Sexual Assault on College Campuses: An Investigation of
Psychological Well-Being and Reporting Behaviors of Female Victims

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Abstract

One in five college women have been sexually assaulted since enrolling in university classes. Past research had identified a relationship between experiencing sexual assault and poor psychological outcomes. After experiencing a sexual assault, victims engage in meaning making of the assault, which includes attributing blame (e.g., self-blame or perpetrator blame). Prior research has identified that outcomes of psychological well-being have been related to attributions of blame and informal social reactions. For example, victims who blame their character typically have more symptoms of depression and anxiety, as well as, more overall distress. Negative social reactions to sexual assault disclosures have been associated with higher levels of self-blame, as well as, poorer psychological outcomes, compared to positive social reactions.

The purpose of this dissertation was to assess the attributions of blame, social reactions, and well-being of college women who have been sexually assaulted. More specifically, this study examined how attributions of blame and informal social reactions influenced a victim’s psychological well-being following a sexual assault (Ahrens, Campbell, Ternier-Thames, Wasco, & Sefl, 2007; Littleton, 2010; Orchowski & Gidycz, 2012; Ullman & Filipas, 2014). This study goes beyond examining the separate effects of attributions of blame and social reactions on psychological well-being (e.g., self-esteem, general stress, depression, anxiety) and hypothesizes that attributions act as a mediator. Specifically, this study hypothesized that attributions of blame mediated the relationship between psychological well-being and social reactions, rape myth, as well as, sexual assault histories and characteristics. Additionally, to provide a deeper understanding of the impact of social reactions, this study examined the victims’ lived experiences of
informal disclosing (e.g., friends, family, partners) and formally reporting (e.g., law
enforcement, Title IX, university victim advocates, mental health providers, mandatory
reporters).

This study utilized a mixed methods approach to examine these relationships and
experiences. In order to assess the relationships between informal social reactions,
attributions of blame, and psychological well-being an online survey was sent to all
female students who were currently enrolled in classes. In-depth interviews were
conducted following the campus wide survey with a subset of survey participants. These
in-depth interviews focused on the victims’ experiences with disclosing and reporting.
Victims were asked about their decisions to disclose or not to disclose following their
sexual assault. Victims were asked about the types of reactions (e.g., positive, negative,
mixed) they received following a disclosure or report. Additionally, victims were asked
about their perception of blame following the sexual assault and how their discussions
with others impacted their attributions of blame.

The main findings of this study suggest that social reactions were related to
attributions of blame, specifically, negative reactions from others were related to higher
levels of self-blame. Behavior self-blame was unrelated to psychological well-being,
character blame was negatively related to all factors of psychological well-being, and
perpetrator blame was connected to greater levels of depression and anxiety. Additionally,
receiving positive reactions was related to better outcomes of psychological well-being.
Attributions of blame did not mediate the relationship between social reactions and
psychological well-being. The interviews identified how subsets of positive and negative
reactions impacted attributions of blame. However, the most interesting finding was that
certain responses could be considered both positive and negative, which impacted attributions of blame differently. Expressly, responses of validation could reduce self-blame or increase self-blame. Positive validation, believing the victim and emphasizing that the experience was a sexual assault or rape decreased self-blame. In contrast, dismissive validation, including suggestions that the victim’s experience was not a big deal or that the experience was a misunderstanding, increased self-blame. Results of this study highlight the influential nature of attributions of blame and social reactions to sexual assault disclosures. The importance of educating others about how social reactions impact victims’ perception of events and well-being are further discussed.
Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to all women who have experienced a sexual assault.

I see you. I hear you. I believe you.
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I am forever grateful for the guidance, direction, encouragement, and mentorship from Dr. Marta Elliott. I am incredibly fortunate to have had the opportunity to learn and work with you. You showed me what a powerful woman looks like, an image that I strive to be.

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Table of Contents

Abstract ................................................................................................................................ i
Dedication ................................................................................................................................ iv
Acknowledgements ........................................................................................................................ v
Table of Tables .......................................................................................................................... xii
Table of Figures ........................................................................................................................ xiv
Table of Appendices ................................................................................................................ xv
Chapter 1 - Introduction ......................................................................................................... 1
Chapter 2 – Literature Review ............................................................................................... 4
  Prevalence of Sexual Assault on Campus ........................................................................ 4
  Rape Myth ............................................................................................................................. 5
  Myths about Rape ................................................................................................................. 7
  Myths about the Perpetrator ............................................................................................... 9
  Myths about the Victim ....................................................................................................... 9
  Acknowledging Sexual Assault .......................................................................................... 10
  Disclosure and Reporting ................................................................................................. 14
  Reactions to Reporting and Disclosure ......................................................................... 18
  Causal Blame Attributions ............................................................................................... 20
  Self-Blame .......................................................................................................................... 21
  Perpetrator Blame .............................................................................................................. 24
  Psychological Well-Being ................................................................................................. 24
  Conceptual Model and Hypotheses .................................................................................. 26
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hypotheses for Study 1</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Questions for Study 2</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 3 - Methods</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Design</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Study 1</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sampling</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instruments</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexual Experiences Survey - Short Form</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Details of Specific Event</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Updated Illinois Rape Myth Acceptance Scale</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexual Victimization Attributions Measure</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Reactions Questionnaire</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Symptoms Checklist-90 Revised</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Symptoms Checklist-90 Revised</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kessler Psychological Distress Scale</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demographic Information</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Procedure</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recruitment</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Analyses</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confirmatory Factor Analyses</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Structural Model ....................................................................................................40

Chapter 4 - Study 1 Descriptive Results ............................................................................42

Sample....................................................................................................................42
Demographic Information ......................................................................................42
Measurement Models .............................................................................................44
Confirmatory Factor Analyses for Rape Myth Subscales, First Order .................45
Confirmatory Factor Analyses for Rape Myth Factor, Second Order ...............46
Confirmatory Factor Analysis for Informal Social Reactions ...........................46
Confirmatory Factor Analysis for Behavior, Character, and Perpetrator Blame as
Separate Factors .....................................................................................................47
Confirmatory Factor Analysis for Behavior, Character, and Perpetrator Blame in
One Measurement Model .......................................................................................49
Confirmatory Factor Analyses for Self-Esteem, Distress, Depression, and Anxiety
................................................................................................................................49
Confirmatory Factor Analyses for Including All Measurement Models ..............51
Correlations Between Latent Variables and Observed Variables .......................51

Chapter 5 - Predicting Blame Attributions......................................................................54

Rape Myth and Attributions of Blame ......................................................................55
Social Reactions and Attributions of Blame ...........................................................56
Relationship to Perpetrator and Attributions of Blame .........................................57
Tactics and Attributions of Blame ...........................................................................57
Sexual Assault Characteristics and Attributions of Blame ........................................58
Full Attribution Regression Model .............................................................................59
Discussion ....................................................................................................................64

Chapter 6 – Predicting Psychological Well-Being ....................................................70
Informal Social Reactions and Psychological Well-Being .......................................70
Attributions of Blame and Psychological Well-Being ..............................................71
Full Regression Model for Psychological Well-Being .............................................72
Indirect Effects of Social Reactions on Psychological Well-Being Through Blame
Attributions .................................................................................................................75
Alternative models .....................................................................................................75
Attributions of Blame and Rape Myth .................................................................76
Informal Social Reactions and Rape Myth .............................................................76
Attributions of Blame and Informal Social Reactions .............................................76
Psychological Well-Being and Attributions of Blame .............................................77
Psychological Well-Being and Informal Social Reactions .....................................77
Discussion ..................................................................................................................78

Chapter 7 - Study 2 ....................................................................................................81
Procedure ....................................................................................................................81
Recruitment ...............................................................................................................81
Data Collection ........................................................................................................83
Data Analysis ............................................................................................................83
Chapter 8 – Informal Disclosure to Friends, Family, and Partners

Disclosing to Friends
Positive Reactions from Friends
Negative Reactions from Friends
Disclosing to Family
Positive Reactions from Family Members
Negative Reactions from Family Members
Disclosing to Partner
Positive Partner Responses
Negative Partner Responses
Preferred Responses
Barriers to Informal Disclosures
Discussion

Chapter 9 – Formal Reporting

Encouraged to Report
Reporting to the Police
Reasons for not reporting to the Police
Title IX
Victim’s Advocate
Mental Health Professionals
Other University Affiliates
Residential Assistant
# Table of Tables

Table 7.2 *Interview Sample Characteristics* ................................................................. 82

Table 4.1 *Frequencies of Sample’s Race/Ethnicity* ....................................................... 213

Table 4.2 *Frequencies of Assault Characteristics* ......................................................... 214

Table 4.3 *Confirmatory Factor Analysis of Rape Myth Subscales* ............................ 215

Table 4.4 *Confirmatory Factor Analysis of Rape Myth Created from Items* ............... 216

Table 4.5 *Confirmatory Factor Analysis of Informal Social Reactions* ...................... 217

Table 4.6 *Confirmatory Factor Analysis for Behavior, Character, and Perpetrator Blame* ................................................................................................................................. 218

Table 4.7 *Confirmatory Factor Analysis of Blame Attribution Concurrent Model* ...... 219

Table 4.8 *Confirmatory Factor Analysis of Psychological Well-Being Concurrent Model* ............................................................................................................................... 221

Table 4.9 *Confirmatory Factor Analysis for All Latent Variables* .............................. 222

Table 4.10 *Bivariate Correlations between All Latent Constructs* ............................. 224

Table 4.11 *Means and Standard Deviations of Factors* .............................................. 225

Table 4.12 *Correlations between Latent Variables and Observed Variables* .......... 226

Table 5.1 *Rape Myth “She Lied” Regressed on Blame Attribution* .......................... 227

Table 5.2 *Rape Myth “She Asked for It” Regressed on Blame Attribution* ............... 228

Table 5.3 *Rape Myth “He Didn’t Mean to” Regressed on Blame Attribution* ............ 229

Table 5.4 *Rape Myth “Not Really Rape” Regressed on Blame Attribution* ............. 230

Table 5.5 *Rape Myth on Blame Attribution* ............................................................... 231

Table 5.6 *Social Reactions Regressed on Blame Attributions* ................................. 232

Table 5.7 *Relationship to Perpetrator Regressed on Blame Attribution* .................... 233
Table 5.8 Sexual Assault Tactic Used Regressed on Blame Attribution ..................234
Table 5.9 Sexual Assault Characteristics Regressed on Blame Attribution ............235
Table 5.10 Full Regression Model for Blame Attribution ..................................236
Table 6.1 Social Reactions Regressed on Psychological Well-Being .....................237
Table 6.2 Attributions of Blame Regressed on Psychological Well-Being ..............238
Table 6.3 Social Reactions and Attributions of Blame Regressed on Psychological Well-
Being .................................................................................................................240
Table 6.4 Mediation Model ..................................................................................241
Table of Figures

Figure 1. Basic Mediating Model Predicting Well-Being ................................................ 51
Figure 2. Rape Myth Regressed onto Attributions of Blame .............................................. 57
Figure 3. Social Reactions Regressed onto Attributions of Blame ..................................... 58
Figure 4. Sexual Assault Tactics onto Attributions of Blame .............................................. 59
Figure 5. Sexual Assault Sexual Assault Labeling and History onto Attributions of Blame .................................................. 60
Figure 6. Social Reactions Regressed onto Psychological Well-Being .............................. 70
Figure 7. Attributions of Blame Regressed onto Psychological Well-Being ........................ 71
Table of Appendices

Appendix A: Modified Sexual Experiences Survey...........................................242
Appendix B: Extent of Disclosure........................................................................246
Appendix C: Updated Illinois Rape Myth Scale..................................................248
Appendix D: Sexual Victimization Attributions Scale..........................................250
Appendix E: Social Reaction Questionnaire.....................................................252
Appendix F: Symptom Checklist-90 Revised – Depression...............................254
Appendix G: Symptom Checklist-90 Revised – Anxiety....................................255
Appendix H: Posttraumatic Diagnostic Scale....................................................256
Appendix I: Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale..........................................................258
Appendix J: Kessler Psychological Distress Scale.............................................259
Appendix K: Demographic Information...............................................................260
Appendix L: Survey Recruitment Email..............................................................262
Appendix M: Informed Consent...........................................................................264
Appendix N: End of Survey..................................................................................266
Appendix O: Semi-Structured Interview Questions – Those who have reported...267
Appendix P: Semi-Structured Interview Questions – Those who have reported...271
Chapter 1 - Introduction

This dissertation is concerned with how having been sexually assaulted is related to psychological well-being among female undergraduate and graduate students, and with factors that influence whether or not women report sexual assault to informal and formal authorities. This dissertation has two components: Study 1, a quantitative online survey, and Study 2, a qualitative in-person interview. The survey focused on the determinants of well-being, whereas the interviews focused on factors that influence reporting to the authorities. This study focused on female students since they are much more likely than men to experience sexual assault (Cantor et al., 2015).

This study used the terms “victim” and “survivor” to describe someone who had experienced a sexual assault. In Williamson and Serna’s study (2018), participants who had been sexually assaulted were allowed to self-identify. Forty-one percent identified as a victim, 28% identified as a survivor, and 31% did not identify as either. Furthermore, this study found that there was no difference in the level of self-blame based on how one identified (Williamson & Serna, 2018).

Victims of sexual assault are likely to experience negative overall psychological well-being. Previous research has indicated that victims of sexual assault often experience PTSD, depression, anxiety, distress, and low self-esteem (Dworkin, Menon, Bystrynski, & Allen, 2017). Research has indicated that causal attributions are related to these psychological outcomes in several ways. For example, a victim who blames herself because of a character flaw, “I am too naïve,” is more likely to experience negative psychological outcomes compared to a victim who blames her behavior (e.g., getting drunk). Littleton, Rhatigan, & Axom (2007) indicated that greater negative effects of
character self-blame could be associated with the personal nature of character, while behavioral self-blame focuses on a changeable behavior.

Several factors can contribute to the causal attributions that a sexual assault victim would make. Rape myths are false definitions of rape that held not only at the individual level, but societal as well (Burt 1980; Ryan, 2011). These beliefs typically involve blaming the victim and excusing the perpetrator. Belief in rape myths can increase the likelihood that a victim would judge themselves to be responsible for the sexual assault. Additionally, the reactions of others can influence how the victim attributes blame or responsibility. Negative social reactions following the disclosure of sexual assault, such as victim-blaming or discounting her experience, can increase the likelihood that a victim would attribute blame to herself. However, positive social reactions can help the victim see that she is not to blame for the experience.

Study 1 is mainly concerned with how causal attributions and disclosure reactions influence overall psychological well-being. Causal attributions refer to the causes women cite for the assault and include three domains – their behavior, their character, and the perpetrator of the sexual assault (Breitenbecher, 2006). Disclosure reactions refer to how others responded when the woman who was assaulted told them what happened to her (Ahrens & Aldana, 2012). This study used a survey to assess a mediation model in which rape myth acceptance, disclosure reactions, and assault characteristics influence how the victim ascribes blame to the sexual assault and how blame attribution is related to overall psychological well-being. Additionally, this study assessed how disclosure reactions are not only related to blame attributions but also directly related to psychological well-being.
Study 2 is mainly focused on reporting behavior. Study two used in-depth interviews of women who formally reported their sexual assault and women who did not formally report their sexual assault. These interviews provided a narrative of the sexual assault victims’ experiences with disclosing and reporting, assessing how reactions to disclosure influenced women’s perceptions of sexual assault and their decisions regarding reporting to formal authorities. For example, did disclosing to a friend help them to report formally, or did they decide not to report following the disclosure? Last, this study explored the experiences of reporting to a formal agency and how that might be different from disclosing to an informal source.

