate what feeling unsafe does to oneself as well as the motivation to distance ourselves from that sensation.

Vulnerability

The participants discussed that in instances where they felt unsafe, it exposed their individual vulnerabilities to harm and who may be most likely to target them. For all the individuals who identified as women, their fear was being attacked by a man who may overpower them. Collette, Natalie, and Kristen specifically noted these fears are not only related to physical safety but their sexual safety as they feel being a woman places them at a higher

vulnerability to rape. As Collette explains, "just feeling like a target for sexual assault." Laila and Anna loosely hinted at the fear of sexual harassment but focused primarily on physical attacks by men or individual who were stronger than they are. All women reported concerns of being snuck up on by an attacker they could not see who could take advantage of their lack of physical prowess. Laila added that her vulnerability intersects at her being a woman, a person of color, a Muslim, and an immigrant. She describes how this intersection makes her particularly susceptible to attack stating, "I could be a really good victim. …when I'm walking around, I'm more careful just because I know people know me and what my opinions are so it makes me more vulnerable to anything that could happen."

Chris discusses vulnerability and how it pertains to his safety as a gay man. In his experiences where his disclosure of his status has been used against him, this has made him vulnerable to either attack or placement as the butt of a joke. The jokes made connect to a time in his life where exposing who he truly was put him in immediate danger by individuals who are homophobic and wish to do him harm. As he discusses instances where he felt unsafe because of disclosing his orientation, he remarks that it makes him cautious about future instances with others where he could be vulnerable. His caution creates the instances where he feels he is not being his "most authentic self" in spaces. Chris states, "Now, I have to, like, have this constant dialogue within myself. What can I expose? Why can I not expose? If I were to expose something, how much of it could I actually expose…" Additionally, the passing of open carry in the state, Chris remarks, "that makes me feel very uncomfortable and unsafe at clubs, at work, in the classroom, wherever. …because so often I read and hear stories of people within the LGBTQ community being murdered in cold blood."

Prevention Seeking

The participants engage in prevention seeking strategies and thought processes to increase the likelihood that they will not come to harm. Based on what the participants feel makes them more vulnerable to threat, their strategies were tailored to provide the most effective defense against a potential attacker. Chris analyzes situations and individuals regularly to assess if he can disclose his full self or if he can blend in with the assumption that he is a white, heterosexual man. He acknowledges the ability to do so affords him more opportunities to utilize resources that further promote his safety. Laila adds to her wealth of knowledge in crime studies by regularly watching television shows, listening to podcasts, and researching articles on the subject. She remarks that it makes "me more paranoid" however she "observe[s] things even more and think about, okay, this could go wrong." Natalie utilizes her access to information related to campus safety as a student, student advocate, and employee to help prevent potential harm to herself. However, she too remarks that "I am a little paranoid just because I am more aware of what happens on campus."

Natalie takes several measures to ensure her safety through the self-defense tool she keeps on her and the classes she has taken. Even how she holds her bag is placed in a position that she could get away and avoid possible harm. Anna utilizes a similar strategy as she carries several self-defensive tools on her person so that she can ensure her attacker receives the damage, instead of her. She notes the tools she chose were intentional as she is "not trying to be, not wasting any time if something does happen." Collette's strategy to prevent possible attacks is to assess her surroundings from the safety of her car or the building she is in before leaving the confines of that space. If she determines that space to be unsafe, she will spend time finding an alternative or employing the help of an escort of whom she knows. Following the incident at her

sorority house, she "retained, like, those awareness behaviors" and continues to use them to assess the likelihood of threat. Kristen utilizes similar strategies as Collette to assess the likelihood of a possible threat. On her runs though campus, she will take alternate routes if she suspects something is "not right" or run in the street as it's an "easier way to get away and, like, a bigger space." She takes care not to cross paths with people who appear intoxicated or another male when there are few spectators nearby. For an added defense, if she cannot avoid a path that appears unsafe, she will call a friend to listen for anything that sounds concerning and keep her keys with the pointed edge sticking out through her fingers.

Discussion

The principal purpose of this study is to understand the living experience of safety for students on a university campus. Gaining knowledge of how the phenomenon of safety and threats to it are individually felt provide a window into the challenges students face coming to and staying in college. Safety is subjective and highly dependent on the background or experience the student brings with them. Previous challenges with securing safety either in high school or at another university help to shape the perspective that student will view future educational environments. Conversely, no impediments to maintaining safety can set the students up to not assess threats effectively, which can place them at an added risk. Most of the participants remarked that their experiences with safety in high school did not adequately prepare them for college. This lack of preparation caused them to be fearful of campus, the mixed student population, and the lack of visible presence from university administration to ensure their security. Two participants noted that the lack of preparation from high school influenced their ability to assess potential threats as they perceived no harm could occur nor would the university allow this to happen.

