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Factors Influencing the Decision to Disclose After Sexual Assault

Courtney A. Hanley
Old Dominion University

FACTORS INFLUENCING THE DECISION TO DISCLOSE AFTER SEXUAL ASSAULT

by

Courtney A. Hanley
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Approved by:

_____
Barbara Winstead (Director)

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Thomas F. Cash (Member)

_____
Michelle L. Kelley (Member)

ABSTRACT

FACTORS INFLUENCING THE DECISION TO DISCLOSE
AFTER SEXUAL ASSAULT

Courtney A. Hanley
Old Dominion University, 2005
Director: Dr. Barbara Winstead

Virginians Aligned Against Sexual Assault (VAASA, 2004) report that 1 in 4 women are sexually assaulted in their lifetime. Despite the prevalence of the crime, most women do not report acts of sexual assault to the police, making sexual assault, and rape in particular, one of the most underreported crimes (Backman, 1998). Research on has focused primarily on third-party reactions to sexual assault and victim culpability, but rarely seeks data directly from the victim in order to understand the psychological process of disclosing, or delaying disclosure, after an assault. Participants, 44 sexual assault victims seeking counseling at a non-profit rape crisis center, each completed anonymous surveys designed to examine factors that may influence one's decision to disclose following an assault. The current exploratory study found the following factors to delay significantly disclosure of sexual assault: the victim's categorization and degree of relationship to the assailant, congruence of perpetrator race, self-blame, religion as a reason to disclose, reasons against disclosing, and relationship status. The study failed to find a relationship between disclosure and sexual history, use of a weapon, and degree of injury. Although the present study is limited by a small sample size, the identification of factors associated with disclosure after sexual assault may be helpful for crisis counselors and sexual assault educators who work with this population.

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INTRODUCTION

According to FBI crime statistics, 1 in 4 women experience sexual assault at some point in their lifetimes (VAASA, 2004). Despite the prevalence of the crime, most women do not report acts of sexual assault to the police, marking sexual assault, rape in particular, one of the most underreported crimes (Backman, 1998). Virginians Aligned against Sexual Assault (VAASA) report only 16% of rapes are reported to the authorities. The decision not to disclose assault to authorities presents a societal problem (i.e., allowing perpetrators to go unpunished), and even greater even problem for victims who are unable to disclose the assault to others and may be unable to obtain the psychological services they may need.

Disclosure of an assault, either formally to police or mental/medical health professionals or informally to family/friends, has been shown to positively affect the recovery process (Frazier, Tashiro, Berman, Steger, & Long, 2004). If a victim chooses not to disclose, she may remain in an isolated state of self-blame and avoidant coping until she is in a position to disclose the information and begin the process of recovering (Backman, 1998; Ullman & Filipas, 2001).

Because researchers rarely solicit information from the victims, little is known about how victims make the decision to disclose their sexual assault or why victims may wait years before making their disclosure (Frazier, Tashiro, Berman, Steger, & Long, 2004; Smith, Letourneau, Saunders, Kilpatrick, Resnick, & Best, 1998; Ullman, 1996a, 1996b; Ullman & Filipas, 2001; Williams, 1984). Attention has long been focused on understanding the psychological journey of the victim in recovery, but not on

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understanding the victim who has yet to disclose to others about her assault. Research focusing on issues of those in recovery, though useful, rarely considers that years may have passed between experiencing the assault and disclosing the experience to others. Delay of disclosure is often related to methods of avoidant coping, such as alcohol and drug abuse, resulting in low self-esteem, depression, sexual dysfunction, and risk of re-victimization (Koss, Figueredo, & Prince, 2002; Ullman & Filipas, 2001). Several studies have tried to understand how the reactions of others and the view of society may influence one's decision not to disclose sexual assault. Research examining these factors often employs hypothetical vignettes rather than directly asking victims why they chose to delay disclosure. The purpose of the current study is to identify factors influencing the victim's decision to disclose an assault, and to better understand factors that contribute to disclosure delay.

Disclosure of sexual assault can provide both benefits and risks for the victim. Previous research has shown that some victims view disclosure as a positive experience and are motivated to disclose in order to gain social support and prevent harm to others (Dunn, Vail-Smith, & Knight, 1999). In addition, some victims choose to disclose sexual assault to receive advice and information to help themselves cope with the sexual assault (Derlega, Winstead, & Folk-Barron, 2000). However, there are many risks facing the victim as well, mainly because societal views towards sexual assault may place the individual in a defensive position. Despite the potential risk of being rejected by one's perceived social support system (i.e., the victim is not believed or her behavior is called into question), the process of disclosure after sexual assault marks the beginning for many individuals of a journey toward recovery and empowerment.

The majority of studies seek to understand what happens after the individual discloses sexual assault. In the author's review of the literature, these studies are limited because few examined the target of the disclosure. That is, disclosure was treated as absolute and the possibility that disclosure may have been to the police, not members of their support system, was ignored. For example, one could disclose to a formal target such as the police, a mental health or medical professional, or to an informal target, such as a friend, family member, or a romantic partner. Moreover, disclosing to a formal party may not be a choice if the individual wants to prosecute or if there are injuries requiring medical attention. In contrast, the choice to disclose to those in one's social circle who may or may not react with support is a completely different decision.

Current literature addresses the separation between formal and informal disclosure, but does not explore whether the benefits of disclosure (suggested as psychologically necessary for most victims to begin recovery) may not necessarily have occurred because only a formal target was informed of the assault. For example, an individual may have reported the assault to the police, technically a disclosure, but never confided their assault to family and friends. The extant literature fails to address the psychological implications of these two very different types of disclosure. This is surprising given that after disclosure many victims report receiving unhelpful and negative reactions from formal targets (Holzman, 1996; Kalof, 2000; Ullman, 1996b; Ullman & Filipas, 2001). Unfortunately, negative responses from formal targets may prevent the individual from disclosing to more informal targets.

Before trying to understand why the victim chooses to disclose or not to disclose a sexual assault, it is important to acknowledge that societal factors may contribute to fear

of disclosure (Backman, 1998; Dunn et al., 1999; Smith et. al, 2000). Historically, the burden to prove rape as a crime has rested solely on the victim. Prior to the 1980s, during which time sexual assault laws underwent massive reform in the United States, the definition of rape vaguely read as carnal knowledge (exclusively penile-vaginal penetration) of a woman, forcibly and against her will. Such a definition excluded many types of assault punishable by today's laws such as sodomy, sexual battery, inanimate/animate object sexual penetration, incest, and same gender sexual assault. The victim was required to report the assault to the authorities promptly, provide proof of sufficient resistance during the act, corroborate the allegation with witnesses and allow previous sexual history to be admissible during criminal proceedings (Backman, 1998). Although today's laws are far more gender and relationship neutral and victim-friendly, the stigma of responsibility attached to victims of assault, currently referred to as rape myths, is still widely evident (Dunn et al., 1999).

Societal reaction to sexual assault and the existence of rape myths among differing populations have been the foci of the majority of research regarding sexual assault. One of the weaknesses of the literature in the effort to understand reactions to sexual assault is the use of vignettes to assess judgments and reactions from the third party perspective rather than collecting data from survivors. Most commonly, a convenience sample is exposed to a hypothetical rape scenario and then asked questions regarding the victim's level of responsibility (Ullman, 1996a). These studies illustrate issues influencing societal judgment, such as victim characteristics, victim-offender relationship, victim's clothing and alcohol use, and victim's level of resistance. Results have shown that negative reactions to rape victims generally involve victims to be

perceived as having an active sexual history, less responsible, less respectable, non-resisting, and using alcohol prior to the assault (Ullman, 1996a, 1996b). Although research involving vignettes is useful in validating the existence of rape myths and as a source for demonstrating the factors third-party individuals regard as affecting the culpability of the victim, it does not elucidate the psychological processes and issues facing a victim's decision of whether or not to disclose the assault. Research involving vignettes and third-party perspectives may not be entirely useful in the detection of psychological barriers to self-disclosing sexual assault, but they are useful when trying to understand why the rape victim is different from victims of other violent crimes. Unlike other crimes, our society places much of the responsibility for sexual assault on the victim (Ullman, 1996a; Williams, 1984). The belief that the victim is to some degree responsible is often cited as the reason for non-disclosure of the assault to both formal targets (i.e., police, mental health workers, and medical professionals) as well as informal targets (i.e., family, friends, romantic partners).

Current Study

Sexual assault may result in prolonged psychological distress. Koss et al. (2002) reported that victims of rape were three times more likely than others to meet the criteria for life-long depression, more likely to use medical and mental health services, more likely to experience problems at work, and more likely to report sexual problems than women who had not experienced rape. Given that sexual assault may result in serious psychological effects, it is paradoxical that many victims do not disclose sexual assault or wait for years to disclose their experience.

More research is needed to identify individual factors that influence a victim's decision to disclose or not to disclose a sexual assault. The factors under investigation include perceived victimization, ethnicity, sexual history, relationship status, substance use, relationship to perpetrator, religious views, self-blame, and fear of societal reaction.

Perceived Victimization

Viewing the self as a sexual assault victim increases in proportion with the severity of the crime (Backman, 1998), thereby increasing the likelihood of reporting the crime to the authorities. Backman (1998) found that severity of injury followed by the presence of a weapon were significant factors involved in one's decision to report an assault. Williams (1984) reported that women were more likely to view themselves as victims, as contrasted to regarding themselves as responsible for the assault when the assault involved a greater use of force. Women who did not know their assailant, who had been attacked outside of their homes, and who had been injured and threatened with a weapon, were the most likely to report the incident shortly after the attack. Williams defined this as the "classic rape". It is important to recognize that classic rape is rare. In fact, close to 80% of victims know their assailant (VAASA, 2004).

The current study seeks to evaluate the impact of several factors suggested in previous literature to influence disclosure delay. Specifically, it is plausible that these factors either may foster feelings of victimization, which may facilitate disclosure, or conversely, may foster feelings of self-blame, which may lead to the decision to delay disclosure.