The following literature review examines the prevalence of sexual assaults on campus, and provide definitions for sexual assault, rape myth, informal disclosures, formal reporting, and attributions of blame. It also addresses previous research on the connection between rape myths and attributions of blame. Next, the literature review identifies associations between attributions of blame and informal and formal reactions to disclosures of sexual assault, including positive and negative reactions. Subsequently, literature involving sexual assault and psychological well-being outcomes are explored. Last, the literature review addresses the association between social reactions to sexual assault disclosures and attributions of blame that are specifically related to psychological well-being outcomes following a sexual assault.
Chapter 2 – Literature Review

Prevalence of Sexual Assault on Campus

Sexual assaults frequently happen on college campuses but are rarely reported to the authorities (e.g., Title IX). The University of Nevada, Reno, conducted a Sexual Conduct & Campus Safety Survey (SCCS) in 2014 and 2016. The 2014 report included 6,098 currently enrolled degree-seeking students (61% female). Overall, 651 students (11%) were identified as having experienced some degree of sexual assault, more specifically, 540 (9%) women and 111 (2%) men. The 2016 report included 6,439 students; gender differences were not stated. The report indicated that 8% of students who completed the survey had experienced sexual assault. Additionally, the report revealed that separate from sexual assault, sexual coercion was reported by 13% of the students. Twenty-two percent of women did not tell anyone about the experience. Victims were more likely to disclose the assault to a friend or roommate (77%), while very few reported the experience to an authority. The most common form of reporting the sexual assault was to a counselor (7%), while 3% reported to off-campus police, 2% to on-campus police, and 2% to campus sexual assault victim advocate.

Two large scale surveys measuring sexual assault on campuses in the U.S. have been conducted in the last fifteen years. These studies offer insight into the national problem of sexual assault on campuses. Krebs, Lindquist, Warner, Fisher, and Martin (2007) conducted The College Sexual Assault study (CSA) to identify the magnitude of sexual assault on campus. CSA included 6,800 undergraduate students (80% female) from two large public universities. Although men were included in the study, the report only focused on women’s experiences. Of the 5,446 women, 19% had experienced some
degree of sexual assault, attempted (12.6%) and/or completed (13.7%) sexual assault since entering college.

Additionally, 16% of forced sexual assault victims and 8% of those assaulted while incapacitated contacted a victim’s, crisis, or health care center. Of those who experienced sexual assault, 64% of women assaulted while incapacitated, and 70% of women assaulted by force told someone close to them. Considerably fewer reported to law enforcement - only 13% of women assaulted by force and 2.1% assaulted while incapacitated.

A more recent nationwide survey assessing sexual assault on campus was the Association of American Universities (AAU) Campus Climate Survey (Cantor et al., 2015). The AAU survey included undergraduate and graduate students from 27 private and public campuses. The survey included 150,072 undergraduate and graduate students (58.5% female). Overall, the survey identified that 11.7% of students who completed the survey experienced some degree of sexual assault. The survey identified that women (17%) had experienced sexual assault more than men (4.4%).

Furthermore, 23.1% of undergraduate women and 5.4% of undergraduate men indicated that they had experienced nonconsensual penetration or sexual touching. Of those who experienced forced penetration, only 25% reported the experience to an authority (e.g., campus police, local police, Title IX). Rates of reporting to an authority were even less for those who were assaulted while incapacitated (13%).

**Rape Myth**

One of the primary reasons why women who are assaulted may not formally report the assault is the prevalence of myths about rape. Sexual assault is unique from
other crimes because the victim is examined for fault, equal to or even more so than the perpetrator. One important explanation for this is the cultural acceptance of rape myth. Rape myths are inaccurate beliefs concerning the characteristics of rape (Burt, 1980). Rape myths are based on stereotypes and prejudices, and like any other stereotype or prejudice, they are shared and promoted through the media and peers (Burt, 1980). These beliefs typically involve blaming the victim (e.g., victims provoke sexual assaults when they dress provocatively or act in a promiscuous manner”), excusing the perpetrator (e.g., “they had sex with them before, so it can’t be sexual assault”), downplaying the prevalence of sexual assault (e.g., “rape does not happen that often”), or promoting false reactions to sexual assault (e.g., people that have been sexually assaulted will be hysterical and crying”). Benedict (1992) suggested that rape myths are perpetuated by the idea that rape is sex. Thus, people are less likely to take sexual assault seriously when they are told to frame sexual assault as sex instead of an aggressive act against the victim (Benedict, 1992). Rape myths allow one to shift the blame onto the victim rather than the perpetrator.

Rape myths narrow the definition of what is “real rape” or counts as sexual assault. Ryan (2011) found that when people are asked to describe a typical rape, they include responses such as the perpetrator was a stranger, the victim engaged in extreme physical and verbal resistance, the rape was a surprise attack, and the perpetrator overpowered the victim. These myths provide a protective function that allows one to deny or play down sexual assault, while also providing an explanation for the occurrence of sexual assault, in turn allowing others to feel less vulnerable to sexual assault (Lonsway & Fitzgerald, 1994). However, a woman is more likely to be assaulted by
someone she knows, including romantic partners, rather than strangers (Temkin & Krahé, 2008). Furthermore, the use of physical force or violence is less prevalent than coercion and alcohol (Temkin & Krahé, 2008).

One of the most common predictors of rape myth acceptance in college students is gender, in that men tend to accept more rape myths than women (Aronowitz, Lambert, & Davidoff, 2012; Suarez & Gadalla, 2010). Men not only endorse more rape myths, but they are also more likely to adhere to rape myths (Süssenbach, Eyssel, & Bohner, 2013). Furthermore, male college students are more likely to blame the victim and believe that women should be held responsible for the prevention of rape (Lee, Pomeroy, Yoo, & Rheinboldt, 2005).

The acceptance of rape myths provides an opportunity for cases or stories that do not fit the archetypical script to ignore or silence women who have been assaulted under other conditions, for example, when not resisting against the perpetrator by fighting back physically or screaming. In these circumstances, those who accept rape myth scripts are more likely to engage in victim-blaming (Masser, Lee, & McKimmie, 2010). There is an assortment of rape myths, but most fall into one of the three categories: myths about the rape event, myths about the perpetrator, and myths about the victim (Payne, Lonsway, & Fitzgerald, 1999).

**Myths about Rape**

There are three core myths about sexual assault: that it is a trivial event, it is a deviant event, and it was not really sexual assault. The belief that sexual assault is trivial, or not a big deal, is associated with expecting victims of sexual assault to easily move past the experience and go on living their lives (Payne et al., 1999). This belief allows for
the assertion that sexual assault victims exaggerate their victimization. Trivializing sexual assault in this manner minimizes the impact of sexual assault on a victim’s mental health.

The belief that sexual assault is a deviant event allows one to remain blind to the actual prevalence of sexual assault. The belief also provides comfort, assuring the believer that sexual assault will not happen to them because it is a rare occurrence, and the risk of experiencing sexual assault is low. The belief aligns with the traditional rape script of rape being an abnormal occurrence, such as a being sexually assaulted by a stranger in an alley (Ryan, 2011), which supports the belief that sexual assault is not likely to include their friends or romantic partners (Payne et al., 1999). In reality, acquaintance sexual assault has been estimated to account for 90% of reported cases (Skaine, 2015).

Rape myths are the beliefs that narrowly define sexual assault. For example, the experience can only be defined as sexual assault if the perpetrator was a stranger, and physical violence was used during the assault. By believing in a narrow definition of sexual assault, one could reject all other circumstances as not being sexual assault if their defined characteristics of sexual assault are not present during the event (Ryan, 2011). Defining sexual assault by specific parameters shifts the blame from the perpetrator to the victim, essentially increasing victim-blaming. For example, when a woman is sexually assaulted by a boyfriend with whom she has previously had consensual intercourse, one might not deem this instance as a “real” sexual assault if it does not fit one’s sexual assault definition. Furthermore, there are specific myths about those who are involved in the sexual assault, the victim, and the perpetrator (Payne et al., 1999).
**Myths about the Perpetrator**

Rape myths excuse the perpetrator's behavior in one of two ways: “he didn’t mean to” and “he couldn’t help himself.” “He didn’t mean to” can be best described as either a miscommunication or a misunderstanding.” (Payne et al., 1999) This myth is upheld by the notion that consent is a difficult concept to understand. For example, if a woman says no to sexual intercourse, but he does not stop, and she does not fight back physically, then the man would assume that she did not mean it when she said no, or that she was just “playing hard to get.” “He didn’t mean to” promote the notion that men just accidentally sexually assault someone due to a misunderstanding (Payne et al., 1999). “He didn’t mean to” is another way to justify that if a coercive tactic is used rather than psychical force, then it is not real sexual assault.

“He couldn’t help himself” is another rape myth category, although not exclusive from “he didn’t mean to.” However, “he couldn’t help himself” perpetuates the belief, based on the impression that gender differences are innate, that men are expected to have higher sex drives that are nearly impossible to control (Prentice & Miller, 2006). This belief supports the notion that men cannot control themselves once sexual activity begins, regardless of their partner’s requests to stop. This myth excuses the man’s behavior because it is thought to be inherent and unstoppable. Although “he didn’t mean to” and “he couldn’t help himself” excuse the man’s behavior, these myths also aid in shifting blame to the victim.

**Myths about the Victim**

Rape myths about the victim include a focus on the woman’s behavior, “she asked for it,” and secret desires, “she wanted it.” “She asked for it” is grounded in the belief that
if a woman behaves a certain way that she is sending out cues that men will interpret as an advertisement for sexual interest. For example, if a woman dresses provocatively or flirts with a man, her actions might be misinterpreted as she is interested in sex. Jacques-Tiura, Abbey, Parkhill, and Zawacki (2007) found that men are more likely than women to misinterpret sexual intentions. “She asked for it” can be used to justify acquaintance rape, because the victims show some interest in the perpetrator prior to the sexual assault. The focal point of why the sexual assault occurred is based on her behavior, and blame is shifted from perpetrator to victim. Specifically, she could have prevented sexual assault from occurring if she did not behave in such a manner. This myth can also serve a protective function for women; if they believe that sexual assault happens to those who act a certain way, by avoiding those behaviors, they can also avoid sexual assault (Iconis, 2008). However, rape myths, in general, can also be potentially harmful to the extent that they discourage women from acknowledging that what happened to them constituted rape.

**Acknowledging Sexual Assault**

Rape myth acceptance can influence a sexual assault victim’s conceptualization of her experience. Rape myths can specifically impact whether a victim of sexual assault acknowledges her own experience as sexual assault (Peterson & Muehlenhard, 2004). An unacknowledged rape victim was defined by Koss (1985) as “a woman who has experienced a sexual assault that would legally qualify as rape but who does not conceptualize herself as a rape victim” (p. 195). For example, rape myths are narrowly defined and typically shift blame to the victim. When a woman draws upon the narrow definitions of rape myths as a comparison to her own experience, these myths can prevent
her from acknowledging her experience as sexual assault. This issue can occur because her experience does not align with the rape myths or scripts that she holds. A victim’s acknowledgment of sexual assault or rape can affect important factors, such as disclosure, reporting, attributions of blame, which can impact the victim’s psychological well-being.

In a meta-analysis that included the assessment of victim’s acknowledgment of sexual assault/rape ($n = 3,721$), over half of women college students (62%) whose experience met the legal definition of sexual assault or rape did not acknowledge that they had been raped or sexually assaulted (Wilson & Miller, 2016). Additionally, of those in the community sample ($n = 2,196$), nearly half of the women from community samples (49%) were also unacknowledged victims (Wilson & Miller, 2016). These findings imply that unacknowledged rape is a common occurrence, more so in college samples than community samples. However, few studies have examined the differences in blame attributions, psychological well-being, and disclosure and reporting behaviors between acknowledged and unacknowledged victims.

As previously mentioned, the rape myths that the victim holds serve as a framework for interpreting or explaining the sexual assault or why the unwanted sexual experience occurred. In the event of a perceived ambiguous assault, one that does not fit the victim’s belief in what rape is, the victim could initially adhere to the classification that an assault did not occur and would be considered an unacknowledged victim. Women who have experienced a sexual assault that does not fit with their beliefs about rape may discount the experience and find other ways to explain it, such as a “hook-up” or “bad sex” (Littleton, Tabernik, Canales, & Backstrom, 2009). Conversely, they might believe what happened was wrong, but not consider it a big deal based on the assault
characteristics (e.g., it wasn’t violent). Thus, justifying the experiences as a “miscommunication,” or they are unsure how to categorize their experience (Dardis, Kraft, & Gidycz, 2017). Whereas, those who experience a sexual assault that closely fits with their rape script are most likely to acknowledge their assault.

Researchers have found mixed results regarding how a victim makes meaning of the sexual assault and whether they acknowledge the assault. Bondurant (2001) suggested that acknowledged and unacknowledged rape victims felt they had some responsibility or blamed themselves in some way for unwanted sexual experience. However, Bondurant (2001) implied that acknowledged rape victims were more likely to engage in self-blame as well as perpetrator blame, compared to unacknowledged rape victims. Bondurant speculated that women who label the experience as rape are likely to affirm the seriousness of the experience. Jaffe, Steel, DiLillo, Messman-Moore, and Gratz (2017) found women who were assaulted by their romantic partner were less likely to blame themselves or their partner because they did not label their experience as rape.

Orchowski, Untied, and Gidycz (2013) suggested that acknowledged rape victims were more likely to take responsibility or blame themselves, specifically their behavior, for the unwanted sexual experience that involved coercive tactics. Orchowski et al. (2013) speculated that these acknowledged rape victims believed they should have been more vocal about their unwillingness to engage in sexual activity. In contrast, other researchers have indicated that unacknowledged rape victims are more likely to engage in self-blame (Frazier & Seales, 1997; Pitts & Schwartz, 1993; Wilson & Miller, 2016). Wilson and Miller (2016) suggested that women could be less likely to label their experiences like rape or sexual assault because they blame themselves. The victim’s rape
myth beliefs could influence the link between blame and responsibility with rape acknowledgment and whether their experience fits within their belief system.

Research on victim acknowledgment and psychological well-being has produced mixed results (Clements & Ogle, 2009; Layman, Gidycz, & Lynn, 1996; Littleton, Breitkopft, & Berenson., 2008; Wilson, Miller, Leheney, Ballman, & Scarpa, 2017). Acknowledged victims were more likely than unacknowledged victims to have symptoms of PTSD and depression (Wilson et al., 2017). In contrast, Clements and Olge (2009) reported that unacknowledged victims exhibited more obsessive-compulsive symptoms, anxiety, and psychosis. Furthermore, unacknowledged victims were more likely to use alcohol compared to acknowledged victims (Littleton et al., 2008). Layman et al. (1996) indicated that acknowledged victims had more PTSD symptoms, but those symptoms decreased over time. This decrease could indicate that over time, unacknowledged victims develop mental health issues, while acknowledged victims’ mental health improves. Victim’s acknowledgment of sexual assault should be addressed when examining the impact of sexual assault on outcomes such as psychological well-being.

Victim rape acknowledgment can influence the likelihood of a victim reporting their sexual assault to authorities or disclosing their experience to an informal source, such as a friend. Acknowledged rape victims are more likely than unacknowledged rape victims to report the crime, seek mental health services, and seek medical care (Littleton Rhatigan, & Axsom, 2007; Wilson et al., 2017). According to Walsh et al. (2016), rape acknowledgment has been identified as the strongest predictor of seeking support and services. Unacknowledged victims are less likely to disclose their experience to others (e.g., friends and family; Littleton & Breitkopf, 2006). Research has indicated that
women are discouraged to label their victimization as rape, through victim-blaming and negative social reactions following a disclosure (Campbell, Dworkin, & Cabral, 2009; Grubb & Turner, 2012; Ullman, 1996; van der Bruggen & Grubb, 2014). These social consequences can impede the likelihood of rape acknowledgment. Whether or not women acknowledge that their experience meets the criteria for rape may influence to whom she discloses the experience, including whether or not she reports it to any formal authorities.