Through participant interviews, the researcher understands that the lived experience of safety for students on campus is vulnerability. Coming to an entirely new environment, the participants discussed how their identity plays a role in feeling exposed to possible threats. For Chris, the exposure of his sexual orientation made him more vulnerable to attacks by individuals who are homophobic or wish to use their power to marginalize him. That vulnerability created frustration and pain as disclosing his true self could be used against him in the classroom or on campus. Laila's intersection of her gender, ethnicity, religious affiliation, and immigrant status made her vulnerable to those in and outside of her culture. She is vulnerable to threats to safety by individuals who take issue with ethnic and religious minorities, women, and immigrants, regardless of her visa status. She also remarked specific vulnerability as she may not fall into traditional or acceptable roles as a woman in her culture. Laila is aware this can make her likely to be attacked from both sides without the possible support from her culture.

The women interviewed expressed concern that their gender made them vulnerable to attacks by individuals who would want to overpower them. Predominantly, their focus was their vulnerability to men as they could cause both physical and sexual harm. Many participants took measures to prevent possible attacks by taking self-defense classes, carrying defensive weapons, avoiding specific areas of campus that appeared unsafe or prone to violence, walking with a known escort (typically another man), cataloging their environment, or calling a friend to act as a witness if something should occur. All the women stated they felt less vulnerable to threats if others were present to act as either a witness or a defender of their safety. Many cited that they felt harm would not come to them if others were present because someone would have to intervene. The strategies taken served to either prevent an incident from occurring, or, to wound their attacker so they may escape and find safety. Employing either strategy helped these women

to feel secure being on campus and attaining their education.

All the participants except for one outlier perceived they were at higher risk of danger due to the lack of visibility that the university was in support of their safety. Many participants cited that the university does notify them of possible threats on campus, however, they do not have the same level of immediacy to notify students that the incident is resolved or that any action was taken. Two participants reported this creates added stress and fear as they do not know if campus is safe to access or if coming to campus places them in immediate danger. One participant believed this delay was intentional and indicated the university was hiding information about the true nature of the incident due to image. Apart from these notifications, participants believed relevant departments should have a more visible, physical presence on campus. This visible presence varied from safe spaces easily accessible by day or night, more lights on campus to reduce the number of areas that are prone to attack, transparency from university administration and relevant departments charged with promoting safety, and people on campus who actively promote their interest in protecting students.

During the interviews, participants were asked about their knowledge of university resources to support student safety. While their knowledge of resources varied, many participants reported that the existence of resources is not properly advertised or communicated to students. Participants who are aware of resources came to know of them because their safety, or the safety of a peer, was threatened and they had to find assistance themselves. Those who researched resources expressed frustration that they felt they had to dig for guidance instead of being able to easily find help. The delay of time that occurred left them to believe the university was not actively engaged in protecting their safety proactively. By having to work to find these aids, it gave the impression that discovering these resources and the people associated were a

matter of luck. Two participants remarked that they experienced inconsistencies through these departments to deliver compassionate care, which left them feeling that the university was not truly invested in their wellbeing.

The purpose of this research is to add to the growing literature that exists on perceptions of safety as well as college students' perceptions of safety. Safety is an issue that impacts all no matter how old or young. The conditions that enforce or promote safety continue to change as the variables that can threaten safety continue to change. What would be perceived as threatening ten or twenty years ago may not be as threatening now because we have more knowledge about how to protect ourselves against that threat. As individuals learn more about threats, they learn how best to defend themselves or incorporate safer practices to avoid those types of encounters. Collegiate perceptions of safety must continue to be researched as the conditions that make a college campus safe evolve with the times that a university is situated. What made a college campus safe in the 90s would no longer apply to a campus in 2020. The variables that threaten college students evolve with time so our interest and study into those perceptions of safety must progress forward.

Existing literature has examined perceptions of safety from the vantage point of Asian-American and international Asian students (Muffini, 2018), undergraduate and graduate women (Kelly & Torres, 2006; Ledwitz-Rigby, 1993), minority students and their response to racially charged events on campus (Stotzer & Hossellman, 2012), and lesbian, gay, and bisexual students (Reed et al., 2010). Safety has also been studied for accurate perceptions of threat when dispersed through social media (Intravia et al., 2017) and news syndicates (Weber, 2014; Chapin, 2008; Weitzer & Kubrin, 2004). University policies have been studied to determine their effectiveness at protecting their students using trigger warnings (Byron, 2017), blue lights

(Ellcessor, 2019), or measures to reduce the likelihood for a campus shooting incident (Kyle et al., 2017). This research expands on these studies as it focuses on the influences that come together to create the perception of safety on campus. The data obtained from this study demonstrated how all these forces work together, both positively and negatively, to determine how safety is felt, viewed, processed, defined, and achieved.

