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The Process and Meaning of Sexual Assault Disclosure

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THE PROCESS AND MEANING OF SEXUAL ASSAULT DISCLOSURE

by

SHARON G. SMITH

Under the Direction of Sarah Cook and Rod Watts

ABSTRACT

Disclosure of sexual assault is a complicated process which depends upon a host of factors, such as assault characteristics, the victim's interpretation, and the level of distress she experiences. Comprehensive theories of adult sexual assault disclosure have not been proposed. Most studies concentrate on a particular aspect of disclosure, such as outcomes of disclosure and reasons for disclosing versus not disclosing. A number of gaps exist in the current literature on adult sexual assault disclosure. These include the conceptualization of disclosure as a discrete or continuous variable; how it may evolve during stages of recovery; the progression of disclosure (e.g., observable patterns to disclosing); the potential variety of motivations for disclosing beyond help-seeking; and the role of culture (e.g., how one's cultural and familial upbringing influences comfort and acceptance of disclosure as a viable option). The present study aimed to clarify and expand our previous knowledge about disclosure of sexual assault by investigating the overall process. A qualitative study, using a grounded theory approach, was conducted with a diverse sample of women who were sexually victimized after age 12.

Findings from the study reveal the complex nature of disclosure and expand on previous conceptions of its process and behavioral manifestations, such as evidence supporting a disclosure continuum, a variety of motivations for disclosing and not disclosing, the roles of culture and parenting practices that may influence disclosure, and the interactive nature of disclosure and recovery. The results suggest that the disclosure process consists of the factors that contribute to whether a disclosure is made, the disclosure itself, and the aftereffects of the disclosure, a process which could be conceived as occurring in circular manner. Thus, decisions of disclosure appear to be very complex, and all of these factors potentially interact with one another and collectively influence whether a woman discloses and how much. A number of research and practical implications are discussed including examining the relationship between motivations and current recovery stages, modifying our conceptualization of disclosure (as continuous rather than dichotomous), and recognizing the needs and concerns of diverse cultural groups in their decisions to disclose.

INDEX WORDS: Disclosure, Sexual Assault, Rape, Culture, Recovery, Grounded
                Theory, Qualitative, Measurement

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by

SHARON G. SMITH

A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

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by

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Dedication Page

This dissertation is dedicated to all the many people who encouraged me to seek my truth, and to

follow my instincts and my passion. You all have my sincere gratitude. In the midst of

completing this work, I discovered a quote that I believe captures my philosophy of research and

chosen field:

> *My own view is that you take these things personally. You do an experiment because your own philosophy makes you want to know the result. It's too hard, and life is too short, to spend your time doing something because someone else has said it's important. You must feel the thing yourself...*
>
> Isidor I. Rabi, Nobel Prize winner in Physics
>
> Quoted in Gary Zukav, *The Dancing Wu Li Masters: An Overview of the New Physics*

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List of Abbreviations

PTSD: Posttraumatic Stress Disorder

NVAW: National Violence Against Women

NCVS: National Crime Victimization Survey

TLEQ: Traumatic Life Events Questionnaire

SES: Sexual Experiences Survey

SCS: Self-Concealment Scale

Brief FNE: Brief Fear of Negative Evaluation Scale

GSU: Georgia State University

PI: Principal Investigator

CHAPTER 1: LITERATURE REVIEW

Women are victimized by sexual assault at alarmingly high rates. Annual estimates reveal that women are over three times more likely to be raped than men, and National Violence Against Women (NVAW) Survey findings indicate that 1 in 6 women in the U.S. experienced an attempted or completed rape as a child or an adult in their lifetime (Tjaden & Thoennes, 1998). The rates on college campuses appear to be even higher. A study of college students suggested that nearly 5% of women are victimized during a given calendar year, and over the course of the college career, rates may be as high as 20-25% (Fisher, Cullen, & Turner, 2000) an estimate that has remained consistent over a ten-year period despite the advent of date rape prevention programs on many college campuses; however, these prevention efforts may not consistently target the most common form of rape—acquaintance rape (Sampson, 2003).

A sexual assault can range in its severity; some women endure threats to life, serious physical injury, and devastating psychological harm, such as anxiety, depression, and suicidal thoughts. Others experience no apparent physical injury, but are left with a great deal of confusion over what and how it happened. In either case, the impact of rape may present itself in the form of posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), sexual dysfunctions, reduced self-esteem, and a range of other social and emotional disruptions and problems (see Koss & Harvey, 1991; Resick, 1993). Women in college may experience reductions in academic performance and/or drop out altogether in response to the emotional impact of the incident and fear of seeing or being confronted by the perpetrator.

Disclosure and Health

Traumatic experiences, such as sexual assault, can lead to reduced self-esteem, greater vulnerability (see Norris & Kaniasty, 1991, for a review), and PTSD (see Brewin, 2000, for a review). Disclosing the experience to others creates opportunities for increased understanding of the incident (e.g., through discussing it with others) and social support which may mitigate negative effects of the experience. For example, findings indicate that confiding in others is associated with less rumination about a traumatic experience and fewer health problems (Pennebaker & O'Heeron, 1984). Thus, given the potential benefits of disclosure, psychological studies of general disclosure have become more prevalent in the last decade.

Jourard (1971) first hypothesized that disclosure was related to physical and psychological health. Since then, several studies have demonstrated specific ways in which disclosing traumatic experiences is linked to beneficial health outcomes. The majority of these studies were conducted with college students in an experimental design in which participants wrote about either a personally traumatic event or a trivial (i.e., control) event. Beneficial findings include fewer illness-related doctor visits (Greenberg, Wortman, & Stone, 1996; Pennebaker & Beall, 1986), decreased blood pressure (Pennebaker, Hughes, & O'Heeron, 1987), decreased negative mood in the long-term (Paez, Velasco, & Gonzalez, 1999), improved immune functioning (Petrie, Booth, Pennebaker, Davison, & Thomas, 1995), and finding meaning in a traumatic experience (Park & Blumberg, 2002). A non-experimental study examined disclosure patterns among African-American HIV-infected women and found that those who disclosed their HIV status to their partners had fewer symptoms of depression compared to those who disclosed to other individuals (e.g., family members, friends) (Armistead, Morse, Forehand, Morse, & Clark, 1999).

The content of disclosure may also be significant. To elaborate, whether people discuss their feelings about a traumatic incident, objectively give only the facts, or do both may impact health. In one study, participants who wrote about either their feelings surrounding an event or a combination of feelings and facts, reported fewer health problems (Pennebaker & Beall, 1986). In disclosure of sexual assault, the content may be particularly important given the range of feelings associated with such a traumatic event, such as self-blame, anxiety, and mistrust of others. In terms of achieving closure, discussing one's whole experience (i.e., feelings and facts) about a sexual assault may facilitate recovery. These findings stress the importance of disclosure on women's health and potentially their recovery from traumatic events such as sexual assault.

Disclosure of Sexual Assault

Although many women are victimized by sexual assault, very few report their experiences to authorities such as the local police, campus police, medical professionals, and mental health professionals (see Fisher, Daigle, Cullen, & Turner, 2003, for a review) or other informal recipients. Data from the National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS) indicate that from 1992-2000, only 36% of rapes, 34% of attempted rapes, and 26% of sexual assaults were reported to the police. Among women who reported their assault to the police, 53% received medical treatment compared to 18% of women who did not report their assault (Rennison, 2002). Ideally, reporting a sexual assault to legal authorities will result in a conviction and prevent future assaults to others. However, conviction rates are extremely low (Campbell, Wasco, Ahrens, Sefl, & Barnes, 2001) and too often, victims are subjected to procedures that may feel unsupportive, blaming, and result in unwanted publicity (see Koss, 2000). Other reasons explain the low reporting rates to local and campus police. NCVS data indicate that the most frequently cited reasons for not reporting are (1) victims' perceptions that the incident was not serious

enough, (2) uncertainty over whether a crime or harm was intended, (3) not wanting others, including family, to know, (4) lack of proof that the incident occurred, (5) fear of reprisal by the assailant or others, and (6) beliefs that police would not view the incident as serious enough (Fisher et al., 2003).

These and other factors lead many women to choose not to formally disclose to an authority and to cope with the assault on their own. Women's coping strategies may involve disclosing the experience to individuals within their intimate social circles, such as family and friends. According to NCVS data, 70% of victims disclosed the incident to someone other than the police, most often to friends (88%) (Fisher et al., 2003). However, other studies indicate that many women never tell anyone. For instance, Koss (1985) found that among women who acknowledged a rape experience, 48% did not tell anyone about it.

Considerations in Disclosing

The decision to disclose is complex and contingent upon a number of factors which include whether the assailant was a stranger vs. an acquaintance, presence of injury and/or emotional distress, if the assault was attempted versus completed (Golding, Siegel, Sorenson, Burnam, & Stein, 1989; Resnick et al., 2000), and the victim's acknowledgment of the assault as rape (Kilpatrick, 1983). Acknowledgment of the incident as a rape or assault is critical to the disclosure process. It has been suggested that a woman must interpret the sex act as unwanted and that she was victimized before she is likely to disclose it to others (Browne, 1991), and additionally that others will also perceive her as a victim (Williams, 1984). If she does not perceive herself as having a problem or an issue to discuss, a victim is unlikely to disclose the experience to others. However, even without acknowledging the incident as assault, the experience can still affect victims' long-term physical and psychological health (e.g., diminished

self-esteem and restricted affect) and introduce challenges in their sexual relationships (e.g.,

sexual dysfunction), and women may not always link these problems to the assault itself

(Kilpatrick, 1983). A recent study of young women's disclosure of date rape found a

relationship between the timing of disclosure and the perpetrator having drunk. Specifically, if

the perpetrator drank at least one drink, they were more likely to disclose sooner rather than later

(Rickert, Wiemann, & Vaughan, 2005). In sum, factors related to the incident itself, the victim's

interpretation, and the level of distress she experiences influences the likelihood of disclosure,

but the picture becomes more complicated as she anticipates the reactions of others and must

weigh the potential costs and benefits of disclosing.

Despite the potential benefits to disclosing, it is not always possible or advantageous to

disclose. Studies of disclosure of adult sexual assault often concentrate on victims' efforts to

obtain social support, including reporting to police or emergency rooms (see Ullman, 1999, for a

review), and of those, many examined the immediate social reactions to disclosing (e.g.,

McAuslan, 1998; e.g., Routbort, 1997; Sudderth, 1998). Although most victims experience a

combination of positive and negative responses from others (Ullman & Filipas, 2001), many

women may delay or avoid disclosure out of fear of negative reactions from others, such as being

blamed, not believed, or discriminated against (Kilpatrick, 1983; Washington, 2001). For

example, Ullman and Filipas (2001) suggested that victims of acquaintance rape may fear blame

and disbelief especially if they were not physically injured in the assault. A number of studies

examined the perceived helpfulness of various support sources. Some formal support providers

are viewed as helpful, such as rape crisis centers, mental health professionals, and legal

professionals, while others, such as the police and physicians, are often perceived as less helpful

(Golding, Siegel et al., 1989; Ullman & Filipas, 2001). Informal support providers, such as

family and friends, are often rated as helpful (Golding, Siegal, Sorenson, Burnam, & Stein, 1989), but they may also give support in ways that are perceived as unhelpful but also hurtful, such as blaming her and treating her differently (Campbell, Ahrens, Sefl, Wasco, & Barnes, 2001; Filipas & Ullman, 2001). Some studies have examined the perceived helpfulness of men's and women's support, and found perceptions varied: males were significantly less helpful than females immediately after a rape experience (Frazier & Burnett, 1994), equally as helpful (Routbort, 1997), and more helpful than females (Mims & Chang, 1984).

Interestingly, the type of response, positive or negative, does not impact victims' recovery in predictable ways. One would assume that negative social reactions (e.g., blaming, not believed) would negatively impact a victim's recovery and health, however, positive reactions from others (e.g., listening, supporting) do not have the impact on victims' recovery that one might expect; in fact, studies indicate that the effect is small (Campbell, Ahrens et al., 2001; Ullman, 1996b). In one study of rape victims (Frazier & Burnett, 1994), women rated support providers as helpful, but factors such as the number of people told and the supportiveness rating were not significantly associated with adjustment. However, Ullman (1996b) examined the impact of positive and negative reactions to a disclosure and found that being listened to was significantly associated with better recovery, being believed was not related, and some negative reactions (e.g., being treated differently) were related to poorer recovery. Thus, the impact of social support on women's recovery from rape is unclear. Perhaps, other effects of disclosing (e.g., increased understanding of the incident) may be related to adjustment when working in conjunction with other effective coping strategies.

Theories of Disclosure Motivations

Comprehensive theories of adult sexual assault disclosure have not been proposed. Most studies concentrate on a particular aspect of disclosure, such as outcomes of disclosure and reasons for disclosing versus not disclosing. A few theories have sought to explain disclosure of personal and sensitive information, three of which are applicable to motivations for disclosing sexual assault. First, Davis & Franzoi (1987) hypothesized three motivations: (1) *Expressive need*, in which a people disclose in order to express their feelings and thoughts; rape victims who disclose may frequently be motivated by a need to express the negative feelings associated with the incident, such as shame, confusion, and anger, as well as discuss their perceptions and thoughts about what occurred. (2) *Self-knowledge need*, in which people disclose because it enables them to gain self-knowledge. For example, this type of disclosure may occur in therapeutic settings as a way to work through the rape experience. (3) *Self-defense need*, in which people avoid disclosing when they determine that there is too much potential risk involved (Petronio, 2002). For example, women often avoid disclosing when they fear they will be blamed, not believed, retaliated against, or experience other negative consequences.

Second, Jourard (1971) argued that disclosure is a reciprocal process. In disclosing traumatic events such as sexual assault, the motivation or context of reciprocity may be a relevant factor. Jourard stated:

> "In an ordinary social relationship, disclosure is a reciprocal phenomenon. Participants
> disclose their thoughts, feelings, and actions to others and receive disclosure in return. I
> called this reciprocity the "dyadic effect": disclosure begets disclosure" (p. 66, as cited in
> Petronio, 2002, p. 50).

It is natural that individuals will feel more comfortable sharing private and important life experiences when the same types of information are reciprocated by the person told. This point may be particularly salient among sexual assault victims. Given the potential for blaming and minimizing reactions, women are likely to be more motivated to share a sexual assault experience with others who have had similar experiences than those who have not.

Last, Stiles (1987) proposed a "fever model" of disclosure, arguing that people in distress disclose in order to relieve their burden (as cited in Petronio, 2002), thus it may be therapeutic to disclose. For example, women may disclose in order relieve the emotional stress that can occur from holding a secret. This is certainly a valid and potentially frequent motivator of disclosure; however, altruistic reasons may also be primary motivators for women as well. Women may disclose their experiences in order to support someone else with a similar experience or protect someone from the possibility of future assault.

Comparison of Child Sexual Abuse and Adult Sexual Assault Disclosure

It is useful to briefly compare and contrast disclosures of child sexual abuse and adult sexual assault because they may have important similarities and differences which may inform our understanding of the two and highlight areas for further study. Sorenson and Snow (1991) examined 116 cases of confirmed child sexual abuse and analyzed the victims' disclosure process. They found supporting evidence of two types of disclosures, purposeful vs. accidental, identified in earlier studies (Sgroi, Blick, & Porter, 1982), and that preschool children were more likely to disclose accidentally compared to adolescents who were more likely to disclose purposefully (i.e., deliberately). Further, the disclosure process consists of different stages, specifically, denial, tentative disclosing, and active disclosing. Thus, a child who initially discloses may not continue to disclose. In fact, children often begin by denying then tentatively

revealing the abuse, vacillating from a position of acknowledging the abuse to denying and recanting it. Over time, children move to actively disclosing in which they consistently affirm the abuse and are able to provide coherent, detailed, first-person accounts of the abuse. The time required in this process varies among children. In their study, 70% gave increased amounts of information over time. Some children may progress from denial to tentative to active stages relatively quickly, and others may take months to reach the active disclosing phase.

The characteristics, predictors, and process of disclosure of adult sexual assault may be similar to the patterns and process of disclosing child sexual abuse (e.g., Kellogg & Huston, 1995; e.g., Nagel, Putnam, Noll, & Trickett, 1997). In contrast to children, adults appear more likely to disclose purposefully rather than accidentally, and disclosure appears to occur more often in adult than in child victims (Golding, Siegel et al., 1989). Further, similar to child sexual abuse, adults frequently experience denial of the assault. Whether they go through stages of denial, tentative disclosing, and active disclosing is not presently known. However, it is likely that they do experience similar stages to denial and recanting based on the reactions they receive to their initial disclosures, and once they reach the active disclosing stage, they are likely to remain there.

Limitations in Sexual Assault Disclosure Research

Compared to disclosure of child sexual abuse, a number of gaps exist in the current literature on adult sexual assault disclosure. These include the conceptualization of disclosure (e.g., the definition and content); how it may evolve during stages of recovery (e.g., whether disclosure behaviors change or are impacted by earlier or later stages in recovery); the progression of disclosure (e.g., whether there are observable patterns to disclosing); motivations for disclosing (e.g., disclosing to receive support); and the role of culture (e.g., how one's

cultural and familial upbringing influences comfort and acceptance of disclosure as a viable option). The following is a discussion of each of these areas.

Conceptualization of Disclosure

The conceptualization of disclosure is murky and often defined by researchers. It is unclear what disclosing means to the individuals enacting them, such as the various defining characteristics of a disclosure. These characteristics may encompass a wide range of behaviors such as talking to someone, journaling, and prayer. Also, the manner of disclosing is not discussed in the literature, and it is often assumed that disclosures are purposeful and direct. However, many disclosures may actually occur indirectly (e.g., dropping hints), perhaps to limit the information that is revealed or to test the receptiveness of the listener. Little is known about the situations in which these types of disclosures are likely to occur.   These issues highlight the importance of understanding the disclosure process. Many psychological studies define disclosure as a single event whose occurrence is measured dichotomously (having disclosed vs. not disclosed). This assumes that disclosure is a single event and not a process, and that participants define it this way. Greenberg and Stone (1992) suggested that disclosure of traumatic events may actually function along a continuum, such that a person's disclosure status is not a question of yes or no (i.e., whether they disclosed), but rather a question of how much was disclosed (i.e., how much detail was given). This is an important point to consider in measuring and understanding disclosure, especially when examining the outcomes of disclosure (e.g., recovery and adjustment).

Relation between Disclosure and Recovery

Little research has examined how the experience of disclosure influences or is influenced by a person's current state of adjustment after a traumatic experience. Harvey (1996) argued that

in the psychological literature, "recovery" is often poorly defined but dimensions of recovery may include authority over remembering traumatic events, integrated memory and affect, tolerance for one's affect, mastery of posttraumatic symptoms, improved self-esteem and self-cohesion, ability to safely connect with others, and finding meaning in the traumatic event. A woman's current stage of recovery potentially plays a powerful role in her motivations to disclose. Intuitively, it seems that these different stages will influence a person's disclosure behaviors. For instance, a person may be more likely to disclose when she is experiencing intense post-event distress (e.g., PTSD symptoms) vs. after the distress has decreased. Sudderth's (1998) study found that women may initially have difficulty disclosing, but later they may find it difficult to contain it and be more willing to discuss their experiences. Also, women who have achieved a sense of closure and/or derived meaning in the experience may disclose in ways that are different than someone who is in earlier stages of recovery (e.g., in distress).