**Disclosure and Reporting**

Sexual assault victims tend to seek support from those who they believe would be helpful and supportive (Siegel, Sorenson, Golding, Burnam, & Stein, 1989). Many victims do not report their sexual assault to formal authorities or seek formal support (e.g., police, medical personnel, mental health professionals). However, the majority disclose to informal sources of support (e.g., friends, family) (Ahrens, Campbell, Ternier-Thames, Wasco, & Sefl, 2007; Sabina & Ho, 2014). Sexual assault victims are more likely to disclose their experiences to friends and family and have described those experiences as helpful (Siegel et al., 1989). Sexual assault victims are more likely to report their experience to a mental health professional who they perceive as helpful, compared to reporting to the police, who they perceive as least helpful (Siegel et al., 1989; Ullman, 1996). Research has indicated that of women who have been sexually assaulted, approximately 88% to 98% do not report the experience to law enforcement (Fisher, Daigle, Cullen, & Turner, 2003; Wolitzsky-Taylor, Resnick, Amstadter, McCauley, Ruggiero, & Kilpatrick, 2011).

Women who have been sexually assaulted are most likely to seek support from a friend or family member (Ullman, 1999; Ullman & Filipas, 2001). Ahrens et al. (2007)
found that first disclosures are most likely to be a friend rather than a family member, and typically of the same gender. These initial disclosures to informal support sources can serve as an opportunity to access other sources of support. Additionally, informal disclosures can function as a litmus test of sorts that could determine whether a victim would seek further help. For example, if responses from informal sources are negative, a victim might be less likely to seek further help from other sources. Whereas, positive responses could facilitate further help seeking, specifically formal sources of support.

Women who have been sexually assaulted and disclose their experience to a friend or family member are most likely to disclose immediately after the assault (44%), while 32% disclose within a month, and 24% disclose after one month (Marriott, Lewis, & Gobin, 2016; Orchowski & Gidcyz, 2012). Several researchers have suggested that 75% to 89% of victims disclose their experience to at least one person with an overall average of 3 disclosures (Ahrens et al., 2007; Brown et al., 2009; Orchowski & Gidcyz, 2012; Ullman & Filipas, 2001).

Reporting sexual assault to a formal university agency (e.g., Title IX or campus police) is relatively rare among college students. According to the AAU survey, 25% who experienced forced penetration and 13% who experienced penetration by intoxication reported to at least one program within the university. These numbers do not reflect which services were utilized but indicate that students are reporting their experiences to at least one campus resource. Similarly, Nasta et al. (2005) reported that 22% of sexual assault victims used an on-campus resource. More specifically, 12% used health services, and 8% used psychological services. Another interesting finding from Nasta et al. (2005) was that of those who had not been assaulted, 97% said they would hypothetically use
campus resources in the event of a sexual assault, even though very few victims do use the resources.

Reporting to a campus authority or use of campus resources can have varying effects on the victim. Regardless of which campus resource that the victim chooses to use, the largest contribution to their psychological well-being is the feedback that they receive from the resource. For victims who receive negative reactions from formal support sources, such as campus police or Title IX, their psychological well-being suffers, many have increased PTSD symptoms (Ullman & Filipas, 2001). These formal services can offer tangible assistance, but victims often receive more negative reactions. However, for victims who have utilized mental healthcare services following a sexual assault, either immediately or much later, they express that the resource was more beneficial than other resources, specifically because victims did not receive negative feedback. Many women who used victim advocates reported their services as beneficial, receiving support that addressed their immediate needs without blame and judgment (Patterson & Tringali, 2014).

Research has identified several characteristics of the sexual assault experience and their impact on both disclosing and reporting. Such factors are organized around whether they are based on the offender, the incident, or the situation. Offender-based factors that increased the likelihood of disclosing and reporting include the relationship to the victim, number of assailants, and difference in race/ethnicity (Fisher et al., 2003; Wolitzsky-Taylor et al., 2011). For example, the victim-offender relationship is one of the factors that had had the largest impact on the likelihood of disclosing and reporting. If the offender is a stranger, the sexual assault is much more likely to be reported and disclosed.
The closer a relationship that a victim has with their offender, the less likely they are to disclose or report the sexual assault. A potential reason for not reporting a sexual assault could be related to a desire to avoid consequences that could result in endangering themselves (e.g., retaliation) or their loved ones (e.g., legal consequences).

Incident-based factors that increased the likelihood of reporting include physical force, injuries, presence of a weapon, and peritraumatic fear such as fear of injury or death during the assault (Fisher et al., 2003; Sabina & Ho, 2014). Victims who are violently assaulted and sustain injuries from the experience are more likely to report and disclose compared to those who did not experience violence as part of the assault.

The most consistently reported situational-based factors that influence reporting were the victim’s use of alcohol or drugs before the sexual assault and the location of the sexual assault (Sabina & Ho, 2014). The use of alcohol or drugs voluntarily by the victim prior to the assault decreases the likelihood of reporting and disclosing; however, if these substances were unknowingly given to the victim, the likelihood of reporting increases. If the sexual assault occurred during a home invasion, or if the victim was abducted, the possibility of reporting is greater.

A victim’s disclosure of their sexual assault can influence their recovery process and psychological well-being (Kearns, Edwards, Calhoun, & Gidycz, 2010). Informal disclosures can help the victim make sense of the experience, such as aid in understanding that the assault was not their fault and that the assault was illegal. Positive responses to the disclosure can alleviate some of the negative effects of sexual assault. Fear of negative reactions from others has been cited as the main reason for not disclosing or delaying the disclosure (Zinzow & Thompson, 2011).
Reactions to Reporting and Disclosure

The reactions from others that occur when one discloses a sexual assault can influence future disclosures and can cause victims to reassess their experience or beliefs. For example, the reactions of others can cause victims to reevaluate their beliefs about whether the event constituted a sexual assault. The likelihood of reassessment depends in part on whether others confirm or discount victims’ perceptions of the experience (Ahrens et al., 2007). Researchers have suggested that around 80% to 98% of victims who have disclosed receive at least one negative reaction and 74% to 97% receive at least one positive reaction and are likely to experience both (Ahrens & Aldana, 2012).

According to Ahrens (2006), negative reactions from friends and/or family are associated with reinforced self-blame, uncertainty about whether the experience qualified as rape, and the silencing of future disclosures. Negative reactions to sexual assault disclosure, such as victim-blaming or discounting the experience, making the disclosure about themselves instead of the victim (i.e., focal shift), and trying to control the victim’s actions (i.e., pushing the victim into reporting the assault to the authorities or disclosing to others despite the resistance of the victim to do so), can hinder the recovery process (Ahrens, 2006; Ahrens et al., 2007; Ullman & Peter-Hegene, 2014). Controlling and blaming reactions have been associated with negative psychological outcomes, increased depression and anxiety, and lower self-esteem (Orchowski et al., 2013). Other negative reactions include distracting (e.g., trying to get the victim to avoid thinking about the experience), treating the victim differently (e.g., acting like there is something wrong with the victim), and unsupportive acknowledgment (e.g., well-intended responses) (Orchowski et al., 2013). These negative reactions can reinforce self-blame and belief in
rape myth, increasing negative cognitions. Furthermore, negative reactions can cause the
victim to doubt themselves and hinder their recovery by experiencing a lack of control
(Ullman & Peter-Hagene, 2014).

Jacques-Tiura et al. (2010) suggested that many disclosures result in positive and
supportive reactions. These positive reactions include providing tangible support (e.g.,
providing resources, information, assistance) and emotional support (e.g., telling the
victim it was not their fault, believing their story, listening; Sigurvinsdottir & Ullman,
2015). Littleton and Grills-Taquechel (2011), suggested that having more positive
reactions from multiple informal sources could buffer negative reactions. Typically,
victims who receive positive reactions have better health physical and mental health
outcomes, as well as increasing feelings of self-efficacy (Peter-Hagene & Ullman, 2014).
Rather than assessing each positive reaction by itself, typically, positive reactions are
regarded as an aggregate of all positive reactions. Positive social reactions can reduce
posttraumatic cognitions and PTSD symptoms (Littleton & Breitkopf, 2006) while also
facilitate a more adaptive recovery (Ingram et al., 2001). Furthermore, positive social
reactions and support can aid in negating undesirable cognitions and self-blame.

Those providing social support to a sexual assault victim can be both helpful and
hurtful, even if their responses are well-intended (Ingram et al., 2001). Stigmatizing,
victim-blaming and unsupportive responses to sexual assault disclosure can be
destructive to the recovery process and possibly increase the stress that directly stems
from sexual assault (Ullman, 2003). Negative social reactions have been connected to
several negative outcomes such as more PTSD symptoms (Ullman, 2010), depression
(Ahrens et al., 2010), more drinking problems (Ullman et al., 2008), and more physical
health problems (Ahrens et al., 2010). Negative social reactions could affirm self-blame and negative cognitions that the sexual assault victim experiences.

Social reactions to sexual assault disclosure can influence how a victim assesses the cause of sexual assault. Researchers have identified a positive connection between negative social reactions and increased self-blame (Littleton & Breitkopf, 2006; Ullman & Najdowski, 2011). Additionally, Ahrens (2006) suggested that these negative social reactions to sexual assault disclosures can cause the victim to feel responsible for the assault, especially negative reactions such as victim-blaming and discounting the experience (Ahrens, 2006). These negative reactions can both elicit and reinforce self-blame related to sexual assault (Ullman & Najdowski, 2011). For example, the experience of sexual assault can be a traumatic event, to make sense of the experience, the victim would turn to someone they trusted for their help and support. When a victim experiences a negative social reaction from someone they trusted for support or help, this can lead them to question the cause of the assault and their role in it.

**Causal Blame Attributions**

The meaning-making process of explaining the causes of a sexual assault after it occurs, i.e., making causal attributions, can affect mental health outcomes. Causal attributions for traumatic, ambiguous, or negative events such as sexual assault are part of a meaning-making process and a way to gain a sense of control. Self-blame refers to a sexual assault victim’s appraisal of causality, in which she holds herself responsible for the assault. More specifically, self-blame associated with an unwanted sexual experience has previously been linked to the internalization of feelings of responsibility for the experience happening, especially in circumstances they thought they could have
prevented (Sigurvinsdottir & Ullman, 2015). Ullman (2006) speculated that self-blame following an unwanted sexual experience is higher than in other traumatic experiences. This result could be due to societal expectations of women being able to prevent unwanted sexual experiences and that others tend to disbelieve women that report sexual assaults more than other crimes.

**Self-Blame**

The two most common types of self-blame that have been studied concerning psychological adjustment following sexual victimization are behavioral self-blame and character self-blame (Breitenbecher, 2006; Frazier, 2003; Janoff-Bulman, 1979). Characterological self-blame as a victim-blaming themselves for a traumatic event, sexual assault, because they perceive that their personality or character is flawed (Breitenbecher, 2006; Janoff-Bulman, 1979). For example, a victim may blame themselves for a sexual assault because they believe that they are promiscuous or naïve. Behavioral self-blame occurs when the victim believes that they were sexually assaulted because of their actions or behaviors (Breitenbecher, 2006; Janoff-Bulman, 1979). For example, a victim might believe the sexual assault occurred because they drank alcohol or flirted with the perpetrator early in the evening.

Character self-blame typically has a negative association with psychological well-being outcomes, including self-esteem, life satisfaction, distress, depression, anxiety, and PTSD (Koss, Figueredo, & Prince, 2002; Littleton et al., 2007; Sigurvinsdottir & Ullman, 2015; Ullman, Townsend, Filipas, & Starzynski, 2007). Littleton et al. (2007) indicated that more significant negative effects of character self-blame could be associated with the personal nature of character, while behavioral self-blame can be focused on an action.
While character self-blame has a harsher impact on a victim’s well-being, Littleton et al. (2007) suggested that behavioral self-blame is more common among sexual assault victims. Actions are presumably easier to change than an individual’s character, providing some sense of control, which might make it easier for victims to blame their behavior. This perception of control and avoidability that is afforded by behavioral self-blame has been connected to fewer symptoms of PTSD, depression, and anxiety (Breitenbecher, 2006; Frazier, Berman, & Steward, 2001).

Rape myths provide false and narrow definitions of what constitutes as rape. These rape myths provide the victim with a lens to interpret their sexual assault experience. Some rape myths support victim-blaming, and others excuse the behavior of the perpetrator. All rape myths can influence whether a victim will blame themselves, especially when their experience does not match the narrow definition or closely matches specific rape myths. Rape myths support both characterological and behavioral self-blame. For example, the rape myth “If a girl doesn’t physically fight back, you can’t really say it was rape” indicates that her behavior or lack of action is to blame for the sexual assault. Self-blame shifts the culpability to the victim and relieves the perpetrator of any wrongdoing by justifying the perpetrator’s behavior or flat out, blaming the behavior or personality of the victim. Rape myths take into account very specific details about the experience and determine whether a sexual assault occurred. Many times, these assault characteristics can influence self-blame.

Acknowledged victims of sexual assault are less likely to blame themselves or believe that they were responsible for the assault (Peterson & Muehlenhard, 2011). Acknowledged victims may place more blame on the perpetrator rather than themselves.
Unacknowledged victims could make attributions to the assault that do not fit their schema of rape. In this case, drawing from their schema could dictate the causal attributions that are made. For example, if the victim blames herself for the sexual assault for not being assertive enough, they could also make the attribution that this was something they could control in the future (by changing their behavior), essentially behavioral self-blame. On the other hand, the victim could attribute the experience to their character, being a timid person, which is a stable characteristic that is uncontrollable, essentially leading to characterological self-blame. Behavioral self-blame protects mental health compared to character self-blame, which can have negative effects on mental health.

Self-blame, specifically behavioral self-blame, can hinder the likelihood that a sexual assault victim would choose to disclose or report their experience (Starzynski, Ullman, Filipas, & Townsend, 2005). If the woman believes that her actions were somewhat responsible for the assault, she might not feel compelled to discuss the event with others, possibly reframing the assault as a misunderstanding. Another reason why victims who engage in self-blame might not want to disclose is fear of others’ reactions, specifically negative reactions. Both social reactions and self-blame are associated with the psychological well-being of sexual assault victims (Borja, Callahan, & Long, 2006; Frazier, 2003; Ullman & Filipas, 2001). Positive reactions to sexual assault disclosure have been found to reduce overall self-blame (Sigurvinsson & Ullman, 2015; Ullman & Najdowski, 2011). In particular, characterological self-blame decreases when informal support sources provided emotional support following the sexual assault disclosure (Sigurvinsson & Ullman, 2015). Whereas, negative social reactions following sexual
assault disclosure have been proposed to exacerbate a victim’s self-blame, especially when the negative feedback includes some form of victim-blaming (Ullman & Najdowski, 2011).

**Perpetrator Blame**

Several studies have examined the impact of character and behavioral self-blame on the victim’s psychological well-being. In contrast, few have explored the relationship between causal attribution involving the perpetrator and the victim’s psychological well-being. Typically, research that has examined perpetrator blame include vignettes or hypothetical situations assessed by the broader population, rather than assessing victim’s experiences (Bell, Kuriloff, & Lottes, 1994; Viki, Abrams, & Masser, 2004). Blaming the perpetrator could protect a victim’s psychological well-being, in that she would be less likely to blame herself (Peterson, Buchanan, & Seligman, 1995). However, if the victim feels as if she had no control over the situation or if the abuse is on-going, she could experience hopelessness and dysphoria (Clements & Sawhney, 2000). In general, people are more likely to blame the perpetrator rather than the victim when the experience fits with a rape script (Peterson & Muehlenhard, 2004). For example, if a woman was sexually assaulted by a stranger who used physical force, then the blame would likely fall to the perpetrator.

**Psychological Well-Being**

In a meta-analysis of sexual assault and psychopathology, Dworkin, Menon, Bystrynski, and Allen (2017) indicated that there are significant positive associations between sexual assault and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, and anxiety. Much of the research on mental health and sexual assault focuses on PTSD and
post-traumatic symptoms as outcomes. While PTSD is an important psychological outcome, the amount of literature on that relationship is well documented; therefore, it is important to consider other psychological outcomes following a sexual assault.