Smith et al. (2000) report that age is a key factor for disclosure of assault; the older the victim, the more rapid the disclosure. For instance, 47% of the sample who

reported being raped during their childhood on average waited at least five years before disclosing the assault to others. This suggests that the younger the victim at the time of the assault, the less likely she will be to view herself as a victim. However, this does not explain the population of women victimized in adulthood that delay disclosure for many years. It may be possible that there is a small window in adolescence when factors increasing self-blame (reducing the degree to which one views the self as a victim) such as sexual history and alcohol use are not a factor, thus increasing the likelihood of a rapid disclosure. The presence or use of alcohol and/or drugs, or a promiscuous sexual history may decrease the likelihood of viewing oneself as a victim. Johnson (1994) states that "any factor that minimizes the general credibility of a victim tends to lead toward less favorable responses toward her" (p. 784).

Ethnicity

Ethnicity influences public opinion and judgment, especially in cases of sexual assault. In a study of over 300 college students, George and Martinez (2002) found both the victim's and the assailant's ethnicity influenced the amount of blame attributed to the victim, particularly if the rape was interracial. George and Martinez (2002) cited several stereotypes about Black individuals and the sexuality of Blacks as potentially responsible for blame attributed to Black victims in various rape scenarios. In a comparison of White and Black victims in the same acquaintance rape scenario, Willis (1992) reported that participants found the Black victim to be perceived as more responsible for the assault than the White victim; however, no significant differences were found for victim-blaming when the scenario depicted stranger rape. It is also possible that the ethnicity of the rapist influences the amount of blame a third party attributes to the victim. Varelas and Foley

(1998) found that White participants attributed more blame to the Black victim than a White victim if the assailant was Black.

It is possible that ethnicity affects one's definition of what constitutes a rape. In a study of 383 college students, Kalof (2000) reported that the majority of Black and White women sampled did not consider themselves victims of sexual assault and had never reported an incidence of assault to the authorities. However, their descriptions of their sexual experiences met the legal definition of rape, indicating that they had in fact be victims of sexual assault. This illustrates a growing problem in that women, particularly college-aged women, may be minimizing unwanted sexual activity rather than consider themselves to be a victim of sexual assault. Also, some ethnicities seem more prone to experiencing assault than others. Kalof found that Black and White women were almost three times as likely to have had an experience meeting the legal definition of rape than Hispanic women. In a sample of 3,000 Los Angeles adults, Sorenson and Seigel (1992) found that Hispanic women had the lowest incidence of sexual assault over their lifetime. It is possible that Hispanic women are less likely to experience sexual assault. Alternatively, the Hispanic culture may not support rape victims thus discouraging Hispanic women from disclosing the assault.

Kalof (2000) suggested that Black women may delay in disclosure compared with women of other ethnicities due to differing definitions of what constitutes rape; however, questions concerning disclosure delay were not directly asked. Kalof and Wade (1995) reported that Black college women reported fewer experiences of sexual victimization than did White women. Kalof and Wade suggested that Black women are either less susceptible to rape, are less likely to perceive themselves as victims of rape, or do not

wish to disclose their true impressions. George and Martinez (2002) suggest that it is a lack of perceived societal support that stops Black women from reporting an assault. When asked if they would go to the authorities and report a rape, significantly fewer Black women as compared to White women reported that they would go to the authorities for fear of lack of societal support. Kalof (2000) proposed that Black women might doubt their credibility to be regarded as a victim in the legal system as well as within their community.

Research on the impact of ethnicity to the disclosure process has not been consistent. In a sample of residents from Los Angeles County, Wyatt (1992) found no differences between Black and White women in their experiences of sexual assault. Given that other studies have shown evidence that Black women overall experience a higher prevalence rate of assault, Wyatt argues that the reason no differences exist between Black and White women is due to the fact that the credibility of the rape victim is not as well established for Black women as it is for White women. Black women may not be reporting their experiences for fear the community will not recognize them as victims, thereby creating an illusion that there are no racial differences for sexual assault.

In the review of the literature of ethnicity and rape, there were few current studies directly examining ethnicity as a factor that may potentially influence disclosure of assault. Again, it is most likely explained by the examination of third party reactions rather than directly asking rape victims if their race was a factor in their decision (i.e., belief that because one is Black, they have a decreased chance of being believed by authorities). This is surprising considering that ethnicity has been well documented to influence one's self-concept, self-esteem, locus of control, and view of gender roles

(Parks, Carter, & Gushue, 1996). The current study will examine relationships between ethnicity and length of time until disclosure. Specifically, Black women have longer disclosure delays than White women will be investigated as well as congruence of perpetrator ethnicity.

Sexual History and Relationship Status

A victim's sexual history, especially promiscuity or perceived promiscuity, can have a damaging effect both on court proceedings and public opinion of sexual assault victims (Johnson, 1994). Johnson (1994) found that the victim's sexual history had an impact on the participant's attribution of guilt. Perceptions of victim culpability in conditions allowing evidence of sexual history were less favorable than culpability attributed in the condition when sexual history was inadmissible. The same was found in acquaintance rape scenarios. Overall, the admissibility of sexual history to the court proceeding increased the degree of blame the third party participant attributed to the victim when compared to scenarios where sexual history was inadmissible. In particular, males reported a higher probability of victim enjoyment in the condition allowing the victim's sexual history.

Relationship to Perpetrator

The majority of sexual assault victims are acquainted with their perpetrators, therefore disclosure by the victim may involve accusing a family member, a fellow student, or a co-worker (Dunn et al., 1999; Smith et al., 2000). Often the victim is concerned with the impact of disclosing the assault may have on the perpetrator (i.e., causing problems at work or within one's family). In some cases, she may fear that the

assailant will receive a harsh sentence or may not want to subject anyone to the cruelty of prison life (Williams, 1984).

When a victim has been assaulted by a stranger, there are fewer factors to instigate victim-blaming. When assaulted by an acquaintance, the act of the assault and the actions of the victim are called into question because there is some degree of relationship between the victim and the assailant. For example, in some situations the victim may have accompanied the perpetrator on a date, have consumed alcohol and/or drugs prior to the assault, or engaged in some type of consensual sexual activity such as kissing and/or petting which may add to the level of ambiguity. Clearly, these types of factors are not present in cases of stranger rape (Johnson, 1994). In review of assailant-victim relationships coupled with his findings, Johnson proposed that for a victim to have credibility (i.e., less self-blame), she must clearly resist the attacker from inception to the close of the sexual attack, which is not usually the case as the majority of acquaintance rapes may begin with consensual sexual acts and end in rape. It is possible that many women delay in disclosure of the assault because they do not perceive themselves as victims and believe they are to blame for the assault having consented to some type of sexual activity.

The degree to which the victim knows the perpetrator can influence the decision to disclose after an assault. The victim may feel that rape cannot be proven if the assailant and the victim had engaged in prior acts of consensual sexual behavior. Society already perceives rape as unlikely in situations in which the victim and the perpetrator are acquainted (Johnson, 1994).

Another deterrent to disclosing after an acquaintance rape may be the victim's relationship status. Viki and Abrams (2002) found that in scenarios of acquaintance rape, married women are viewed as far more responsible than when the relationship status of the victim is unknown. Viki and Abrams attributed this finding to the belief that a married woman who experienced assault may have engaged in some degree of infidelity or violated traditional gender roles because she knew the perpetrator.

Self-Blame and Fear of Rejection

One of the many initial responses after experiencing a sexual assault may be, "Why did this happen to me?" The victims' beliefs about their level of personal control, trust, self-esteem, invulnerability, and intimacy may cause them to blame external factors as well as aspects of their own behavior (Koss et al., 2002). Individuals often have pre-existing cognitions that affect the ability to process the trauma she has experienced. Several factors may increase the degree of responsibility she assigns to herself such as relationship to the perpetrator, alcohol and/or drug use at the time of the assault, being out late and so forth.

Victims of sexual assault internalize a lot of blame for the event. They believe they should have been able to control the event, particularly in cases of acquaintance rape (Branscombe, Wohl, Owen, Allison, & N'gbala, 2003). Specifically, victims often attribute more blame to self and believe they should have known better than to have some type of relationship with the assailant. Perceptions of one's responsibility and the beliefs that the assailant is not responsible coupled with the fear that they will not be believed, often creates greater conflict for victims of sexual assault compared with less invasive crimes, such as burglary.

Koss et al. (2002) theorized that the recovery process begins only after the victim stops trying to assign blame for the assault and stabilizes certain beliefs about herself. If the victim is unable to do so, she will continue assigning blame and may develop maladaptive beliefs about herself such as they were responsible for the assault. These beliefs often make it difficult to trust, protect oneself, and feel trusted by others (Koss et al., 2002). If a victim is unable to disclose the assault, it is possible that they may be more likely to continue to blame themselves for the assault.

The tendency to blame the self in cases of sexual assault is perpetuated by the stigma society has attached to sexual assault. First, delay in disclosure after an assault lessens victim's credibility. The assumption is that delaying disclosure is not behavior that would be expected from someone who was attacked (Smith et al., 2000; Williams, 1984). Therefore, if a victim does not immediately disclose the assault, she may feel that she will be perceived as trying to hide something or is not telling the truth. Second, in order to disclose information regarding an assault, the victim must reveal an event involving personal shame, self-blame, fear, embarrassment, while anticipating some degree of negative consequences (Ullman, 1996). Even if the victim does not disclose to authorities and thereby limits her exposure for societal judgment, and instead discloses to family and friends, she still faces the risk that her support system of family and friends will reject her. Fear of rejection from one's support system may be one of the leading factors for delaying disclosure of the assault. Symonds (1980) used the term "second injury" to describe the re-victimization that occurs for an individual when the disclosure meets with negative reactions.

Religion

According to a 2003 Gallup report, 61% of Americans reported that religion was a "very important" part of their lives. Although researchers have considered the importance of religion in therapy (Johnson & Hayes, 2003), the connection between religion and recovery from sexual assault has received little attention. Given that a majority of the American culture expresses a belief in a form of spirituality, it is important to address the role of religion for victims of sexual assault.

Individuals high in religiosity may experience a sexual assault differently than those who are not religious, thereby processing the decision to disclose differently from others. It has been found that religiosity is inversely related to early sexual activity (Johnson & Hayes, 2003). If the assault happened in adolescence or in college, it may be the victim's first sexual experience. Johnson and Hayes report that individuals with religious/spiritual concerns (i.e., questioning one's faith, conversion to a new religion) were 25% more likely than non-religious individuals to experience distress from sexual concerns, 34% to 37% more likely to feel they will be punished for their sins (most likely due to the restrictions many religious institutions have stipulated regarding sexual activity before marriage), and are less likely to talk about the assault with others of dissimilar religious backgrounds. The fear of being rejected or viewed as a sinner from one's religious community may affect when and how one chooses to disclose sexual assault.