A related issue is the progression of disclosure, such as whether it occurs in a linear manner in which individuals progress from non-disclosure to eventual disclosure or in a spiral manner, in which individuals reveal information, conceal it, and reveal it again (Dindia, 1998) as was the case in a study of children who were sexually abused (Sorenson & Snow, 1991). The psychological literature primarily focuses on the first disclosure and its subsequent effects, but there is little to no discussion of the progression of disclosure. Instead, most discussions of the link between disclosure and recovery concentrate on how disclosing impacts victims' adjustment. For example, studies have examined positive and negative social reactions to disclosures (see Ullman, 1999, for a review), the perceived helpfulness of disclosing (e.g., Campbell, Ahrens et al., 2001; e.g., Filipas & Ullman, 2001; Golding, Siegel et al., 1989), and

how disclosures influence future disclosures and non-disclosures (see Ahrens, 2002; Kilpatrick, 1983; Sudderth, 1998), patterns which may ultimately impact victims' recovery.

Motivations for Disclosing

The potential range of motivations for disclosing has been the subject of limited investigation. The psychological literature often concentrates on help-seeking and catharsis motivations, and most studies have not addressed other motivations and factors that may prompt disclosure, especially among victims of sexual assault whose motivations may be very different from other trauma populations. In one exception, Karen, Dunn, and Vail-Smith (1999) examined the context of disclosures from rape victims but from the perspective of the person told. Findings revealed that disclosure occurred in a number of contexts including: (1) within trusting, intimate relationships, (2) during conversations that ranged from casual to in-depth, often about relationships, sex, rape, and other problems, and sometimes while the victim and others were drunk and recalling past experiences (3) when the victim sought support or demonstrated need, (4) when the victim was trying to warn about or prevent someone from being victimized, and (5) when the victim responded to questions about her own behavior, such as emotional distress or unusual behavior. This study provides an initial glimpse into the range of stimuli that may prompt disclosure and the potential motivators for disclosing. However, it is limited because the study was based on the recipients' perspectives rather than the victims'.

The reasons women do not disclose are complex. For instance, the great risk involved in disclosing sexual assault leads many women to halt disclosing or to never disclose at all (Kilpatrick, 1983). Considering the complications that are likely to arise, might it be beneficial or advantageous to *not* disclose, or would women prefer to disclose but are discouraged through fears of or actual negative social responses? Little is known about other reasons or motivations

that may inhibit women from disclosing. For example, some women may delay or avoid disclosing in an effort to bring about recovery. That is, victims may believe that if they do not talk or think about it, they will recover (Resick, 1983). It is unclear to what extent not disclosing may be an effective coping strategy. However, motivations for not disclosing do not appear to be limited to social fears, thus is a worthy area of further investigation.

The Role of Culture and Familial Upbringing in Disclosure

Possibly the largest gap in the literature are the roles of culture and familial upbringing in disclosure. In general, the role of culture is often examined as a predictor of different ethnic groups' likelihood of disclosing, the groups' common experiences (e.g., reactions) after disclosing (e.g., Golding, Siegel et al., 1989; e.g., Maciejewski, 2002; Resnick et al., 2000; Ullman, 1996a), how a woman's culture is involved in her recovery (e.g., Neville, Heppner, Oh, Spanierman, & Clark, 2004), and its role in helping her make sense of the experience (Lebowitz & Roth, 1994). The influence of a victim's culture on disclosure is rarely examined. In one exception, Washington (2001) studied the disclosure patterns of female African-American victims of sexual assault and found that their experience and identity as African-Americans influenced a number of important factors such as whether they disclosed, to whom, their knowledge and socialization around sexuality, and other cultural rules regarding revealing personal problems and information to others, and the amount of support (if any) they expected to receive from institutions such as criminal justice.

The victims' culture and upbringing is a potentially powerful predictor of whether a woman discloses and the manner in which she does. There are a number of important factors that may influence disclosure. First, the impact of problem-solving strategies acquired during childhood and adolescence has not been examined. The messages women received from their

families regarding the appropriateness of disclosing to others and turning to non-family members for support may predict future disclosure of personal problems and traumatic events. Help-seeking behaviors often vary across culture and these cultural norms may influence adult disclosures. In fact, studies of adolescents show strong cultural influences on help-seeking often in the direction of not seeking help from others. A review of the cross-cultural influences on adolescent help-seeking (Cauce et al., 2002) revealed that some African-Americans may rely on willpower to overcome difficult situations (Broman, 1996); some Asian Americans handle problems by choosing not to dwell or focus on them (Cheng, Leong, & Geist, 1993); for many people in East Asian cultures, seeking outside help is viewed as shameful (Cheung & Snowden, 1990); in a predominantly White sample of adolescents, the majority did not seek help for serious problems such as depression and suicidal thoughts (Dubow, Lovko, & Kausch, 1990). Compared to males, females are typically more comfortable with help-seeking, but cultural and ethnic norms may carry more weight in influencing disclosure.

Next, it may be important to understand the way sexual topics were handled in women's families. For instance, parents' comfort around discussing and educating their daughters about healthy sexual behavior could impact how comfortable young women feel in approaching them with questions or confusing situations they encounter. Jaccard and Dittus (1991) found that approximately 15-25% of parents had not discussed sexual topics (e.g., birth control) with their adolescent children. Thus, if parents do not initiate it, many young women may not have the opportunity to openly discuss important sexual topics during the very time when they are likely to encounter sexual situations. Findings in Sudderth (1998) suggested that without an appropriate setting for young women to discuss their sexuality, any dialogue about sexual coercion is silenced as well. Thus, due to lack of communication and education, women may

frequently lack sufficient knowledge to distinguish between consensual and non-consensual sex (e.g., recognizing whether consent for sex was given), a content area that has been recommended for rape prevention programming (Holcomb, Savage, Seehafer, & Waalkes, 2002). All of these factors may contribute to a woman's ability to protect herself from rape, recognize it if it occurs, and influence whether she discusses it with others.

Another important factor is dating practices within a woman's culture. Cultural and family norms often dictate when (e.g., age) and who (e.g., ethnicity and/or religion) girls are allowed to date, and these may influence disclosure. For example, a young woman who is raped by someone outside her ethnicity may experience internal shame and not disclose for fear of reproach from her family and others within her culture. A related issue is the way in which sex is viewed within her culture and religion, (e.g., shameful, natural, for procreation only). In a society in which abstinence is highly promoted for prevention and religious purposes, women may feel uncomfortable and/or ashamed about discussing sexual experiences, even unwanted ones.

Conclusions

Existing research illustrates the challenges of measuring disclosure and how current conceptualizations may limit our understanding of disclosure behaviors in general. Previous studies of sexual assault disclosure demonstrate the potential risks and benefits of disclosing, provide some information about victims' reasoning for disclosing and not, and illustrate the mixed reactions that are often received after disclosure. Thus, sexual assault disclosure appears to be a complex and ongoing process, fraught with several factors that women must consider in their decisions to disclose.

CHAPTER 2: INTRODUCTION TO CURRENT STUDY

Each year women are sexually assaulted at very high rates. A study of college students suggested that nearly 5% of women are victimized during a given calendar year, and over the course of the college career, rates may be as high as 20-25% (Fisher et al., 2000). Further, findings from the National Violence Against Women (NVAW) Survey estimate that 1 in 6 women in the U.S. experience an attempted or completed rape in their lifetime (Tjaden & Thoennes, 1998). However, very few women report their victimization to authorities such as the local police, campus police, medical professionals, and mental health professionals for many reasons, such as feeling uncertain that a crime was committed and not wanting others to find out about the incident (Fisher et al., 2003). Consequently, data from the National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS) indicate that the majority (70%) of victims disclosed the incident to someone other than the police, most often to friends (88%) (Fisher et al., 2003), but other studies show that many women never tell anyone (Koss, 1985).   Factors that predict rape disclosure include whether the assailant was a stranger vs. an acquaintance, presence of injury and/or emotional distress, if the assault was attempted vs. completed (Golding, Siegel et al., 1989; Resnick et al., 2000), and the victim's acknowledgment of the assault as rape (Kilpatrick, 1983).

In the last decade, psychological studies of disclosure have grown in number, especially those that examine the effects of disclosure. Disclosing the experience to others creates opportunities for increased understanding of a traumatic incident and social support which may mitigate deleterious effects (e.g., PTSD, vulnerability) of traumatic events. In fact, previous studies show a relationship between disclosure and decreased symptoms of depression (Armistead et al., 1999), improved immune functioning (Petrie et al., 1995), fewer health

problems (Pennebaker & O'Heeron, 1984), and finding meaning in a traumatic experience (Park & Blumberg, 2002). These results stress the importance of disclosure on women's health and potentially their recovery from traumatic events such as sexual assault.

However, it is not always possible or in one's best interest to disclose, regardless of the possible benefits. (e.g., McAuslan, 1998; e.g., Routbort, 1997; Sudderth, 1998). Although most victims experience a combination of positive and negative responses from others (Ullman & Filipas, 2001), many women may delay or avoid disclosure out of fear of negative reactions from others, such as being blamed, not believed, or discriminated against (Kilpatrick, 1983; Washington, 2001). A number of studies examined the perceived helpfulness of various support sources. Findings indicate that some formal support providers are viewed as helpful (e.g., rape crisis centers, mental health professionals) while others are often perceived as less helpful (e.g., police and physicians) (Golding, Siegel et al., 1989; Ullman & Filipas, 2001). Reactions to disclosures to family and friends are also mixed. Although family and friends are often rated as helpful (Golding, Siegal et al., 1989), they may also attempt to support the victim in ways that are perceived as unhelpful as well as hurtful, such as blaming her and treating her differently afterward (Campbell, Ahrens et al., 2001; Filipas & Ullman, 2001).

Theories of Disclosure

Comprehensive theories of adult sexual assault disclosure are virtually absent from the literature. Most studies concentrate on a particular aspect of disclosure (e.g., outcomes of disclosure). Previous theories have attempted to explain disclosure of personal and sensitive information, three of which are applicable to sexual assault disclosure. Davis & Franzoi (1987) suggested that disclosure occurs in order to express one's feelings and thoughts and to increase self-knowledge, and does not occur when the risk seems too great (as cited in Petronio, 2002).

Second, Jourard (1971) proposed that disclosure is reciprocal and that individuals naturally feel more comfortable sharing private and important life experiences when the same types of information are reciprocated by the recipient. Finally, Stiles (1987) suggested that people in distress disclose in order to relieve the emotional stress that can occur from holding a secret (as cited in Petronio, 2002). These theories are a good starting point for understanding disclosure of traumatic events, such as sexual assault.

<div align="center">Gaps in the Current Literature on Disclosure</div>

A number of gaps exist in the psychological literature on adult sexual assault disclosure. An important area that impacts current as well as future studies of disclosure is our conceptualization of the construct. Most psychological studies define disclosure dichotomously (having disclosed vs. not disclosed); however, disclosure of traumatic events may actually function along a continuum, such that a person's disclosure status is not a question of yes or no (i.e., whether they disclosed), but rather a question of how much was disclosed (i.e., how much detail was given) (Greenberg & Stone, 1992). This is an important point to consider in measuring and understanding disclosure, especially when examining the outcomes of disclosure (e.g., recovery and adjustment).

Second, most current studies on sexual assault have not addressed motivations and factors that may prompt disclosure, beyond that of support-seeking, yet victims may disclose sexual assault for a variety of reasons. One study (Karen et al., 1999) examined the context of and reasoning for disclosures of rape victims but from the perspective of the person told. Findings indicated that disclosure occurred within trusting, intimate relationships, and during conversations that were often about relationships, sex, rape, and other problems. Further, victims disclosed to gain support, warn about or prevent someone else from being victimized, and to

respond to questions about her own behavior, such as emotional distress or unusual behavior. This study provides an initial glimpse into the range of stimuli that may prompt disclosure and the potential motivators for disclosing, but lacks the personal perspective of the victims.

Relatedly, a woman's current stage of recovery may impact disclosure, such as her motivations to disclose, but little research has examined this relationship. Intuitively, it seems that these different stages will influence a person's disclosure behaviors. For instance, a person may be more likely to disclose when she is experiencing intense post-event distress (e.g., PTSD symptoms) vs. after the distress has decreased. Women who have achieved a sense of closure and/or derived meaning in the experience may have different reasons for disclosing (and not) than victims in earlier stages of recovery. Previous studies have focused on how concerns about others discourages disclosure (see Ullman, 1999, for a review), but very little is known about recovery-related reasons or motivations that may prevent women from disclosing. For example, some women may delay or avoid disclosing in an effort to bring about recovery (i.e., if they do not talk or think about it, they will recover) (Resick, 1983). It is unclear to what extent not disclosing may be an effective coping strategy, but motivations for not disclosing do not appear to be limited to social fears, thus is a worthy area of further investigation.

The roles of culture and familial upbringing in disclosure are rarely examined. In one exception, Washington (2001) studied the disclosure patterns of female African-American victims of sexual assault and found that their experience and identity as African-Americans influenced a number of important factors such as whether they disclosed, to whom, their knowledge and socialization around sexuality, the likelihood of revealing personal problems and information to others, and the amount of support (if any) they expected to receive from institutions such as criminal justice.

The victims' culture and upbringing is a potentially powerful predictor in whether a woman discloses a sexual assault and the manner in which she does. A number of related areas have not been examined which include: familial attitudes about disclosure of personal information and if it is viewed as a viable option; issues related to the discussion of sexual topics, such as parents' comfort in discussing healthy sexual behavior and the ways in which dating practices (e.g., appropriate age) and sex are viewed within the victim's culture and religion, (e.g., shameful, natural, for procreation only).

The Present Study

The present study aimed to clarify and expand our previous knowledge about disclosure of sexual assault by investigating the overall process. The focus of this study was to generate a theory of the overall disclosure process and increase our understanding of its meaning to women. Secondary goals were to clarify disclosure as a construct, expand our knowledge about the potential influence of culture, and uncover the potential variety of motivations and reasons for disclosing. To address these goals, a qualitative study was conducted with a diverse sample of women who were sexually victimized after age 12. A grounded theory approach was employed in order to learn from the victims themselves about the overall process of sexual assault disclosure. To address the overarching question of process, the following research questions guided the investigation:

(1) How is disclosure defined (i.e., what are its characteristics)?

(2) What is the role of culture and upbringing in disclosure?

(3) What motivates women to disclose (i.e., for what reasons do women disclose) and what factors discourage disclosure?

(4) How is disclosure involved in construing meaning from the victimization experience?

(5) How is disclosure of sexual assault involved in the recovery process?

(6) How does disclosure change over time?

CHAPTER 3: METHODS

Sample

Participants were recruited through a screening process. All screening participants (N=144) were undergraduate women who participated to fulfill a class requirement and were required to be 18 or older. Participants completed a screening questionnaire consisting of a demographics page, history of potentially traumatic life events, sexual experiences, social anxiety, tendency toward self-concealment, and social desirability, and a concluding page with information about the interview's focus and an area for them to indicate their interest in participating in a one-to-one interview.

To be eligible for the interview, participants must have experienced at least one attempted or completed act of oral, anal, or vaginal sex since age 13 and under at least one of the following conditions: (1) perpetrator threatened her with physical harm; (2) perpetrator used physical force, such as holding her down or ripping her clothes; (3) victim was incapacitated from alcohol/drugs and could not object or consent. These incidents were measured with a revised version of the *Sexual Experiences Survey* (McConaghy & Zamir, 1995). Additionally, participants must have experienced the sexual incident at least one year prior to the interview. Forty-nine (34%) women qualified for the interview, 34 (71%) expressed interest in participating, and 20 of those were ultimately interviewed. The remaining 15 participants were not interviewed because they could not be reached to schedule the interview, there was a scheduling conflict, they later changed their mind, or they attended the interview and stated that their incident occurred less than one year ago, in which case the interview was discontinued.

Demographics

Within the sample (N=20), the majority (55%) identified as White and 45% identified as other racial groups (African-American, Asian/Pacific Islander, Hispanic, Multi-racial, and Other). The women's ages ranged from 18-45 with a mean age of 23.5 (SD=7.19). Most of the women were single (85%); two (10%) were married, and one (5%) was divorced. The majority belonged to a Christian-affiliated religion: 40% (N=8) identified as Protestant, 15% (N=3) were Catholic, 5% (N=1) was Orthodox Christian. Five percent (N=1) were Hindu, 5% (N=1) were Agnostic, 10% (N=2), identified with "other" religions, and 20% (N=4) had no religious affiliation.

As expected, given the population from which the sample was drawn, the participants' parents were relatively well-educated, in that most received at least some education beyond high school. Among the participants' fathers, 25% (N=5) had graduate degrees, 25% (N=5) had college degrees, 30% (N=6) had some college education, 10% (N=2) had some technical or trade school education, 5% (N=1) had a high school diploma, and 5% (N=1) did not complete high school. Among the participants' mothers, 5% (N=1) had graduate degrees, 25% (N=5) had college degrees, 40% (N=8) had some college education, 5% (N=1) had some technical or trade school education, and 25% (N=5) had a high school diploma.

Measures

Participants completed the following measures during screening:

Demographics

Participants completed a brief demographics page requesting their age, racial identity, marital status, religious affiliation, and parents' highest level of education.

History of Potentially Traumatic Events

Potentially traumatic events were measured with the *Traumatic Life Events Questionnaire (TLEQ)* (Kubany, 1995). The *TLEQ* assesses the occurrence of 21 potentially traumatic events plus one open-ended event. Although a new instrument, it has demonstrated good reliability and validity (Kubany et al., 2000).

Sexual Experiences

The modified *Sexual Experiences Survey (SES)* (McConaghy & Zamir, 1995) was used to screen for the occurrence of unwanted sexual experiences (i.e., sexual assault). The modified *SES* measures sexual behavior with varying degrees of coercion, threat, and force. The original instrument is both reliable and valid in assessing sexual experiences (Koss & Gidycz, 1985). For the current study, only the items assessing sexual victimization were included (i.e., perpetration items were excluded); see Appendix A.

Most Stressful Event

Participants were asked to identify their most stressful life event within the group of potentially traumatic events and sexual experiences. This question was used to examine the types of events perceived as most stressful among participants.

Disclosure of Traumatic and Sexual Experiences

Two procedures were used to assess disclosure. To assess individual disclosure, each *TLEQ* item was supplemented with the question, "have you ever told anyone about this experience?" To assess disclosure of sexual experiences, the same question was added to the *SES* items but applied to groups of sexual experiences rather than individual incidents (see Appendix A). This method was chosen to avoid the potential confusion of trying to recall if individual sexual experiences were disclosed to someone.

To assess public disclosure, three question items were included to assess (1) disclosure made by the media, such as newspapers and news programs; (2) disclosing in a support group; (3) public disclosures, such as in court, on television, radio, or in a book.

Given the self-selective nature of participation, the following instruments were used to determine differences between participants who volunteered for the interview and those who did not. It is possible that those who volunteer for research participation may be more comfortable with disclosing and be more open in general.

Self-Concealment

Participants' tendencies toward self-concealment was measured with the *Self-Concealment Scale* (*SCS)* (Larson & Chastain, 1990). The *SCS* is a 10-item scale that assesses individuals' dispositional tendencies to conceal secret information from others. The instrument has shown good reliability and validity (Cramer & Barry, 1999). For the screening sample, Cronbach's alpha was .84.