Depression is another common mental health problem that has been identified following a sexual assault. In the review by Campbell et al. (2009), 31% - 51% of sexual assault victims exhibited symptoms of depression. Zinzow et al. (2010) found that depressive symptomatology was present for those who had experienced a forcible sexual assault, but not for those who experienced alcohol or drug-related sexual assault. There is also a positive relationship between anxiety and sexual assault. Campbell et al. (2009) indicated that 73% - 82% develop fear/anxiety, while 12% to 40% develop generalized anxiety.

Comorbidity among the various mental health disorders following a sexual assault is not uncommon. Ullman, Townsend, Filipas, and Starzynski (2007) found that personal factors, assault characteristics, and post-assault factors increased the likelihood of PTSD and alcohol abuse. Whereas, Nickerson et al. (2013) found that in the initial four months following a sexual assault, changes in depression and anxiety symptoms were fully accounted for by changes in PTSD symptoms. Additionally, Nickerson et al. (2013) suggested that depression, anxiety, and PTSD are distinct, rather than comorbid, since there was variability in change over time for each separate symptom type. Based on the numerous studies that focus on PTSD and fewer with depression and anxiety disorders, it seems the literature describes PTSD as a primary outcome, and depression and anxiety disorders could be considered secondary outcomes. However, many of the symptoms for PTSD, depression, and anxiety overlap, indicating that the symptoms measured for PTSD
disguise depression and anxiety. In this sense, these mental health issues would coincide. It is also possible that experiencing PTSD could also precede or follow depression or anxiety. Further research would help explain the pattern of comorbidity following sexual assault.

Comparisons between those who have and have not experienced sexual assault indicate that those who have experienced sexual assault have more negative mental health issues. Arata (1999) found that women who had experienced sexual assault were more likely to experience PTSD than women who had not. Zinzow et al. (2010) found that victims of forced sexual assault were over three times more likely to develop PTSD and major depressive disorder than nonvictims. Similarly, their study revealed that drug or alcohol-induced sexual assault victims were twice as likely compared to nonvictims to develop PTSD. Furthermore, research has shown that compared to other traumas, sexual assault victims have more symptoms of PTSD. Kelley et al. (2009) found that victims of sexual assault were more at risk for PTSD. They also have higher symptom severity on all three clusters of PTSD symptoms (reexperiencing, avoidance/numbing, and arousal) compared to both victims of motor vehicle accidents and those who experienced a sudden or unexpected death of a loved one.

**Conceptual Model and Hypotheses**

The conceptual model guiding Study 1 is presented in Figure 1. Figure 1 depicts the broad constructs in the model. Study 1 predicted a victim’s causal attributions of sexual assault as a function of the assault characteristics, her rape myth beliefs, and the reactions from others she received to her disclosure of the sexual assault. Causal attributions, in turn, predicted psychological well-being, and attributions were tested as
mediators of the associations between its predictors (assault characteristics, rape myth, and disclosure reactions) and well-being.

Additionally, the direct effect between sexual assault disclosure reactions and psychological well-being was assessed (see Figure 1). Last, whether or not a woman acknowledged being raped was explored in terms of its possible associations with sexual assault characteristics, rape myth, disclosure, attributions, and well-being.

**Hypotheses for Study 1**

*Sexual Assault Characteristics → Causal Attributions*

Two major assault characteristics, who the perpetrator was, and the tactics used during the assault, have been associated with sexual assault causal attributions made by the victim. More specifically, women who were sexually assaulted by their romantic partners have been less likely to blame their partners and more likely to blame themselves. In contrast with women who were assaulted by others, such as strangers, this is in keeping with the myth that romantic partners cannot be held responsible for rape (Harned, 2005).

Additionally, the type of tactic used during the sexual assault has also been related to causal attributions. Sexual assaults that include physical force tend to be associated with less self-blame and more perpetrator blame (Brown et al., 2009). Whereas, sexual assaults that involve coercion, but not outright force are more often associated with self-blame. Sexual assaults that involve taking advantage of a woman who is incapacitated may predict increased self-blame to the extent that a woman holds herself responsible for being incapacitated in the first place (Brown et al., 2009; Littleton et al., 2009).

*Hypothesis 1-3*: Women who report being sexually assaulted by a romantic
partner vs. any other relationship are: 1) more likely to blame their behavior, 2) more likely to blame their character, and 3) less likely to blame the perpetrator.

_Hypotheses 4-6_: women who reported being sexually assaulted via physical force are: 4) less likely to blame their behavior, 5) less likely to blame their character, and 6) more likely to blame the perpetrator.

_Hypotheses 7-9_: women who reported being sexually assaulted via coercion are: 7) more likely to blame their behavior, 8) more likely to blame their character, and 9) less likely to blame the perpetrator.

_Hypotheses 10-11_: 10) women who reported being sexually assaulted via incapacitation are more likely to blame their behavior, 11) women who reported being sexually assaulted via incapacitation are more likely to blame the perpetrator.

_Rape Myth → Causal Attributions_

Rape myths shift the culpability to the victim and relieve the perpetrator of any wrongdoing by justifying the perpetrator’s behavior or blaming the behavior or personality of the victim (Ryan, 2011). These myths provide a lens for the victim to interpret their experience and may lead women who endorse them to blame themselves rather than the perpetrator for the assault.

_Hypotheses 12-14_: women endorse rape myths are 12) more likely to blame their character, 13) more likely to blame their behavior, and 14) less likely to blame the perpetrator.

_Disclosure Reactions → Causal Attributions_

Negative reactions from those to whom the victim can reinforce or prompt beliefs of self-blame or responsibility for the sexual assault (Ullman & Peter-Hagene, 2014).
Whereas, positive reactions can cancel out self-blame cognitions and potentially shift the focus to the perpetrator (Sigurvinsdottir & Ullman, 2015). Therefore, it is important to address social reactions to sexual assault disclosure when assessing causal attributions.

*Hypotheses 15-17:* women who disclose and receive positive reactions are: 15) less likely to blame their character, 16) less likely to blame their behavior, and 17) more likely to blame the perpetrator.

**Disclosure Reactions → Psychological Well-being**

In addition to social reactions to sexual assault disclosure affecting causal attributions, it is also necessary to examine the direct connection to a victim’s psychological well-being. Negative social reactions to sexual assault disclosure can impede the victim’s recovery, negatively affecting their psychological well-being (Ahrens, 2006; Ahrens et al., 2007; Ullman & Peter-Hegene, 2014). Negative reactions, such as controlling the victim or blaming the victim, can lead to lower self-esteem and higher anxiety and depression (Orchowski et al., 2013).

*Hypothesis 18:* Positive reactions to sexual assault disclosure are positively related to psychological well-being (e.g., higher self-esteem, lower rates of general distress, depression, and anxiety).

**Causal Attributions → Psychological Well-being**

Character self-blame is more likely than behavioral self-blame to have negative associations with psychological well-being outcomes, including self-esteem, life satisfaction, distress, depression, anxiety, and PTSD (Koss et al., 2002; Littleton et al., 2007; Sigurvinsdottir & Ullman, 2015; Ullman et al., 2007). Littleton et al. (2007) indicated that greater negative effects of character self-blame could be associated with the
personal nature of character, while behavioral self-blame focuses on a changeable behavior.

_Hypothesis 19:_ Behavior self-blame will be negatively related to emotional well-being (e.g., lower self-esteem, higher rates of general distress, depression, and anxiety).

_Hypothesis 20:_ Character self-blame will be negatively related to emotional well-being (e.g., lower self-esteem, higher rates of general distress, depression, and anxiety).

_Disclosure Reactions → Causal Attributions → Psychological Well-Being_

Both characterological self-blame and negative social reactions have been directly related to negative psychological well-being outcomes (Ahrens et al., 2010; Koss et al., 2002; Littleton et al., 2007; Sigurvinisdottir & Ullman, 2015; Ullman, 2003; Ullman, 2010; Ullman et al., 2007). Additionally, for sexual assault victims, negative social reactions have been specifically linked to greater characterological self-blame (Ullman, 1996; Ullman et al., 2007). The victim’s causal attribution could partially explain the relationship between negative social reactions and poorer psychological well-being.

_Hypothesis 21:_ Positive informal social reactions to sexual assault disclosure are positively and indirectly related to emotional well-being via victim’s causal attributions (e.g., lower self-esteem, higher rates of general distress, depression, and anxiety).

**Research Questions for Study 2**

Given the high prevalence of sexual assault on college campuses, low rate of reporting to authorities, and the number of women who are victimized by romantic partners and other known assailants (e.g., friends and acquaintances), it is important to understand how disclosure influences the victim. The information gleaned from study one was used to inform questions about their experiences with disclosure and reporting. This
study examined the relationship between informal disclosure and how the disclosure
affected their perspective of the event. Additionally, this study provided insight into how
informal disclosure leads to or prevented formal reporting of sexual assault. The use of a
qualitative methodological approach focused on the meaning made from participants’
experiences and assists in interpreting situations, allowed for a complex assessment
providing contextual information that might not have been captured using quantitative
methods alone.

Research question 1: What are victims’ experiences with sexual assault
disclosure?

Research Question 2: How have the experiences of sexual assault disclosure
impacted victims’ perspective of the sexual assault?

Research question 3: What are the barriers to disclosing sexual assault?

Research Question 4: How did informal disclosures lead to or inhibit formally
reporting a sexual assault?

Research Question 5: What are the experiences of formally reporting a sexual
assault?
Chapter 3 - Methods

Research Design

A mixed-methods design was used to research the complex inter-relationships among social-psychological constructs and the lived experiences of sexual assault victims. The explanatory sequential mixed method design had two distinct stages (Creswell & Plano-Clark, 2018). The first stage of the study was quantitative, consisting of data collected through an online survey. The data was used to examine the direct and indirect relationships among the following constructs: sexual assault characteristics, rape myth acceptance, blame attributions, disclosure/reporting, and psychological well-being. The second stage of the study was qualitative and was collected through semi-structured in-depth interviews. The qualitative data provided context and perspective to patterns that arose in the quantitative data and focused on disclosing and reporting sexual assault experiences.

Study 1

Sampling

The sampling pool for an online survey included women currently enrolled, excluding freshman students, and who have agreed to make their contact information public (N = 10,104). First semester students were excluded because the focus of the study was experiencing sexual assault while in college and how disclosure and/or reporting affect mental health. Those who enrolled in the spring semester as their first semester of attending college would prohibit the measure of experiencing sexual assault while attending college. An initial screening question determined qualification for participation based on enrollment status.
Instruments

Sexual Experiences Survey - Short Form

Items assessed victimization of unwanted sexual experiences (Koss et al., 2007; see Appendix A). This scale was effective in identifying sexual assault by using behaviors that describe sexual assault rather than using the terms sexual assault or rape. This verbiage was necessary to identify those who have been assaulted who do not identify their experience as sexual assault or rape. Women are more likely to report assaults when measures do not include labels such as “sexual assault” but rather use descriptions of behaviors (Fisher et al., 2000; Fisher, 2009).

Participants were asked to indicate the number of times four types of completed sexual experiences occurred (i.e., groping, oral sex, vaginal penetration, anal penetration) as well as the tactic used (i.e., coercion, physical force, alcohol/drugs). For example, “Someone had oral sex with me or made me have oral sex with them without my consent by telling lies, threatening to end the relationship, threatening to spread rumors about me, making promises I knew were untrue, or continually verbally pressuring me after I said I didn’t want to.” The original scale assessed two time periods, since the age of 14 and in the last 12 months. For the current study, the time period was defined as “since you enrolled in college.”

Details of Specific Event

Respondents answered detailed questions about their experiences. If participants had experienced more than one sexual assault, they were asked to report on the one that they remember best. Detailed questions included when the assault occurred, their relationship to the perpetrator (stranger, romantic partner, non-romantic acquaintance,
casual or first date, or relative that is not a not romantic partner), and whether they perceived their life was in danger. Respondents indicated whether they would describe their unwanted experience as rape or sexual assault.

Respondents who identified as having experienced a sexual assault on the SES-SF were asked if they ever told anyone about their experiences (see Appendix B). Those who answered yes were asked to identify their relationship with the first person whom they disclosed and the duration of time between the event and the disclosure. Respondents were also asked if they reported the unwanted sexual experience to any authority, including counselors, Title IX, victim’s advocate, student health center, campus police, other police, or a professor. The respondents were asked about the duration of time between the event and their reporting of the assault. For each reported instance of disclosure or reporting, participants were asked if they found it helpful on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (not helpful at all) to 5 (extremely helpful).

Updated Illinois Rape Myth Acceptance Scale

The Illinois Rape Myth Acceptance Scale has been considered one of the most reliable scales measuring rape myth acceptance (IRMA; Payne et al., 1999). Updated Illinois Rape Myth Acceptance Scale (U-IRMA; McMahon & Farmer, 2011, see Appendix C) is a modified version of the IRMA that is shorter and slightly modernized. U-IRMA includes 22 items and four sub-scales, compared to the 45 items and seven subscales found in the IRMA. The updated version utilized language used by college students while also assessing subtler rape myths. Items were measured on a scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strongly agree). Subscales included “she asked for it” (6 items), “he didn’t mean to” (6 items), “it wasn’t really rape” (5 items), and “she lied” (5...
items). Examples items included, “Rape accusations are often used as a way of getting back at guys,” “If a girl acts like a slut, eventually she is going to get in trouble,” and “A rape probably didn’t happen if a girl doesn’t have any bruises or scraps.” Scores were totaled then averaged for the entire scale and subscales. McMahon and Farmer (2011) reported reliability of the updated scale as $\alpha = .87$.

**Sexual Victimization Attributions Measure**

Several items measured the constructs of behavioral self-blame, character self-blame, and perpetrator blame (Breitenbecher, 2006; see Appendix D). The SVAM includes statements that a sexual assault victim might believe caused her unwanted experience. Participants were asked to indicate their perception of how much each item explained why they were assaulted on a Likert scale from 1 (completely true) to 6 (completely untrue). Scores were reversed coded so that higher scores indicated stronger attributions of blame. Participants who experienced more than one sexual assault, as identified on the SES, were asked to consider their most memorable experience. Eleven items measured character self-blame; items include “I am naïve,” “I am a bad person,” and “I can’t take care of myself.” Behavioral self-blame was measured by nine items, including “I didn’t scream,” “I made out with him,” and “I flirted with and/or teased him.” Perpetrator blame was measured by 12 items, including “He is manipulative,” “He didn’t listen to me,” and “He has a strong sex drive.”

Jones and Elliot (2018) identified limitations of the subscales of the SVAM; the perpetrator blame subscale does not distinguish between known and unknown perpetrators. Additionally, the overlap between character and behavioral self-blame was identified, indicating that the two constructs are not mutually exclusive (Jones & Elliot,
Since this study does not exclusively focus on acquaintance sexual assault, items were created to measure the blame of both known and unknown assailants.

**Social Reactions Questionnaire**

The SQR scale measured the victim’s perception of how others’ reactions to the disclosure of sexual assault using 44-items (Ullman, 2000, see Appendix E). Social reactions were assessed using both positive and negative reactions measured on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 0 (never) to 4 (always). Furthermore, the SRQ measured the rate of receiving positive and negative reactions following the disclosure of sexual assault. Positive reaction items included “reassured you that you are a good person” and “provided information and discussed options.” Negative social reactions items included “treated you differently in some way than before you told them that made you uncomfortable” and “told you to stop thinking about it.” Negative items were reverse coded so that higher values of social reaction would indicate more positive reactions.

**Psychological Well-Being.** Psychological well-being was assessed using five scales measuring depression, anxiety, self-esteem, and distress.