In reviewing the literature for the current study, little information was available regarding the role of religion in the disclosure process. Therefore, the current study seeks to explore whether or not one's religious beliefs are a factor when deciding whether to

disclose after an assault. Due to the exploratory nature of this variable, specific hypotheses based on previous findings were not made.

Target of Disclosure

Disclosure of an assault, formally to police or mental/medical health professionals or informally to family/friends, has been suggested to affect positively the recovery process of victims of sexual assault (Frazier, Tashiro, Berman, Steger, & Long, 2004). However, victims report having felt conflicted over whether or not to disclose to others based on fears of negative societal reactions (Smith et al., 1998; Ullman, 1996a; Williams, 1984), and report long delays between the assault and the ability to disclose the information to others. Many victims choose not to disclose or delay disclosure as a way of avoiding the possibility of negative reactions from others (Ullman & Filipas, 2001), then fail to get the needed support to process the trauma that they have experienced.

The current study is intended to build upon previous literature by identifying factors that may influence length of disclosure delay. Delay of disclosure is operationalized for the current study into five categories: no delay, short delay, moderate delay, extended delay, and severe delay. No delay involves disclosure immediately following the assault, short delay involves disclosure within one week of the assault, moderate delay involves disclosure within one week to three months following the assault, extended delay involves disclosure three months to one year after the assault, and severe delay involves disclosure at least one year after the assault.

Based on previous research, the following hypotheses were examined: (1a) Individuals who know their assailant would report a delay in disclosure compared with those who were assaulted by a stranger. (1b) Of the victims who know their assailant,

those who know their assailant well have a significantly longer disclosure delay compared with those who do not know the assailant well. (2) Severity of physical injury would be negatively correlated with disclosure. (3) Individuals whose assailant did not use or make the presence of a weapon known would experience a delay in disclosure as compared to those individuals whose assault did include a weapon. (4) White individuals would disclose more quickly than will Black individuals. (5a) Self-blame would significantly delay disclosure. (5b) Alcohol and/or drug use would be a predictor of self-blame. (6) Reasons against disclosing would be positively correlated with disclosure delay. (7) The higher the number of sexual partners prior to the assault would increase delay of disclosure.

Several factors that are not addressed in previous literature were incorporated into the current study as the following research questions: (1) Do individuals who do not have siblings report a delay in disclosure as compared with those who do have siblings; (2) Do individuals who consider religion to be an important aspect of their lives have a delay in disclosure as compared to non-religious individuals; and (3) Do individuals who are in a committed or marital relationship experience delay in disclosure as compared with those who are not?

The majority of research in the area of sexual assault focuses on third party reactions to scenarios evaluating the culpability of the victim and reasons why victims disclose. In contrast, the current study sought to identify some of the factors that influenced victims who sought crisis counseling for sexual assault when faced with the decision whether to disclose after an assault. There has been little interest in investigating why victims may choose not to disclose, especially from the victims themselves. This

information will be extremely useful in targeting the victim that will be most likely to experience difficulty in disclosing to other targets, and may be particularly useful for crisis counselors and sexual assault educators who serve this population.

METHOD

Participants

For this study, 47 participants were recruited from Response Sexual Assault Support Services of the Norfolk, Virginia YWCA, a non-profit crisis center for victims of sexual assault. Clients of Response were asked to voluntarily participate during their first counseling session. Restrictions for the participants included gender, female participants only, and age, all participants were to be at least 18 years old. Three participants who were under the age of 18 were excluded, leaving a total sample of 44 participants for the project (see Table 1).

Of the 44 participants, 63.6% identified themselves as White, 20.5% as Black, 4.5% as Asian, 6.8% as Hispanic, and 4.5% selected Other. Participants ranged in age from 18 to 58, with a mean age of 32 years old. Age at time of assault ranged between 2 and 51 years of age, with a mean age of 18 years old.

All Institutional Review Board (IRB) and APA (2002) ethical guidelines were followed. Participants were not compensated for their participation in this project.

Procedure

To control for the effects of crisis counseling, each participant was given the survey materials during their first appointment at Response. Each of the six crisis counselors was briefed as to the nature of Project Disclosure and provided with a debriefing sheet detailing the project. The crisis counselor asked the client if they would like to participate and then reviewed the notification letter with the client. Acceptance of the information provided in the notification letter served as consent. The crisis counselor

Table 1
Frequency Distribution for Participant Assault Factors

Variable	Frequency	Percent
Victim Ethnicity		
White/Caucasian	28	63.6%
Black/African American	9	20.5%
Asian	2	4.5%
Hispanic	3	6.8%
Other	2	4.5%
Perpetrator Type		
Acquaintance	36	81.8%
Stranger	8	18.2%
Victim's Classification of Relationship to Perpetrator		
Acquaintance	11	30.6%
Friend	9	25.0%
Family Member	13	36.1%
Husband/Dating Partner	3	8.3%
Physical Injury		
No Injury	19	43.2%
Mild Injury	12	27.3%
Moderate Injury	7	15.9%
Serious Injury	6	13.6%
Presence of a Weapon		
Yes	11	25.0%
No	32	72.7%
Victim Drinking and/or Using Drugs		
Yes	10	22.7%
No	34	77.3%
Religious Affiliation		
Yes	26	59.1%
No	17	38.6%

Note. $N = 44$.

then led the participant to an empty room designated for the study and gave them one legal sized envelope containing the survey materials. The survey materials took an average of 10 to 15 minutes to complete. The participant was instructed to leave the materials in the room, which were then collected by the researcher. All materials were anonymous and could not be linked to the participant in any way.

A sheet detailing the nature of the study and the researcher's contact information was included in the packet in order to debrief the participant. Each participant was given the opportunity to speak with a counselor again after completing the materials.

Measures

The packet included the following materials:

Factors Influencing Disclosure. A 37-item survey (see Appendix A) assessing the participant's ethnicity, age at time of assault, relationship to the perpetrator, severity of injury, presence of a weapon, alcohol and/or drug use, target of disclosure, religion, sexual history, and relationship status was designed for the use of this study.

Measure for Self-Blame. Attributions of self-blame (see Appendix B) were assessed with a 7-item scale adapted from a previous study (Branscombe et al., 2003) to measure blame for sexual assault specifically. Participants rated their agreement to statements such as "I should not have been out so late" and "I should have been dressed differently" using a 5-point scale (1 = completely disagree, 5 = completely agree). The measure for Self-Blame had a reliability (Chronbach's alpha) of .89 in the current study.

Reasons Against Disclosure. A modified version of the 29-item measure (see Appendix C) developed to assess reasons for not disclosing HIV status (Derlega et al., 2000) was used. The items were altered, substituting disclosure of sexual assault for

disclosure of one's HIV status. An example of the 8-item scale assessing Fear of Rejection would be "I didn't want to scare the other person away from me." For the current study, Fear of Rejection yielded an alpha of .83. An example of the 5-item scale assessing Privacy would be "People have big mouths and they might go running around telling other people;" alpha for the scale was .82. An example of the 5-item scale assessing Self-Blame/Self-Concept concerns would be "I felt that there was something wrong with me;" alpha was .87. An example of the 5-item scale assessing Communication Difficulties would be "I didn't know how to put into words what happened to me;" alpha was .88. An example of the 6-item scale assessing the desire to Protect Others would be "I didn't want this person to worry about me;" alpha was .88. The total score for Reasons for Non-Disclosure yielded an alpha of .94.

Notification. A notification form (see Appendix D) describes the study as anonymous and informs the participant of their right to cease participation at any point in the study. Acceptance of the information in the notification letter served as participant consent.

Debriefing Form. The debriefing form (see Appendix E) outlined the nature of the project and provided the researcher's contact information for the participant for any questions or concerns. The form also informed the participant that a counselor was available to meet with the participant again after completing the survey.

RESULTS

Descriptive statistics were performed to identify missing data or other irregularities in the data. Each analysis was checked for homogeneity of variance yielding no violations of assumptions. The hypotheses under investigation for the current study examine several factors and their ability to influence disclosure of sexual assault. The factors studied were: the victim's relationship to assailant, congruence of ethnicity, self-blame, religion, reasons against disclosing, relationship status, sexual history, alcohol and/or drug use, use of a weapon, degree of injury, and siblings (see Table 1). It was theorized that individuals may not necessarily disclose to members of their support structure after making a formal disclosure to the police or a medical professional. Therefore, delay of disclosure was measured with two outcome variables, first disclosure (time between assault and first disclosure to any target) and secondary disclosure (time between disclosure to a formal target, such as the police or medical professional, and disclosure to an informal target, such as friends and family). Delay between the assault and first disclosure will indicate how long it took for an individual to tell anyone, formal or informal, about the assault. The measurement of time between disclosing to a formal target and then making a secondary disclosure to friends and family targets those individuals that may have technically made a disclosure by telling the police, but choose to wait for an extended period of time before feeling able to disclose to informal targets. It was theorized that an individual may have disclosed to a formal target due to the desire to prosecute the individual or because medical attention was required, but delay for an extended period of time before disclosing to members of their support system. The

difference between first disclosure and secondary disclosure may illustrate a delay of disclosure that has been overlooked.

Of the 44 participants, 38.6% disclosed their assault for the first time immediately after the assault occurred, 4.5% disclosed within 1 week, 4.5% between 1 week and 3 months, 15.9% within 1 year, 13.6% between 1 and 2 years, 9.0% between 2 and 10 years, and 13.6% waited more than 10 years to first disclose their assault. For 25 participants (43.2%), first disclosures were not to formal sources such as the police or medical professionals and these participants were not included in the analyses for secondary disclosure delay. Of the 19 participants first disclosing to a formal target, 31.5% immediately made a secondary disclosure of the assault to informal sources such as family and friends, 15.8% within 1 week, 10.5% between 1 week and 3 months, 10.5% within 1 year, 5.3% between 1 and 2 years, 10.5% between 2 and 10 years, and 15.8% waited more than 10 years to disclose the assault to others (see Table 2).