Social Anxiety

Participants' social anxiety was measured with the *Brief Fear of Negative Evaluation Scale* (*Brief FNE)* (Leary, 1983). The *Brief FNE* is a 12-item scale composed of the original *FNE* items. The *Brief FNE* is both reliable and valid (see Fischer & Corcoran, 1994). For the screening sample, Cronbach's alpha was .92

Social Desirability

The short form of the *Marlowe-Crowne Social Desirability Scale* (Reynolds, 1982) is a 13-item true/false scale that assesses social desirability tendencies in general populations. For the screening sample, Cronbach's alpha was .70

Procedure

General Procedures

     All participants were students enrolled in the Introductory to Psychology course at Georgia State University (GSU) and recruited through the online Experimetrix system. Criteria for participation were female, 18 years and older, and able to speak fluent English. Participants completed all measures in a research room in the Psychology department. First, participants read and signed an informed consent form, and then they were given brief verbal instructions by the principal investigator (PI) or a research assistant about the survey. Next, participants completed the screening survey, and based on their responses, were invited to participate in the one-to-one interview. To qualify, they must have experienced a sexual assault since age 13, and at least one year must have passed since the incident. As part of the screening questionnaire, participants were instructed to read an "invitation page" containing brief information about the interview topic and instructions for determining whether they were eligible. To determine eligibility, participants were instructed to refer back to their responses to the questions that asked about their sexual experiences (i.e., the *SES* items) and see if they answered affirmatively that they experienced any of the sexual incidents at least once since age 13. Next, they were asked to mark whether they qualified for the interview and to indicate if they wished to participate in the interview, and if so, to write their contact information on this page. Last, all participants were instructed to separate this page from their questionnaire so the process did not identify anyone as a victim (see Appendix B).

     Next, the PI examined all the questionnaire responses and verified eligibility. Then, the PI contacted interested participants via their contact information to ask again of their interest in

participating and set up an interview date and time. To protect their confidentiality, no information that revealed the study's topic was given on voicemail messages.

All participants were given one research credit hour for completing the screening questionnaire. Those who participated in the interview received an additional 2 hours research credit and a monetary incentive of $20 at the conclusion of the interview.

Procedures for Verifying Eligibility

All interviews were conducted by the PI in an assessment room in the GSU Psychology Clinic. Upon arrival to the clinic, the PI escorted participants to the interview room. Prior to beginning the interview, the PI verified the eligibility of each participant in the following manner. First, each participant gave proof of age (e.g., driver's license). Next, the PI and the participant looked through the answers given on the *SES*. We discussed each item to ensure that participants understood the questions' intent and verified their answer choices. Last, we examined the sexual incidents that met behavioral criteria for sexual assault (items c-e on the *SES*, see Appendix A), but in a way that did not label it as such. Of those incidents, we identified the one(s) that occurred at least one year ago. If there were more than one, participants were asked to identify the one that was the most stressful. If none of the incidents occurred at least one year ago (i.e., occurred within one year), then the interview process ended. I explained the criteria for the interview and thanked them for their willingness to participate. Those participants were given 2 hours of research credit for their class, but were not given the $20 incentive. Participants were given a resource sheet containing local psychological services. I explained the services outlined on the resource sheet, and suggested that if she still wanted to discuss her incident and experiences, that she contact any of the service providers listed, especially the GSU Counseling Center or GSU Psychology Clinic.

Interview Procedures

To protect their identity, participants provided verbal rather than written consent. Rather than signing their names, participants checked a box on the consent form to indicate their consent for participation (see Appendix C). Afterwards, participants were given a brief introduction about the interview focus and asked for their permission to audio tape the interview session for transcription purposes. Interviews were 1-1.5 hours in length.

During the actual interview, participants' names were not used. Instead, each participant was identified with a number. The interview itself was guided by a series of open-ended questions. In order to place the interview within a specific context, participants were asked to briefly describe the sexual incident (or set of incidents) we identified during the eligibility check. Next, they were asked about their experiences of disclosing (and not disclosing) the incident to others. Then, they were asked to describe the some of the outcomes of these experiences (e.g., recovery). The questions in this section were guided by recovery criteria suggested in Harvey (1996). Next, they were asked about their perceptions of how their culture and familial upbringing influenced their comfort and experiences with disclosing. Last, they were asked why they decided to do the interview study (i.e., what reasons, motivations did they have) and to provide their reactions to doing the interview. The interview protocol is presented in Table 1.

At the conclusion of the interview session, participants were thanked for their participation and were given $20 and a resource sheet containing local psychological services. We talked about the resource sheet and the services available, and I answered any questions they had. In some cases, the participant seemed to want feedback, and in those cases, I provided supportive feedback by reassuring her that these types of sexual experiences are more common than many people realize, and I told her that her reactions to the incident were typical. Then I

encouraged her to contact the resources provided on the resource sheet. With all participants, I made special efforts to encourage them to contact the GSU Counseling Center or GSU Psychology Clinic, in case they felt that they wanted to discuss their incident and experience in greater depth. Finally, I sent a thank-you email to all participants who attended an interview session, whether they completed the interview or not.

Table 1

Interview Protocol

Subject Addressed	Guiding Questions
Incident	Please tell me about what happened to you, as much as you want to share. (PROBE FOR CHARACTERISTICS OF THE INCIDENT: WHO, WHERE, WHEN, RESPONSES TO THE ASSAULT). What thoughts and feelings did you have while it was happening? Afterward?
Disclosure Experiences (general)	When was the FIRST time you told someone about the experience in a way that was especially important or meaningful to you? Tell me about a disclosure experience that sticks out in your mind. (PROBE FOR HOW IT HAPPENED, WHO TOLD, WHEN, WHO INITIATED, MOTIVATIONS, CONTEXTUAL FACTORS, HOW WELL IT WENT). What was it like for you after discussing the experience? Did you feel differently about it later? Were you glad you did it? Why? Why did you decide to do it with that person and at that time? Sometimes the most memorable or meaningful time you discuss the experience happens a while after the event. Are there any other disclosure experiences that were especially memorable or important for you? (SAME PROBES AS WITH PREVIOUS QUESTION FOR FIRST MEMORABLE DISCLOSURE)
Disclosure Experiences (formal)	You've told me about telling people in some INFORMAL roles (such as friends and family). Did you tell anyone in a formal role such as the police, a nurse, or a counselor? Did you feel that it was necessary to tell any of them? What was it like for you after discussing the experience? (Did you feel different about it later? Were you glad you did it?) Why did you decide to do it with that person and at that time?

Table 1 continued

Subject Addressed	Guiding Questions
Change over time in disclosures	Do you think your disclosures have changed over time? For example… Probes: Easier the more you did it More or less detail/depth Fewer or more disclosures More or less emotion Less need felt to disclose Few others you wanted to share with Reasons for disclosing changed Situations in which disclosing took place changed Overall, have your disclosures changed how you feel about the incident? (PROBES: Or how you feel about yourself, or how the experience has affected you? Have the disclosures helped you to move forward with your life? Have they made it less difficult to think about? Made it less traumatic? Think less about it?). How so or why not? Has telling others affected your views about the incident today? Do you think disclosing has changed you in any way? If yes, how so?
Recovery outcomes related to disclosure	Have your disclosures changed how you feel about the incident? (PROBES: Or how you feel about yourself, or how the experience has affected you? Have the disclosures helped you to move forward with your life? Have they made it less difficult to think about? Made it less traumatic? Think less about it?) How so or why not? Has telling others affected your views about the incident today? Do you think disclosing has changed you in any way? If yes, how so? Is there anything else you would like to tell me about these experiences?

Table 1 continued

Subject Addressed	Guiding Questions
Experiences NOT disclosing	Has there been an especially memorable time when you made a decision NOT to talk about it, even though you had an opportunity to do so? (PROBES: What about the person, situation, made her not want to disclose) Why did you decide not to talk about it? How did you feel after this decision? How do you think this experience influenced your willingness to talk about it to other people?
Indirect Disclosures	Have you ever told someone about the incident without actually telling them (e.g., describe without actually saying it happened to you, or provide information without actually saying that it happened to you)?
Culture and Upbringing	Sometimes our parents, our peers, or even television, books, or other influences affect how we deal with an unwanted sexual experience. Do you think that your upbringing or other previous experiences had any effect on how you coped with it? (PROBE FOR ETHNICITY & RELIGION IF IT DOESN'T COME UP). If yes, how so? Did it affect your decision to tell others?
Reasons for Participation	What made you want to do this interview with me? How has it felt talking about it in this setting (i.e., research setting)?

CHAPTER 4: PLAN OF ANALYSIS

Our understanding of sexual assault disclosure is limited to smaller components of the disclosure process (e.g., recipients of disclosure, when disclosed, fears about disclosing). To date, there is no sexual assault disclosure theory based on the experience of women. Thus, it is essential to initiate theory development by examining the women's perspectives and lived experience. To accomplish this, the interview process was informed by a grounded theory approach, specifically that of Strauss and Corbin (1998). The strength of this approach is that theory is generated inductively from the data upward. In summary, the analysis relies on inductive and deductive methods in an iterative procedure for analyzing the data. This study employed an open-ended, semi-structured interview style to allow for adjustments in the interview as significant themes emerged. Specifically, the "constant comparison" method was used to compare interviews and uncover prominent themes in the data. In this way, the theories of the disclosure process and experience is developed from the data and used to inform the emergent theory. The following is a description of each phase of analysis.

Qualitative Software

All interviews were transcribed and then coded by the PI using ATLAS.ti (Muhr, 2004) (version 5), a powerful Windows-based qualitative software program that allows users to upload text files and code transcripts within the program. The program facilitates organization of the data by providing functions for categorizing, defining, searching, editing, and merging codes and categories. Furthermore, it encourages the use of memos for recording ideas and potential theories about the data and relationships among the codes and categories.

General Rules for Coding

Open coding began soon after the commencement of data collection to allow the opportunity to make adjustments to the interview measure if necessary and learn the emergent themes in the data. This was important in order to focus sufficient time and questions on potentially important themes during the interview itself.

Open coding was guided by two factors, the research questions and the incident identified in the eligibility check at the start of the interview. First, only material related to the construct of interest—disclosure—was coded. For example, a participant's description of the assault was generally not coded except for statements related to the research questions (i.e., disclosure), such as assigning blame to herself and/or the perpetrator and interpretation of the assault as rape or not; however, general characteristics of the assault (e.g., location, relationship to the victim) were not coded. Second, in order to gain a clear picture of the disclosure process, it was important to concentrate the coding on the specific incident identified in the eligibility check. Periodically, participants digressed from the central incident (i.e., assault) or interview question at hand. In those instances, if a participant spoke about experiences unrelated to the incident itself or about additional incidents that were not a focus of the study (e.g., domestic violence), those were not coded except to the extent that they provided information about disclosure of the incident under investigation (i.e., the one identified during the eligibility check). Last, coding was restricted to statements about disclosing to individuals outside of the study. Specifically, coding was not applied to remarks about disclosing to the PI, such as feelings or reactions to disclosing that occurred during the study. Disclosures that occur within a research project are qualitatively different than those that occur toward individuals within the participants' social circle, especially with regard to possible reactions (negative and positive), confidentiality, and the lack of

reciprocal communication (i.e., listener sharing something personal in return). Thus, the decision was made to exclude remarks from the current analysis that were related to the disclosure that occurred within the research setting. The only exception to this rule was if the research study played a role in a participant's disclosure to someone else (e.g., discussion about participating prompted a disclosure). If such an instance occurred, then it was coded.

Coding and Codebook Development

The codebook was developed in a concurrent process that involved individual analysis (i.e., coding) conducted by the PI, and collaborative analysis by the PI and a group of raters who were involved in the assessment of inter-rater reliability. The following is a discussion of each phase in the process.

Phase One: Open Coding

Initial coding proceeded in two phases that were based on *open coding* techniques described in Strauss and Corbin (1998). First, a detailed, micro level of coding was employed, in which the PI read the transcripts at a very micro level (i.e., line by line), looking for interesting and potentially relevant quotes that may have provided insight into the major research questions. Such close analysis helps allow initial concepts to emerge from the data. Responses to the interview questions (i.e., quotations) were represented by short descriptors (i.e., code names) that captured the essence of the responses. These responses were placed in general grouping categories that represented the particular question that was asked during the interview. For example, in response to the question, "what motivated you to talk about it?" quotes that reflected reasons for disclosing were coded and given short code names (e.g., relief) and ultimately placed in the broader category of *Motivations for Disclosing*. This procedure results in several codes but allows the researcher to discover the major themes within the data. Concurrently, while

locating quotations and assigning codes, each code was described with the use of *memos*, defined as a "record of analysis, thoughts, interpretations, questions, and directions" about the data (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 110).

During the second phase, data were reduced and grouped into distinct categories. During this phase, codes were closely examined for their similarities, differences, and interactions and placed into larger categories that represented their characteristics, as recommended in Strauss and Corbin (1998). For example, codes such as *Blaming Remarks* and *Fear of Being Viewed Differently* were placed in the larger category of *Factors that Discourage Disclosure*. This procedure facilitates organization of the codes.

Phase Two: Verification of Categories

The next step involved verification that the categories observed by the PI were also apparent to outside observers. This step helps to validate the observations and interpretations made by the PI. To accomplish this, a group of five racially diverse, female graduate students in psychology participated as raters for this study. All raters had previous research experience in the area of violence against women.

Initially, raters were given basic training in locating and coding themes within an interview transcript. Training was based on coding procedures described in Strauss and Corbin (1998). Next, two transcripts were given to the raters to determine if all major themes were discovered and if they reflected potential answers to the research questions. The two transcripts differed in the participant's disclosure status. In one transcript, the participant had disclosed to at least one person prior to the interview, and in the other, the participant had never disclosed prior to the interview. It was important to apply this step to both types of interviews given the potential for different themes based on disclosure status.

Raters were told that the list of themes were tentative and instructed to read the transcripts and (1) decide if the themes listed reflected the content in the transcript; (2) decide if the names of the major categories were appropriate as descriptors; (3) note and recommend additional themes that they noticed that were excluded from the theme list. Results from this step confirmed that all categories were appropriately named, represented in the data, and relevant to the research questions. No additional major categories were discovered by the raters.

Phase Three: Axial Coding

The third phase, *axial coding,* actually occurs simultaneously with open coding, and represents the process of relating categories to one another according to their properties and dimensions (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). During this phase, codes are analyzed and subcategories are created that provide information about the larger categories. Using the previous example, the codes, *Blaming Remarks* and *Fear of Being Viewed Differently* were placed into the subcategory of *Unhelpful Responses from Others*, within the larger category of *Factors that Discourage Disclosure*. This procedure facilitates organization of the codes and reduction through combining similar categories and concludes when the data is "saturated" (i.e., no other codes or categories are observed in the data). This phase involves an iterative process of coding, re-coding, and repeatedly examining the categories for their accuracy in describing the dimensions within the data.

Phase Four: Verification of the Coding System

At this point, the coding system (i.e., code book) had become elaborate. It was important to verify that the system made sense, that it was coherently presented and organized in a way that could be easily utilized by others.   In this step, raters were instructed to examine the current list of codes and brief definitions of each. They were asked to determine their agreement with the

major category headings (i.e., does the category name accurately represent the individual codes within it?). Then they were asked to examine the individual codes to determine if there were any other groupings (i.e., categories and subcategories) and/or redundancies that were overlooked by the PI. Based on the group's feedback, the codes, categories, and their organization were revised. At this point, the code book consisted of 87 codes, and the focus remained on continuing to clarify the codes and concepts in order to develop a codebook instrument. During this time, the major categories, subcategories, and codes were compiled into a codebook which described the definitions and rules for applying each code.

Phase Five: Assessing Reliability of the Codebook

The next steps involved continued revisions and reductions of the codebook to prepare for assessment of interrater reliability. First, raters were given additional training on coding using a sample of generic text provided with the ATLAS.ti documentation. The text sample illustrated how to select quotations and how single and multiple codes may be applied to a single quotation. Next, raters were given instructions for using the codebook and instructed to code a practice transcript with text segments from a variety of interviews. The text segments reflected all of the major categories within the codebook. Afterwards, the PI met with the raters to gather feedback on the codebook itself, the clarity of the definitions, difficulty experienced in applying codes, and other general impressions of the process. Disagreements in the coding decisions were discussed, consensus was reached over the appropriate code to be applied, and the codebook was revised to reflect suggestions given by the raters (e.g., combine redundant codes, clarify definitions). After making revisions and collapsing categories, the codebook was reduced to 37 codes.

Last, raters were given two additional practice rounds of coding, this time with a full transcript with highlighted segments to be coded. It was decided that the raters would be given highlighted text segments vs. non-highlighted ones (in which they would be responsible for selecting the appropriate text to code as well as decide on a code) due to time constraints and because deciding on the appropriate text to code is difficult without having a thorough knowledge of the disclosure literature and the study aims. Therefore, because the purpose was to test the reliability of the codebook, raters were given transcripts that contained highlighted text segments to code. However, to assure that raters could detect segments that were inappropriate to code at all (i.e., unrelated to research questions) 4-5 "ringers" were included among the highlighted text segments. The ringers were intended to be coded as a "no code". After each round, the coding process and disagreements were discussed, consensus was reached over the appropriate code to be applied, and the codebook was revised for clarity. Ultimately, the total codes were reduced to 30, the final number.

Reliability of the codebook was tested on 25% (N=5) of the transcripts. Due to time constraints, this method was chosen rather than testing the entire group of transcripts. The same procedures were followed as described for the practice rounds. Raters were each given 2 transcripts to code. Each transcript included 4-5 randomly selected ringers to be coded as "no code". The PI also coded each of the 5 transcripts at the same time as the raters. After the coding was completed, the PI met with the raters to discuss disagreements that occurred on each transcript. Disagreements mostly occurred when raters did not apply a code correctly (i.e., based on codebook definitions) because they did not fully understand it. Once the meaning of the code was clarified, they altered their coding decision. In a few cases, a text segment was interpreted differently by different raters, and the interpretations were discussed. In each of these cases, the

group reached consensus on the appropriate code. In very few cases, consensus could not be reached, and the text segment was marked as a disagreement. This occurred 11 times (3%) in 405 coding opportunities. Four of those instances occurred within the same code (*Person Blamed*) which the raters sometimes found difficult to interpret. All other departures from consensus occurred once on a single code (i.e., the 7 remaining fell across 7 single codes, once per code), which is not problematic.

To compute reliability, simple agreement was computed (as described in Shaughnessy, Zechmeister, & Zechmeister, 2003): number of times two observers agree / number of opportunities to agree, multiplied by 100; this method was adapted to use 3 raters instead of 2. In some studies, the Kappa coefficient is used to calculate reliability because it controls for chance agreement. For this study, there were 30 codes that were not mutually exclusive, and multiple codes could be applied to a single text segment, thus the likelihood of chance agreement is extremely low. Given these factors, the simple agreement method was chosen to calculate reliability.