**Symptoms Checklist-90 Revised**

Depression was assessed using the 13-item depression subscale of the Schwarzwald, Weisenberg, & Solomon, 1991; see Appendix F). SCL-90-RD measured the frequency of depression symptoms on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 0 (None of the time) to 4 (All of the time). Items included “feeling low in energy or slowed down,” “feeling blue,” feeling hopeless about the future.” Items responses were averaged; higher scores indicate more frequent symptoms of depression.
Symptoms Checklist-90 Revised

Anxiety was evaluated with the 10-item anxiety subscale of the SCL-90 (Schwarzwald et al., 1991; see Appendix G). The SCL-90-RA measured the frequency of anxiety symptoms using a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 0 (None of the time) to 4 (All of the time). Items included “suddenly scared for no reason,” “feeling something bad is going to happen,” and “heart pounding or racing.” Items responses were averaged; higher scores indicate more frequent symptoms of anxiety.

Rosenburg Self-Esteem Scale

Various items measure (Rosenburg, 1965; see Appendix I). The Rosenberg Self-Esteem uses ten positive and negative statements about the self on a 4-point Likert ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 4 (Strongly Agree), statements include “I feel I have a number of good qualities” and “I feel I do not have much to be proud of.” Negative statements are reversed scores so that greater scores indicated higher self-esteem.

Kessler Psychological Distress Scale

The Kessler Psychological Distress Scale screened for non-specific psychological distress using six items (Kessler et al., 2003; see Appendix J). Each item was measured on a 4-point Likert scale ranging from “None of the time” (0) to “All of the time” (5). The prompt asked participants to identify if experienced any of the items in the last 30 days, items included “…that everything was an effort?” and “restless or fidgety?” Items responses were averaged; higher scores indicate more psychological distress.

Demographic Information

Several questions were included in the survey to collect standard demographic
characteristics (see Appendix K). Participants provided information on their age, gender, sexual orientation, race/ethnicity, and student ranking. Demographic information was included as control variables in the final structural models.

**Procedure**

**Recruitment**

Following approval from the university’s Institutional Review Board, all female undergraduate and graduate students enrolled in the spring semester of 2019, excluding first-semester college students. The latter has agreed to make their contact information public were invited via email to participate in a study regarding unwanted sexual experiences (see Appendix L). The invitation indicated that those who completed the survey were allowed an opportunity to enter a lottery to win one of five $25 Amazon gift cards.

**Data Collection**

All participants in the study completed the survey online via email invitation. Respondents who opened the study were presented with an electronic consent form, which informed all participants the intentions of the study, their rights regarding participation, potential risks to themselves, and researcher contact information (see Appendix M). Screening questions were asked to determine whether or not they had an unwanted sexual experience using the Sexual Experiences Survey – Short Form to identify the type of sexual assault they experienced, if at all. Participants who identified more than one type of sexual assault were asked which of those that they identified was considered their most memorable; these participants were informed that this would be considered the focal assault for the remaining questions. Participants who identified an
experience of sexual assault were asked assault characteristic questions, including their relationship to the perpetrator, tactics used by the perpetrator, and if they considered the experience rape or sexual assault. Participants were asked to identify if they had disclosed or reported their experience, to whom they disclosed, and reasons for non-disclosure.

Participants then completed the blame attribution (SVAM) and the perceived disclosure reactions (SRQ-R) measures, followed by the psychological well-being measures of depression, anxiety, PTSD, distress, and self-esteem. Following all measures, participants were provided with information regarding interview recruitment. They were asked if they would like to be considered for a potential interview. Those who agreed were asked to enter an email address. Upon study completion, they were thanked and provided a link to enter their email into the lottery for one of the gift cards. Following survey data collection, five participants were randomly selected for the gifts cards and notified via the email they provided. Two hundred thirty-six participants were contacted and asked to complete the survey from those who completed the survey and identified that they would be willing to take part in an in-depth interview. Of those contacted, 23 participated in the interview.

**Data Analyses**

Data collected from the survey were prepared, and descriptive statistics were examined using SPSS. Structural equation modeling (SEM) was used to test the direct and indirect effects of the conceptual model (Figure 1). Maximum likelihood estimations for linear regression were estimated using Mplus Version 8 (Muthén & Muthén, 2017). Indices including comparative fit index (CFI), the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA), and the standardized root mean square residual (SRMR) were
examined to determine model fit (Hu & Bentler, 1999; Kline, 2018). The significance of \( \chi^2 \) was not interpreted since the values could be inflated due to a large sample size, which would impact the assessed model fit (Hu & Bentler, 1999; Kline, 2018; Muthén & Muthén, 2017).

**Confirmatory Factor Analyses**

Quantitative analyses occurred in two steps. The first step examined confirmatory factor analyses (CFA) to assess the fit of each latent construct or measurement model, followed by the fit of one model with all latent constructs. Significant correlated residuals between pairs of indicators in a given CFA model were included when the residuals are significantly correlated, and the two indicators were substantively distinct from other indicators of the latent construct.

**Structural Model**

The structural model integrated each CFA from the first step. The structural model included direct pathways between latent variables (see Figure 1). Each direct pathway was considered a regression model. For example, sexual assault characteristics, rape myth beliefs, and disclosure reaction were regressed onto the victim’s attributions. Furthermore, the study tested a mediation model in which the relationship between disclosure reaction and emotional well-being was mediated by the victim’s attributions of the sexual assault. Specifically testing Hypothesis 21: Positive reactions to sexual assault disclosure would be positively and indirectly related to emotional well-being via victim’s attributions of character and behavioral self-blame (e.g., higher self-esteem, higher rates of general distress, depression, and anxiety). The variance in the total effect explained by the indirect pathways was calculated by dividing the indirect effect by the sum of the
absolute values of the indirect and direct effects (MacKinnon, Fairchild, & Fritz, 2007).
Chapter 4 - Study 1 Descriptive Results

Sample

The sampling pool for an online survey included women currently enrolled as graduate and undergraduate, excluding those who started in the spring semester, students, and who had agreed to make their contact information public (N = 10,104). First semester students were excluded because the focus of the study was experiencing sexual assault while in college and how disclosure and/or reporting affect mental health. Those who enrolled in the spring semester as their first semester of attending college would prohibit the measure of experiencing sexual assault while attending college. An initial screening question determined qualification for participation based on enrollment status. The 10,104 female students were contacted to participate in a survey regarding sexual experiences during college. Of those who were contacted, 1,917 consented to participate in the study. Eighty-four percent (1,614) of those who agreed to participate finished the survey. Approximately one-quarter of those who completed the survey (24.7%) reported an unwanted sexual experience while enrolled in college, and these 400 women are the focus of the dissertation.

Demographic Information

Descriptive statistics were used to obtain a description of the sample (n = 400). The average age was 21.63 (SD = 4.44, Median = 21.00) and ranged from 18 to 73. Participants were predominately white (66.5%, see Table 4.1) and heterosexual (74.3%). The majority of respondents were undergraduate students (82.8%). See Table 4.2 for a description of sexual assault characteristics. Forty percent of the sample experienced more than one sexual assault (n = 160). Of those who had multiple sexual assault
experiences, 56.9% experienced some form of penetration. Those who reported only one sexual assault occurrence were more likely to experience non-penetration only (60.8%). Forty-three percent had experienced some type of an unwanted sexual experience before college.

In reference to the focal unwanted sexual experience (i.e., their only experience or the experience that had the greatest impact on their life). Sixty-eight percent labeled their experience as sexual assault, while 27.5% labeled their experience as rape. Twenty-five percent reported that violence or the threat of violence was used during their assault. Twenty-one percent identified that they were coerced into the unwanted sexual experience. Forty-four percent indicated that the unwanted sexual experience occurred while they were intoxicated. Twenty-seven percent did not identify a tactic used during their sexual assault. Fifty-seven percent indicated that experienced only one type of tactic during their sexual assault, 13% indicated they experienced two different types of tactics during their sexual assault, and 3% indicated that experience all three types of tactics during their assault (e.g., physical force, coercion, and intoxication). Twenty-five identified that force and intoxication were both tactics used during their sexual assault. Fourteen percent indicated that they had been assaulted by their partner. Of those who were sexually assaulted by their partner, 42% were assaulted by force, 30% were coerced, and 23% were intoxicated. While those who were sexually assaulted by someone they did not know (e.g., stranger, someone they just met, or acquaintance), 22% were assaulted by force, 14% were coerced, and 48% were intoxicated.
Measurement Models

Confirmatory factor analyses (CFA) were conducted to examine the overall model fit of each latent variable as well as their respective loadings (EFA does not provide information about individual latent variable fit). Hu and Bentler (1999) provide guidelines for model fit, suggesting that for continuous data, the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) should be less than .08. The non-normed fit index (TLI) and comparative fit index (CFI) should be equal to or greater than .90. The standard root mean square (SRMR) should be less than .05. If the majority of indexes indicated an acceptable fit, then the model was considered to be an acceptable fit.

First, measurement model analyses were conducted for each latent variable to examine the fit of each CFA. Modification indexes were checked to determine if there were significant correlated residuals that were substantively meaningful and distinct from the latent construct. I reran the measurement model after accounting for each significant and substantive correlation to reassess the acceptableness of fit. This allowed me to seek a balance between parsimony and optimizing model fit. Next, I combined CFA models with categories of measures, such as combining the three attribution models into one CFA model, and the four well-being CFA models into one larger model. During this phase, I examined significant correlated residuals for items loading on two factors (e.g., items for behavior and character blame) and eliminated items as necessary to ensure that each factor was distinct. The procedure for determining model fit remained the same, including the examination of modification indexes. Last, all CFA models were estimated simultaneously to examine the model fit and modification indices.
Confirmatory Factor Analyses for Rape Myth Subscales, First Order.

See Table 4.3 for the standardized factors loading for rape myth subscales. “she asked for it,” “it wasn’t really rape,” “she lied,” and “he didn’t mean to.”

Rape myth 1. The rape myth that women lie about being raped, i.e., she lied, fit the observed data structure well: CFI = .99; RMSEA = .05 (90% CI [.00, .10]); SRMR = .03 after adding the correlated residual between the following two items. “A lot of times, girls who say they were raped agreed to have sex and then regretted it” with “A lot of times, girls who say they were raped often led the guy on and then had regrets.” The two corresponding items of these residual terms assessed aspects of initial consent in sexual behavior followed by regret. Standardized factor loadings ranged between .54 and .78 (p < .001).

Rape myth 2. The rape myth that women wanted to have sex, i.e., she asked for it, factor fit the observed data structure well: CFI = .98; RMSEA = .04 (90% CI [.00, .07]); SRMR = .03. I did not allow any residual terms to correlate among the openness items. Standardized factor loadings ranged between .53 and .77 (p < .001).

Rape myth 3. The rape myth that the perpetrator did not intend to commit rape, i.e., he didn’t mean to, fit the observed data structure well: CFI = .95; RMSEA = .08 (90% CI [.05, .11]); SRMR = .04 after adding the correlated residual between the following pair of two items: (1) “When guys rape, it is usually because of their strong desire for sex” with “Rape happens when a guy’s sex drive goes out of control,” and (2) “It shouldn’t be considered rape if a guy is drunk and didn’t realize what he was doing” with “If both people are drunk, it can’t be rape.” One pair of the corresponding items of these residual terms assessed aspects of men’s uncontrollable sex drive. The second pair
of the corresponding items of these residual terms assessed aspects of drinking alcohol and sexual behavior. Standardized factor loadings ranged between .32 and .69 ($p < .001$).

Rape myth 4. The rape myth that what a victim describes as rape was something else, i.e., *it wasn’t really rape*, fit the observed data structure well: CFI = .99; RMSEA = .02 (90% CI [.00, .08]); SRMR = .02 after adding the correlated residual between the following two items: “If a girl doesn’t physically fight back, you can’t really say it was rape” with “A rape probably doesn’t happen if a girl doesn’t have any bruises or marks.” The two corresponding items of these residual terms assessed aspects of physically fight back against the perpetrator. Standardized factor loadings ranged between .31 and .69 ($p < .001$).

**Confirmatory Factor Analyses for Rape Myth Factor, Second Order**

A second-order latent variable measuring rape myth was constructed from the four subscales (e.g., “*she lied,*” “*she asked for it,*” “*he didn’t mean to,*” with “*it wasn’t really rape.*” The second-order latent factor rape myth had an adequate model fit, CFI = .88; RMSEA = .05 (90% CI [.04, .06]; SRMR = .06 after adding five sets of correlated residuals, as previously noted in the rape myth subscale CFAs. No additional correlated residuals were added to this measurement model. See Table 4.4 for the standardized factor loadings for rape myth. Standardized coefficients ranged from .13 to .77.

**Confirmatory Factor Analysis for Informal Social Reactions**

See Table 4.5 for the standardized factor loadings for social reactions for informal disclosures. I allowed for positive and negative factors to load onto one latent factor.

Social reactions fit the observed data structure well: CFI = .94; RMSEA = .11 (90% CI [.10, .12]); SRMR = .05 after adding the 5 pairs of correlated residuals. The first
pair of correlated residuals was between “Helped you get information of any kind about coping with the experience” with “Provided information and discussed options.” Both items assessed aspects of tangible help as a response to their sexual assault. The second pair of correlated residuals was between “Was able to really accept your account of your experience” with “Listened to your feelings.” Both items assessed that the victim felt heard without questioning. The third pair of correlated residuals “Showed understanding of your experiences” with “Seemed to understand how you were feeling” both assessed aspects of understanding the victim’s perspective. The fourth pair of correlated residuals, “Told you it was not your fault” with “Reassured you that you are an acceptable person,” both assessed the reiteration that the victim was not to blame. Lastly, the fifth pair of correlated residuals “Told you that you could have done more to prevent this experience” with “Told you that you were irresponsible or not cautious enough,” both assessed victim-blaming as a response to the disclosure. Standardized factor loadings ranged between .60 and .97 ($p < .001$).

**Confirmatory Factor Analysis for Behavior, Character, and Perpetrator Blame as Separate Factors**

See Table 4.6 for the standardized factors loading for behavior blame, character blame, and perpetrator blame.

Behavior blame fit the observed data structure well: CFI = .94; RMSEA = .07 (90% CI [.05, .09]); SRMR = .04 after adding the correlated residual between the following three pairs of two items. “I made out with them” with “I flirted with and/or teased them,” “I went back to their apartment (house or room) or my apartment (house or room) with them” with “I made out with them,” with “I didn't scream” with “I didn’t run
away.” The first pair of two of the corresponding items of these residual terms assessed aspects of choosing to spend time with the perpetrator. The second pair of two of the corresponding items of these residual terms assessed aspects of initial consensual behavior. The third pair of two of the corresponding items of these residual terms assessed aspects of breaking free of the perpetrator. Standardized factor loadings ranged between .38 and .66 ($p < .001$).

Character blame fit the observed data structure well: CFI = .96; RMSEA = .08 (90% CI [.06, .10]); SRMR = .04 after adding the correlated residual between the following three pairs of two items: (1) “I am a bad person” with “I got what I deserved,” (2) “I am reckless” with “I have poor judgment,” and (3) “I am a poor judge of character” with “I have poor judgment.” The first pair of two of the corresponding items of these residual terms assessed aspects of believing that bad things happen to bad people. The second pair of two of the corresponding items of these residual terms assessed aspects of inability to make smart choices. The third pair of two of the corresponding items of these residual terms assessed aspects of poor judgment. Standardized factor loadings ranged between .62 and .83 ($p < .001$).

Perpetrator blame fit the observed data structure well: CFI = .96; RMSEA = .07 (90% CI [.05, .09]); SRMR = .03 after adding the correlated residual between the following two pairs of items. (1) “He or she is cruel or mean” with “He or she is a jerk,” and (2) “He or she is cruel or mean” with “He or she is a bad person.” All the corresponding items of these residual terms assessed aspects of the perpetrator’s character. Standardized factor loadings ranged between .53 and .80 ($p < .001$).
**Confirmatory Factor Analysis for Behavior, Character, and Perpetrator Blame in One Measurement Model**

Items assessing blame attribution and their respective standardized factor loadings are presented in Table 4.7. Three constructs were expected to assess blame attribution, including behavior blame, character blame, and perpetrator blame.