Hypothesis 1a, which stated that individuals who knew their assailant would experience a delay in disclosure compared with those who were assaulted by a stranger, was addressed with an independent between groups *t* test with the outcome measure representing their first disclosure to anyone. Thirty-six participants reported having known their assailant, with eight reporting that the assailant was a stranger. The hypothesis was not supported $t(42) = 1.61$, *ns*. A second independent-groups *t* test was used to assess if there were any group differences for disclosure delay to individuals other than the police. No group differences were found for secondary disclosure $t(17) = .21$, *ns*.

Hypothesis 1b stated that of the individuals who knew their assailant, there would

Table 2
Frequency Distribution for First and Secondary Disclosure Delay

Variable	*n*	Percent
Delay in first Disclosure		
Immediate/ No Delay	17	38.6%
Within 1 Week	2	4.5%
1 Week – 3 Months	2	4.5%
Within 1 Year	7	15.9%
1-2 Years	6	13.6%
2-10 Years	4	9.0%
10+ Years	6	13.6%
Still Have Not Disclosed	0	0%
Delay in Secondary Disclosure		
Immediate/ No Delay	6	13.8%
Within 1 Week	3	6.8%
1 Week – 3 Months	2	4.5%
Within 1 Year	2	4.5%
1 – 2 Years	1	2.3%
2 – 10 Years	2	4.5%
10+ Years	3	6.8%
Still Have not Disclosed to Others	0	0.0%
Primary Disclosure to informal Source (N/A)	25	56.8%

Note. $N = 44$.

be a longer delay in disclosure for those who knew their assailant well compared to those who did not know their assailant well. Participants were asked to categorize their relationship to the assailant as being an acquaintance, friend, family member or husband/dating partner, as well as to rate the degree to which they knew the perpetrator using a 10-point Likert scale (1 = not well at all, 10 = very well). A one-way between groups ANOVA was used to measure delay of first disclosure for each of the four relationship categories. A significant relationship was found for relationship to perpetrator and delay of disclosure $F(3, 32) = 4.96$, $p < .01$. A Tukey post-hoc revealed that those who reported knowing the perpetrator as an acquaintance reported less delay in disclosure ($M = 2.36$, $SD = 2.01$) compared with those who reported the perpetrator as a family member ($M = 5.23$, $SD = 1.42$). Other group differences were not significant. See Table 3 for a comparison of relationship differences for disclosure. No significant results were found for secondary disclosure $F(3, 10) = .99$, *ns*.

A Pearson correlation was performed using the degree to which the victim rated knowing the perpetrator and first and secondary disclosure. There was a significant relationship between delay of first disclosure and the degree to which the victim knew the perpetrator $r(41) = .31$, $p < .05$, indicating that the better the victim rated having known the perpetrator, the longer she waited to disclose the assault. No significant results were found between the degree to which the victim rated knowing the perpetrator and secondary disclosure.

Hypothesis 2, which stated that the severity of physical injury would be negatively correlated with disclosure, was assessed with a Pearson correlation. The

Table 3
Mean Differences in Delay as a Function of the Relationship to the Perpetrator

Variable	*F*	*n*	*M*	*SD*
First Disclosure	4.96**			
Acquaintance		11_a	2.36	2.01
Friend		9_{ab}	4.22	2.11
Family Member		13_b	5.23	1.42
Husband/Dating Partner		3_{ab}	2.66	2.88

Note. Groups sharing the same subscript are not statistically different. Differences found with a Tukey post-hoc analysis, $p < .01$.
**$p < .05$.

hypothesis was not supported for first disclosure $r(44) = -.18$, *ns*, nor for secondary disclosure $r(19) = .16$, *ns*.

Hypothesis 3, which stated that individuals whose assailant did not use or make the presence of a weapon known would experience a delay in disclosure compared to individuals whose assault did include a weapon, was assessed with an independent-groups *t* test. For first disclosure, those who reported the use or presence of a weapon had less delay in disclosure compared with those who did not report the presence of a weapon; however, results were not significant $t(41) = -.89$, *ns*. Group differences for secondary disclosure were not found $t(17) = .47$, *ns*.

Hypothesis 4, which stated that White individuals would disclose more quickly than Black individuals, was assessed with an independent-groups *t* test. Group differences were not be found for either first disclosure $t(35) = -.74$, *ns* or secondary disclosure $t(12) = -.18$, *ns*. Congruence of ethnicity of the perpetrator was also examined as a possible factor influencing disclosure. There was a significant difference found between assaults involving perpetrators whose ethnicity was either the same or different from that of the victim $t(41) = 3.72$, $p < .01$.Victims whose perpetrator was of the same ethnicity ($M = 4.39$, $SD = 2.01$) delayed significantly in first disclosure compared with those whose assailant was of a different ethnicity ($M = 1.92$, $SD = 1.78$). No significant differences were found for secondary disclosure $t(17) = 1.69$, *ns*. To ensure that the findings for congruence of ethnicity were not dependent on degree to which the victim knew the perpetrator, a partial correlation was performed controlling for degree of relationship with the perpetrator, confirming a significant negative relationship $r_p(38) = -.45$, $p < .01$ between congruence of ethnicity and first disclosure.

A 2x2 ANOVA was conducted to understand if the differences found for congruence of ethnicity applied to both Black and White victims. The current findings are applicable to only White victims, as all Black victims reported their assailant to be of the same ethnicity. There was a significant delay in disclosure for White victims whose perpetrator was of the same ethnicity ($M = 4.33$, $SD = 2.06$) compared with those whose assailant was of a different ethnicity ($M = 1.85$, $SD = 1.57$).

Hypothesis 5a, which stated that self-blame would significantly delay disclosure, was assessed using a Pearson correlation. The current study utilized two separate scales tapping self-blame. The two scales were positively significantly related to one another $r(44) = .42, p < .01$. The first scale assessed the degree to which the individual blamed herself for having been assaulted. This scale was not significantly correlated with delay in disclosure for either first disclosure $r(44) = .06$, *ns* or secondary disclosure $r(19) = -.01$, *ns*. The second scale, self-blame as a reason not to disclose, was significantly positively correlated with first disclosure $r(44) = .56, p < .01$, and with secondary disclosure $r(19) = .51, p < .05$, indicating that there is a difference between having feelings of responsibility for the assault, which was not significantly related to disclosure, and using those feelings in deciding to disclose, which was found to be a factor significantly related to disclosure delay.

Hypothesis 5b, which stated that alcohol and/or drug use by the victim is a predictor of self-blame was assessed with an independent-groups *t* test. Again, self-reported feelings of blame for the assault and self-blame as a reason for non-disclosure were both used as variables. Alcohol and/or drug use was a significant predictor for feelings of self-blame $t(42) = 3.21, p < .01$, but not for self-blame as a reason for non-

disclosure $t(42) = .27$, *ns*. Victims who reported using alcohol and/or drugs at the time of the assault reported significantly higher levels of self-blame ($M = 3.86$, $SD = .82$) than those individuals who had not been drinking and/or using drugs ($M = 2.56$, $SD = 1.20$). Using an independent-groups t test, we did not find alcohol and/or drug use to have any direct effect on first disclosure $t(42) = -1.02$, *ns* or secondary disclosure $t(17) = -.85$, *ns*.

Hypothesis 6, which stated that reasons against disclosing would be positively correlated with disclosure delay, was assessed with a Pearson correlation. Reasons against disclosing was positively correlated with first disclosure $r(43) = .39$, $p < .01$ but not with secondary disclosure $r(18) = .18$, *ns*. Of the reasons against disclosing, self-blame $r(44) = .56$, $p < .001$ and communication difficulties $r(44) = .57$, $p < .001$ were both found to be positively correlated with delay in first disclosure, self-blame was also positively correlated with secondary disclosure $r(19) = .51$, $p < .05$ (see Table 4). Individuals rating self-blame and communication difficulties as concerns are more likely to delay in disclosure than those with concerns about privacy, fear of rejection, and the desire to protect others, which were not found to have a significant relationship with delaying disclosure.

Hypothesis 7, which stated that the number of sexual partners prior to the assault would affect disclosure, was assessed using a Pearson correlation. Prior to this analysis, all those individuals who reported having no sexual partners prior to the assault were excluded. This hypothesis concerned those who might consider their sexual history as a reason to delay disclosure. This was not applicable for those who were molested as children and would naturally not have had sexual partners prior to adolescence. Although in the expected direction, the number of sexual partners was negatively correlated with

Table 4
Correlations for Reasons Against Disclosing

Variable	First Disclosure	Secondary Disclosure
Total Reasons Against Disclosing		
Self-Blame	.56***	.28*
Privacy	.09	.03
Communications Difficulties	.57***	.16
Protect Others	.19	.18
Fear of Rejection	.25	.14

Note. * $p < .05$. *** $p < .001$.

first disclosure $r(23) = -.28$, *ns* and with secondary disclosure $r(12) = -.44$, *ns*, but not significantly in either case.

The first research question, which asked if individuals who do not have siblings report a delay in disclosure as compared to those who do have siblings, could not be assessed as only one participant of the 44 was an only child. A Pearson correlational analysis yielded no significant relationships between first disclosure $r(44) = -.04$, *ns* and siblings or secondary disclosure $r(19) = .20$, *ns* and siblings.

The second research question, which asked if individuals who consider religion to be an important aspect of their lives have a delay in disclosure compared with non-religious individuals, was first assessed with an independent-groups *t* test between those who reported being religious and those who did not. There were no significant group differences for either first disclosure $t(41) = -.57$, *ns* or secondary disclosure $t(17) = .30$, *ns*. Of those individuals who reported a religious affiliation, a between-groups *t* test was performed between those who stated that religion was a factor in their decision to disclose and those who stated it was not a factor. There was a significant delay $t(24) = -2.40$, $p < .05$ for those who did not report religion as a factor ($M = 3.95$, $SD = 2.14$) compared to those who stated religion was a factor ($M = 1.67$, $SD = 1.63$) in their decision to disclose the assault. There was a marginally significant effect for secondary disclosure $t(9) = -2.02$, $p < .08$ (see Table 5).