Three calculations of agreement were computed per code, per transcript: (1) the most stringent, 3/3 agreement, such that consensus occurred across all 3 raters; (2) 2/3 agreement, such that if 2 of the 3 raters agreed, then it was counted as an agreement; (3) after discussion, in which full agreement was reached after discussing the coding decision. Discussion occurred after each disagreement including 2/3, in order to try to reach full consensus (i.e., 3/3 agreement). Next, agreement was averaged across all transcripts per code (i.e., each percentage value calculated on each of 5 transcripts for Code X was averaged). In using the 3/3 criterion, agreement ranged from 13.8-93.4%. Agreement improved when using the 2/3 criterion to a range of 40-100%, and improved even more after discussion of disagreements (and reaching full

consensus), to a range of 80-100% which is very good agreement. An important note is that for a number of the codes in which there was initially low agreement, the opportunities to apply those codes were few. For example, for one code that was initially 20% agreement (*Change over Time in Situations & People Disclosed*), there were only 7 opportunities for agreement across all transcripts, meaning that the code was applied a total of 7 times across all 5 transcripts. Therefore, on one transcript, if there was only one opportunity to apply the code and on that opportunity there was no agreement, then the agreement for that transcript was zero, which reduced the overall average across all transcripts. Codes with such low initial agreement were typically resolved through discussion and often reflected a misapplication of the code. The only somewhat problematic code (*Person Blamed*) had an initial agreement of 51.4% (3/3 criterion), then 65.6% by the 2/3 criterion, and 86.4% after discussion. Upon completion of reliability analyses, the PI re-coded the full set of transcripts.

CHAPTER 5: RESULTS

Descriptive Data

Differences among Qualifying Participants

Forty-nine participants qualified for the interview. Of those, 34 (71%) volunteered to participate in the interview. Independent samples *t* tests were conducted between those who volunteered for the interview and those who did not for differences in self-concealment tendencies, fear of negative evaluation, and social desirability. The purpose of these tests was to address the self-selective nature of participating in the interview and determine if there were any major differences regarding potential for disclosure between those who volunteered and those who did not (i.e., whether those who tend to disclose more will volunteer for the interview). No significant differences were found between the two groups; however, given the small group *Ns*, there may not be sufficient power to detect differences. Thus, the interview sample does not appear to be any more likely to possess personal characteristics (self-concealment tendencies and fear of negative evaluation) that would influence their likelihood of disclosing compared to participants who did not volunteer for the interview.

History of Potentially Traumatic Life Events

All participants experienced at least one potentially traumatic life event. Out of 26 possible events, participants experienced a range of 4-18 potentially traumatic events in their lifetime. Twenty-five percent (N=5) experienced a range of 4-7 events; 60% (N=12) experienced a range of 8-11 events; 15% (N=3) experienced a range of 12-18 events. Descriptions of traumatic events are presented in Tables 2-3 according to the type of questionnaire (*TLEQ* and *SES*).

Table 2

History of Potentially Traumatic Life Events (based on *TLEQ)* (N = 20)

_____

General Events

Sudden death of a loved one	16
Someone threatened to kill or cause serious physical harm to her	12
Natural disaster	7
Witnessed a stranger attack or beat up someone else	7
Loved one experienced life-threatening or disabling accident	6
Motor vehicle accident	6
Robbery	5
Life-threatening illness	4
Abortion	3
Hit or beaten up by a stranger	3
Miscarriage	3
Other accident (e.g., plane crash, drowning, fire)	3
Lived, worked, served as military in war zone	2
Other traumatic events	6

Physical & Sexual Assault Events

Stalked	12
Child sexual abuse by someone 5 yrs older	7
Child sexual abuse by someone close to her age	7
Physical violence by intimate partner	6
Child physical abuse	5
Witnessed family violence	5

_____

Note. Events in "Other" category were: bizarre near fatal accident of sister, hate crime assault attempt, brother deployed to Baghdad for marine service, witness to neighbor's entrapment in house fire and death, witnessed both parents threatening suicide, witnessed father and uncle violently kill a frog, and witnessed violent death of her pet. The number of "other" incidents identified (7) is not the same as the number of participants who experienced them (6) because some wrote in multiple events.

Table 3

History of Attempted and Completed Unwanted Sexual Experiences Since Age 13 (based on
SES) (N = 20)

Unwanted Sexual Experience	Frequency	
	Never	1 or more times
Oral sex		
Partner told lies, made promises, threatened to end relationship, or spread rumors	25	15
Arguments, pressure, partner's displeasure	19	21
She drank alcohol or used drugs and was incapacitated and could not object or consent	**29**	**11**
Partner threatened physical harm	**36**	**4**
Partner used physical force	**32**	**8**
Vaginal Sex		
Partner told lies, made promises, threatened to end relationship, or spread rumors	27	13
Arguments, pressure, partner's displeasure	19	21
She drank alcohol or used drugs and was incapacitated and could not object or consent	**26**	**14**
Partner threatened physical harm	**32**	**8**
Partner used physical force	**23**	**17**
Anal Sex		
Partner told lies, made promises, threatened to end relationship, or spread rumors	35	5
Arguments, pressure, partner's displeasure	32	8
She drank alcohol or used drugs and was incapacitated and could not object or consent	**35**	**5**
Partner threatened physical harm	**38**	**2**
Partner used physical force	**39**	**1**

Note. Frequencies of each item are based on 40 responses (2 per participant) because the *SES* contains two questions for each item based on whether the act was attempted or completed. Items in non-boldface type reflect verbally coercive events, whereas boldface items reflect sexual assault as defined by legal terms. To qualify for the study, all participants must have experienced at least one completed or attempted sexual assault (i.e., bold items).

Disclosure of Most Stressful Life Events

Participants were asked about their direct and indirect experiences of publicly disclosing the event identified as "most stressful". Twenty percent (N=4) indicated that the event was made public through the media (e.g., newspaper), and 1 stated that she was "not sure". Fifteen percent (N=3) disclosed within a support group setting. Last, 15% (N=3) made a public disclosure such as in court, on television, radio, or newspaper.

<div align="center">

Sexual Assault Experiences

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The interview focused on participants' disclosure of a specific unwanted sexual experience or a set of experiences if they were related in some way. Participants were asked to estimate when the incident(s) occurred. The average time since their first (or only) assault since age 13 was approximately 6.3 years, with a range of 1.5-25 years. On average, the women were about 17.5 years of age at the time of their first (or only) assault (since age 13), with a range of 13-26. The incidents themselves varied across severity (e.g., injury) and the victim's relationship to the assailant (e.g., friend, boyfriend, stranger), although most were perpetrated by an acquaintance. The incident descriptions are presented in Appendix D.

Disclosure of Sexual Assault Experiences

Participants were asked whether they disclosed their unwanted sexual experiences (see Appendix A). For completed oral and/or vaginal sex, all women experienced one form or the other, and 13 (65%) disclosed to someone, and 7 did not disclose. For the group, completed anal, attempted oral, and attempted vaginal sex, 19 of the women experienced at least one of these acts, and 10 (53%) disclosed to someone, and 9 did not disclose. For attempted anal sex, of the 5 women who experienced it, (80%) disclosed to someone, and 1 did not disclose. Regarding the

incident discussed during the interviews, 3 of the 20 women never disclosed the experience prior to the interview.

Study Aims and Initial Findings

The primary aim of this investigation was to reach a better understanding of the process of disclosure from a larger perspective. To address the overarching question of process, the following research questions served as guides:

(1) How is disclosure defined (i.e., what are its characteristics)?

(2) What is the role of culture and upbringing in disclosure?

(3) What motivates women to disclose (i.e., for what reasons do women disclose) and what factors discourage disclosure?

(4) How is disclosure involved in construing meaning from the victimization experience?

(5) How is disclosure of sexual assault involved in the recovery process?

(6) How does disclosure change over time?

Each question will be separately addressed through a description of the categories identified during analyses, including quotations to illustrate the concepts. For clarity, in a given quotation, the speaker is the participant, except in cases with the following notations: *I* represents statements made and questions posed by the interviewer (i.e., the principal investigator), and *P* represents statements by the participants. Also, for brevity, filler remarks such as "um" and "uh" are excluded.

Characteristics of the Incident

Although the characteristics of the assault were not an aspect of any of the research questions, this category was coded because previous literature has discussed the importance of interpretation of the incident as a precursor to disclosure, thus it plays a potentially important

role in the disclosure process. Following an assault, women assess the seriousness (e.g., injury) of the incident and often label it in some way (rape, not rape, bad mistake, misunderstanding, etc.). The labels applied among this sample were inconsistent, even within the same individual. It is unclear if this is due to ambivalence of what is an appropriate label for their experience, discomfort in applying the terms "assault" or "rape" to their experience, or if their labels were influenced in some way by the advertised title of the study and the label used within it ("unwanted sexual experiences"). Therefore, conclusions cannot be drawn about the link between the women's labels and disclosure patterns.

Furthermore, the way in which women assign blame or responsibility also plays a role. Women who blame themselves for an assault often do not disclose it. Related to the idea of responsibility, women also look for explanations for why the incident occurred. In this sample, alcohol was frequently a factor and cited as a contributor to the incident, whether it was her who was drinking, him, or both. Other explanations often reflected self-blame, such as trying to avoid a conflict with the assailant, trying not to make a dramatic scene, efforts to find love (but with the wrong partners), powerlessness to stop the assault, and the assailant's perception that he had the right to sex in a relationship context.

Women's perception of the seriousness of the incident generally influenced whether they reported it to authorities, and in most cases they did not. Again, this was probably influenced by the level of blame they assigned to themselves. In many cases, they stated that they did not report it to a formal support source (e.g., police, doctor) because they did not believe it was necessary. However, most of the sample did believe that it warranted discussion with others in an informal role, such as friends, family, and romantic partners, which was illustrated throughout the interviews.

Research Question #1:   How is Disclosure Defined?

The following characteristics of disclosure were identified: the person told, the content of the disclosure, and the type of disclosure: direct vs. indirect. In this sample, disclosures were typically enacted through talking to another person (the recipient or "target") about the assault, and most often this was someone in their social circle and less so to a professional, such as a therapist or police officer. Sixty percent (N=12) of participants disclosed to a friend, 45% (N=9) to a romantic partner, 35% (N=7) to a family member, 20% to an acquaintance (N=4), 15% (N=3) to a therapist, 10% (N=2) to a legal professional (e.g., police, attorney), and 10% (N=2) to a miscellaneous individual (co-worker, God). One participant described having told God about the assault through prayer:

> *As far as how it helped me cope, you know, through prayer and stuff like that, yeah I mean 'cause the only people that know, the only people that I was, you know, just me and God, you know, that's it.*

The content of the disclosure was represented by the amount of detail that participants gave in a disclosure. The detail amount ranged from telling the recipient as much as the entire story to as little as just the facts, without delving into the details involved. For example, one woman disclosed to her best friend and provided full details:

> I: *So you went into full detail with her about what happened?*
> P: *Yeah, I told her everything that happened. Every detail, everything.*

The detail given often depended upon the closeness of the relationship between the participant and the recipient, the motivations for disclosing, the passage of time, and aspects of her recovery and readiness to disclose. For example, one participant gave very little detail, but due to the closeness of the relationship between herself and the recipient, her body language, and the words she used, her disclosure was made effectively:

> P: I just kinda sat in the middle of the living room floor and just sat there. And she
> was like, are you okay? I was like no (slight laugh). She's like, why, what happened? I
> said these guys came up to my room. And she's like, which one? I said all of them. She's
> like, oh my god (slight laugh). And I didn't really go into details of what happened, she
> kind of was able to figure out what I meant.
> I: How so?
> P: Just, I guess from, she could tell that I was really shaken, and we had been friends
> for a really long time, so we knew each other pretty well.

Motivations and purposes for disclosing can influence the amount of detail given. To illustrate, a

participant described how little detail she gives when she is disclosing for the purpose of

supporting someone else with a similar experience:

> I: Do you go into full detail about what happened to you?
> P: Usually not. I mean, certainly not like this but … just saying … I've had
> something like that happen to me, or whatever and you know, you shouldn't be with
> someone like that, that's not good, you know, that's not cool, you know, that kinda thing.

In some cases, the detail given was related to the passage of time. For example, a participant

stated that she provides fewer details than she did in earlier disclosures and does so in a less

story-like manner:

> At first I told people (pause), the story and then, the situation, as what happened and I
> would recount the details. But now, I tell it more as a, this happened, as opposed to a—
> it's not a narrative anymore.

Sometimes, the detail is a reflection of her readiness to disclose. For example, one participant

who had never fully disclosed prior to the interview, stated that she has given a little detail but

intends to give more as she becomes more comfortable:

> And when I'm ready to tell you, I'll tell you bits and pieces until I'm ready to tell you the
> whole thing.

Related to content, two types of disclosures were identified: direct and indirect. Most

disclosures are direct, in that participants tell the target about the assault in varying amounts of

detail and fully admit that it did occur. In contrast, in an indirect disclosure, the participant may

give verbal hints that the assault occurred, but does not fully reveal that it did. This often

occurred in the context of supporting another person:

> *One of my friends was telling me that she got into the wrong trouble … She, she had been*
> *sexually molested as a child and she was really upset about it and she was trying to talk*
> *to me about it. And I was indirectly telling her that, you know, I know how it feels, you*
> *just have this feeling.*

Other times an indirect disclosure occurred when she was seeking information about an aspect of

the assault. One participant described her indirect disclosure to her therapist:

> *I told my therapist that I, well I didn't tell him, but I, he probably figured it out, he's a*
> *smart guy. I asked him about nonconsensual sex, if it's, even if you, you know, you say no*
> *or you don't want to do it, but we really didn't go into depth about that yet.*

Findings indicate that the characteristics of disclosure include the recipient of the disclosure and

the content, which ranges from a little detail to full detail (i.e., describing her full experience).

Additionally, there appear to be disclosure types, reflecting the directness or indirectness of the

disclosure.

Research Question #2:   What is the Role of Culture and Upbringing?

A number of themes were identified in the discussion of participants' familial upbringing

and culture: history of child abuse, communication practices within the family, gender norms

within her culture, religious beliefs, attitudes about race within the family, and dating practices

within her culture. All of these background experiences have the potential to impact women's

decisions of whether and how to disclose.

History of Abuse and the Impact on Disclosure

Women with a history of child abuse enter a later assault from a potentially unique

perspective than those without such a history. Experiences of child abuse often result in self-

blame that may persist if a future assault occurs and subsequently impact disclosure. For

instance, one woman described how her history of child abuse influenced her willingness to talk about an assault as an adult:

> *I guess like if you, some people you talk to about it, if you're ever gonna talk to them about it and you think that they were gonna judge you, then you feel like, okay if they don't support you on what you're saying now, then if you have any doubt about it then you're just gonna feel as doubtful as you ever did, and then, anything else that ever happened to you is just gonna feel as doubtful … Like, when I was saying, like being abused as a child and then having it happen in the future, you think well am I partially to blame for it? Is there something wrong that I did that I should've done differently for it not to happen?*

Attitudes about Race and Ethnic Identity

Racist attitudes can discourage disclosure by adding additional stress to an already difficult experience. In the case of one participant, the assailants were Black and the attitudes of her family prevented her from disclosing her assault to them:

> *First of all, most of my family is very racist, and the fact that they were Black men, I had a hard time with that at first (pause), not so much that I think it would've been any different if they were White, but I think it made it even more important that I not tell [my family] about it. It made it sort of—it was like another thing added on to why it was difficult to talk to them about it and why I still haven't talked to them about it.*

Other times, the assailant shared the same ethnic identity as the victim and this more firmly entrenched prejudiced attitudes toward men of her own ethnic group, as illustrated:

> *I: Do you think that your upbringing, your culture or any of these things we just talked about has affected your decision to talk to other people about that particular incident?*
> *P: Yeah, just because that guy was from the same background… I didn't think everybody from Iran was gonna be like that, and they're not, but it just kinda proved to me that the majority of … Persian guys, if they get together with a Persian girl, you know, they're gonna probably force you to do whatever that they want you to do. I don't know, it just made me form another opinion, proving to myself that I was definitely right, you know, when I didn't wanna ever date anybody from the same country.*

Religious Influences

Most of the participants did not voice a connection between their religious practices (if any) and sexual assault and/or disclosure. However, some religious practices, such as

prohibiting premarital sex, may actually encourage self-blame and ultimately discourage

disclosure, as in the following case:

> *I mean it's just not stuff that should happen, so you don't talk about it because it shouldn't be happening. In a Catholic family, I mean really you shouldn't be having those problems, you shouldn't be having sex. You should wait till you're married so why are you having those problems?*

In another participant's case, religious views of sex were generally negative and placed the

burden on women for men's behavior toward them, potentially resulting in self-blame:

> *I come from a very fundamentalist, Baptist background, and the particular church that I was raised in sort of kind of had the view that sex is dirty and as a woman you're supposed to kind of do everything in your power to not appear sexual to men.*

Sometimes the church culture in combination with small town culture and family practices

inhibits disclosure of personal information, as one participant describes:

> *I was a member of a Baptist church which would play a part as opposed to being a member of a Catholic church, say, you know where you go to confession. You know, that we don't do confession … You don't, in my religious group, in my family, in my town, you don't go around telling things. You know, I guess that first of all comes from being in a small town where everybody knows your business anyway.*

<div align="center">Communication Practices within One's Culture</div>

A woman's culture and ethnic identity is very powerful in influencing her decisions to

disclose. Cultural norms dictate the appropriateness of disclosing any personal information to

others outside of the family. Additionally, women of non-white ethnicity are impacted by their

own ethnic norms as well as those of the larger society, as illustrated by one participant:

> *Like nowadays things are changing and Hispanics are sort of just kind of assimilating more to an American way of thinking in life, but maybe just up to a few years ago Hispanics just tried to keep their culture and really much try to stay within themselves … well, stay within the culture and the customs of their old, the countries, South America or the Caribbean, things like that of where, in our culture you don't really talk about things. It's not something that you do, you know, you don't go see a psychiatrist, you don't go to your Mom and say you know hey this little boy wanted to touch me there, you know, what should I do?*

In some cultures, male dominance is so powerful an influence that women must endure abusive

conditions and are discouraged from talking about it to others, as in the case of one woman

whose culture reflected oppressive attitudes toward women:

> I: How do you think your culture influenced … your feelings around talking to other
> people about personal issues?
> P: Well, usually you don't. In African cultures, you won't hear the woman complain
> about this kind—you just don't talk about it, basically.
> I: What do you do?
> P: If you—you just suck it up. If you have maybe a sister or someone very, very
> close, you might kind of let it out with that one person but you just don't talk about it. I
> mean, we all know it goes on, you know that Uncle this hit Aunty that, but we just look the
> other way, pretend it didn't happen, you know.

Some participants were discouraged from talking about sexual topics in general which inhibits

disclosure, as described by one participant:

> Sex is just not something you talk about, at all. So that is just something that is just there
> and everyone has sex but we don't talk about it.

Problem-solving Practices

Participants were taught to manage personal problems in contrasting ways, ultimately

impacting disclosure. Some participants were discouraged from talking to people outside of the

family about personal matters. For one participant, not disclosing was both a function of

maintaining privacy as well as a belief that others would not be receptive:

> I remember very specifically my family talking about not sharing personal stuff, and that
> not only was it private, and you don't talk about stuff that's private outside the family, but
> also other people probably don't wanna be burdened with your problems.

In contrast, others were encouraged to seek outside help:

> Well, I always was taught to, if something's wrong, always go to somebody, always, you
> know, get help or seek advice or whatever, in the best way that you could, or the way that
> I saw fitting.