It is beneficial to explore how each influence of safety such as identity, media sources, and university administration impacts students on campus. However, perception is influenced by many factors both seen and unseen. Perception of safety is a prime example of this. Experience is a large driver in evaluating a safe space, person, or atmosphere. It is individual experience that then begins to examine the setting for things that may be reminiscent of another instance where they were threatened. The setting can include the physical landscape, the campus altogether, the people, the time of day, what has occurred in the news, society's responses to certain threats, and the perceived likelihood that help would come. This study aimed to open the door to the ways that these factors worked together to not only answer the research question but evaluate if their perception accurately evaluated and responded to threats. The results found are only the tip of the iceberg as hermeneutic phenomenology does not seek to provide absolutes. It seeks to explore a phenomenon in such a way that when presented, the reader experiences it too.

With the findings of this research, we can explore what this means for university administration, future research, and the reader. It is not enough to create a study, analyze the data, and discuss the results. Studies are conducted so that valuable and applicable information can be given to the parties that have the most impact to change the circumstances. Researchers study problems that are unresolved or whose needs are not met. Presenting data gives a voice to those issues and opens the conversation on how resolution or improvement can be made. The

problem of safety on campus is not new. However, there are always new viewpoints to learn from and see the effectiveness of current strategies to ensuring security for all students. Findings of this study also provide specific areas that can be explored further or can prompt replications of the research to give a voice to other students' experiences. Lastly, research must give a starting point for the audience on what to do with this information. We hear the participant experiences – now, what is the next step?

Implications for University Administration

To help prepare college students about potential threats that can occur on campus and how to respond, administration administers training to students to help them understand how to react and what they can do to stay safe (O'Donnell et al., 2018). Some of the media images used in the training include actual media coverage following a violent attack on a university campus and fictionalized reenactments of the attack. The types of images presented in the training can illicit perceptions about the safety of the campus and the administration's ability to maintain it. While this is helpful if the campus is threatened by an active shooter, this training does not encompass some of the more nuanced threats that exist on a college campus. Trainings related to consent with physical or sexual contact should address the specific risks and threats faced by students who are sexual minorities (Edwards et al., 2014; Edwards & Sylaska, 2013). Additionally, instruction or encouragement could be provided that reinforces the inclusion of marginalized groups and the allyship of the administration (Ameen, 2012).

While universities cannot prevent or halt harm that can occur on their campuses, they do have the ability to create an atmosphere where their students feel comfortable trusting their administration to support them. No one can stop all harm from coming to any individual, however, the visibility of university administration to encourage safety and discourage

individuals who pose a threat could prove encouraging to the student population. The participants interviewed acknowledged the university could not stop all bad things from happening on its campus. Where their focus resided was with the idea that the seemingly hidden administration's presence enforcing and promoting safety led students to feel they were on their own. Not only were they on their own, but the university is more interested in protecting itself than assisting its students. Universities are an environment of free thinking and exploration; however, they can set the atmospheric tone to the campus. Their image and stance can influence positively both the recruitment of students and the retainment of them.

Implications for Future Research

The findings of this study provide insight into the growing research on the experiences of college students and their perception of safety. However, with this research, there remains many avenues that need to be explored. Future researchers should replicate or further advance the study on the lived experience of safety on campus. Most participants were graduate students who either worked for the university or in the private sector. Future research could continue to research graduate students' perceptions to discover if any specific aspects of advanced degree work influence safety. Additionally, researchers could explore if the dual role of student and instructor places them at added risk for threat. Being that there was only one undergraduate student, future research could explore the perspective and essence of safety for undergraduate student populations. It is possible the manner undergraduate students view safety could vary from graduate students due to their age, experience, and understanding of risk.

Five of the participants identified as white citizens leaving one participant illuminating the intersection of their ethnicity, religious affiliation, immigrant status, and gender. Future research could further explore the role of intersectionality and the lived experience of safety. Or

to examine the role that ethnicity plays in experiencing safety and how the perception of that campus changes in response. Additionally, the role of citizen status could serve as an interesting well of knowledge on the essence of safety as many participants did not have to worry about adjusting to a new country, language, and culture. The role of gender expression and sexual orientation is another avenue to explore as most participants identified as cisgender heterosexuals. Research is needed to understand the nature of safety and its relation to the disclosure or exposure of one's true self when it deviates from the majority.

Lastly, the timing of participant interviews coincided with the university text alert regarding a recent sexual assault as well as the COVID-19 pandemic. While the researcher could not have anticipated either of these events coming together, it is possible that they impacted participant responses. The text alert was sent out the week that the second interview occurred and within a week, news of the devastation the coronavirus caused in China and Italy spread. A week after, the virus appeared in the United States which soon caused for a statewide and national lockdown of businesses and schools as well as an order to shelter in place. The remaining four interviews were conducted during this time, which could have influenced any heightened fears related to safety due to the unprecedented nature and strain of quarantine. Future research could replicate this study on the lived experience of safety once the pandemic subsides to explore if there was any noticeable impact on perceptions of safety due to fears prompted by both events.