The final research question, which asked if individuals who are in a committed or marital relationship experience delay in disclosure compared with those who are not, was addressed with a between-groups one-way ANOVA. To ensure that results reflect those individuals whose significant other was not the perpetrator, the three participants who

Table 5
Mean Differences in Disclosure for Religion as a Factor in the Decision to Disclose

Variable	*t*	*M*	*SD*
First Disclosure	-2.40*		
Religion was a Factor		1.67	1.63
Religion was not a Factor		3.95	2.14
Secondary Disclosure	-2.02^{+}		
Religion was a Factor		2.33	1.53
Religion was not a Factor		5.12	2.17

Note. All participants indicated a religious affiliation for this analysis.
$^{+}p < .10$.* $p < .05$.

indicated assault by a husband/dating partner were excluded. Relationship status was significantly related to disclosure $F(2, 35) = 11.04$, $p < .001$ (see Table 6). A Tukey post-hoc analysis was performed to identify group differences. Contrary to expectation, individuals in a significant relationship were more likely to disclose that those who were not in a significant relationship. There was a significant delay for those individuals who were single at the time of the assault ($M = 4.69$, $SD = 1.91$) and those who reported their relationship status as dating ($M = 2.16$, $SD = 1.33$) or as being in a committed or marital relationship ($M = 1.50$, $SD = 1.22$). No significant differences were found for secondary disclosure, $F(2, 14) = 2.63$, *ns*.

Finally, all factors were entered in a correlational analysis with disclosure. Age at time of assault, degree to which the victim rated knowing the perpetrator, the congruence of perpetrator race, and self-blame as a reason for non-disclosure were found to have significant relationships with disclosure and were assessed with a multiple regression for their combined and individual ability to predict disclosure delay. The overall test of the model was significant $F(4,36) = 13.15$, $p < .001$, $R = .77$. Combined, the factors accounted for 59% of the variance in disclosure delay. Age at time of assault was the best predictor of disclosure ($\beta = -.44$, $t = -3.10$, $p < .01$), indicating that the younger the victim, the longer she will delay in disclosing to others. Self-Blame as a reason not to disclose was found to significantly predict disclosure ($\beta = .31$, $t = 2.72$, $p < .01$), indicating that the victim must view her perceived culpability, regardless of the degree to which she blames herself, as a reason against disclosing in order to affect delay of disclosure. Congruence of perpetrator ethnicity ($\beta = -.24$, $t = -2.07$, $p < .08$) was found to be a marginally significant predictor of disclosure (see Table 7). Degree to which the

Table 6
ANOVA for the Influence of Relationship Status for First Disclosure

Variable	*F*	*n*	*M*	*SD*
Relationship Status	11.04*			
Single		26	6.69_a	1.91
Dating		6	2.16_b	1.33
Committed/Married		6	1.50_b	1.22

Note. Means (delay of disclosure) differing in subscript are significantly different at $p <$ .01 in the Tukey Honestly Significant Difference comparison.
** $p < .001$.

Table 7
Summary of Multiple Regression Analysis of Variables Predicting Disclosure

Variable	B	SE	β	*t*
Age at time of assault	-9.61	.03	-.44	-3.10**
Degree of relationship to perpetrator	1.28	.07	.00	.02
Perpetrator race	-1.14	.62	-.23	-1.85^{+}
Self-Blame as a reason against disclosing	.62	.23	.31	2.72**

Note. R = .77. Adj. R^2 = .55 ($p < .001$). $N = 40$.
$^{+}p < .10$.** $p < .01$.

victim knew the perpetrator ($\beta = .01$, $t = .01$, *ns*) was not a significant predictor of disclosure.

Age as a Confound

Results may be confounded with age at time of assault as many of the participants were assaulted as children. Although it was not an aspect of the original study, each analysis was re-analyzed excluding those participants that were assaulted as children. Victims assaulted as children demonstrated the longest delayed which could be a confound to the current study. The distribution revealed that 12 of the 14 individuals assaulted by family members were 12 or younger, therefore the criteria for child victims was established as those assaulted at the age of 12 or younger and those individuals were excluded. Hypotheses regarding perpetrator type (acquaintance vs. stranger), degree of injury, presence of a weapon, victim's ethnicity, and number of siblings were each originally found not to significantly delay disclosure. The exclusion of children did not increase significance. For those hypotheses where significant results were found, the exclusion of child victims, for the most part, reduced the level of significance.

A significant difference was originally found depending on the victim's categorization of relationship to perpetrator (acquaintance, friend, family member, or husband/dating partner). After excluding victims assaulted at age of 12 or younger, there was no significant relationship between the victim's categorization of relationship to perpetrator $F(3, 19) = .58$, *ns*, or the degree to which the victim reported having known the perpetrator $r(25) = .08$, *ns*. Original results revealed that reporting the perpetrator as being a family member would cause a delay in disclosure. After removing child victims,

these results were not replicated. The distribution indicates that of the 14 participants who were assaulted by family members 12 were assaulted as children.

Congruence of ethnicity was originally found to delay disclosure of sexual assault $t(41) = 3.72, p < .01$. After excluding child victims, these results were not replicated $t(25) = 1.44$, *ns*.

Blame as a reason against disclosure was originally found to significantly delay first disclosure $r(44) = .56, p < .01$ and secondary disclosure $r(19) = .51, p < .05$. After excluding child victims, these results were replicated for both first disclosure $r(28) = .57$, $p < .01$ and secondary disclosure $r(16) = .52, p < .05$. In the original data, those who reported using alcohol and/or drugs had significantly higher levels of self-blame than those who did not $t(42)$ 3.21, $p < .01$. After excluding child victims, this result was not replicated $t(26) = .10$, *ns*.

The original data supported the hypothesis that reasons against disclosure would be significantly correlated with disclosure $r(43) = .39, p < .01$, with self blame $r(44) = .56, p < .001$ and communication difficulties $r(44) = .57, p < .001$ both significantly delaying disclosure. After excluding child victims, overall reasons against disclosure had a marginally significant effect on disclosure $r(27) = .37, p < .06$. Both self-blame $r(28) = .57, p < .001$ and communication difficulties $r(28) = .46, p < .05$ remained significant reasons for delay of disclosure.

Number of sexual partners prior to the assault was not found to significantly affect disclosure in the original data $r(23) = -.28$, *ns*, which had excluded all victims who had been assaulted prior to the age of 18. After only excluding only victims prior to the age of 13, a significant relationship was found between the number of sexual partners

prior to the assault and disclosure $r(28) = -.43, p < .05$. This finding illustrates the difficulty in categorizing exactly what age defines the cut off for a child victim. It was assumed by the researcher that any victim under the age of 18 should be considered a child, in which some factors such alcohol and/or drugs use and prior sexual partners would not be applicable. This does not appear to be the case.

The original data indicated no statistical difference in delay of disclosure for those individuals who affiliated with a religion compared with those who did not $t(41) = -.57$, *ns*. No differences were found after excluding child victims $t(26)$ .20, *ns*. It was found in the original data that for those that did affiliate with a religion, choosing to use one's religion as a factor in the decision to disclose decreased delay $t(24) = -2.40, p < .05$ compared to those who did not choose to use their religion as a factor in their decision. A marginal effect was found after excluding child victims $t(16) = -2.02, p < .06$.

The original data supported a relationship between relationship status at the time of the assault and disclosure $F(2, 35) = 11.04, p < .001$. Individuals who reported being in a committed or marital relationship had disclosed more quickly than those who were single. After excluding victims assaulted at age 12 or younger, the results could not be replicated $F(2, 20) = 2.11$, *ns*. These findings may reflect those child victims that waited to disclose until adulthood, once they had left the family unit and had a significant partner to aid in the disclosure process.

Finally, the multiple regression revealed that age at time of assault ($\beta = -.44, t = -3.10, p < .01$), was the best predictor of delay in disclosure $F(4,36) = 13.15, p < .001, R = .77$, with self-blame as a reason for deciding about disclosure also predicting disclosure ($\beta = .31, t = 2.72, p < .01$). After excluding victims assaulted at age 12 or younger, the

model was still significant $F(4, 20) = 3.72, p < .05, R = .65$, although age of assault was no longer a significant predictor ($\beta = .32, t = -1.65, ns$). Self-blame as a reason for deciding about disclosure was the only significant predictor ($\beta = .44, t = 2.46, p < .05$). This finding was not supported after excluding those victims assaulted at age 12 or younger. This is not surprising considering that of the 15 participants who reported delaying disclosure for more than one year, 13 were assaulted prior to the age of 12. It would appear that the results supporting significant findings may in fact be due to the long delay in disclosures related to child victims.

DISCUSSION

The current study was designed to identify factors that may influence a woman's decision to disclose, or delay disclosure, of a sexual assault. Because researchers rarely solicit information from victims, little is known about how victims make the decision to disclose their sexual assault or why victims may wait years before making their disclosure (Frazier et al., 2004; Smith et al., 1998; Ullman, 1996a, 1996b; Ullman & Filipas, 2001; Williams, 1984). Research in the area of sexual assault has established that the more the individual regards herself as a victim, i.e., less responsible for the assault, the greater the likelihood of a rapid disclosure (Backman, 1998; Johnson, 1994; Williams, 1984). Factors under investigation for the current study were chosen for their potential influence on the degree to which the individual regarded herself as a victim, thereby influencing the decision to delay in disclosure of the assault.

It was hypothesized that the following factors may influence disclosure delay: relationship to assailant, severity of injury, presence of a weapon, congruence of ethnicity, self-blame, religion, sexual history, reasons for non-disclosure (fear of rejection, privacy, self-blame, communication difficulties, desire to protect others), whether or not the victim is an only child, relationship status, and alcohol/drug use. Identifying factors associated with disclosure after sexual assault will be particularly helpful for crisis counselors and sexual assault educators who work with this population. Of the factors chosen to influence disclosure of sexual assault for the current study, victims' relationship to perpetrator, degree to which the victim knew the perpetrator, congruence of ethnicity, self-blame, religion as reason to disclose and relationship status were each shown to significantly influence disclosure delay.

Factors Significantly Delaying Disclosure

Close to 80% of victims report knowing their assailant (VAASA, 2004). In this study thirty-six participants (81.8%) were assaulted by an acquaintance and 8 (18.2%) were assaulted by a stranger, suggesting that this sample is similar in this regard to the national average. The victim's relationship to the assailant was addressed in two parts by Hypothesis One. The prediction that victims of a stranger assault would disclose more quickly than victims of an acquaintance assault was not supported. It was also hypothesized that disclosure would be delayed by the degree to which the victim reported having known the assailant. Participants were asked to categorize both the relationship to perpetrator as an acquaintance, friend, family member, or dating partner/spouse, and rate the degree to which they knew the perpetrator (1= not well at all, 10 = very well). A significant relationship was found for differences between the relationship categories. Individuals who knew their assailant as an acquaintance disclosed more quickly than those individuals categorizing relationship to perpetrator as a family member. A significant relationship was found based on the degree to which the victim rated having known the perpetrator. The better the victim knew the perpetrator, the longer it took for the victim to disclose the assault.