Gender Norms and Expectations

A woman learns specific rules from her family and culture about men and women's expected and approved behavior. For example, these rules may prescribe how women should behave in order to be "lady-like" or to discourage sexual behavior. A Muslim participant received traditional cultural messages regarding sex and gender practices:

> *I grew up in a Muslim country. Even though my parents were on the wealthy side and everything, and I didn't have to cover my hair or you know, do a lot of things that they did, but you know, sex is bad and you have to cover your hair from the guys.*

An American participant spoke about the "traditional" messages she received:

> *I: What kind of messages did you get growing up about sex?*
> *P: Don't do it, it's bad, women don't have sex, stay a virgin until you get married, the very classic, you know (pause), very old traditional, keep your legs crossed (laughs).*

Sex and Dating

Information received and learned during childhood and adolescence about reproduction and dating norms have a potentially powerful influence on a woman's comfort with recognizing and disclosing a sexual assault. In many cases, the participants' parents seemed uncomfortable providing rudimentary information about sex and reproduction, a factor that is very likely to inhibit women from seeking support from their parents. One participant described how her mother avoided discussions about healthy sexual development and behavior:

> *If she wanted you to know anything I guess what she, her tactic would be to like leave some of my father's magazines (laughs) laying around the house, you know where they know we gonna see them and kind of like, they can figure out the rest, so they don't have to sit there and talk to us about it, especially her, she really was, is uncomfortable with that, and still is.*

Similarly, another participant spoke about how she received all of her sexual knowledge at school:

> *I: Did you feel comfortable talking about sex growing up?*
> *P: Yeah, but not with my parents ... They never even talked about it ... everything I learned, I learned in school.*

A related point is the differing experiences girls and boys have with regard to receiving information about sex. One participant described how she and her sister were treated differently than their brother by their parents in discussions about sex:

> *I guess you could say the culture, you wouldn't even start talking to your kids about sex or anything at least 'til they're 18 or I think, right before they get married ... They talked to my younger brother a lot more about these things at an earlier age than they did with me. And my sister too ... I was like did mom and dad ever talk to you about sex or something like that? She was like, no, never.*

In contrast, other participants received positive messages about sex, as in the case of one woman who eventually told her mother about the assault:

> *Well, my mom ... was like ... this is where babies come from ... She educated me very early on ... She was like well, you know if something else comes up I don't want you to feel embarrassed about sex. Sex is something that's beautiful that's shared between people who really love or care for each other, and it's not something that should be shared with everybody; that's something special. And so my mom enforced that in me very early, you know.*

Findings reflect the powerful impact of women's developmental experiences, religious and cultural norms, and communication practices around discussing general problems and sexual situations, and how these experiences may influence their attitudes and behaviors around disclosure.

Research Question #3: What Motivates Disclosure (i.e., for what reasons do women disclose)?

The categories that emerged fell into two themes: factors that encourage disclosure, and factors that discourage disclosure. Each of these themes and their subcategories are addressed separately.

Factors that Encourage Disclosure

The factors that encourage disclosure include generally appropriate conditions (e.g., closeness with listener), stimuli that prompt disclosure (e.g., media report about rape), disclosing in order to facilitate coping, disclosing to strengthen a relationship, and disclosing for altruistic reasons (e.g., supporting another person).

Appropriate Conditions

In order to disclose something as personal and potentially traumatic as sexual assault, women look for the existence of specific conditions. Women generally disclosed to individuals with whom they feel close, such as friends and family, those with whom they experience confidentiality and trust, and persons that they feel "should" know about important life events. Other contextual factors also play a role such as convenience factors such as the appropriate time and place to disclose. For example, the social climate provides cues as to the appropriateness of disclosure. One participant observed a contrast between her home country of Spain and the United States in the comfort level and behaviors of discussing personal information. She remarks:

> *And when I came here and I saw more people talking about it and going on TV, putting your face on national TV, telling everyone what you gone through, you know, it's like okay, well I guess it's more socially accepted now to do this. So you know, I felt I could say a few more things, but before that, mmm, mmm.*

In an intimate context, disclosure often occurs during conversation when individuals are sharing personal life experiences in a reciprocal manner. To illustrate, a participant described a time when she disclosed to a former co-worker:

> *We ended up getting back in touch with each other, and we were just kinda going over, you know, catching up, and he was having problems with his girlfriend, and I was having problems with my girlfriend, and um, we just got into the, you know, whole, you know, tell me your life story thing, and … he was, you know, telling me a lot of the important*

*things that happened to him. I told him all the important things that have happened to me.
And that was one of the things that I told him.*

Similarly, disclosure frequently occurs in response to someone else disclosing a similar

experience, creating a climate in which both individuals can relate to one another:

*Well, something similar to that happened to my best friend and she called me and she
was really upset. And ... that's when I told her something like that happened to me too,
and what I did and you know, don't blame yourself and you know, I was just pretty much
trying to help her through what happened to her.*

Stimuli that Prompt Disclosure

Sometimes contextual stimuli will prompt disclosure. The women cited typical examples

related to the assault itself such as the victim's physical appearance (bruises) and interest in the

legal proceedings of the case. These stimuli may prompt questions from others and a disclosure

or further discussion from the victim. The media is another stimulus that may prompt disclosure,

such as hearing about a rape case on the news. One participant described how the Kobe Bryant

case served as a stimulus for her indirect disclosure:

*The Kobe Bryant thing came up. That might've been a time when I kinda talked about it
... because I was saying like you really don't know what was going on in that room, and
nobody knows except for him and her, no matter what. And even if she did go to the
room, that doesn't mean that she wanted to have sex with him.*

Similarly, seeing movies that address rape may prompt a disclosure or further discussion of the

victim's experience. A participant describes how her boyfriend brought up the subject after

seeing a movie together:

*Sometimes when we watch Lifetime together and stuff like that happened, he's like well
how did you feel? ... He's like, you didn't feel like that did you?*

In this sample, disclosure was also stimulated through discussing a third party's experience of

rape or abuse, disclosing in the context of psychological therapy, and disclosing because another

person asked her about her participation in this study.

Disclosing to Facilitate Coping

Coping motivations can include feeling comfortable and ready to disclose, disclosing in

order to "get it off her chest", disclosing in order to help her understand the incident and her

feelings, and disclosing to explain her behavior and/or circumstances that follow the assault. The

women often remarked that they were motivated by such concerns. In a variety of stressful

circumstances, people may disclose in order to release, to get it out of their systems, as described

by one participant:

> *I think probably the first time I told him I was trying to just let, let it out, and just, I don't know, it's like when you have a secret for so long it's just weighing on you and I think emotionally it was just like, oh (makes relieved breath sound), thank God I got it out.*

Given the traumatic nature of sexual assault, discussing it can help victims comprehend the

incident and acknowledge that it did occur. One participant described her experience:

> *I was trying to sort of, I don't know, like, work the experience out in my head, and it seemed like the sort of non-real thing that happened in a movie that (slight laugh) was really far away from me, and I was trying to, sort of attach it to myself somehow so I could, like, wrap my mind around it … It was kind of like if I say it out loud, it'll make it little bit more real, and maybe I can deal with it.*

Relatedly, women disclose in order to get confirmation and support of their impressions, such as

the incident qualifying as rape and it not being their fault. One woman explained why she

disclosed to a friend:

> *I: Were you hoping to gain something from it by telling her?*
> *P: Maybe some kind of justification that it wasn't, that, I don't know … maybe some kind of justification that it wasn't my fault.*

Other times, women may disclose in order to cope with the behavior of other people who

misunderstood the incident or were misinformed about the true events that took place. For

example, one participant disclosed in order to halt rumors at her school that she willingly

engaged in sex with a male student:

The first time I tried to tell someone about it was when the rumors started spreading when I came back to school in the following weeks. And I was at a basketball game. And one of the older guys that knew this person had heard about what had happened that night but he heard it as, you know we had sex and we had oral sex and we did all these different things, which never happened. And, I was trying to explain to him that that didn't happen and it wasn't willingly like he thought.

Disclosing to Strengthen a Relationship

Another frequently cited reason for disclosing was to address issues in a romantic relationship or to strengthen a relationship in some way. Given that this sample was comprised of college students, several of them stated that the potential for marriage with a current romantic partner motivated them to disclose. A number of the participants seemed to share the opinion that there is an obligation to disclose to serious romantic partners. One participant illustrated this point in explaining her current reasons for planning to disclose to her boyfriend:

The purpose actually would be because we've been talking about marriage and to kind of start out fresh and the fact that he basically knows everything else about me and even though that's not a huge issue, I would like him to know absolutely everything. And I feel like I know everything about him … and I think it would be a good foundation of just having that trust and no secret kind of relationship.

As often happens after an assault, victims are uncomfortable in sexual situations. For example, a participant disclosed to her boyfriend in order to explain her sexual discomfort:

I felt like he needed to know, why I was refusing, even though we had been dating for about 6 months, why I was refusing his advances, 'cause it was really, I don't know, he wasn't frustrated but he just was wondering, like what he was doing wrong.

Other times, the motivation was to strengthen a platonic or family relationship, perhaps to improve communication, as in the case of one participant who hopes to disclose to her mother:

I'm not sure if it would be relief on my part or just [to] kind of have a grown-up talk for once, you know where she's not viewing me as mother up here, daughter down here … you know, the communication is just going one way, from her to me.

Altruistic Motivations for Disclosing

The women in this sample frequently cited altruistic reasons for disclosing. They stated interest in protecting others from experiencing an assault and disclosed in order to provide such information, or predicted that they would disclose again under such circumstances. One woman explains her rationale for telling others her story:

> *I'll tell anyone that'll listen now. I mean 'cause I use it as an example story more so than like a woe is me story. I don't want people to feel sorry for me. I just want people to be mindful, because if they're in a vulnerable situation that they don't realize, then they need to be aware of their circumstances immediately when they feel vulnerable so they can get out of that situation.*

The most frequently cited altruistic reason was to support someone else, to let another woman know that she can empathize and that she's not alone. For example, one participant describes a circumstance that would prompt her to disclose in the future:

> *If I was using it to console somebody, like if I had, let's say one day I have a friend who was relating to me a story of when she was raped. You know, misery loves company, you know, I'd have to, I'd, I'd want to tell her because I'd want her to know that I knew how she felt ... she was actually talking to somebody who could relate.*

In summary, factors that facilitate disclosure include: the existence of appropriate conditions (e.g., trust), contextual factors (e.g., appropriate time and setting), reasons that may promote the victim's coping, to strengthen a relationship with another person, and disclosing for altruistic motivations, such as to support another victim.

<div align="center">

Factors that Discourage Disclosure

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The general factors that discourage disclosure include inappropriate conditions (e.g., not a close relationship), concerns about others (e.g., worries of being treated differently), and not disclosing as part of her coping strategy or as a reflection of her stage in recovery or coping (e.g., avoidance).

Inappropriate Conditions

Participants were unwilling to disclose if certain conditions were not met. Primarily, they felt that there needed to be some justification, some "need" for the other person to know about the assault. If there was not a need, then they did not think it was necessary to disclose. One participant explains why she does not intend to tell her current boyfriend:

> *I don't feel like it's that type of a relationship that I need to, you know, I don't feel like that we're gonna be together, I don't see myself with this person long-term, therefore I don't feel like it's really relevant.*

Also, the lack of closeness in a relationship discouraged disclosure as well as factors such as it being an inappropriate time or place. To illustrate, a participant explains why she decided not to disclose to a friend at a particular time:

> *I didn't feel it was an appropriate place … I was with a group of friends … they were telling different stories about bad things that had happened to them … I was almost gonna do it, but I realized I was in a room full of people. If it had been just one or two people I might have been able to do it, but there were like, ten of us there, too many people, yeah.*

Concerns about Others

Although most of this sample disclosed prior to the interview, they did experience a number of instances in which a concern about someone else's reaction discouraged their disclosure. Some reasons reflect those commonly found in previous studies, such as being treated differently, being questioned, not believed, and judged. The following is a description of newer or lesser reported experiences of not disclosing due to a concern about others. One participant describes the negative treatment that girls at her school experienced after reporting their assaults:

> *A lot of the girls that did do that, they got victimized more …The girls that did come forward and talk, you know go to the police or whatever, people would talk about them and just negative attention you know? And I think that scared a lot of people off from ever telling their experiences to people of authority.*

Related to the issue of reporting the assault to authorities (e.g., police), another fear is that others will find out about the incident, as was the case for one participant:

> *When you go that far there's no way I could keep it from my parents, you know that, and ... it would be publicized and I did not want family members or friends or anybody to know.*

Confidentiality is an important condition for disclosing. Participants voiced concerns about others repeating the information or it leading to gossip:

> *I: What is it about your family that you've made the decision not to tell them so far?*
> *P: Part of it is ... it's my experience and it's my story, and I don't want other people telling it for me. And I know in family situations, once you tell one person it (laughs) suddenly, everybody knows about it.*

Other times, the concern is about protecting the feelings of another person, their reaction to it (e.g., worry). These concerns are strong enough that they may inhibit disclosure, as explained by one participant:

> *My main reason, I didn't want her to freak out ... I know how my mom is and I know she's gonna panic ... And she'll try to blame herself and I did not want her to blame herself for something that happened that wasn't even my fault either. So that was my main reason for not telling her.*

Related to the idea of protection is a fear that the listener will violently retaliate against the assailant, as was the case of a number of participants and illustrated below:

> *I: So why didn't you want to tell your parents about it?*
> *P: My Dad would've killed him.*
> *I: Really?*
> *P: Literally. Like, I'm not just playing or saying or using that expression. My Dad probably would've killed him, or anybody.*

A lesser cited but important reason for not disclosing was a fear of getting in trouble with the parents. Sometimes victims are involved in behavior, such as drinking alcohol, and they do not want their parents to find out. By disclosing an assault, they would have to reveal all the circumstances leading up to the assault. One participant described her experience:

> *Well, if I told my parents then what if like the police got involved and then like everybody would just start hating me and like lose trust in me 'cause you would've never expected, like my parents' are really, really strict. They were at that time, so even, I wasn't even allowed to like date a guy or have a boyfriend, so that would've been a really big shock. So, I was just scared.*

Another important reason for not disclosing is for her to protect her independence, to avoid protection by a loved one, or in the case of younger participants, not be given stricter rules at home. One participant explains why she never told her long-time boyfriend:

> *The reason I never told him is because ... I don't wanna be the, the woman that has to be protected ... I don't need a man to protect me and I think he would step up to the plate and say, oh well I have to protect you now ... I keep a lot to myself because you know, it's kinda like my way of holding my independence with not having to hear, not having to hear it back, you know, and not having it to come back at you all the time, like don't you remember what happened to you back this time, now see it's gonna happen again. So that's kinda the way I operate. I kinda hold a lot in so I can keep my independence.*

Not Disclosing for Coping Reasons

The women cited a number of reasons for not disclosing, including believing that she was to blame, feeling embarrassed or that it was too upsetting to talk about, and reasons that reflect avoidant strategies. Also, women assess whether it will be helpful to disclose, and if they expect that it will not be or it will not change anything for them, then they are unlikely to disclose. For example, in this sample, some women seem to believe that if they put themselves at risk for assault in any way, then this negates their right to disclose, as was the case for one such participant, who never disclosed prior to the interview:

> *I know that it was sort of partly my fault so I just kind of chalk it up to me being responsible for my actions and just dealing with it in my own way and not having to burden anybody with my stuff.*

Relatedly, accepting the identity as victim was perceived a quite undesirable for some participants. Disclosing to others means admitting that you were victimized. Taking

responsibility alleviated the need for the victim identity and facilitated coping in the sense of

regaining control. One participant states:

> *It's not a good feeling to feel like a victim. Nobody-'cause, when that happens to you, you lose control, you don't have control. And so if you take some sort of (slight laugh) responsibility for it, well I shouldn't have done this, I shouldn't have done that—that gives you some of that control back I guess.*

Others, in spite of their self-blame, seem to be empowered by not disclosing, by dealing with the

incident on their own, as in the case of one participant who never disclosed prior to the

interview:

> *P: Yeah, and I've got through this by myself, you know? You can take away my control and I, I may have let it happen, I may have been weak-minded and weak-willed to let you do this, but I got through it by myself. You know, I didn't have to run tell so and so, or I didn't have to go call the cops on you to get back at you. No, I did it by myself, you know.*
> *I: And what does that feel like?*
> *P: Empowering. It feels good.*

Sometimes women have reached some form of resolution, and telling others would bring the

incident back to the forefront, as explained by one participant:

> *I think it was because I had moved on from it and usually when you tell somebody something new, they kinda dwell on it when you're over it. Just like my family, they would bring it up and "when did that happen" and you're like, it's old now, who cares?*

In summary, factors that inhibit disclosure include: inappropriate conditions (e.g., no need for the

other person to know), concerns about others' reactions, and to facilitate the victim's coping

strategies.

<div align="center">Research Question #4: How is Disclosure Involved in Construing Meaning from the

Victimization Experience?</div>

The major category identified for this question represented how she achieved resolution,

how disclosure contributed to her understanding of the incident. Resolution was defined as an

outcome of disclosure, statements that reflect a perspective change in the direction of recovery, such as learning from the experience, moving forward in her life, and realizing that she is not to blame for the assault. For example, one participant disclosed to her boyfriend, and doing so helped to confirm to her that she was not to blame for the incident:

> *I guess talking about it, I mean, [my boyfriend] was very adamant in telling me that it, it wasn't my fault … So I guess maybe having another person tell me it wasn't my fault sort of helped solidify my feelings that it wasn't my fault.*

Other times, the act of talking about it and hearing herself say the words helped her gain perspective on the incident that was less blameful toward herself. One participant stated:

> *It's like the more I hear myself tell the story, the more it's apparent that there was really nothing I could've done about it.*

In some situations, talking about it led to a new path in life, giving the incident meaning as well as allowing her to move her life in a new and positive direction. For one participant, disclosing led her to decide on a career with abused children:

> *I: Do you think that talking about it has helped you to move forward and put that incident behind you?*
> *P: I don't think I would be doing a psychology major and going towards children who have been abused if I didn't talk about it … after I did the whole volunteer work and then I decided to speak up [about] my own thing, it definitely made me move forward and try to stop other children [from] feeling the same way I do.*

For some women, talking about can help them to learn from the experience and move on, as one participant describes:

> *P: I mean you're always gonna feel violated and awful. But you can make it better by talking about it and … you can view it from a different perspective …*
> *I: Which is what?*
> *P: Retrospective (slight laugh), I mean it, and … as a learning experience and you know … it happened, and I can't change it … I've accepted that I can't change it, and I've moved on. And I think that talking about it has definitely helped that.*

Talking about it can also be an eye-opening experience, one that causes women to rethink what happened to them. One participant disclosed her assault to someone without such an experience,

and this made her realize that the incident was not something that everyone goes through, that it

was not a "normal" type of sexual experience:

> *A couple of years ago I got reunited with one of my best friends from elementary school and we started talking about all these sorts of things and then it hit me, I was like, this is not normal. You know I've told myself that these things are normal 'cause I had friends that were sexually active and just been around it. It wasn't that odd to me. And then just, you know, sitting back and really looking at it from a more mature perspective, I realized how wrong it was and that I didn't deserve to be treated that way.*

Conversely, the reactions of others can influence how seriously one perceives the incident and

whether they disclose again or take further action. One participant disclosed to her cousin who

responded in a nonchalant manner, leaving her to question if the experience was important or

not:

> *After they left she of course, saw my neck, my war wounds. And she was like, what happened … And I told her and she was just like, to her it was just like one of those sexual experiences like you have sex with somebody that you've been wanting to for a long time. She was like, "Oh for real" it was one of those responses I got from her from that … So, I mean she was taking it one way and but I didn't tell her how I like was actually feeling. She just thought I was glad that it happened. So, I didn't say nothing. I just blocked it out and that was it … it was just like, I mean I'm young and they're like older than me … So, it was just like, I guess it wasn't a big deal.*

At a later point, she disclosed again to a friend who had a much different reaction and response,

more consistent with the way the she had initially interpreted the incident:

> *I mean, I felt better, but like I said I had already told my cousin that night. But to her, it was just like, oh for real, and then with my friend it was just like, you know, why didn't you tell somebody? So it was—I got a different response, but I still felt better that she was actually concerned about what happened.*

Findings indicate the disclosing helps women construe meaning from the incident by helping

them achieve resolution and understanding of the incident in important ways, such as influencing

their interpretation of the incident, realizing that they were not to blame, and finding closure.