The factors of blame attribution were significantly positively associated with each other (r’s ranging between .28 and .71). These factors were combined to examine fit and correlated residuals. For each examination of correlated residuals between models in the original models to ensure that the changes did not interfere with the original models’ fit. Blame attributions fit the observed data structure adequately: CFI = .91; RMSEA = .06 (90% CI [.05, .06]); SRMR = .07. After examining correlated residuals, one item from the behavior blame factor, two items from character blame, and three items from perpetrator blame were dropped. “I didn't communicate clearly enough with them” was dropped from the behavior blame scale because it was highly correlated with perpetrator blame. “I am unassertive” and “I made a rash decision” from the character blame scale because they were highly correlated with behavior blame. “He or she is domineering,” “They isolated me from other people,” and “He or she has a strong sex drove” were removed from the perpetrator blame scale because they were highly correlated with both the behavior and character blame scales.

**Confirmatory Factor Analyses for Self-Esteem, Distress, Depression, and Anxiety**

See Table 4.8 for the standardized factors loading for self-esteem, distress, depression, and anxiety.
Self-esteem fit the observed data structure well: CFI = .96; RMSEA = .07 (90% CI [.06, .09]); SRMR = .04 after adding the correlated residual between the following two items: “At times I think I am no acceptable at all” with “I certainly feel useless at times (reversed).” The two corresponding items of these residual terms assessed aspects of self-worthlessness based on occasion (compared to general feelings of esteem and worth). I allowed these two residuals to correlate based on theoretical and empirical reasons. Standardized factor loadings ranged between .59 and .81 ($p < .001$).

Distress fit the observed data structure well: CFI = .99; RMSEA = .06 (90% CI [.03, .10]); SRMR = .03 after adding the correlated residual between the following two items. “nervous” with “restless or fidgety”. The two corresponding items of these residual terms assessed aspects of uneasiness. I allowed these two residuals to correlate based on theoretical and empirical reasons. Standardized factor loadings ranged between .53 and .82 ($p < .001$).

Depression fit the observed data structure well: CFI = .94; RMSEA = .08 (90% CI [.07, .09]); SRMR = .04 after adding the correlated residual between the following two pairs of items: (1) “Thought of ending your life” with “Feeling worthless,” with (2) “Blaming yourself for things” with “Feeling no interest in things.” The first two corresponding items of these residual terms assessed aspects of worthlessness. I allowed these two residuals to correlate based on theoretical and empirical reasons. Standardized factor loadings ranged between .40 and .85 ($p < .001$).

Anxiety fit the observed data structure well: CFI = .97; RMSEA = .07 (90% CI [.06, .09]); SRMR = .03 after adding the correlated residual between the following two items: “Feeling fearful” with “Suddenly scared for no reason.” The two corresponding
items of these residual terms assessed aspects of fearfulness. I allowed these two residuals to correlate based on theoretical and empirical reasons. Standardized factor loadings ranged between .65 and .85 ($p < .001$).

**Confirmatory Factor Analyses for Including All Measurement Models**

See Table 4.9 for the standardized factors loading for rape myth, social reactions, behavior blame, character blame, perpetrator blame, self-esteem, distress, depression, and anxiety. No changes to the combined CFA model based on modification indices. The combined CFA including all latent variables had acceptable model fit: RMSEA = .04, CFI = .88, and SRMR = .05.

Correlations between latent models are included in Table 4.10. Consistent with my hypotheses, positive social reactions were negatively related to both behavior and character blame. Similarly, as hypothesized, positive social reactions were positively related to self-esteem and negatively related to distress, depression, and anxiety. However, contrary to my hypothesis, positive social reactions were negatively related to perpetrator blame. Consistent with my hypotheses, both behavior blame and character blame had a negative relationship to psychological well-being (e.g., lower self-esteem, and higher rates of distress, depression, and anxiety). Descriptive statistics for all latent variables are included in Table 4.11.

**Correlations Between Latent Variables and Observed Variables**

Correlations between latent variables and observed variables are included in Table 4.12. Experiencing a sexual assault prior to college was positively associated with being assaulted by force as well as perpetrator blame and negatively associated with psychological well-being. Experiencing more than one sexual assault was positively
associated with being assaulted by one's partner, with the physical force and coercion tactics, and with all three blame attributions, and was negatively associated with psychological well-being. Labeling their experience as sexual assault was negatively associated with belief in rape myth as well as psychological well-being, and positively associated with being assaulted by force or while intoxicated, and all three blame attributions. Interestingly, labeling their experience as sexual assault had low correlations with all previously identified variables except perpetrator blame, which was moderate. Labeling their experience as rape was negatively associated with social reactions, and positively associated with being assaulted by their partner, all three types of tactics used during the assault, and all three blame attributions. In addition, it was negatively associated with psychological well-being.

Labeling their experience as sexual assault or rape had positive correlations with all three types of blame. It could be possible that once a label is attached to their experience, they may need to ascribe blame to justify the label. The surprising negative relationship between informal social reactions and labeling their experience as rape could indicate that others’ reactions to the disclosure could downplay the severity of the experience, in turn steering the woman away from labeling the experience as rape. Or women who label their experience as rape may be more likely to receive negative reactions from those whom they disclose to.

This chapter detailed the assessment of the measurement models for all latent constructs, as well as, identify relationships between latent and observed variables. The final measurement model, assessed by confirmatory factor analysis, which combined all latent constructs, was identified to fit the data well. Which indicated confidence in the
latent construct validation. Therefore, the following structural models for blame attributions, psychological well-being, and the mediated model were based on these confirmatory factor analyses. First, I assessed the direct effects of rape myth, informal social reactions, and assault characteristics (e.g., relationship to the perpetrator, tactics used during the assault, prior experience with sexual assault, and labeling their experience) on blame attributions.
Chapter 5 - Predicting Blame Attributions

A series of multiple regression analyses were conducted to examine the relationships between the three types of blame attribution (e.g., behavioral, character, and perpetrator) with potential predictors including rape myth, social reactions, type of perpetrator, type of tactic and assault characteristics (see Figure 1). Additionally, the regression models included the following control variables: age, graduate versus undergraduate status (coded 1 = graduate student, 0 = undergraduate student), white versus non-white ethnicities (coded 1 = white, 0 = non-white), and heterosexual versus non-heterosexual (coded 1 = heterosexual, 0 = non-heterosexual). To create a model including all predicting variables for blame attribution, five complete regression models, including rape myth, social reactions, partner as the perpetrator, type of tactic, assault characteristics along with control variables were tested.

Figure 1

Basic Mediating Model Predicting Well-Being
Rape Myth and Attributions of Blame

I began by examining the associations between rape myth subscales (e.g., she lied, she asked for it, he didn’t mean to, and it wasn’t really rape) and the three blame attributions sequentially, because they were too highly intercorrelated to be modeled simultaneously. Examining the subscales of rape myth allowed for the identification of patterns between the subscales and blame attributions that would be obscured by examining the second-order rape myth latent factor. Each regression of attributions on the rape myth subscales had an acceptable model fit. RMSEA (.04), which fell within the cutoff of < .08; however, CFI (.88) and SRMR (.06) did not meet the standard cutoffs of > .90 and < .05 respectfully. The rape myth subscale “she lied” was positively related to behavior blame \( (b = .15, \ SE = .06, p = .022) \), but not significantly related to character or perpetrator blame (see Table 5.1). The rape myth subscale “asked for it” was positively related to behavior blame \( (b = .16, \ SE = .06, p = .009) \) and character blame \( (b = .17, \ SE = .07, p = .012) \), but not to perpetrator blame (see Table 5.2). The rape myth subscale “he didn’t mean to” was positively related to behavior blame \( (b = .22, \ SE = .06, p < .001) \) and character blame \( (b = .16, \ SE = .06, p = .008) \), but not to perpetrator blame (see Table 5.3) Lastly, the rape myth subscale “it wasn’t really rape” was positively related to behavior blame \( (b = .18, \ SE = .06, p = .004) \) and character blame \( (b = .15, \ SE = .06, p = .019) \), but not to perpetrator blame (see Table 5.4)

I then examined the regressions of attributions on the second-order rape myth latent variable, created from four subscales, and the three blame attributions (see Table 5.5). The overall fit of the regression model, including control variables, was RMSEA (.04), which fell within the cutoff of < .08 indicating acceptable fit; however, CFI (.88)
and SRMR (.06) did not meet the standard cutoffs of > .90 and < .05 respectfully. In support for hypothesis 12 and 13, rape myth was positively associated with behavior blame ($b = .18$, SE = .06, $p = .005$) as well as character blame ($b = .16$, SE = .07, $p = .014$). Hypothesis 14 was not supported; rape myth was not significantly related to perpetrator blame.

Additionally, assessing control variables in the rape myth and attribution model indicated that whites ($b = -.12$, SE = .05, $p = .028$) and heterosexuals ($b = -.13$, SE = .05, $p = .014$) were less likely to engage in character blame and older women were more likely to engage in perpetrator blame ($b = .23$, SE = .06, $p < .001$).

**Social Reactions and Attributions of Blame**

I examined the relationship between social reactions and the three blame attributions (see Table 5.6). The overall fit of the regression model, including control variables, was RMSEA (.05) and CFI (.92), which fell within acceptable model cutoffs, <.08, and >.90 respectively; however, SRMR (.06) was slightly above the cutoff of .05. Supporting hypotheses 15 and 16, women who received more positive feedback when they disclosed their sexual assault were less likely to blame their behavior ($b = -.21$, SE = .06, $p < .001$) and their character ($b = -.20$, SE = .05, $p < .001$). However contradictory to hypothesis 17, women who received more positive reactions to their disclosure were also less likely to blame perpetrator ($b = -.17$, SE = .05, $p < .001$).

Additionally, assessing control variables in the social reactions and attribution model indicated that whites were less likely to engage in character blame ($b = -.11$, SE = .05, $p = .042$) and older women were more likely to engage in perpetrator blame ($b = .23$, SE = .06, $p < .001$).
**Relationship to Perpetrator and Attributions of Blame**

Next, I examined the effect of partner as a perpetrator, compared to all other perpetrator relationships, on behavior, character, and perpetrator blame (see Table 5.7). The overall fit of the model, including the perpetrator relationship and all control variables, indicated an acceptable fit, RMSEA (.06), and CFI (.90) both met the parameters indicating acceptable fit. However, SRMR (.06) was slightly above the .05 cutoff. Hypothesis 1 was supported in that those who were assaulted by their partner were more like to blame their behavior ($b = .36$, SE $= .15$, $p = .018$). Hypothesis 2 was not supported; partner as a perpetrator was not significantly related to character blame. Hypothesis 3 was supported; being assaulted by a partner was positively related to blaming the perpetrator ($b = .51$, SE $= .17$, $p = .002$).

Additionally, assessing control variables in the relationship with perpetrator and attribution model indicated that whites were less likely to engage in character blame ($b = -.21$, SE $= .10$, $p = .029$) and older women were more likely to engage in perpetrator blame ($b = .05$, SE $= .01$, $p < .001$).

**Tactics and Attributions of Blame**

Next, the effect of type of tactic used during the sexual assault (physical force, coercion, and intoxication) was regressed on behavior, character, and perpetrator blame (see Table 5.8). Each type of tactic was coded as 1 for experienced during the assault, and 0 for did not experience during assault. The overall fit of the model including all tactics used in sexual assault and control variables was adequate, RMSEA (.06) met the > .08 cutoff, while CFI (.89), and SRMR (.06) were slightly outside of the cutoff range, >.90 and <.05 respectively. Hypothesis 4 and 5 were not supported. Rather than the predicted
negative relationship between the use of physical force and self-blame, the use of physical force during the sexual assault was positively associated with behavior blame \((b = .23, SE = .05, p < .001)\) and with character blame \((b = .15, SE = .05, p = .005)\).

However, hypothesis 6 was supported, in that the use of physical violence was positively associated with perpetrator blame \((b = .45, SE = .05, p < .001)\).

Hypotheses 7 and 8 were also not supported; the use of coercion tactics was not significantly related to behavior blame nor character blame. Hypothesis 9 was supported; there was a positive relationship between the use of coercion and perpetrator blame \((b = .19, SE = .05, p < .001)\). Hypothesis 10 was supported, in that being incapacitated due to intoxication was positively related to behavior blame \((b = .26, SE = .06, p < .001)\).

Although I did not predict an association between intoxication and character blame, the positive relationship was significant \((b = .27, SE = .05, p < .001)\). Contrary to hypothesis 11, intoxication was not related to perpetrator blame.

Additionally, assessing control variables in the tactics and attribution model indicated that whites were less likely to engage in character blame \((b = -.11, SE = .05, p = .042)\) and older women were more likely to engage in behavior blame \((b = .10, SE = .05, p = .032)\) and perpetrator blame \((b = .22, SE = .06, p < .001)\).

**Sexual Assault Characteristics and Attributions of Blame**

Although there were no formal hypotheses regarding sexual assault characteristics (e.g., prior sexual assault experience, multiple experiences of sexual assault in college, and whether or not the sexual assault was considered a ‘rape’ or a ‘sexual assault’ by the victim), these aspects were analyzed as predictors of attributions because of their potential impact on event interpretation (see Table 5.9). The overall fit of the model,
including all sexual assault characteristics and control variables, was acceptable, RMSEA (.05), and CFI (.90) both met the parameters indicating acceptable fit. However, SRMR (.06) was slightly above the .05 cutoff. Being assaulted prior to college was positively associated with blaming the perpetrator ($b = .10$, SE = .05, $p = .025$). Furthermore, women who had experienced more than one sexual assault during their time in college were more likely to blame the perpetrator ($b = .16$, SE = .05, $p < .001$). Women who labeled their experience as rape were more likely to blame their behavior ($b = .25$, SE = .06, $p < .001$), their character ($b = .23$, SE = .06, $p < .001$), and the perpetrator ($b = .19$, SE = .05, $p < .001$). Similarly, women who labeled their experience as sexual assault were more likely to blame their behavior ($b = .15$, SE = .07, $p = .025$) and blame the perpetrator ($b = .29$, SE = .05, $p < .001$).

Additionally, assessing control variables in the sexual assault characteristics and attribution model indicated that whites were less likely to engage in character blame ($b = -.13$, SE = .05, $p = .014$) and older women were more likely to engage in perpetrator blame ($b = .16$, SE = .05, $p < .001$).

**Full Attribution Regression Model**

Last, I examined the full regression model predicting blame attributions that including rape myth, social reactions, type of perpetrator, tactics, and sexual assault characteristics (Table 5.10). The overall fit of the model, including all independent variables along with all control variables, was acceptable, RMSEA (.05) met the parameters indicating acceptable fit. However, CFI (.88) was slightly below the .90 cutoff, and SRMR (.06) was slightly above the .05 cutoff.
Rape myth was positively associated with both behavior ($b = .19$, SE = .06, $p = .001$) and character blame ($b = .15$, SE = .06, $p = .011$) see (Figure 2). These results are substantively the same as the previously reported in the rape myth regression model. This indicates that the more one adheres to or believes in rape myths, the greater is the likelihood of self-blame for a sexual assault.