Knowing the perpetrator to some degree, perhaps as a co-worker or a family member, would seemingly create trepidation for the victim in disclosing the assault to the rest of their community. The stress involved in accusing a family member, a fellow student, or a co-worker (Dunn et al., 1999; Smith et al., 2000) may cause delay. Often the victim is concerned with the impact that disclosing the assault may have on the perpetrator (i.e., cause problems at work or within one's family). The victim may also

delay in disclosing because she feels that she will not be regarded as truthful given that there is some degree of established relationship between her and the perpetrator. Results of other research support the belief that society perceives rape as unlikely in situations in which the victim and the perpetrator are acquainted (Johnson, 1994).

It is important to note that almost half of the sample ($N = 20$) were individuals who were assaulted as children. Of those individuals, 12 reported their assailant as a family member, and all of these 12 were assaulted prior to the age of 12. The process of deciding whether or not to disclose becomes a different issue when the victim is a child and the assailant is a member of their family. A child may fear breaking apart the family unit by disclosing. It is also important to contrast an adult victim with a child in regard to material needs. A child is dependent on the family for shelter, food and clothing and may delay in disclosure in order to safeguard their means of survival. It is also important to consider the cognitive abilities of a child and the fact that she is not sexually mature and may have a limited understanding of the sexual assault. It is entirely possible that the child does not understand that the behavior is wrong and should be disclosed to others, or the child may be too ashamed to disclose to others. From the current study, it can be expected that those who know the perpetrator well will delay in disclosure compared with those who do not know the assailant or know him less well. However, is important to consider that a child's reason for delaying in disclosure may be entirely different from that of an adult. Further research in this area should distinguish between children and adults.

Ethnicity was examined as a possible factor influencing the decision to disclose. Based on the theory proposed by Wyatt (1992) that the credibility of "victim" is not as

well established for Black women as it is for White women, it was hypothesized that Black women would delay in disclosure compared with White women. This hypothesis was not supported. However, ethnicity as a factor may rest more with the congruence of the perpetrator's ethnicity. Individuals whose ethnicity was the same as the perpetrator significantly delayed in disclosure of the assault compared with the victims whose perpetrator was of a different ethnicity. These results were not confounded by the degree to which the victim knew the perpetrator. However, the results were applicable only to White participants given that all Black participants were assaulted by a perpetrator of the same ethnicity in the current study. Results indicate that an inter-racial assault increases the likelihood that one will disclose more rapidly. These findings support research conducted by Varelas and Foley (1998), who stated that White participants attributed less blame to the victim if the assailant was of a different race. It may be possible that being assaulted by an individual outside of the victim's ethnicity (and perhaps norms for physical relationships) aids in legitimizing feelings of victimization, thus allowing for a more rapid disclosure to others.

The influence of self-blame on the disclosure process was examined in two parts. The current study utilized two scales for assessing self-blame: feelings of self-blame and self-blame as a reason against disclosing. It was predicted that greater degrees of self-blame would significantly delay disclosure; however, feelings of self-blame were not significantly related to disclosure delay. However, a significant relationship between using self-blame as a reason against disclosing and delay of both first and secondary disclosure was found. The lack of significant results for feelings of self-blame as a factor for delaying disclosure may reflect that some participants may have sought counseling

prior to obtaining services at Response Sexual Assault Support Services and/or previously resolved issues of self-blame. These findings suggest that self-blame is both an emotional state as well as a cognitive reason for non-disclosure. Results indicate that it may be possible to possess feelings of responsibility for the assault, which may or may not evolve as a factor in the decision to disclose. However, if self-blame does become a factor in making a decision about disclosure, results indicate that it will cause a delay in disclosure of sexual assault.

The second part of the hypothesis addressing self-blame predicted that use of alcohol and/or drugs would serve as a predictor of self-blame. This hypothesis was supported for feelings of self-blame, but not for self-blame as a reason against disclosing. Again, it may be possible that alcohol and/or drug use contributes to feelings of responsibility for the assault, which may not necessarily affect the decision making process. It was not found that alcohol and/or drug use predicted self-blame as a reason not to disclose or that using alcohol and/or drug use directly delayed disclosure. Individuals may feel a degree of regret for having consumed alcohol, thus lowering their perceived level of control, but do not feel that their actions should deter them from disclosing to others. Many acquaintance rapes involve assaults occurring during a date, in which alcohol use is a common activity. Overall, the use of alcohol and/or drugs predicted significantly higher levels of self-blame. However, alcohol and/or drug use did not have a significant relationship with one's decision to use self-blame as a reason not to disclose. For the 22.7% of the sample that reported the use of alcohol and/or drugs prior to the assault, it appeared that high levels of self-blame were separated from the feelings that influenced the decision to disclose.

Hypothesis Six predicted that reasons against disclosing (fear of rejection, privacy, self-blame, communication difficulties, desire to protect others) would positively correlate with delay in disclosure. The overall score for reasons for non-disclosure significantly correlated with first disclosure, but not secondary disclosure. Of the scales that assessed reasons for non-disclosure, self-blame and communication difficulties both were related significantly to delay in first disclosure; with self-blame also significantly correlated with delay of secondary disclosure. Disclosure of an assault, either formally to police or mental/medical health professionals or informally to family/friends, has been shown to positively affect the recovery process (Frazier et al., 2004), perhaps making further disclosures less difficult. For example, if communication difficulties, such as "I just didn't know how to tell someone," were a concern, it would seem likely that after finally telling someone, it would no longer be as strong a concern for telling others. It is surprising that self-blame as a reason against disclosing did not diminish in strength for secondary disclosure, whereas communication difficulties as a reason for delay of secondary disclosure did diminish in strength. It would seem fitting that reasons for self-blame such as "I felt there was something wrong with me" would no longer be a factor if the first disclosure met with the reassurance that the victim's feelings were normal. Perhaps communication difficulties are abated once the individual finds a way to disclose, but issues of self-blame remain regardless of the response from the target of disclosure until the individual receives counseling.

There was little empirical data for the role of religion in the disclosure of sexual assault. Through the use of a research question, it was theorized that individuals who consider religion to be an important aspect in their lives would delay in disclosure

compared with non-religious individuals. Religious beliefs might trigger an internal dilemma for victims more so than those who did not consider themselves to be religious. There were no differences in disclosure between those who reported a religious affiliation and those who did not. When looking specifically at those individuals who did report a religious affiliation, the inverse was found. That is, victims who stated that their religion was not a factor in their decision to disclose significantly delayed in disclosure compared to those individuals who stated that their religion was a factor in their decision to disclose.

Johnson and Hayes (2003) report that individuals with religious/spiritual concerns (i.e., questioning one's faith, conversion to a new religion) were 25% more likely than non-religious individuals to experience distress from sexual concerns, 34% to 37% more likely to feel they would be punished for their sins (most likely due to the restrictions many religious institutions have stipulated regarding sexual activity before marriage), and were less likely to talk about the assault with others of dissimilar religious backgrounds. It was theorized that religious beliefs would further compound the victim's sense of confusion and level of perceived responsibility for the assault, or that one's religious beliefs would be affected by the assault assault. It would appear that one's religious beliefs are affected, although almost an equal number of participants reported feeling more religious as those who reported feeling less religious. Twenty-five percent of participants stated they were less religious following the assault, 22.7% more religious, 36.4% just as religious as before, and 13.6% reported remaining non-affiliated.

For those individuals who stated a religious affiliation, incorporating their religious beliefs into the decision to disclose allowed for a significantly more rapid

disclosure compared to those religious individuals who did not consider their religion to be a factor in the decision making process. More research is needed in this area as not all of the individuals who reported religious affiliations stated that their religion was a factor in their decision. Affiliating with a religion does not appear to affect rate of disclosure, but perceiving religion as having an impact on disclosure decision-making does appear to affect when the victim chooses to disclose.

It was theorized that individuals in a committed or marital relationship would have a longer delay in disclosure compared to those who are not in a committed relationship. This question was based on whether or not one's relationship aided or deterred one from disclosing; therefore the three participants who indicated that their husband or dating partner was the perpetrator were excluded from this analysis. This theory was based on research by Viki and Abrams (2002) who suggested that society may attribute more blame to a married woman because she may have engaged in some degree of infidelity or violated traditional gender roles because she knew the perpetrator. The inverse was found. Individuals who reported being in a dating or committed/marital relationship had significantly less delay in first disclosure compared to individuals who reported being single at the time of the assault. It is probable that women in committed or marital relationships felt assured of support and found it easier to disclose. However, it is not clear what factors unique to single women delay disclosure except that there may not be a target for disclosure that the victim feels she will be unconditionally supported by. Of the reasons for non-disclosure, the Desire to Protect Others was not a significant factor, lending support that delay in disclosure does not appear to be the result of the

desire to protect one's significant other, at least with regard to the current sample. Instead, having a significant other appears to aid in a more rapid disclosure.

Of the factors chosen to relate to disclosure delay for the current study, number of previous sexual partners (i.e., sexual history), presence of a weapon, degree of injury sustained, and siblings were not shown to significantly influence disclosure of sexual assault. Based on previous research (Johnson, 1994), it was hypothesized that one's sexual history would be a factor in the participant's perceived level of credibility as a victim. Two factors may have influenced the results assessing this hypothesis. First, it was assumed that more sexual partners prior to the assault would indicate that the victim believed herself to have a sexual history that may be negatively viewed. The participant was not directly asked if her sexual history was a factor in the decision to disclose the assault or if she believed that her sexual history would be a source of negative judgment. Second, in order for this question to be addressed accurately, it may require a sample that included only individuals who were assaulted as adults. After excluding individuals assaulted as children, this hypothesis was tested with a sample of 23 participants, which did not yield significant results. However, in the re-analysis investigating age as a confound when only victims assaulted at the age of twelve and earlier were excluded, a significant relationship was found between disclosure delay and number of sexual partners. This finding illustrates the difficulty in categorizing exactly what age defines the cut off for a child victim.