Research Question #5: How is Disclosure of Sexual Assault Involved in the Recovery Process?

For this question, the impact of disclosure on recovery criteria was examined, with an interest in whether disclosure serves to facilitate recovery. It is acknowledged here that time is a very powerful factor in recovery and participants frequently cited time as an important contributor. It is highly probable that the passage of time works in concert with other coping strategies such as disclosing and talking to others about a sexual assault, but the effect of time was not coded.

In this study, the focus was on the following recovery categories: emotion, memory and cognition, effect on personal relationships, self-esteem, and miscellaneous positive and negative changes (on her part) after a disclosure. During one part of the interview, participants were asked a series of direct questions to assess the impact of disclosure on some specific areas of recovery. Some statements are responses to those questions. Additionally, participants frequently made spontaneous remarks that were relevant to the issue of recovery. Each of the recovery categories is discussed below. Overall, it appears that disclosure and recovery factors work cooperatively, influencing one another. As one becomes easier or improved, so does the other.

Emotion

This category represented the impact of disclosing on emotion, such as feeling specific emotions (e.g., anger, anxiety, etc.) after disclosing, relieving emotional numbness, and ability to manage one's emotions during disclosure. For some, repeated disclosure or discussion helps to lessen the emotional intensity she experiences:

> *When I first talked about it, you know, I couldn't say anything about it without crying but now it's, it's a lot more matter of fact, and I think that's because I've talked about it so much.*

For others, disclosing and discussing it helps her to make sense of the incident, release the

tension of containing it, and helps her feel less vulnerable to potential emotional triggers. One

participant explains:

> *The more you discuss it and understand it the easier it is to deal with. People that hold it all in, you know, are like a volcano (laughs) about to erupt. So I don't think like now if, you know, if let's say I was watching a movie and a scene like that came up that was similar to mine I wouldn't freak out (laughs) 'cause I've dealt with it, you know? It's not like I have those triggers (laughs).*

Other times, the amount of detail given functions as a strategy that allows her to manage her

emotions, as explained by one participant, who uses indirect disclosing and minimal detail as a

way to manage her emotions:

> *I: What about whenever you're kind of indirectly telling people about it, does any emotion come up then?*
> *P: No, 'cause I don't try to pull it completely up … I would, just by being basic with it, you know, just doing a general overview, I don't pull anything up.*

On the opposite end, disclosing may serve as a potential way to *feel* emotion, to relieve the

numbness, so she may connect with her feelings about the assault, as was the case of one

participant:

> *I: So what would you be hoping to gain from telling someone?*
> *P: Trying to connect with those emotions … logically I'm like, there must be some anger about it; there must be some fear about it. It's gotta be in there somewhere.*

Memory and Cognition

This category represented effects of disclosing on her memory of the incident (e.g.,

reminding, thinking more/less about it, replaying it in her head, analyzing the events, reliving it,

etc.). During the interview, participants responded to a direct question about whether disclosing

had an impact on their thinking and memory (e.g., easier or more difficult to think about, feel

less traumatic). Participants overwhelmingly stated that they think less about the assault, but

opinions were mixed regarding their comfort with thinking about it. Regarding specific aspects

of thinking and memory, disclosing may facilitate a woman's efforts to comprehend the events:

> *It makes … thinking about it easier, 'cause if I can talk about it, I can sort of sort out what happened. Instead of just a bunch of random thoughts going through my head, I can put a timeline to it and a story to it. And the more I do that the more it sort of solidifies the whole event and what happened 'cause I was, right after it happened I was kind of, like I said, sort of in a daze and out of it and confused about what had gone on.*

However, in some cases, the nature of the thoughts remains the same. One woman stated that

although it is easier to talk about it, it is not necessarily easier to think about because she replays

the incident in her mind and analyzes her behavior:

> *It makes me anxious to talk about. It's like watching an action film … because I can think about what I would've done differently, and I can think about that situation. I'm like that doesn't sound like me. I would've done this or I would've done that, and it just kinda makes me anxious that I'm just kinda sitting there almost replaying it in my head like a movie, like why don't you do something! … It's like, replaying it back, and it's not always in sequence … I'm looking at my own story like okay, that doesn't look like you, and that doesn't look like you either, and what in the world and what's going on, you know? Slap him or something you know?*

Similarly, talking about it may elicit unhappy memories of the incident and related times:

> *The only part I … didn't like about telling her is the fact that it's … dragging up old memories. You know, I've done a lot of therapy to forget about those years or not to forget, just to put them behind me. So, I'm you know, having to emotionally have to deal with these things again, I'd really rather forget them by myself.*

Relationships

Participants mostly stated that disclosure impacted their relationships positively, in both

platonic and romantic relationships. Women frequently experience sexual dysfunction and

anxiety with their sex partners after a sexual assault. For one such participant, disclosing helped

bring about significant change in her relationship with her boyfriend:

> *I stopped having that moment of like (takes breath), I'm sorry I can't tell you … I stopped having to avoid it, and I stopped dreading it, 'cause I—every time we would like go out, I knew he, he'd end up asking, what was wrong. But now he knew, and so he stopped doing that and actually it was a lot easier for us to become intimate after that, so, that was*

positive (slight laugh) … Our relationship could've been cut short because of all this … 'cause if I would've kept on and not told him, it would've become evident at some point that I was not telling him something and that I didn't trust him enough to tell him something, so … it's a very real possibility that we're still dating today because, I told him about this, was truthful with him.

For another participant, disclosing allowed her to get support as well as strengthen her relationship with her best friend who also was sexually assaulted:

Well, talking to my best friend, it's made me feel like … I'm not alone. I'm not the only person that it happens to. And … it just made me feel a little bit more comfortable. It just made me feel like okay well I'm not the only person out there and I knew that it would make her feel like I'm not the only person and … it's happened to two of us already… so we kinda got, you know, a little bit closer and I was like okay, we kinda have that too, that we got through it.

Self-esteem

In general, disclosing to someone who responded in a supportive way can help improve women's self-esteem that had been damaged after an assault. One participant describes her experience:

It kinda confirmed that I'm still a good person and I'm still okay, 'cause I felt really bad. I felt just as bad as somebody that had been raped because that was a big thing to me to be assaulted by somebody and you know, jerked up and just man handled. That was bigger to me than being sexual assaulted, but because that was going to lead up to a sexual assault it just, it really bothered me.

Positive Changes and Reactions from Disclosing

Participants reported that they reacted in a number of positive ways as a result of disclosing, such as feeling supported and more open as individuals. Several women also expressed how relieving and liberating it was for them to disclose:

I didn't really wanna discuss it and I would tell people I don't wanna discuss it. But now that I can, and I can talk about it and just almost feel liberated because I'm not carrying a burden.

Positive experiences with disclosing impact women's decisions to disclose in the future. For one

participant, her positive disclosure experience made her feel optimistic about disclosing to future

boyfriends if necessary:

> *I mean maybe future boyfriends, if I ever have any, then it would influence, like oh, this turned out okay, so, later I'll sort of have that, that backing me up, that it turned out okay.*

For some, disclosing strengthened their desire to help people with similar experiences, as

described by one participant:

> *I've always thought about maybe somehow trying to get involved to help, you know, children that have been abused … I guess I feel that, you know, anytime that you can give information to people about yourself, whether it's, you know, directly to someone and it may help them personally or … [by participating in a study]… to help people in the future, that that's a good thing, and people should, you know, try and contribute on a lot of different levels to help people.*

Others stated that talking about it made them feel stronger. For example, one participant

explained how talking about it reminded her of how she was able to escape an attempted rape:

> *I: Do you think that talking about it has changed you personally in any way?*
> *P: Yes … I think it's made me I guess a little bit stronger as an individual, just because I feel like (pause), like even though I was in a bad situation that I really didn't wanna be in, I was still able to get out of it. That, that's definitely helpful.*

Talking about it also led to the realization that others have been assaulted and can empathize

which reduces the shame and anxiety about discussing it and helps them feel less alone, as

illustrated below:

> *P: I had always felt kind of, sort of, isolated by the experience 'cause I didn't know anybody else it had happened to, so it kind of, sort of put me in a group of other people that that had had the experience instead of just me (slight laugh).*
> *I: And how did that feel?*
> *P: It kinda, it relieved a lot of the anxiety about just talking about it … 'Cause it, I'm like there are other people out there that this has happened to and other people are having a hard time dealing with it.*

Negative Changes and Reactions from Disclosing

As often happens, women receive unsupportive and blaming reactions from the people to whom they disclose. These reactions lead to negative feelings such as increased isolation, misunderstanding, and defensiveness. For example, one participant disclosed to her mother who, in trying to understand the situation, instead made her feel worse:

> *I don't know if she meant to or not, but with those questions she would make me feel like she thought I was lying, like, no, you know, I don't believe you [participant's name], you went to his house and intended to have sex, you know, you intended to be this way, you intended to be one of those girls, you know? And she always made me feel that way with her questioning, and I mean, God it was like frequent interrogation every, every night it was, we'd talk about it and she just, she made me feel like she didn't understand and she made me feel alone.*

Similarly, another participant felt supported when she first disclosed to her boyfriend, but it led to discussions about her previous sexual experiences which created tension in their relationship, to the point that she no longer felt supported by him, but instead judged:

> *I felt like I'm trapped because I can't talk to that one person I talked to the first time … I mean he made me feel so much better, but, now I can't talk to him anymore.*

Other times, the reaction from another is mixed. The listener may not know how to respond, leaving the victim ambivalent about the helpfulness of the disclosure:

> *P: It wasn't really validated or anything, but it felt better to tell someone.*
> *I: So did you feel supported by them?*
> *P: Mmmm, in a way, like they, they didn't make me feel (pause), well I didn't feel horrible … I didn't feel like a disgusting outcast from society, they didn't make me feel like what had happened to me was you know, an awful, horrible thing that, that should cast me out of the world, you know, but they … weren't really comforting or supporting but they weren't unsupportive.*

In summary, findings reveal that disclosure impacts women's recovery in the areas of emotion, memory of and thinking about the incident, relationships with others, and self-esteem, and indicated that hat disclosing had beneficial effects on their recovery. Furthermore, the women

experienced a combination of positive and negative outcomes from disclosing that were often, but not always, based on the reaction of the listener.

<p style="text-align:center">Research Question #6: How Does Disclosure Change over Time?</p>

To address this question, participants were asked to describe the differences between when they first began disclosing to the present time, and to talk about their reasons for disclosing, how their disclosure behaviors and reasoning have changed (if changed). The major questions of interest were the change in the ease or difficulty in disclosing, change in situations in which disclosing occurs, and change in the types of people she discloses to. To facilitate analysis of these questions, functions within ATLAS.ti were used to query the instances of co-occurring codes. For example, "reasons for disclosing" was applied as a single code. Within a participant's discussion of her reasons for disclosing in the past and now, she mentioned specific motivational criteria. Those motivations were coded in their appropriate categories (e.g., altruistic motivations, coping motivations, etc.). Using the query function allows one to observe the co-occurrence of these codes, allowing more accurate interpretation of the interaction between them. In some instances, there was not a co-occurring code (i.e., none were applicable), and those were interpreted on a case-by-case basis. These instances occurred primarily when the participant's explanation was vague, such as stating that any change in her disclosure behavior is dependent upon the particular day or situation, and there was no apparent pattern or consistency that she observed.

<p style="text-align:center">Ease of Talking about the Incident</p>

Changes in the ease or difficulty of talking about the incident coincided primarily in the areas of detail amount, emotion, and resolution. In general, participants stated that it was easier to talk about the incident, particularly to individuals with whom they had already discussed it.

Also, the passage of time made at least some of them feel more comfortable talking about it, in

part, due to knowing that others have experienced it as well. One participant states:

> *I'm like wow, you know it's not just me. It's happening all over the place, you know,*
> *different cities and like, I'm, I'm a little bit more comfortable talking about it now.*

The detail given is an important change that occurs. For some, giving the specific details

continues to be difficult, and it can be comforting not having to repeat the entire story:

> *I wouldn't have to start at, the beginning so much and actually, tell the whole story, and I*
> *wouldn't have to go from, point to point to point, and like during the most painful parts,*
> *I'd just be like, you know, when he, you know. I don't think that—if I ever had to talk*
> *about the whole thing again, it would be easier because he already knew.*

Other times, the detail given reflects a change in the manner in which she tells her story, as one

participant explains:

> *The initial telling is always kinda the same … It's, it's kinda like a, a script (slight laugh)*
> *… that I go over, that is pretty much the same, every time I tell somebody (laughs).*

Several times, the women remarked that it became easier after feeling less embarrassed and

emotional about the incident. In addition, at later points women may speak about it in a more

matter-of-fact tone. One participant states:

> *I find it's a lot easier now, the more I talk about it and, but I mean it's kind of reached a*
> *plateau of, of easy to talk about. It just is one of those things that happened back when.*
> *So I mean, it, it got progressively easier to talk about. At first it wasn't so much and there*
> *was still a lot of the feelings of shame and embarrassment and everything … when I first*
> *talked about it, you know, I couldn't say anything about it without crying but now it's, it's*
> *a lot more matter of fact, and I think that's because I've talked about it so much.*

The reactions of others continue to be a factor for some, but if a woman feels more confident to

defend her actions and not tolerate blame from others or from herself, then it is easier to talk

about:

> *Now when people ask me I'm more confident when I say, no, you know, I, I was scared. I*
> *didn't know what I was doing. Before I guess I felt more insecure about it before, and*
> *now I feel like, you know it was okay for me to behave the way that I did because I didn't*

> *know what else to do … I'm more comfortable … stating, you know, my reasons, and I don't feel as defensive.*

In addition, achieving a sense of recovery and closure makes it easier to talk about, as described

by one participant:

> *Not necessarily am I talking about it more, it's just easier to talk about it when I do … Just because it's not, it's not hindering me in any way. It's not messing up my frame of thinking; it's not keeping me from getting any sleep. I can still go to class everyday, wake up. I don't have to look at a guy that looks similar to this guy and say oh no it might be him, you know. I don't have to do things like that. I don't feel like the next person that I date is gonna put me in a situation where I can be raped, even though I know that is possible. I'm not victimized. I don't feel victimized anymore.*

<div align="center">

Reasons and Situations in Which Disclosing Occurs

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The *Change Over Time* categories, *Reasons for Disclosing* and *Situations and People*,

were combined in this analysis because they often overlapped. During the interview, the

questions reflected an intention to learn about differences in reasons for disclosing over time and

any contextual (i.e., situational) changes over time. Participants often stated that the two were

similar and generally did not seem to separate the two (reasons and context) in their minds and

explanations.

Changes in disclosing coincided with the following factors: coping motivations, general

conditions (e.g., through sharing, in response to someone with a similar experience), altruistic

motivations (e.g., support others), and relationship motivations (e.g., strengthen a relationship

with another). Initially, as one would expect, women disclose in order to cope with the assault

experience. Later, there becomes less of a need to disclose it, except under specific

circumstances, as one woman explains:

> *Now I don't feel like I need to because I've come to terms with it and I understand it and you know, before I needed to tell people, you know, to figure it out and to cope with it, but now I'm fine (laughs), you know … now the reasons would be if it just fit the conversation and I was talking to somebody I cared about and they inquired about it, or*

if you know, they told me a story similar and we were just carrying a conversation, it's not like I feel like I need to.

Again, specific circumstances that arise will usually dictate when women disclose at later points in their recovery. Such circumstances may be a new relationship and trying to help others by disclosing her own experience, as illustrated below:

I used to feel like I was sort of obligated to let people know. I felt like, oh if you are gonna be in a relationship with me, I have to tell you this. Now … there are times I feel I need to talk about it for me, not so much for other people, and I'm starting to kinda get a sense that it's important for other people, that I talk about it, in the sense of, other women that have gone through it and haven't, that if I can, you know, talk about it, for someone else who can't, then that's important.

Women may disclose later in order to give those with whom they are close a sense of who they are and a context for their behavior, which is quite different from initial disclosures in which they are actively trying to understand their own feelings and the incident's impact on their lives. One participant describes her disclosure transition from telling her best friend right after the incident to telling her boyfriend more recently:

When I told her I just told her what--after it happened, so that you know I wouldn't have to go through it by myself, but when I told him, it was just telling him just an explanation for why I act the way I act so he can know why I do some of the things that I do.

Similarly, women may have disclosed earlier in order to cope with it, but having worked through it, they may later feel little need to disclose at all:

Now I don't feel like I need to because I've come to terms with it and I understand it and you know, before I needed to tell people, you know, to figure it out and to cope with it, but now I'm fine (laughs), you know.

The women in this sample generally transitioned from disclosing in order to cope to disclosing in order to help or support someone else, to clarify their own behavior in a close relationship, and through general communicative sharing. In later points, there appears to be much less intensity around disclosing, little need to disclose in order to relieve herself of internal distress, but

instead, the emotions are less intense and this facilitates the ease in discussing it and shifts the focus to other reasons for initiating it at all.

CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSION

Women are victimized by sexually assault at very high rates. One study estimated that 1 in 6 women in the U.S. were raped in their lifetime (Tjaden & Thoennes, 1998). Unfortunately, women usually do not report it to authorities such as the police or medical professionals (Fisher et al., 2003), and many never tell anyone at all (Koss, 1985). However, a large number of women do disclose to individuals within their social circles. Disclosing may benefit victims, potentially leading to improved health outcomes (Pennebaker & Beall, 1986) and allow them to receive support to assist them in coping with the assault, but the risks of negative reactions from others and other negative consequences often deter them from disclosing (Kilpatrick, 1983; Koss, 2000; Washington, 2001). Previous studies in disclosure have focused on who was told (Ullman & Filipas, 2001), the timing (Ullman, 1996a), reactions of recipients (e.g., Campbell, Ahrens et al., 2001; Ullman, 1996b), and predictors of disclosure, especially to police and other formal support sources (Golding, Siegel et al., 1989). Although the literature on adult sexual assault disclosure is growing, conceptualizations of disclosure and its process remain murky, in that disclosures are often viewed as an end result and the focus is typically on early disclosure.

This qualitative study of 20 ethnically diverse women sought to clarify the process of disclosing sexual assault, the complex factors involved in decisions to disclose, and expand our knowledge about women's motivations for disclosing and not disclosing. Data were obtained from 20 undergraduate women who participated in semi-structured, face-to-face interviews about their experiences disclosing (and not disclosing) to others. The data were analyzed using a grounded theory approach. Findings from the study reveal the complex nature of disclosure and expand on previous conceptions of its process and behavioral manifestations. Major categories

and themes revealed in the data are discussed in terms of their contributions to the larger disclosure experience and the roles that each play in a given disclosure.