Figure 2

Rape Myth Regressed onto Attributions of Blame

Social reactions were negatively related to behavior ($b = -.15$, SE = .05, $p = .007$), character ($b = -.15$, SE = .05, $p = .005$), and perpetrator blame ($b = -.10$, SE = .04, $p = .010$) (see Figure 3). These results are carried forward from the previous informal social reaction regression. Receiving more positive or supportive feedback from those to whom one has informally disclosed one’s sexual assault is negatively associated with each type of blame attribution.
In the full model, the use of physical violence during their experience increased the likelihood that she would blame the perpetrator ($b = .31$, SE = .05, $p < .001$) (see Figure 4). The previous model assessing tactics also identified a positive relationship between the use of physical force and behavior as well as character blame; the full model no longer identified these relationships. The use of coercion during their experience had a positive relationship with blaming the perpetrator ($b = .11$, SE = .05, $p = .017$), as identified in the previous model. Being under the influence of alcohol or drugs increased the likelihood of both behavior ($b = .19$, SE = .06, $p = .001$) and character blame ($b = .20$, SE = .05, $p < .001$), as previously identified by the tactic regression model.
In the full model, being assaulted by one’s partner was no longer significantly related to any of the three blame attributions (see Figure 5). Also, being assaulted before college was no longer associated with perpetrator blame. Experiencing more than one sexual assault was positively related to perpetrator blame ($b = .12, SE = .05, p = .008$), as previously identified in the sexual assault characteristics model. Labeling their experience as sexual assault was positively related to behavior blame ($b = .16, SE = .06, p = .012$) and perpetrator blame ($b = .24, SE = .05, p < .001$), consistent with Table 5.11. Labeling their experiences as rape was positively related to blaming their behavior ($b = .14, SE = .06, p = .018$) and character ($b = .17, SE = .06, p = .006$), and no longer associated with perpetrator blame.
Additionally, assessing control variables in the full model predicting blame attribution indicated that whites were less likely to engage in character blame ($b = -0.11$, $SE = 0.05$, $p = 0.031$) and older women were more likely to engage in perpetrator blame ($b = 0.13$, $SE = 0.05$, $p = 0.006$).
Discussion

These analyses investigated how rape myth, social reactions to informal disclosures, being assaulted by one’s partner vs. other types of perpetrators, tactic(s) used during the assault, and sexual assault characteristics related to blame attributions. Support for the hypotheses was mixed and discussed below. Building the model included separate regressions for each factor to verify the relationship with each of the blame attributions (e.g., behavior, character, and perpetrator).

Rape myth had a significant and positive relationship with both behavior and character blame. That is, the more a woman ascribed to the beliefs in rape myths, the more likely she was to blame herself for the unwanted sexual experience. This result was not only true for the second-order rape myth factor, but also the subscales of rape myth. Behavior and character blame had a consistently positive relationship with rape myth subscales (e.g., “she lied,” “she asked for it,” “he didn’t mean to,” and “it wasn’t really rape”). Ryan (2011) suggested that belief in rape myths holds the victim accountable while also justifying the perpetrator’s behavior. It is possible that the likelihood that self-blame would increase due to societal beliefs about what constitutes as rape. For example, rape myths provide scaffolding for interpreting what is and what is not socially considered rape. If a woman were to apply beliefs in rape myth to her situation, which may mimic some rape myth beliefs, such as those associated with drinking, she could internalize the blame.

While these results do indicate that women who hold rape myth beliefs tend to blame their behavior or character, there was no evidence that beliefs in rape myths were related to blaming the perpetrator. There has been no prior research relating to rape myth
acceptance and perpetrator blame. This study hypothesized that beliefs in rape myths would be negatively related to perpetrator blame. However, the relationship was not significant. The lack of evidence for the relationship between rape myth acceptance and perpetrator blame could be due to the likelihood that those who accept rape myth scripts are more likely to engage in victim-blaming (Masser et al., 2010) more so than not blaming the perpetrator. It is also likely that the lack of evidence relating perpetrator blame to rape myths could be due to how the rape myth scale focuses on blaming the victim rather than blaming the perpetrator.

Positive informal reactions had a negative relationship with both behavior and character blame. In other words, the more positive responses a woman received after disclosing, the less likely she was to engage in self-blame. More specifically, a woman who disclosed to a trusted friend or family member and received responses that reinforce that it was not her fault may have become less likely to self-blame as a result of those supportive reactions. These results mirror findings of Littleton and Breitkopf (2006) as well as Ullman and Najdowski (2011), who indicated that negative social reactions had been associated with an increase in self-blame. Women who informally disclose may also be processing or making sense of the experience, seeking validation or confirmation that they were not at fault. Additionally, women who are not blamed by those to whom they disclose to are less likely to engage in self-blame. Informal disclosures that do not include victim blaming could prevent or stop women from engaging in self-blame because others have either not reinforced those thoughts or have not introduced those negative thoughts. Essentially, receiving positive feedback or not receiving negative feedback could aid in discouraging women from self-blame.
I predicted that positive responses would increase perpetrator blame; however, the results of this study indicate that positive responses were related to lower levels of perpetrator blame. It is possible that simply disclosing the unwanted sexual experience is a part of the meaning-making process. Positive reactions to disclosure may include reframing of the event that decreases women’s perceptions that the perpetrator was deliberately trying to harm them, thereby reducing perpetrator blame. Since these data are cross-sectional, there is no way of knowing whether informal social reactions impact attributions of blame or if blame attributions influence social reactions. Potentially, how a woman discloses, such as how she speaks of the experience, can influence how others perceive and respond. Women may receive more supportive reactions when they present the perpetrator as less culpable, which could reinforce the lack of perpetrator blame, an alternative hypothesis discussed later in this section.

Being assaulted by a partner was not related to any type of blame attribution once included in the full blame attribution model. This result indicates that other aspects of the assault were more impactful on the attribution of blame than the type of perpetrator. This null finding could also be the result of the positive correlations between being assaulted by their partner and experiencing more than one sexual assault as well as labeling the experience as rape. In addition, both experiencing more than one sexual assault and labeling their experience as rape were significant influences on blame attribution. It is possible that these two indicators fully mediated the relationship between perpetrator relationship and blame attributions. To check for these mediations, hierarchical regression models were conducted. When controlling for labeling their experience as rape ($b = .98$, $SE = .14$, $p < .001$), being assaulted by one’s partner was no longer significant ($b = .22$, $SE$
However, when controlling for experiencing more than one assault, being assaulted by their partner remained significant.

The type of tactics used during the unwanted sexual experience can influence attributions of blame. The use of physical force during a sexual assault has a positive relationship with perpetrator blame. Being assaulted by violence or force could be interpreted as “real rape” based on rape myths; therefore, being assaulted in this manner should remove causation from the victim and place blame on the perpetrator. While the use of force was related to higher levels of perpetrator blame, this study also found higher levels of self-blame. It is possible that when physical force is used, women are more likely to blame themselves because they felt weak, or felt they should have fought back, or believed they should not have been in a situation where they could be overpowered. In any event, the associations between the use of physical force and self-blame were no longer significant in the model that contained all other independent variables.

Tactics of coercion were not related to behavior or character blame. It was proposed that the relationship between perpetrator blame and the use of coercion would be negatively related. However, my results indicated the opposite. The study’s results indicate that women who were coerced into an unwanted sexual experience were more likely to blame the perpetrator. This relationship was maintained in the full regression model.

Being assaulted while intoxicated or incapacitated had a positive relationship with behavior blame, as predicted, and also with character blame. It is possible that women who are assaulted. At the same time, incapacitated find themselves at fault for behaving recklessly and view their recklessness as not just an isolated behavior, but as part of their
core character. Contrary to my prediction, perpetrator blame was not related to assault while intoxicated. These results remained constant in the full model that included all other independent variables.

Several sexual assault characteristics were positively related to attributions of blame. Having experienced more than one sexual assault and labeling their experience as sexual assault had a positive association with perpetrator blame. It is possible that as one experiences more sexual assaults, one becomes more likely to find blame in the perpetrator since one has opportunities in the past to compare one’s experience with. It is also possible that if someone were to disclose previous assaults, others could have reframed their perception of who was to blame, such as shifting the focus to the perpetrator. Labeling their experience as rape or sexual assault has a positive relationship with behavior, blame, and character blame. Labeling one’s experience as rape or sexual assault may increase the need to assign blame, perhaps due to the impact on their life.

Control variables, being white, being heterosexual, and age remained consistent throughout the blame attribution regression models. Specifically, being white had a negative relationship with character blame. White and heterosexual indicate social advantages that translate into being less likely to blame one’s character; age may indicate maturity and experience, which decreases perpetrator blame.

In summary, behavior blame had positive relationships with rape myth, being intoxicated during the assault, and labeling their experience as sexual assault and rape, and a negative relationship with informal social reactions. Character blame had positive relationships with rape myth, being intoxicated during the assault, and labeling their experience as rape, and a negative relationship with informal social reactions. Perpetrator
blame had positive relationships with the use of physical force and coercion during the assault, experiencing more than one sexual assault, and labeling their experience as sexual assault, and a negative relationship with informal social reactions.

Following step one, identifying the direct effects on blame attribution, I continued to build my structural model. Step two of the structural model examined the direct effects of blame attributions and informal social reactions on psychological well-being. Each direct relationship was assessed separately, then as one full model. Which prepared for the examination of the full structural equation model that examined the indirect effects of informal social reactions through blame attributions on psychological well-being.
Chapter 6 – Predicting Psychological Well-Being

A series of multiple regression analyses were conducted to examine the relationships between the four measures of psychological well-being (e.g., self-esteem, distress, depression, and anxiety) with hypothesized predictors including social reactions and blame attributions. Additionally, the regression models included the control variables age, graduate versus undergraduate status (coded 1 = graduate student, 0 = undergraduate student), white versus non-white ethnicities (coded 1 = white, 0 = non-white), and heterosexual versus non-heterosexual (coded 1 = heterosexual, 0 = non-heterosexual). To create a model including all predictor variables for psychological well-being, I began by regressing social reactions on the four well-being outcomes, and then regressed attributions on well-being. I then combined reactions and attributions into one model.

Informal Social Reactions and Psychological Well-Being

The relationships between social reactions and the four measures of psychological well-being are presented in Table 6.1. The overall fit of the regression model, including control variables, was RMSEA (.05), CFI (.92), and SRMR (.05), which fell within acceptable model cutoffs, <.08, >.90, <.05 respectively. Hypothesis 18 was supported; more positive reactions were positively related to psychological well-being. Specifically, positive reactions had a positive relationship with self-esteem ($b = .18$, $SE = .05$, $p < .001$), and negative relationships with distress ($b = -.21$, $SE = .06$, $p < .001$), depression ($b = -.27$, $SE = .05$, $p < .001$), and anxiety ($b = -.23$, $SE = .05$, $p < .001$).

Additionally, assessing control variables in the informal social reactions and psychological well-being model indicated that older women and heterosexual women were more likely to have more positive psychological well-being outcomes. Older
women were more likely to have higher self-esteem ($b = .14$, SE = .05, $p = .003$), lower general distress ($b = -.11$, SE = .04, $p = .018$), lower levels of depression ($b = -.10$, SE = .04, $p = .021$), and lower levels of anxiety ($b = -.11$, SE = .04, $p = .009$). Heterosexual women were also more likely to have higher self-esteem ($b = .11$, SE = .05, $p = .029$), less general distress ($b = -.18$, SE = .05, $p < .001$), lower levels of depression ($b = -.14$, SE = .05, $p = .002$), and lower levels of anxiety ($b = -.14$, SE = .05, $p = .006$).

**Attributions of Blame and Psychological Well-Being**

Next, I examined the relationships between blame attributions (e.g., behavior, character, and perpetrator) and the four measures of psychological well-being (see Table 6.2). The overall fit of the regression model was acceptable; RMSEA (.04), CFI (.90), and SRMR (.05) fell within acceptable model cutoffs, <.08, >.90, and <.05 respectively. Contrary to hypothesis 19, behavior blame was not significantly related to any of the psychological well-being measures. However, hypothesis 20 was supported; character blame was negatively related to each measure of psychological well-being. Specifically, the more a woman blamed her character for the sexual assault the more likely she was to have lower self-esteem ($b = -.55$, SE = .19, $p = .003$), and increased distress ($b = .61$, SE = .20, $p = .002$), depression ($b = .59$, SE = .19, $p = .002$), and anxiety ($b = .49$, SE = .19, $p = .008$). Although a formal hypothesis was not constructed for perpetrator blame, there was a positive relationship between perpetrator blame and depression ($b = .18$, SE = .07, $p = .01$), and between perpetrator blame and anxiety ($b = .20$, SE = .05, $p = .009$).

Additionally, assessing control variables in the blame attributions and psychological well-being model indicated that older women and heterosexual women were more likely to have more positive psychological well-being outcomes. Older
women were more likely to have higher self-esteem ($b = .15$, SE = .05, $p = .002$), lower general distress ($b = -.12$, SE = .04, $p = .002$), lower levels of depression ($b = -.13$, SE = .04, $p = .001$), and lower levels of anxiety ($b = -.15$, SE = .05, $p = .002$). Heterosexual women were also more likely to have less general distress ($b = -.15$, SE = .05, $p = .002$), lower levels of depression ($b = -.10$, SE = .04, $p = .014$), and lower levels of anxiety ($b = -.10$, SE = .05, $p = .035$).

**Full Regression Model for Psychological Well-Being**

Last, I tested a full regression model with all predictor variables, social reaction, blame attribution, assault characteristics, and control variables (see Table 6.3). The overall fit of the full regression model was acceptable RMSEA (.04), CFI (.90), and SRMR (.05). Social reactions had a positive influence on psychological well-being (see Figure 6). Specifically, receiving more positive reactions had a positive relationship with self-esteem ($b = .10$, SE = .05, $p = .037$), and negative relationships with general distress ($b = -.11$, SE = .05, $p = .09$), depression ($b = -.16$, SE = .04, $p < .001$), and anxiety ($b = -.13$, SE = .05, $p = .005$).
Character blame also had a negative relationship with psychological well-being (see Figure 7). Specifically, blaming one’s character was negatively related to self-esteem ($b = -.54, SE = .19, p = .004$), and positively related to general distress ($b = .60, SE = .20, p = .003$), depression ($b = .57, SE = .180, p = .002$), and anxiety ($b = .51, SE = .20, p = .009$). Blaming the perpetrator also had a negative relationship with psychological well-being. Blaming the perpetrator was positively related to depression ($b = .16, SE = .07, p = .002$) and anxiety ($b = .19, SE = .08, p = .014$).
Additionally, assessing control variables in the full psychological well-being regression model indicated that older women and heterosexual women were more likely to have more positive psychological well-being outcomes. Older women were more likely to have higher self-esteem ($b = .14, \ SE = .05, \ p = .002$), lower general distress ($b = -.12, \ SE = .04, \ p = .003$), lower levels of depression ($b = -.13, \ SE = .04, \ p = .001$), and lower levels of anxiety ($b = -.16, \ SE = .05, \ p = .003$). Heterosexual women were also
more likely to have less general distress ($b = -.14, SE = .05, p = .003$) and lower levels of depression ($b = -.09, SE = .04, p = .022$).

**Indirect Effects of Social Reactions on Psychological Well-Being Through Blame Attributions**

I tested the mediation model for *Hypothesis 21*. Positive informal social reactions to sexual assault disclosure are positively and indirectly related to emotional well-being via the victim’s causal attributions (e.g., higher self-esteem, lower rates of general distress, depression, and anxiety). Specifically, informal social reactions and blame attributions directly impact psychological well-being, as identified in the previous regression model for psychological well-being. Taking the model one step further, I hypothesized that informal social reactions also impact psychological well-being indirectly by influencing blame attributions. This hypothesis was not supported (see Table 6.4). There were no significant indirect effects of social reactions on psychological well-being via blame attributions. The relationship between social reactions and psychological well-being is a solely direct effect, as identified in Table 6.4. This indicates that the associations between social reactions and psychological well-being are independent of attributions of blame and their relation to psychological well-being.