It was theorized that the degree to which one identified with the role of victim would influence disclosure. The literature review revealed that the presence of a weapon and injuries sustained from the assault increased perceived victimization (Williams,

1984). It was surprising that neither factor significantly influenced disclosure. This is most easily explained by a lack of statistical power in the analysis of these hypotheses. Almost half of the sample (43.2%) reported having no injury from the assault, 27.3% mild injury, 15.9% moderate injury and 13.6% serious injury. In regard to the use of a weapon, 72.7% reported that a weapon was not used in the assault. Although serious injury and the use of a weapon are rare in the majority of sexual assaults, a larger sample may have better addressed the relationship of these two factors to the disclosure process.

A multiple regression analysis revealed that age at time of assault and self-blame as a reason against disclosing were significant predictors of disclosure, with age at time of assault serving as the best predictor of disclosure. Congruence of perpetrator ethnicity was found to be a marginally significant predictor of disclosure. Correlational analysis indicated that there is a negative relationship between age of assault and disclosure, inidicating that the younger the individual is when assaulted, the longer the victim will delay in disclosure. Considering that assaults in childhood are generally perpetrated by family members or someone close to the victim, it is not surprising that the victim would delay in disclosure for fear of causing problems within the family (Dunn et al., 1999; Smith et. al, 2000). It can be assumed that those who were assaulted as children simply never told anyone until later in life. Of those who waited over ten years, the average delay in disclosure was 26.5 years.

Self-blame as a reason against disclosure predicted disclosure delay; however, it is surprising that perceptions of self-blame was not given that the two scales are highly related ($r = .42$, $p < .01$). Although the two scales were highly correlated, they appear to measure different constructs in relation to self-disclosure. Self-blame may exist on an

emotional level for the victim, but never evolve into a reason to justify delaying disclosure. However, to the degree that the emotional state of self-blame affects cognitive decision making, it may indirectly influence disclosure. Results indicate that having concerns about being at fault or believing that resisting more strongly or dressing differently would have averted the assault while deciding whether or not to disclose delay the disclosure of sexual assault.

It is possible that the results are confounded by age considering that almost half of the sample was assaulted as a child and represent the majority of victims that waited at least a year to disclose the assault. Each analysis was performed again with a data set that excluded those assaulted at age twelve and younger. Several factors initially found to significantly delay disclosure were found to have non-significant results once those assaulted as children were removed, including degree to which the victim reported knowing the perpetrator, congruence of ethnicity, overall reasons against disclosure, using religion as a factor in one's decision to disclose and relationship status at the time of assault. The number of sexual partners, found initially to be a non-significant factor in the decision to disclose, was found to be significant after excluding victims who had been under the age of 12 at the time of assault.

These data make it clear that there is a different set of factors for children versus adults that affect the decision to disclose. Twelve of the fourteen individuals who stated they were assaulted by a family member, a factor found to significantly delay disclosure, were children at the time. It is not surprising that many of the significant results found from the sample were the result of the long delay in disclosure reported by the child victims. Issues such as number of sexual partners and alcohol use are not relevant to their

assault. In addition, almost all of the excluded victims were assaulted by a family member, likely to be someone trusted; therefore it is not surprising that presence of a weapon and being assaulted by a stranger are also not factors that are relevant to their assault. The comparison of the results from the overall sample compared with those results from the sample that excluded those assaulted at the age of twelve or younger reflect the need to sample victims based on their age of assault. The factors used in the current study were identified as having an influence to the lives of adult victims. The development of issues that would be relevant to child victims is recommended.

First and Secondary Disclosure

A second aspect of the current study was designed to investigate the possibility of a delay between disclosing to formal and informal sources. A victim may disclose to a formal target such as the police or a medical professional but delay in a secondary disclosure to members of their social network such as family and friends. An important aspect of the current study was built upon the theory that disclosure to a formal target does not necessarily imply that the victim has "disclosed" the assault and is receiving the benefits of disclosure (suggested as psychologically necessary for most victims to begin recovery) from members of their support system. Current literature has addressed the topic of disclosure as an absolute. The victim having told anyone indicates that the victim has disclosed the assault. An individual may have reported the assault to the police, technically a disclosure, but never confided their assault to family and friends. The extant literature fails to address the psychological implications of these two very different types of disclosure. This is surprising, given that following disclosure many victims report receiving unhelpful and negative reactions from formal targets (Holzman, 1996; Kalof,

2000; Ullman, 1996b; Ullman & Filipas, 2001). To address this issue, disclosure delay was measured by the time it took to disclose to any target following the assault, as well as the time it took to disclose to informal targets following the assault. Any difference in delay between the two targets would indicate that the initial formal disclosure should not be regarded as absolute.

This theory was supported significantly by self-blame as a reason not to disclose and marginally by those who considered religion as a factor in their decision to disclose the assault. However, factors such as an acquaintance assault, injury, presence of a weapon, ethnicity of victim, use of alcohol and/or drugs, and multiple sexual partners reflected some delay of disclosure, though not statistically significant. Analysis of secondary disclosure was hampered by a low sample size. There is evidence that individuals disclose to an initial target and then wait to disclose to others (See Table 2); however, only 19 participants in the current study reported having disclosed first to a formal target and second to an informal target. Because group means supported each hypothesis, replication of the current study is needed before determining the difference between first and secondary disclosure.

Limitations

There are several limitations to the current study. Collecting data directly from victims offers several inherent limitations. First, sampling from the victim is difficult without utilizing individuals who have in some way self-identified (i.e., seeking counseling). The current study was administered to individuals attending their initial counseling session at a sexual assault crisis center. However, previous counseling and the time between the assault and when the survey was taken could not be controlled. Second,

the current study rests upon the recollections of the individual. If previous counseling services, professional or informal, had taken place, it would certainly alter one's perceptions of blame, a critical component of the current study. Third, it is difficult to gather a large sample given the time limitations and participant consent. Fourth, many of the factors investigated did not apply to those individuals who were assaulted as children such as previous sexual history, relationship status, and alcohol and/or drug use at the time of assault. Eliminating these participants for hypotheses involving these factors limited the sample significantly. And fifth, the sample reflected the national average that 80% of individuals are assaulted by an acquaintance making comparisons between stranger and acquaintance assaults difficult. In addition, the presence of a weapon and high degree of injury is rare in most assaults (Williams, 1984), again, making comparisons based on those factors difficult.

The current study was designed to be exploratory in nature. Suggestions for future study would include directly asking if a factor influenced the decision to disclose. The current study only directly asked if religion had been a factor in the decision to disclose, perhaps limiting potential findings. Second, it would be useful to ascertain if the victim met with positive or negative reactions after first disclosure, as this would certainly influence one's motivation for secondary disclosure. Such information may shed further light on the delays that occur between first disclosing to a formal target and disclosure to a secondary, informal target. Third, the findings for religion indicate that one's religious beliefs can influence the decision to disclose. Perhaps distinguishing between affiliations may illustrate more differences. And last, the investigation of factors affecting the disclosure process should be addressed separately depending on age at time of assault by

devising separate scales for those assaulted as children compared to those assaulted as adults. The current study was designed to identify factors that influence one's decision to delay disclosure of a sexual assault. It is hoped that the results may highlight factors that contribute to the decision to delay disclosure of sexual assault and help professionals that assist victims following sexual assault.

SUMMARY

The design of the current study was exploratory and the intention was to investigate factors that may influence a sexual assault victim's decision to disclose. Results indicate that the following factors influence the decision to disclose: degree to which the victim knew the perpetrator, congruence of ethnicity, self-blame, religion as reason to disclose and relationship status. A major component of the study was based on the theory that disclosure is not absolute. In other words, if an individual first discloses to a formal target such as the police or a doctor, she may still delay in disclosure to informal targets such as friends and family. The current study was able to support this theory with two factors, the decision to use one's religious beliefs as a factor in the decision to disclose and using self-blame as a reason against disclosing. Although many of the factors were not significantly found to delay secondary, or informal disclosure, evidence was found for each factor indicating a delay warranting further investigation.

Almost half of the sample included individuals who were assaulted as children, twelve of which were assaulted by family members, shown to be a factor delaying disclosure, prior to the age of twelve. This affected the current study in three major areas. First, many of the factors thought to influence the decision to disclose would not be applicable to child victims such as sexual history, substance use, and relationship status. Second, factors that are of concern to an adult when deciding to disclose may be entirely different than those of concern to a child. And third, age of assault may have been a confound to the current study. Re-analysis of the data excluding victims twelve and younger supported only self-blame and communication difficulties as reasons against disclosing to be significant factors delaying disclosure. Number of sexual partners prior

to the assault was also found to have a significant relationship with delay of disclosure, a result not found with the original sample including child victims. The current study was limited by a small sample, as sexual assault victims are a difficult population to sample. Recommendations for future study include separating victims assaulted as children from those who were assaulted as adults by designing separate scales.

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APPENDIX A

FACTORS INFLUENCING DISCLOSURE

Thank you for your participation in this project. The following pages contain a series of questions pertaining to your experiences with sexual assault. **This questionnaire is completely anonymous and confidential, you will not be asked to list your name anywhere.** All responses will be used for research purposes to better understand the process facing sexual assault victims. Circle the letter that best describes your feelings. Remember, your responses are confidential, so please be completely honest and answer all items.