The Disclosure Process

The process of disclosure includes the factors that contribute to whether a disclosure is made, the disclosure itself, and the aftereffects of the disclosure. Given that the effects of disclosing (e.g., reactions from others) may influence the likelihood and character of future disclosures, the process could be conceived as a circular process (see Figure 1). Each element in the process is discussed separately.
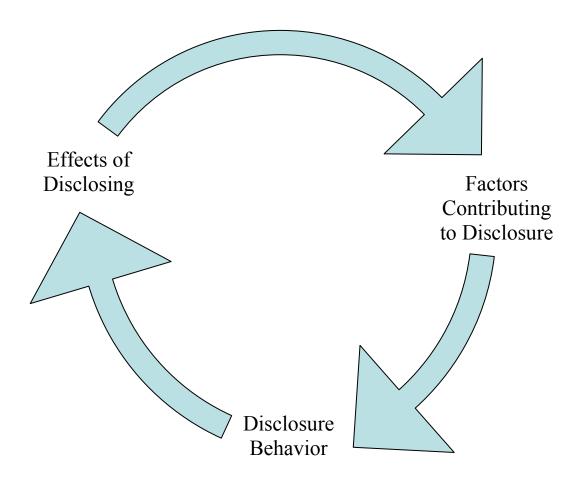
Factors in Decisions of Disclosure

A variety of factors contribute to women's decisions to disclose or not. In this study, four major factors were identified: (1) assault characteristics and interpretation, (2) the victim's culture and upbringing, (3) motivations and reasons for disclosing (or not), and (4) the victim's current place in recovery. Decisions of disclosure appear to be very complex, and all of these factors potentially interact with one another and collectively influence whether a woman discloses and how much. The factors are not necessarily equal in their influence, in that one or two factors may have a stronger impact in a given disclosure situation. Each factor is discussed below in terms of its role in the disclosure process and contribution to the psychological literature in sexual assault disclosure.

Assault Characteristics and Interpretation

This factor represents the characteristics of the assault (e.g., injury, relationship to the victim) and the victim's interpretation of the assault as rape or not, and her attributions of blame. The experiences of this sample reflected those found in the literature (e.g., Fisher et al., 2003) with regard to the powerful influence of the victim's interpretation of the assault. Women often

Figure 1

The Circular Process of Disclosure

Effects of
Disclosing

Factors
Contributing
to Disclosure

Disclosure
Behavior

blame themselves for the assault and consequently do not disclose it to others, and frequently not to police (Fisher et al., 2003). In this sample, only two reported the assault to the police, however, most did disclose to someone within their social circle. Furthermore, many stated that they did not believe the incident warranted police involvement. Although their rationale was not explored in depth, a number of reasons may explain why they did not report to the police. As suggested in previous literature (e.g., Kilpatrick, 1983), the women may have feared unsupportive responses from the police, believed that their cases were not strong enough to lead to a conviction, and/or believed that if they played a potentially contributing role (e.g., drinking), then it negated their right to take legal action, reasons that are consistent with prior research (Fisher et al., 2003). Interestingly, although the incidents met the behavioral definitions of a crime, most of the sample did not perceive their assault as serious enough to inform police, but the incidents were clearly upsetting enough to warrant discussion with informal others. Thus, it appears that most of the sample did not necessarily believe a crime was committed but the incident was sufficiently upsetting to justify telling others about it, perhaps to gain support and/or clarity about the events that ensued. Findings here support those in Ahrens (2002) which also suggested that women need not identify as victims before disclosing, and contrasts with previous arguments (e.g., Browne, 1991) that such identification is necessary for disclosure.

Culture and Upbringing

Previous literature has neglected the role of culture and upbringing as a potential contributor to disclosure. The literature has focused on the impact of societal attitudes that tolerate violence against women and the subsequent victim-blaming that occurs, but very few studies have examined the influence of factors such as familial upbringing, religious beliefs, and cultural norms on disclosure (see Washington, 2001, for an exception). This category included

the sources for which victims gained their knowledge about sex and relationships, the influences of religious beliefs, racial attitudes, dating norms within her culture, what she was taught growing up about the appropriateness of discussing personal information with others, and the broader society's receptivity to disclosure of sexual assault.

Findings indicate that cultural norms and religious views are very powerful in influencing women's comfort with disclosing. Cultural norms dictate rules about dating (e.g., age to begin dating), gender roles between men and women, and how to manage personal problems, such as whether it is appropriate to seek support outside the family. Religious beliefs provide rules for behavior, particularly around premarital sex, and may discourage disclosure through negative views of sexual behavior (e.g., sex is "dirty"). These beliefs create an unsupportive climate for disclosing any sexual experiences, including unwanted ones.

The victim's upbringing influences disclosure in a number of ways that have not been previously explored, such as knowledge about healthy sexual behavior. Although rape is not sexual behavior per se, and should not be treated as such, it does have sexual features, and in the context of a dating relationship, making the distinction between undesirable sexual behavior and rape is often difficult among victims, unless under violent circumstances. These factors make disclosing a very complicated issue. If young women interpret the incident as sexual in any way, and they have received messages that it is inappropriate to talk about it, then they may not disclose. Sudderth (1998) suggested that if young women are not provided with a context in which to discuss sexual situations and problems, they are unlikely to discuss rape either. With few exceptions, the women in this sample frequently spoke about their parents' discomfort with discussing sexual development and behavior. They often stated that they acquired their knowledge from school, magazines, and television, and that any discussion of these issues from

their parents was brief. Consequently, most of the sample did not disclose their assaults to their parents. Given the complicated picture of disclosure, their non-disclosure is unlikely to be directly caused by parental discomfort with discussion of sexual topics. However, it is noteworthy that the women in this sample spoke about their parents' discomfort with the subject, and subsequently their own discomfort talking to their parents about it, and their ultimate non-disclosure of sexual assault.

Furthermore, current trends in school-based sex education may not address the needs and preferences of young people, leaving them ill-equipped to handle precarious sexual situations. A Canadian study surveyed adolescents in grades 7-12 and asked them to rank the subjects they believe should be covered. The two most highly ranked topics were prevention of STDs and sexual assault/rape, and they ranked school and family as the most preferred sources of this information (McKay & Holowaty, 1997). It appears that young people welcome guidance of this kind from their parents and may be more open to discussing it when given the opportunity and encouragement to do so. Unfortunately, that was not the experience of most members of this sample. It can also be argued that lack of education about sex and assault may preclude disclosure of unwanted sexual experiences. For instance, in a study of child abuse disclosure (Palmer, Brown, Rae-Grant, & Loughlin, 1999), 52% of victims did not disclose the abuse because they did not realize the behavior was wrong or unusual. This possibility also exists among teenagers and women who may not realize that their sexual experiences are not healthy and normal. In fact, one participant in this sample stated that she did not realize her dating experiences were not "normal" until she listened to the experiences of other friends, whose were quite different.

Another factor involves the problem-solving strategies that were learned while growing up. Women may be taught to seek support in contrasting ways, and the messages they receive may remain with them, forming individual behavioral patterns that may be difficult to modify. For example, in some cases, the women were taught to talk to anyone who could be helpful, and in other cases, they were discouraged from talking to anyone outside of the family. At worst, victims who receive negative messages may never disclose to anyone, and if they do disclose, it may create fear of the family finding out. This is particularly true in cases in which victims do not believe their family would react in a supportive manner to a sexual assault disclosure.

Relatedly, victims with a history of familial child abuse most likely grew up in a shroud of extreme privacy and secrecy, and this background may taint future attempts at disclosure of adult experiences. What is not clear is what occurs in non-abusive families, whether the messages received during childhood about privacy and problem-solving do indeed influence future disclosure attempts. These issues illustrate the significance of developmental experiences and how help-seeking strategies learned early on may influence later behavior.

Motivations and Reasoning

This broad category encompasses the variety of motivations and reasons women give for disclosing and not disclosing. These include the existence of favorable conditions (e.g., trust and confidentiality), reasons related to other people, including previous disclosure experiences, concerns about others' reactions, relationship issues (e.g., disclose in order to increase intimacy, disclose to explain sexual discomfort), and altruistic reasons (e.g., disclose to support someone else in a similar situation), some of which were found in previous studies (Karen et al., 1999; Sudderth, 1998). In general, upon given the opportunity to disclose, women appear to assess the presence of favorable conditions in which to disclose the assault. These conditions often include

characteristics of the recipient as being trustworthy, close to the victim, receptive, willing to reciprocate by disclosing similar experiences or other important life events, and their "need to know" about the assault. Findings here support Jourard's (1971) position that disclosure is reciprocal. Women often stated that they disclosed when someone else had a similar experience that emerged during conversation.

Furthermore, context is important. When disclosing, women also assess the appropriateness of the timing and location of the disclosure (i.e., is it the appropriate time/place to bring it up?). General conditions and context may be primary facilitators, those that need to be present in order for secondary motivators to potentially encourage disclosure. Secondary motivators may be those such as disclosing to strengthen a relationship and altruistic reasons. For example, a woman may decide to disclose to her boyfriend in order to discuss her sexual and intimacy needs. However, the disclosure is unlikely to occur if certain conditions are not in place, such as closeness, trust, the appropriate time to discuss it, etc. Thus, facilitators of disclosure may operate such that the general conditions must be supportive in order for any other reasons or motivators to play a role.

On the contrary, women's reasons for not disclosing may function in the opposite manner. General conditions may feel less important than concerns about how the recipient will react. For example, the appropriateness of time and place may be irrelevant if a victim believes she will not be supported by the person she considers telling. Thus, the major factor is concern about another's reaction. In sum, there are a number of motivations and reasons for disclosing and not disclosing, and they appear to work together, and some may be more powerful than others in influencing whether women disclose.

It is important to emphasize that this sample spoke about a variety of motivators for disclosing, some of which changed over time. The psychological literature has concentrated on help-seeking motivations for disclosing and reasons why they do not disclose. Findings from this study provide evidence supporting motivations proposed by Davis and Franzoi (1987), specifically, expressive, self-knowledge, and self-defense needs. However, the data revealed that disclosure motivations beyond support-seeking exist and are also important. Non-coping motivations illustrate that victims seem to learn to accept the assault as an important, albeit negative, life event that periodically may need to be discussed. A potentially important question is whether motivations can function as reflections or indicators of the victim's place in recovery. For example, are victims who are mostly motivated to disclose by altruistic reasons currently experiencing advanced stages of recovery? Intuitively, this makes sense because we can probably assume that women who are primarily motivated to disclose in order to help themselves cope are currently experiencing some distress. The findings from this study suggest that this shift in motivations does exist and may reflect a change or improvement toward recovery, although additional studies are necessary to determine if such a pattern exists and how prevalent it is. Nevertheless, this highlights a significant measurement and practical consideration: Asking women *why* they did or did not disclose may be equally as important as asking *whether* they did or did not.

Coping and Recovery

This category represents the victim's general place in recovery, current coping strategies, and the influence that each have on disclosure. Previous literature has discussed the detrimental effects of rape (e.g., injury, anxiety, depression). Consequently, women manage their assault experience in a variety of ways that may impact disclosure. A number of coping strategies were

discussed by this sample. For example, avoidance coping strategies (e.g., withdrawing from others) may influence women to not disclose. Reasons that discourage women from disclosing also include feeling embarrassed, believing she is at fault, and using avoidance strategies to cope with the assault. Other times, she may be too uncomfortable to discuss it because it elicits too much emotion and/or memories of the incident. In this study, coping reasons for not disclosing generally reflected victim distress, but sometimes the decision not to disclose was more pragmatic. For example, a victim may have decided that it would not help her or improve matters, and/or she may feel like she has learned from it and moved on, so there is no reason to talk about it.

Coping strategies reflect women's concerns of feeling like a victim or being viewed as such by others. For some women, accepting the label of victim may change the way others perceive them and treat them differently, also found in Sudderth's (1998) sample. Further, coping strategies in this sample revealed the powerful relationship between victim acknowledgment and personal responsibility (or self-blame) in the assault, a potentially powerful deterrence of disclosure. Similar themes were discussed by Phillips (2000) who suggested that acknowledging oneself as a victim implies that one is naïve and gullible and is potentially threatening to women's identities. This issue is intricately connected to women's self-blame, which they perceive as taking responsibility, also discussed in Phillips (2000) who suggested that "accepting personal responsibility appears more affirming than acknowledging victimization (p. 160). In this sample, for some women, taking responsibility allows them to avoid victim status, but also helps them to make sense of the event and prevent its reoccurrence. If they can imagine contributing in some way, they can prevent future assaults by "learning from their mistakes" and not repeating them, thereby averting future assault.

Conversely, the literature has examined how disclosure promotes coping (e.g., Filipas & Ullman, 2001), such as receiving helpful support (e.g., being believed, listened to). The present study adds to the current literature on helpful responses from others that inevitably promote healing. Participants reported feeling relief, less alone, validation that she was not to blame, and improved intimacy with sex partners. Similarly, findings in this study support the view of Stiles' fever model (1987), in that women are often motivated to disclose by the need to relieve the burden of containing the secret and the feelings and thoughts associated with it.

Disclosure Behaviors

Previous studies in disclosure frequently conceptualized disclosure dichotomously (i.e., did or did not disclose) but without a clear indication of what constitutes a disclosure, such as the amount of detail necessary. Furthermore, disclosure is often conceptualized as an all or nothing experience, either individuals do or do not disclose, and there is no middle such as a partial disclosure. It is natural to expect that victims will disclose when it is comfortable to do so, and will provide details at times that they judge appropriate, but the amount of detail most certainly can vary across situations. In general event disclosures, dichotomous measurement may be sufficient. However, with traumatic and stigmatic events, disclosure is often quite risky, making disclosure decisions and behaviors potentially more complicated. Under normal circumstances, sharing personal information often makes people feel vulnerable, and disclosing victimization experiences can exacerbate those feelings.

It has been suggested that disclosures themselves may actually run along a continuum such that traumatic experiences are "partially disclosed and partially undisclosed" (Greenberg & Stone, 1992, p. 83), meaning that simply asking if a victim has disclosed may not be very informative. Pennebaker and Beall (1986) experimentally examined the relationship between

amount of detail and health outcomes and demonstrated the importance and benefits of providing more emotional content in disclosures of traumatic experiences. However, previous studies in disclosure have not explicitly examined if and how the continuum hypothesis manifests itself in the real world. The present study advances knowledge in this area by finding evidence that supports the existence of a disclosure continuum. In this sample, there was a range of detail given in disclosures, from a minimum of nothing at all to dropping hints, to briefly stating the facts, to complete disclosure of the full experience. For all of these points on the continuum, there were reasons behind the detail given. These findings suggest that in studies of disclosure, we may be remiss in only asking *whether* a victim disclosed. We may actually learn more about the disclosure phenomenon and the victim's current psychological state by supplementing the dichotomous method with questions of *how much* did you tell and *why* did you tell.

Effects of Disclosing

In the general process of disclosure, outcomes of disclosing are very important. These outcomes may be positive or negative, facilitate or impede recovery, and therefore may influence the likelihood and manner of future disclosures. In this study, the role of disclosure in recovery was examined, specifically the types of disclosure outcomes experienced by the women in the sample. Recovery outcomes were explored using recovery criteria suggested by Harvey (1996). The women in this study discussed their experiences of how disclosure impacted these criteria and how disclosing led to other positive and negative experiences. Overall, disclosure and recovery outcomes appear to operate in a cooperative manner, influencing one another, such that if one area becomes easier or improved, the other does as well. For example, as disclosure becomes easier the intensity of emotions might lessen as well, or conversely, if emotions are too difficult to manage, it may also be difficult to disclose. Further research should examine the

intricate relationships among these factors. Nevertheless, the women generally agreed that disclosing facilitated their recovery by helping her to make sense of the assault and put it behind her, improve her relationships with others, and help repair her self-esteem. Clearly, time is an important factor in healing from any traumatic event; therefore, disclosure and time probably work best together rather than apart in helping move victims toward recovery.

Previous studies have examined the impact of social reactions on victims, and the types of reactions experienced by this sample reflect those found in the literature. As found previously, (e.g., Ullman & Filipas, 2001), women experience a mixture of positive (e.g., supportive) and negative (e.g., blaming, judging) reactions from disclosing. These outcomes may influence subsequent disclosures simply by providing a history of disclosure. If previous attempts at disclosure are successful, then she may feel more confident to disclose again in the future if necessary. However, if disclosures are unsuccessful or if she does not benefit from them, then she may adapt her disclosure behaviors (e.g., give fewer details, be more vigilant about who she tells) or she may stop disclosing altogether. The findings in this study support previous ones (e.g., Ahrens, 2002; e.g., Sudderth, 1998) in demonstrating the power of previous disclosures to impact future ones.

Limitations of the Current Study

There are a number of limitations to consider in the present study. First, the study is exploratory and therefore preliminary. Further research may find evidence supporting the conclusions presented within.

Second, the data cannot be generalized to all sexual assault victims and their disclosure experiences. This sample is self-selected and although there were no differences in disclosure tendencies between those who volunteered and did not, the women in this sample may be

different from other victims in the general population in important ways. They may be (1) better adjusted as reflected in the fact that they are currently attending college, (2) more altruistic in nature explaining their decision to volunteer for the study, and (3) given their developmental phase (college), their concerns and experiences may not reflect those of some older victims in the general population. Therefore, their experiences may represent those of a segment of the population as opposed to the majority of sexual assault victims.

Another limitation is that the data is retrospective. The interview questions required participants to recall previous disclosure experiences and the reasons behind their disclosure decisions, of disclosure events that may have occurred years ago. Memory is highly error-prone and may have limited the data in a number of ways: (1) they may have been unable to recall potentially important factors involved in their disclosures, and (2) this sample may possess colored perceptions (e.g., positive or negative) that shaped the responses they gave. However, all the women in the sample spoke about a mixture of positive and negative experiences, such that the data does not appear biased in any direction.

Third, reliability estimates were computed for only a portion of the sample. Whenever possible it is preferable to estimate reliability on a large portion if not the entire sample, given that the codebook is the primary measure in the analytical process for this type of qualitative study. That acknowledged, reliability analysis is a lengthy process, and time constraints prevented the PI from conducting reliability testing on the entire sample of interviews. However, the concepts identified were validated by other researchers in the area of violence against women. Thus, although the number of occurrences of specific concepts is subject to error, the major concepts and themes revealed appear to accurately reflect the data as well as previous findings in the rape and disclosure literature.

Practical Implications

This study's findings have a number of important implications for practice and research. First, it is clear that motivations for disclosing and not disclosing are complex. It is important to recognize the fears and concerns of different ethnic and cultural groups and how they may discourage disclosure. Language barriers are only one challenge; cultural norms are extremely powerful in influencing help-seeking behaviors such as disclosure. Through awareness of the concerns of diverse groups, practitioners and other support sources such as rape crisis centers can inform their approaches to better reach and address the concerns of a diverse population of victims.