Concluding Remarks

The use of hermeneutic phenomenology as a methodology leaves the conclusion of research unfinished as the pursuit of a lived experience is never completely satisfied or absolute (van Manen, 2014). There are always new ways to explore a phenomenon and alternatives to

how it is in that living, breathing moment. Due to the nature of exploring the present moment of a phenomenon, by the time we have researcher it and determined our findings, that present moment is already in the past and a new present experience has emerged (van Manen, 1997/2016; van Manen, 2014). It is this fleeting concept of the present that promises an inexhaustible wealth of knowledge to be gained by the continued study of the lived experience of safety for students on a university campus. As time advances forward, the atmosphere and culture of a university campus continues to change. Just as the atmosphere and culture of a campus changes, so too does society. The conditions that contributed to the perceptions of campus at the time of this study will inevitably change should any future studies examine this phenomenon (van Manen, 2014).

Continued interest on the lived experience of safety must be pursued, especially on the side of the university administration. While they are tasked with promoting an environment that reinforces free flow of thought and expression, they are to balance this with providing the security that allows for learning to occur (Fidanza, 2015). The conditions that may have made students feel secure previously may no longer suffice as safety and security are not fixed. It is in the best interest of administration to regularly check in on the health of their student population to see if their needs are being met and, if not, what the university could do to improve. Ultimately, universities are to serve as an institution for all to learn and advance so that they may positively contribute to society (Freitas & Leonard, 2011). However, learning and self-development cannot occur in an educational environment if safety is not met (Lester, 2013). Student safety must continue to be prioritized and secured for the entire student population, including those who are marginalized and more vulnerable to harm.

Appendix A

Interview Questions

- How would you personally define safety on campus?
- Did your experiences in high school influence your definitions of safety?
    a. Why or why not?
- Have those experiences influenced your concept of safety at a university campus?
    a. Why or why not?
- Have certain experiences on campus shaped your concept of safety?
    a. Why or why not?
- Have the experiences of other college students on campus impacted your perception of safety?
    a. Why or why not?
- Do you have any questions or comments?

Demographic Information:

- Does social media influence how safe you feel on campus?
    a. Why or why not?
- Do media reports on campus violence in the country help you to feel safe?
    a. How so?
- Are you aware of safety resources on campus?
    a. Yes
        i. If so, which ones?
    b. No
- How did you become aware about safety and safety resources on this campus?

- Do you know of any administration safety policies on campus?
    a. Yes
        i. If so, which ones?
    b. No
- Do administration policies help you to feel more safe or less safe?
    a. How so?
- Do you believe the length of time you have been on this campus as positively or negatively impacted your concept of personal safety?
    a. How so?
- Does the change from concealed-carry to open-carry impact your feelings on university safety?
    a. How so?
- Do you think the aspects of your identity impact your definition or concepts surrounding safety on campus?
    a. How so?
- Do you believe your identity places you at certain risks to personal safety?
    a. How so?
- How would you identify your race or ethnicity? (Select all that apply)
    a. Black or African American
    b. Hispanic, Latinx, or Spanish
    c. Asian _____
    d. Asian Indian
    e. Native American or Inuit

f. Middle Eastern

g. North African

h. South African

i. Pacific Islander

j. White

k. Multiracial

l. Other not identified:

_____

- How would you identify? (Select all that apply)

    a. Female

    b. Male

    c. Non-binary

    d. Cisgender

    e. Transgender

    f. Gender Fluid

- How old are you? _____
- What year are you at the University?

    a. Freshman

    b. Sophomore

    c. Junior

    d. Senior

    e. Graduate – Master's (if selected, did you attend OU in undergrad?)

        a. Yes

b. No

f. Graduate – Doctorate (if selected, did you attend OU in undergrad?)

a. Yes

b. No

g. Non-Traditional

- Would you identify as an individual with a disability?
  a. Yes
  b. No
- Do you believe your disability has this impacted your access to campus?
  a. Yes
  b. No
  c. Not Applicable
- Are you a first-generation college student?
  a. Yes
  b. No
- Do you regularly use social media?
  a. Yes
  b. No
- Please select the following apps you use:
  a. Facebook
  b. Instagram
  c. Twitter
  d. YouTube

e. Snapchat

f. Tumblr

g. Grinder

h. Tinder

i. Bumble

j. Vimeo

k. Whatsapp

l. Kik

m. Groupme

n. Tik Tok

- Do you have an open-carry or concealed-carry permit?

  a. Yes

  b. No

- Do you have any questions, comments, or concerns?

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