1. What is your race/ethnicity?
   a. White/Caucasian
   b. Black/African American
   c. Asian
   d. Hispanic
   e. Other: _____

2. How old are you? _____

3. How old were you **at the time of the assault**? _____

4. How many siblings do you have?
   a. 0
   b. 1
   c. 2
   d. 3
   e. 4 +

5. Did you know the assailant?
   a. Yes, I knew him
   b. No, he was a stranger

6. If yes, how would you categorize your relationship?
   a. Acquaintance (I have seen him before, spoken to on only a few occasions)
   b. Friend (spoken to him on several occasions)
   c. Family member (including in-laws)
   d. Husband or dating partner

7. On a scale of 1-10, how well did you know him (1 = not well at all, 10 = very well)
   1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

8. Was your assailant the same race/ethnicity as you?
   a. Yes
   b. No
   c. I couldn't tell

9. How would you classify the external physical injuries you received from the assault?
    a. No injuries
    b. Mild injuries
    c. Moderate injuries
    d. Serious injuries

10. Did your assailant use a weapon and/or make the presence of a weapon known to you?
    a. Yes
    b. No

11. At the time of the assault, had you been drinking and/or using drugs?
    a. Yes
    b. No

12. At the time of the assault, had the assailant been drinking and/or using drug?
    a. Yes
    b. No
    c. Don't know

13. If the assault had NOT occurred, would you have felt guilty about your activities that day/night?
    a. Yes, I probably would not have told anyone what I had been doing
    b. No, I wasn't doing anything I would feel guilty about

14. How long after you were assaulted were you able to tell someone what happened (**excluding your counselor**, in the case of multiple assaults, please refer to the assault that is bringing you in for counseling)?
    a. Immediately, by my choice
    b. Immediately, people knew without me having to tell them
    c. Within 1 week
    d. Within 3 months
    e. Within 1 year
    f. 1+ years (how many years:____)
    g. I still have not told anyone

15. Did you have children at the time of the assault?
    a. Yes, I had _____ child/children
    b. No

16. Whom did you **first** tell that you had been assaulted?
    a. Romantic partner
    b. Family member
    c. Friend
    d. Police
    e. Medical professional
    f. Mental health counselor
    g. Other: _____

17. Was the first person you told a male or a female?
    a. Male
    b. Female

18. What was your main reason for telling the first person that you had been assaulted?
    a. I wanted to report the crime
    b. I needed medical attention
    c. I needed support from my family/friends
    d. I felt like that was what I was supposed to do
    e. I wanted to educate others
    f. The first person knew because someone else told them
    g. I have never before told anyone about the assault

19. If the police or medical professional (doctor or counselor) was the first person you told, how long did you wait to tell someone else (i.e., family, friend)?
    a. Immediately, by my choice
    b. Immediately, people knew without me having to tell them
    c. Within 1 week
    d. Within 3 months
    e. Within 1 year
    f. 1+ year
    g. 2-10 years
    h. 10+ years (how many years:_____)
    i. I still have not been able to discuss it with others
    j. Not applicable, my first disclosure was to a source other than the police

20. Please circle **all** of the following whom you have told about the assault:
    a. Family members
    b. Friends
    c. Counselor
    d. Police
    e. Co-worker
    f. Doctor or Nurse
    g. Minister/Pastor/Rabbi
    h. Other _____

21. Prior to the assault, what did you consider to be your religious affiliation?
    a. _____
    b. I did not choose to affiliate with a religion

22. What do you currently consider to be your religious affiliation?
    a. _____
    b. I do not choose to affiliate with a religion

23. Please rank the importance of religion to your life **before** the assault (1 = not at all important, 10 = extremely important)?
    1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

24. Please rank the importance of religion to your life **after** the assault (1 = not at all important, 10 = extremely important)?
    1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

25. Have your religious beliefs changed as a result of the assault?
    a. Yes, I am more religious now
    b. Yes, I am less religious now
    c. No, I am just as religious as I was before
    d. No, I have never been religious

26. Were your religious beliefs a factor when making the choice to tell others what happened to you?
    a. Yes
    b. No

27. How many sexual partners had you had prior to the assault: _____

28. What was your relationship status at the time of the assault
    a. Single
    b. Dating, but not seriously
    c. Committed relationship, but not married
    d. Married
    e. Separated/Divorced

29. Current relationship status
    a. Single
    b. Dating, but not seriously
    c. Same committed relationship, but not married
    d. Different committed relationship, but not married
    e. Married to the individual I was dating at time of assault
    f. Married to the same individual
    g. Different marriage
    h. Separated/ Divorced

APPENDIX B

MEASURE FOR SELF-BLAME

Please circle the number indicating your level of agreement/disagreement with the following statements about your feelings after the assault using the scale below. If the question does not apply to you, please make a check on the right column.

1	2	3	4	5
Completely Disagree	Disagree Somewhat	Neutral	Agree Somewhat	Completely Agree

Check if not applicable

30. I should not have been out alone _____

1 2 3 4 5

31. I should have resisted more strongly _____

1 2 3 4 5

32. I should have been more cautious about who I went out with _____

1 2 3 4 5

33. I feel responsible for being raped _____

1 2 3 4 5

34. I should not have been out so late _____

1 2 3 4 5

35. I should not have drunk so much alcohol _____

1 2 3 4 5

36. I should have been dressed differently _____

1 2 3 4 5

APPENDIX C

REASONS AGAINST DISCLOSING

The following pages contain a series of statements listing thoughts and feelings that may have affected your decision about disclosing after the assault. Please circle the number under each question using the following scale (1 = not at all a factor, 5 = a major factor) to indicate how important each statement was to you when making your decision. There are no right or wrong answers. Remember, your responses are confidential, so please be completely honest and answer all items.

1	2	3	4	5
Not at all a factor	Of little importance	Neutral	Important	A major factor

37. I just didn't know how to tell someone.

1 2 3 4 5

38. People have big mouths and might go running around telling other people.

1 2 3 4 5

39. I was concerned that no one would understand what I was going through.

1 2 3 4 5

40. I didn't want to do something that would threaten my relationship.

1 2 3 4 5

41. I didn't want to upset anyone.

1 2 3 4 5

42. I felt there was something wrong with me.

1 2 3 4 5

43. I blamed myself for being raped.

1 2 3 4 5

44. I didn't want to be treated as if I was different from other people.

1 2 3 4 5

45. I felt ashamed about being raped.

1 2 3 4 5

46. I would get tongue tied when I tried to say what had happened.

1 2 3 4 5

1 Not at all a factor	2 Of little importance	3 Neutral	4 Important	5 A major factor

47. I had difficulty accepting that I was raped.

1 2 3 4 5

48. I didn't want anyone to have to make any sacrifices for me.

1 2 3 4 5

49. I didn't know how to start in telling someone about the rape.

1 2 3 4 5

50. I didn't want to scare anyone away from me.

1 2 3 4 5

51. I worried that no one would like me if they knew I had been raped.

1 2 3 4 5

52. I didn't want anyone needing to take care of me.

1 2 3 4 5

53. I didn't know how to put into words what had happened to me.

1 2 3 4 5

54. Information about the rape is my own private information.

1 2 3 4 5

55. I was concerned about how someone would feel about me after hearing this information.

1 2 3 4 5

56. I don't have to tell anyone if I don't want to.

1 2 3 4 5

57. I have a right to privacy.

1 2 3 4 5

58. I felt bad about myself.

1 2 3 4 5

1	2	3	4	5
Not at all a factor	Of little importance	Neutral	Important	A major factor

59. I didn't want to put someone's life into an uproar.

1 2 3 4 5

60. I didn't want anyone to worry about me.

1 2 3 4 5

61. I didn't feel that someone would be supportive.

1 2 3 4 5

62. I didn't want to be treated like a "victim".

1 2 3 4 5

63. I didn't want to information to be passed along to others that I did not tell myself.

1 2 3 4 5

64. I just couldn't figure out how to talk about the rape.

1 2 3 4 5

65. I didn't want someone to experience any pain over things I was going through.

1 2 3 4 5

APPENDIX D

NOTIFICATION

Title: Project Disclosure

Researchers: Dr. Winstead, Professor of Psychology, and Courtney Hanley, Masters student.

Description of Study: If you decide to participate, then you will join a study examining factors affecting the disclosure process for sexual assault victims. **Your decision to participate in no way affects your counseling relationship with Response Sexual Support Services of the YWCA.** If you agree to participate, the surveys will take 10-15 minutes to complete and all responses are anonymous and confidential.

Exclusionary Criteria: Participants must be at least 18 years of age.

Risks and Benefits:
Risks: If you decide to participate in this study, you may face the risk of disclosing personal information. The researchers have tried to minimize this risk by providing anonymous survey materials; no one should be able to identify which survey you have turned in. As with any research project, some risks may occur that have not yet been identified.

Benefits: Contributing to research geared toward understanding the unique concerns facing individuals of sexual assault in their decision to disclose the assault to others.

Costs and Payments: The researchers are unable to monetarily compensate you for your participation.

Confidentiality: This questionnaire is anonymous. Do not provide any identifying information such as your name or date of birth. The data collected may be used in reports, presentations, and publications; but the researcher will not identify you at any time. Collected materials may be subpoenaed by court order and/or inspected by government bodies with oversight authority.

Withdrawal Privilege: You have the right NOT TO PARTICIPATE. Even if you agree to participate now, you are free to stop participation at any point. Your participation will in no way affect your counseling relationship with Response Sexual Support Services of the YWCA nor will the results of the questionnaire be shared with any individuals not affiliated with Project Disclosure.

Compensations for illness or injury: It is unlikely that any illnesses or injury will result from your participation in this study. Should any injury result, Old Dominion University does not provide insurance coverage, free medical care, or any other form of

compensation for your injury. Should you experience an injury, please contact Dr. Barbara Winstead to review the situation.

Voluntary Consent: By agreeing to participate, you are agreeing to several things. You are saying that you have read and understood this notification form and are satisfied with the information provided concerning the study and its risks and benefits. Feel free to contact the researchers with any questions: Courtney Hanley, 623-2115.

APPENDIX E

DEBRIEFING FORM

Thank you for participating in Project Disclosure. Disclosure refers to the act of telling another person personal information about yourself. Your participation will aid in the investigation of the factors influencing the decision to tell others about being sexually assaulted. The questions that you have answered were identified by the researcher as factors that may possibly influence a decision to disclose following an assault. The results of this research project will be used to identify the factors that make a rapid disclosure more possible.

If the survey materials have caused you distress in any way, please speak with a Response counselor before leaving. If you find that you are experiencing distress after leaving Response, please feel free to call Courtney Hanley (623-2115) with questions or concerns.

VITA

March 2005

COURTNEY A. HANLEY

EDUCATION

2003-present	Master's Student, Psychology Old Dominion University Area of Study: Clinical Psychology Estimated date of completion: May 2005
1995-1999	B.S., Mass Communications James Madison University, Harrisonburg, VA Area of Study: Print Journalism

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

2004	Facilitator, Domestic Violence Support Group Women-in-Crisis of the YWCA Norfolk, Virginia
2003-Present	Rape Crisis Counselor Response Sexual Assault Support Center of the YWCA Norfolk, Virginia

PUBLICATIONS

Hanley, C., & Winstead, B. (2004) Body Satisfaction and Racial Identity Development Differences between Black and White Females. *Virginia Journal of Science, 55*(1-2), 66.

PRESENTATIONS

Hanley, C. (2004) Body Satisfaction and Racial Identity Development Differences between Black and White Females. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Virginia Academy of Sciences, Richmond, VA.