Second, many women in this sample disclosed for altruistic reasons. Women who disclose for these reasons are often trying to protect and inform others to prevent them from sexual assault. The field should capitalize on this natural inclination of victims and support its potential for prevention. This may serve two purposes: (1) encouraging victims to disclose simply for the sake of informing others increases public awareness, a necessary objective, given that the majority of the population is unaware of the circumstances in which rape often occurs (e.g., date rape) and the people who most often perpetrate the assaults (acquaintances); (2) encouraging altruistic disclosure allows women the opportunity to transform their victim experiences into something positive that can potentially protect others from future victimization, which may facilitate their recovery and give the incident meaning. Related, altruistic disclosures often occurred at later points post-assault, such that the women's reasons for disclosing shifted to altruistic reasons. It is possible that this change represents a distinct marker in their recovery.

Finally, findings indicate that women delay or choose not to disclose for many reasons, which include, initially, trying to discern if the incident qualifies as wrongful intent and/or a

crime, concerns about how others will react, and how disclosing might impact their daily lives. Sexual assault is often not immediately acknowledged by victims and is a crime that cannot be equated with many others that are much more clearly recognized and defined (e.g., theft). It is asking a lot of victims who are often traumatized by the incident, to recognize sexual assault when it occurs, and in a timely enough manner to inform the police. The longer victims take to report it, the less the chances for successful prosecution and the greater the possibility of not being believed. The disclosure and reporting process may be more straightforward for victims of stranger rape, but for the majority of victims who are assaulted by acquaintances and romantic partners, the process is likely to be much more complicated. Victims might actually need additional time to cognitively recognize the incident as an assault and determine the best course of action. Results from this study can inform policy on victim reporting (e.g., statutes of limitations) in ways that may recognize victims' natural process after an assault and their confusion about what qualifies as rape, address their disclosure concerns (e.g., publicity), and support their efforts to prosecute if they choose to report it.

Directions for Future Research

Findings from this study provide foundations for new research. Given the retrospective nature of this study, future research can validate the findings here by prospectively examining the process of disclosure and the factors that influence it. One important area to examine is the concurrent relationship between motivations and recovery. It is possible that specific motivations reflect specific stages in recovery and may serve as indicators of those stages, which may be important for clinicians. Future research may determine if this is the case.

Secondly, this study highlights some of the concerns of diverse populations, but this information is limited due to the small sample size. It is essential that additional studies focus on

specific ethnic and cultural groups and move beyond university samples whenever possible to increase our knowledge of the disclosure process among diverse groups and the unique challenges with which they contend in their disclosure decisions.

Next, results suggest that previous methods for measuring disclosure may be limited, and we can expand current procedures by examining the reasons why women disclose as well as do not. Furthermore, it is important to begin conceptualizing disclosure as a range rather than a discrete variable. For purposes of understanding the impact of disclosure, researchers are encouraged need to measure it in ways that reflect its true nature, as a range, with its own complex process. Studies should move beyond the measurement of disclosure as dichotomous which gives little information about how much information was disclosed.

Relatedly, most studies of disclosure are based on the premise that disclosure is helpful and that it can result in health improvements. However, current measurement techniques may be invalid. It is unclear what it is that links disclosure to positive health outcomes. It may be important to examine the contributing and associated factors of disclosure and how they may play a role in the link between disclosure and health. By examining the bigger picture of the disclosure process, we can partial out the various factors involved in disclosure and determine more definitively what aspects of disclosure lead to improved health.

Finally, a number of the participants in this study were confused about whether their assault qualified as rape and whether the incident was serious or not. Current sex education programs may not adequately address the needs of young people, leaving them unprepared to handle sexual situations and know where to turn for support if assaulted. Consequently, young women may not receive sufficient information to allow them to manage ambiguous sexual situations and confidently be able to determine when undesirable sexual behavior crosses over to

rape. It is important to examine the content of rape prevention programming as well as investigate whether there is a link between disclosure and general knowledge of sexual behavior and rape because this may have implications for help-seeking and reporting sexual assault to the police.

Conclusions

This study sought to increase our knowledge about the process of sexual assault disclosure to elucidate the complexity inherent in the phenomenon. Larger presentations of the adult sexual assault disclosure process have not been discussed in the literature. This study represents a beginning in that direction. Disclosure has a significant impact on surveillance efforts in sexual violence and under the proper circumstances provides victims with the support needed to recover. Additionally, findings from the current study indicate that the continued study of disclosure may reveal important information that will allow us to better understand the challenges victims face after an assault in their decisions of whether to disclose, and how the process itself impacts victims, future disclosures, and their recovery.

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APPENDIX A. SEXUAL EXPERIENCES SURVEY AND DISCLOSURE QUESTIONS

This next set of questions asks about your experiences SINCE AGE 13 and up through the present time. Some of the questions are very similar so please read them VERY CAREFULLY.

The following questions concern sexual experiences that you may have had. We know that these are personal questions, so we do not ask your name or other identifying information. Each question appears in a **bold** type. After each question you will see a statement labeled **a** through **e**. Please circle a number after each of these letters to indicate how many times that that particular sexual experience has occurred under each circumstance described. Your answers are completely confidential. We hope that this helps you to feel comfortable answering each question honestly.

	Sexual Experiences	How many times since age 13
20.	**I gave someone oral sex* or someone performed <u>oral sex</u> on me after:**	
	**Oral sex means contact between the mouth and either the penis or the female genital area.*	
	a. They told lies, made promises about the future they knew were untrue, threatened to end the relationship or spread rumors.	0 1 2 3 or more
	b. They used strong arguments and continual pressure or showed displeasure *(got angry).*	0 1 2 3 or more
	c. I drank alcohol and/or used drugs until I was incapacitated and couldn't object or consent.	0 1 2 3 or more
	d. They threatened some degree of physical harm.	0 1 2 3 or more
	e. **They used some degree of physical force such as holding me down or ripping my clothes off**.	0 1 2 3 or more
21.	**Someone inserted their penis*, their fingers, or an object** *(such as a dildo, bottle, or candle)* **into my <u>vagina</u> after:**	
	**Even if the penetration was very slight and he did not ejaculate (cum)*	
	a. They told lies, made promises about the future they knew were untrue, threatened to end the relationship or spread rumors.	0 1 2 3 or more
	b. They used strong arguments and continual pressure or showed displeasure *(got angry).*	0 1 2 3 or more
	c. I drank alcohol and/or used drugs until I was incapacitated and couldn't object or consent.	0 1 2 3 or more
	d. They threatened some degree of physical harm.	0 1 2 3 or more
	e. **They used some degree of physical force such as holding me down or ripping my clothes off**.	0 1 2 3 or more

IF YOU DID EXPERIENCE ANY OF THE INCIDENTS LISTED IN 20 AND 21, HAVE YOU EVER TOLD ANYONE ABOUT IT? (Please circle an answer)

YES   NO

APPENDIX A continued

		How many times since age 13
22.	**Someone inserted their penis*, their fingers or an object** *(ex. a dido, bottle, or candle)* **into my <u>anus</u> (butt) after:** **Even if the penetration was very slight and he did not ejaculate (cum)*	
	a. They told lies, made promises about the future they knew were untrue, threatened to end the relationship or spread rumors.	0 1 2 3 or more
	b. They used strong arguments and continual pressure or showed displeasure *(got angry).*	0 1 2 3 or more
	c. I drank alcohol and/or used drugs until I was incapacitated and couldn't object or consent.	0 1 2 3 or more
	d. They threatened some degree of physical harm.	0 1 2 3 or more
	e. **They used some degree of physical force such as holding me down or ripping my clothes off.**	0 1 2 3 or more
23.	**Someone attempted to have oral sex with me, or attempted to make me have <u>oral sex</u> with them when I indicated I didn't want to, but it <u>did not</u> happen.**	
	a. They told lies, made promises about the future they knew were untrue, threatened to end the relationship or spread rumors.	0 1 2 3 or more
	b. They used strong arguments and continual pressure or showed displeasure *(got angry).*	0 1 2 3 or more
	c. I drank alcohol and/or used drugs until I was incapacitated and couldn't object or consent.	0 1 2 3 or more
	d. They threatened some degree of physical harm	0 1 2 3 or more
	e. **They used some degree of physical force such as holding me down or ripping my clothes off**.	0 1 2 3 or more
24.	**Someone attempted to insert their penis, their fingers, or an object** *(such as. a dildo, bottle, or candle)* **into my <u>vagina</u> after I indicated that I didn't want them to, but it <u>did not</u> happen.**	
	a. They told lies, made promises about the future they knew were untrue, threatened to end the relationship or spread rumors.	0 1 2 3 or more
	b. They used strong arguments and continual pressure or showed displeasure *(got angry).*	0 1 2 3 or more
	c. I drank alcohol and/or used drugs until I was incapacitated and couldn't object or consent.	0 1 2 3 or more
	d. They threatened some degree of physical harm.	0 1 2 3 or more
	e. **They used some degree of physical force such as holding me down or ripping my clothes off**.	0 1 2 3 or more

IF YOU DID EXPERIENCE ANY OF THE INCIDENTS LISTED IN 22, 23, OR 24, HAVE YOU EVER TOLD ANYONE ABOUT IT? (Please circle an answer)

YES   NO

APPENDIX A continued

		How many times since age 13
25.	**Someone attempted to insert their penis, their fingers, or an object** *(such as. a dildo, bottle, or candle)* **into my <u>anus</u> after I indicated that I didn't want them to, but it <u>did not</u> happen.**	
	a. They told lies, made promises about the future they knew were untrue, threatened to end the relationship or spread rumors.	0 1 2 3 or more
	b. They used strong arguments and continual pressure or showed displeasure *(got angry).*	0 1 2 3 or more
	c. I drank alcohol and/or used drugs until I was incapacitated and couldn't object or consent.	0 1 2 3 or more
	d. They threatened some degree of physical harm.	0 1 2 3 or more
	e. **They used some degree of physical force such as holding me down or ripping my clothes off**.	0 1 2 3 or more

IF YOU DID EXPERIENCE ANY OF THE INCIDENTS LISTED IN 25, HAVE YOU EVER TOLD ANYONE ABOUT IT? (Please circle an answer)

YES   NO

APPENDIX B. INVITATION PAGE

IMPORTANT! PLEASE READ.

Thank you very much for filling out the questionnaire. We are interested in doing a separate follow-up interview with select participants. This interview will last approximately 1-1.5 hours. Those who participate in the interview will earn an additional 2 hours of research credit and $20 for their time.

To see if you qualify, look at your response(s) to number 1 on page 17 of this survey (Section G). Look to see if you circled ANY of the following numbers: **20c-e, 21c-e, 22c-e, 23c-e, 24c-e, and 25c-e**. These are the numbers that represented nonconsensual sexual experiences since age 13. If you circled any one of those numbers then we would very much like to interview you.

During the interview, you will be asked brief questions about your nonconsensual sexual experience, but mainly about your experiences with talking to other people about this incident. The interview will be conducted by a woman and your identification and your answers will be kept confidential.

Below, please mark your interest in participating in the interview study and then TEAR THIS SHEET FROM YOUR QUESTIONNAIRE.

☐ I do NOT qualify for the interview study.

☐ I do qualify for the study, but do not wish to participate.

☐ I do qualify for the study, and I am interested in participating. I am providing my contact information below.

If you are interested in participating in the interview, please write your contact information below. We will contact you at the number you provide so we may describe the interview and set up a date and time for the interview. Please write an email address and/or your phone where we can reach you to set up the interview and talk briefly about the study itself.

First Name _____

Email Address _____

Phone Number _____

May we leave a message or voicemail if you are not home?   Yes   No

Do you prefer to be contacted by phone or email?

Today's Date _____

THANK YOU VERY MUCH FOR YOUR TIME!!

APPENDIX C. INTERVIEW CONSENT FORM

Georgia State University

Department of Psychology

Informed Consent Form

Title: Disclosure of Unwanted Sexual Experience

Principal Investigator: Sharon Smith, M.A.

You have been invited to participate in a research study of the disclosure of unwanted sexual experiences. If you choose to participate, you will participate in a one-to-one interview answering questions about your experiences with disclosing a nonconsensual sexual experience to others. The interview will take approximately 1-1.5 hours to complete. Upon completing the interview, you will receive 2 hours of research credit and $20 for your participation.

Previous research in disclosure has demonstrated the potential benefits to disclosing traumatic experiences to others, including in a research setting. Thus, through your participation in this study you may learn more about yourself and experience improved psychological and physical health. Also, your participation may lead to a better understanding of women's experiences in disclosing an unwanted sexual experience to other people.

Answering questions about your unwanted sexual experience and/or of disclosing it to others might cause some feelings of discomfort. If participating in this study causes problems such as too much anxiety or sadness, the researcher will refer you to a clinical faculty member or clinic supervisor who will talk with you and if needed, refer you to a professional counselor. However, you will be responsible for the cost of any professional treatment.

The interview is confidential, so your participation will not be identified. If you consent to it, the interview will be audio tape recorded, but your identity will be protected (i.e., your name will not be recorded). The findings of this study will be analyzed and reported in group form. Your name and other facts that might point to you will not appear when we present this study or publish its results. If you are participating in this study for class credit, the researcher will give you credit through the Experimetrix system, but your name will not be connected to your responses in the interview. Information that you provide will be kept confidential to the extent allowed by law and not reported to others outside the research project in a way that personally identifies you.

You may ask questions about this project of the researcher, Sharon Smith, or her advisor, Dr. Sarah Cook of the GSU Psychology Department (404-651-2283). If you have questions or concerns about your rights as a participant in this research study, you may contact the Institutional Research Board (IRB) which oversees the protection of human research participants. Shannon D. Herbert can be reached at 404-651-4689.

Participation in research is voluntary. You have the right to refuse to be in this study. If you decide to be in the study and change your mind, you have the right to drop out at any time. You may skip questions or discontinue participation at any time. However, any information already used to the point when you withdraw consent will not be removed. Whatever you decide, you will not lose benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

We will give you a copy of this consent form to keep. To protect the identity of the participants in this study, we are asking for verbal consent. If you are willing to volunteer for this research study, please check the box below.

☐ By checking this box, you are indicating that you agree to participate in this study.

_____   _____
                Principal Investigator   Date

APPENDIX D.   DESCRIPTIONS OF INCIDENTS EXPERIENCED BY PARTICIPANTS

Participant	Descriptions of incidents	Her age at time of the assault	Years since assault (between assault and interview)	Relationship to assailant
A	They were at a party and both were drinking; she was "strongly persuaded" into having anal sex.	22	1.5	Acquaintance, dating
B	Multiple; (1) At party, drinking, and she fell asleep on the couch; she woke up to a guy's hand touching her between her legs. (2) Spent the night with friends (male and female), all drinking, and all 3 were sleeping in the same bed; she woke up and the male was having sex with her from behind. (3) With boyfriend at a party, both drinking; they went into the woods to "talk" and he bent her over and had sex with her.	14 or 15	5-6	(1) Stranger (2) Friend (3) Boyfriend
C	Abusive relationship; multiple occurrences of physical abuse and rape with the same person.	19	14	Boyfriend
D	Two incidents with the same person; he used force by shoving her, ripping her clothes, and holding her down in efforts to have sex. They were interrupted by a friend in the first incident, and she ran away in the 2nd incident.	16 or 17	2.5-3	Acquaintance, dating
E	Three men gave her and roommate a ride home; they were hanging out and drinking and the guys were using drugs; she went to her bedroom to go to sleep, and one of the men broke the lock on her bedroom door, proceeded to rape her, and the other 2 men followed.	19	12	Brief acquaintances

APPENDIX D continued

Participant	Descriptions of incidents	Her age at time of the assault	Years since assault (between assault and interview)	Relationship to assailant
F	She was hanging out with a male friend who was drinking. He took her cell phone, and used force to remove her clothes as well as his own, and they wrestled as he touched her vaginal area with his hands. She pushed him off and was able to make him stop and allow her to leave.	17	4	Friend
G	She was at the mall with friends and got a ride home with friends and their male friend (driver). Before getting in the car, he repeatedly "grabbed" her and put her hand "on his crotch" and made threatening remarks. After dropping off the other girls, he took her to her neighborhood, stopped the car, got on top of her and started pulling her clothes off and touching her breasts, vaginal area, and buttocks, as she tried to push him off. They were interrupted by a neighbor who knocked on the car window.	13 or 14	5-6	Friend of a friend, brief acquaintance
H	She was hanging out at home with her cousin and cousin's male friends. They were all drinking and smoking marijuana. She ended up alone with one of the guys, feeling "out of it and dazed" and not quite aware of what was happening. He touched her vaginal area with his hands and put hickeys on her neck. They were interrupted by her cousin when she returned.	14	5	Brief acquaintance
I	She was with her boyfriend, and she asked him for aspirin but he gave her ecstasy instead. She felt dizzy and they had sex.	19 or 20	3-4	Boyfriend

APPENDIX D continued

Participant	Descriptions of incidents	Her age at time of the assault	Years since assault (between assault and interview)	Relationship to assailant
J	Multiple; (1) Psychologically & physically abusive relationship; both used alcohol and drugs, forced her to have sex. (2) Boyfriend liked to induce pain during sex and would not stop when asked.	17 and 31	17 yrs and 3 yrs	Boyfriend (both incidents)
K	Multiple; (1) Boyfriend periodically would use force (hold her down) to try and have sex with her; (2) she was hanging out with a male friend at the pool, both were drunk, and he took her to the bathroom and "forcefully" tried to have sex with her. They were interrupted by a female guest at the pool.	14; 15 or 16	7 yrs and 5-6 yrs	Boyfriend; friend
L	He held her down as she was saying no and trying to get up, and they had sex. They were interrupted by the phone.	16 or 17	1.5-2	Acquaintance, dating
M	They were having sex digitally, and he switched to vaginal without her consent or awareness. When she realized what happened and told him no, he held her down and continued having sex.	16	3	Boyfriend
N	They went on a date, and went back to his apartment where he tried to coerce her into oral sex. He was forcefully kissing and undressing her.	25	4	Mother's co-worker / friend
O	She was at a party with friends who were in another part of the house. She and other guys were watching TV and suddenly one of them turned off the lights and tried to wrestle her down and she fought them off. The lights went on and off again, but this time they hit her with a wooden chair, and she began screaming which woke another guy who helped get the assailants away from her so she could leave.	14	5	Brief acquaintances

APPENDIX D continued

Participant	Descriptions of incidents	Her age at time of the assault	Years since assault (between assault and interview)	Relationship to assailant
P	She had been drinking and got a ride to her car with a friend and his friend (driver), and she fell asleep in the car. The driver took her into his apartment while she was still asleep. When she awoke he would not let her leave. She tried to escape and he got her into the bedroom and ripped off most of her clothing. She pretended that she was ill so he would allow her to go to the bathroom. When he was not looking, she escaped his apartment and ran to a neighbor's apartment who let her in to call the police.	26	2-3	Brief acquaintance
Q	She was walking home and a gang of men groped and fondled her, ripped off her underwear, and tried to force her into their van; she knee'd one of them and was able to run away.	21	25	Strangers
R	Boyfriend forced her to give him oral sex by pulling her arms down and slapping her.	14	5	Boyfriend
S	She was on vacation, and she and a guy she met at the beach were drinking, and she became intoxicated. He "threw her over his shoulder" and took her back to a room and had sex with her.	17	2	Brief acquaintance
T	She was at a club with friends who left without her. She felt really drunk and suspects she was drugged. A guy with them offered to drive her home, and when he did, her friends were not home. He took her back to his place where she fell asleep. When she awoke, he was lying on top of her having sex with her.	16 or 17	1-2	Brief acquaintance