**Alternative models**

Since the data in this study are correlational, it is not enough to identify one-way causality. One way to strengthen the case for causality is to test alternative models. To do so, I tested the models below.
**Attributions of Blame and Rape Myth**

I originally hypothesized that rape myth would predict attributions of blame. However, attributions of blame could impact beliefs in rape myth. I examined the regressions of the second-order rape myth latent variable on the three attributions of blame. The overall fit of the regression model, including control variables, was RMSEA (.04), which fell within the cutoff of < .08 indicating acceptable fit; however, CFI (.88) and SRMR (.06) did not meet the standard cutoffs of > .90 and < .05 respectfully. There were no significant relationships between rape myth and behavior blame, \( p = .25 \), character blame, \( p = .84 \), nor perpetrator blame \( p = .10 \).

**Informal Social Reactions and Rape Myth**

Although I did not make a hypothesis about the relationship between informal social reactions and rape myth, the social reactions a victim received could influence her in the belief of rape myths. Therefore, I examined the regression of the second-order rape myth latent variable on the informal social reactions. The overall fit of the regression model, including control variables, indicated good fit RMSEA (.05), which fell within the cutoff of < .08, CFI (.92) exceeded the standard cutoff of > .90 and SRMR (.05) which met the standard cutoff < .05. There was no significant relationship between informal social reactions and rape myth, \( p = .53 \).

**Attributions of Blame and Informal Social Reactions**

I hypothesized that informal social reactions would impact the attributions of blame, which was supported by the data. However, attributions of blame could influence social reactions. For example, a victim who blames herself could frame her disclosure in a way that elicits a negative response, such as dismissing or blame from whom she
disclosed. I examined the regression of informal social reactions on attributions. The overall fit of the regression model, including control variables, indicated good fit RMSEA (.05), which fell within the cutoff of < .08, CFI (.92) met the standard cutoff of > .90 and SRMR (.06) which was slightly above the standard cutoff < .05. There were no significant relationships between informal social reactions and blame attributions.

**Psychological Well-Being and Attributions of Blame**

I originally hypothesized that attributions of blame would influence factors of psychological well-being; however, psychological well-being could potentially influence attributions of blame. Therefore, I examined the regressions of the four latent variables of psychological well-being (e.g., self-esteem, distress, depression, and anxiety) on the three attributions of blame. The overall fit of the regression model, including control variables, indicated good fit RMSEA (.04), which fell within the cutoff of < .08, CFI (.90) met the standard cutoff of > .90 and SRMR (.06) which was slightly above the standard cutoff < .05. There were no significant relationships between psychological well-being and behavior blame nor perpetrator blame. Self-esteem had a negative relationship with character blame ($b = -.19$, SE = .04, $p = .004$). Other measures of well-being were unrelated to character blame.

**Psychological Well-Being and Informal Social Reactions**

Initially, I hypothesized that informal social reactions would directly influence aspects of well-being. I examined the regressions of the four latent variables of psychological well-being (e.g., self-esteem, distress, depression, and anxiety) on informal social reactions. The overall fit of the regression model, including control variables, indicated good fit RMSEA (.05), which fell within the cutoff of < .08, CFI (.92) met the
standard cutoff of > .90 and SRMR (.06) which was slightly above the standard cutoff < .05. There were no significant relationships between psychological well-being and informal social reactions.

**Discussion**

These analyses investigated how informal social reactions to disclosure of a sexual assault and attributions of blame are related to psychological well-being. Furthermore, they examined the role of attributions of blame as a mediator between informal social reactions and psychological well-being. Support for the hypotheses was mixed and discussed below. Building the model included separate regressions for each factor to verify the relationship with each of the measures of psychological well-being (e.g., self-esteem, general distress, depression, and anxiety).

Receiving positive social reactions following a sexual assault has been linked to better psychological symptoms, such as increased positive affect, and improved overall adjustment (Filipas & Ullman, 2001; Ullman, 1999). The results of the study confirm and expand on prior research; positive social reactions had a positive relationship with self-esteem and negative relationships with general distress, depression, and anxiety. The more positive reactions a woman had when informally disclosing her unwanted sexual experience, the greater her self-esteem was, and the lower her levels of general distress, depression, and anxiety tended to be. Positive social reactions could encourage an optimistic outlook, increase perceptions of social support, and act as a buffer against negative emotions. Additionally, not receiving reactions of blame decreased the likelihood of experiencing negative psychological outcomes. The positive impact of
social responses carried forward into the full model that included all independent variables.

The relationship between attributions of blame and psychological well-being varied by type of blame. Behavior blame was unrelated to any psychological well-being outcome. This finding, or lack thereof, has been consistent with some literature that found no link between behavior blame and distress (Breitenbecher, 2006), as well as with both PTSD and depression (Hassija & Grey, 2013). However, Jones & Elliott (unpublished), as well as Koss et al. (2002) identified a positive relationship between behavior blame, and self-esteem. In contrast, character blame was negatively related to psychological well-being. Specifically, character blame was connected to lower levels of self-esteem, higher levels of general distress, depression, and anxiety. Perpetrator blame also had a negative relationship with psychological well-being. Specifically, perpetrator blame was related to higher levels of depression and anxiety.

The variation between types of blame could indicate that behavioral self-blame could be considered as a buffer. Being able to blame a behavior allows for the victim to feel some sense of control over future outcomes, changing her behavior to avoid being assaulted in the future, which could alleviate some negative psychological outcomes. A lack of perceived control has been linked to higher rates of depression, stress, and anxiety (Abramson, Metalsky, & Alloy, 1989; Lewis, Mirowsky & Ross, 1999; Shapiro, Schwartz, & Astin, 1996). The lack of perceived control could explain the relationships between negative psychological outcomes and character blame as well as perpetrator blame. Being unable to change one’s character or personality, or another person’s
behavior (i.e., the perpetrator) can foster a perception of having no control, thus leading to negative psychological outcomes.

Control variables, including being heterosexual and older, remained consistent throughout the psychological well-being regression models. Specifically, being older and heterosexual were related to positive psychological well-being outcomes. Being heterosexual indicates a social advantage that may function as a protective factor increasing positive aspects of well-being; age may indicate maturity and experience, which may increase positive aspects of psychological well-being.

Alternative models were tested to provide a robust assessment of the data. The alternative models were examined to strengthen the argument for the one-way models hypothesized. The alternative models did not challenge the hypothesized models. Rape myth was not explained by attributions of blame nor informal social reactions. Attributions of blame did not explain social reactions. Psychological well-being did not explain the attributions of blame or informal social reactions.

Study one examined the victim’s causal attributions of sexual assault as a function of the assault characteristics, her rape myth beliefs, and the reactions from others she received to her disclosure of the sexual assault. Additionally, study one investigated victims’ psychological well-being as a function of attributions of blame and informal social reactions. Last, study one examined the relationship of informal social reactions and psychological well-being through attributions of blame. To elaborate on these identified relationships, study two used interviews to provide an in-depth perspective of the experiences of a sexual assault victim, specifically focusing on disclosure, self-blame, and psychological well-being intertwine.
Chapter 7 - Study 2

Procedure

Recruitment

Participants were recruited for in-depth interviews upon completion of the online survey. Participants were asked if they would agree to take part in an interview related to topics covered during the survey. The participation prompt explained that those who took part in the interview would be paid $30 for their time. Overall, 226 participants were invited to take part in the interview portion of the research. Of those contacted, 76 responded to the email with interest in participating. Thirty-two of those scheduled an interview session; however, nine participants canceled or did not show up for the interview. Therefore 23 women participated in the in-depth interview (see Table 7.1).
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**Data Collection**

Semi-structured in-depth interviews were used for the study. This method allowed me to not only create a structured interview guide to follow but also allowed me the opportunity to ask individual follow-up questions. These questions provided further detail about the victims of sexual assault experiences (see Appendix O for those who have reported; Appendix P for those who have not reported). The questions included in the interview guide pertained to the considerations when deciding to disclose or not to disclose their sexual assault. I conducted the interviews in-person in a private room, my office. Interviews took place over three weeks. Participants were paid $30 for their time following the interview.

All interviews were digitally recorded. Participants were given the option not to be recorded if they felt uncomfortable with audio recording our session. I reminded the participants that their responses would be kept confidential and that anonymity would be preserved in the presentation of the results by using a pseudonym. If, despite this, they were still uncomfortable, the recording device would not be used, and hand-written notes would be taken. All participants verbally agreed to have their session audio recorded. The average interview lasted one hour. Following the interview session, all personal identifiable information was stripped from the data. A pseudonym was then connected to each interview. Additionally, I made notes pertaining to the completed interview following each interview. Interviews were transcribed verbatim via a transcription service.

**Data Analysis**

The data were analyzed using “flexible coding” (Deterding & Waters, 2018),
which was influenced by previous studies, including quantitative. Flexible coding combines literature-based and inductive coding throughout the analysis (Deterding & Waters, 2018). Data preparation included uploading all transcripts to Dedoose. I then identified themes specifically related to questions asked during the interview. I also began making memos of themes that I identified in each transcript.

Flexible coding occurred multiple stages, some reiterative. First, participants were categorized by demographic variables, such as characteristics related to the sexual assault, including relationship to the perpetrator, tactics used during the assault, whether or not they labeled their experience as sexual assault or rape, whether or not they had experienced more than one sexual assault, and whether or not they had been sexually assaulted prior to college.

Next, the content was linked to the interview protocol (broader topics) through the use of index coding. The coding included finding large chunks of data that were relevant to the research questions, which made it easy to categorize by topics. Index codes sometimes included overlapping context; for example, one index code identified chunks of interviews that touched barriers to disclosing or reporting, while another index code focused on how informal disclosures lead to or inhibited formal reporting. This approach allowed the data to illuminate the themes, rather than applying theory to the data collected.

Since the interviews were semi-structured, questions were not always asked in the same order, which provided for a more natural conversation. Because of this flexible interview approach, the use of Dedoose aided in identifying potentially missed application of an index code to an interview. Dedoose flags every index code applied, the
use of the matrix display of codes provided a quick reference to those who had received an index code, and those who had not. The interview that was not initially flagged with an index code were reread to make sure the relative response was not missed.

During the initial index, coding memos were created and associated with interviews. The use of these memos made it easier to identify consistent or emerging concepts, which were then used to form new index codes and/or child codes. Child codes represent subcategories of the initial index code. For example, the parent index code focusing on “how informal disclosures lead to or inhibited formal reporting” included child codes such as “actively dissuaded encouraged,” “aggressively insisted,” and “did not discuss formal reporting.”

Both index coding and child coding were iterative processes; each interview was thoroughly read several times. This approach to index coding provided the opportunity to strengthen my familiarity with the data. Specifically, this approach allowed me to identify relationships and differences between codes. Throughout this phase, it was important to focus on reliability and validity, making sure that codes were applied consistently for each interview. Consistency was achieved through the use of analytic coding, which focused on one index code at a time.

As a researcher conducting in-depth interviews, it was important to recognize relevant identities and biases that I may hold. I recognized that my level of education could have impacted how I interpreted their responses. My understanding of sexual assault and its connections to disclosures, reporting, attributions, and well-being, has been shaped by prior research. As I have experienced sexual assault and disclosure/reporting my sexual assaults, I acknowledged that my experiences were my
own and that my experiences are not universal. Furthermore, being a heterosexual cis-female, I acknowledged that my perspective would differ from those who aren’t heterosexual cis-female. Making these acknowledgments allowed me to better assess my position in creating and conducting the interviews, as well as analyzing data. My lived experiences might have influenced how I coded and interpreted data. Recognizing that my gender, age, education, geographical, and socioeconomic status may be different than those who I interviewed permitted me to tailor the interview to the individual and let the participant be the expert.
Chapter 8 – Informal Disclosure to Friends, Family, and Partners

Disclosure can be either something that you're offering up to somebody else or it can be something that's empowering yourself. And it all depends on how you choose to view it, how you choose to tell your story. Like, in the beginning, it was me offering that chunk to others, but now, it's my story. And I'm going to tell it the way that I want to tell it to who I want to tell it to. So, it's important to have that view and to recognize that, and if you don't want to tell your story, you don't have to. ~ Paula

This chapter presents the results of the analysis of women’s accounts of disclosing their sexual assault to informal sources, which provides a clearer picture of how other people’s responses to their disclosures shaped how they interpreted the sexual assault. Reactions from others varied from positive to negative, some being more supportive than others. The women in the study discussed their experiences with disclosing to friends, family members, and partners. These informal interactions had some influence on how they further discussed their experience with others. Some reactions from others changed their perspective by reframing their experience as sexual assault, rather than leading them to question what happened, while other reactions downplayed the experience as a non-important occurrence.

To provide a thorough examination of their experiences disclosing their sexual assault to close others, I categorized types of responses according to whom they disclosed (i.e., friend, family, partner) and to whether the response was positive or negative. Those who the women disclosed to offered positive responses, such as being supportive through understanding and empathy, offering tangible aid, and validation. In this dissertation positive and negative “validation” refer to the giving of confirmation to the victim. For example, positive validation focuses on the acknowledgement and/or belief that a sexual assault had occurred and that the experience was wrong and not the victim’s fault. On the
other hand, negative validation, could be considered invalidation, as it acknowledges that a sexual assault had occurred, but dismisses or minimizes the victim’s experience. In addition to positive reactions, women were also met with negative responses, such as friends, family members, or partners who were dismissive of the experience, showed a lack of empathy, and questioned the validity of their statements. In addition to women receiving positive and negative responses, it became clear that there was a third category, ambivalent responses. These ambivalent responses were a combination of positive and negative responses within one disclosure exchange. For example, receiving some validation but at the same time being dismissive in ways that challenged their relationship with that person or how personal experiences of the person to whom they disclosed to influence their response, in dismissive ways, to the victim.

This chapter will address Research Question 1: What are the victims’ experiences with sexual assault disclosure? As well as, Research Question 2: How have the experiences of sexual assault disclosure impacted victims’ perspective of the sexual assault?

**Disclosing to Friends**

The women discussed how they would typically turn to their friends as the first person to whom they disclosed their sexual assault. Although, of those who disclosed to their friends first, the friends they disclosed to were not always a close friend, but rather someone of convenience. This disclosure was most likely to occur when a woman disclosed immediately or shortly after the experience. For example, Gwen’s first disclosure was not sought out. Still, the opportunity occurred very soon after her experience, “I told my roommates because they walked in ten minutes after [the sexual
assault].” For some, there was an internal deliberation about who they would speak with. Jane described how she selected a specific friend to disclose to, saying, “I felt like she would be the person that I could probably tell her this too and not feel like the blame would be shifted towards me somehow.”

**Positive Reactions from Friends**

All of the women (n=21 or 91%) who disclosed to a friend had some positive responses. Many said that they were met with understanding and empathy and appreciated it when someone listened to them and made themselves available. Vanessa discussed feeling supported knowing someone was there for her “she just told me like, ‘Anytime you need anything or if you want to talk about this or if you don't want to talk about this, anytime you can come find me.’” After a few negative reactions from others, Sabrina received a positive response from a friend that she found really helpful. "Oh, my God. I'm blocking her right now. I'm never talking to [the perpetrator] again. I'm blah, blah, blah." It made me feel so heard. I was like, "Oh, my God. Thank you. I didn't even know I needed that.”

Women valued being in control of what happened next. Elena discussed how her friend gave her support and autonomy through options:

"We can do whatever you want to do." Which was so nice and supportive because at that moment, I didn't know what I wanted to do, and I didn't want somebody to tell me what to do either. So, she was like, "We can go back home." Because we were living in the dorms, so she was like, "We can go back to the dorms, or we can go to the hospital and get you help." So, she gave me options, which was really nice because it was in my control.

Celeste mentioned that it was helpful that her friend respected her decision to not talk about it and continue with her routine:
“What do you want to do about it?” and I was like, "I don't know, I just want to go to school." And she's just like, "Okay." I mean she respected what I wanted to do, and just let it be.

Jane felt safe when she was reassured that she would not be pushed to discuss the experience more than she wanted to:

I was really timid with my information about what happened and stuff. And, she was the one that was just kind of like, “It's okay, you can tell me as much, or as little as you want, and I'm not here to judge you, and I'm just here to make sure that you're okay.” And so, that kind of gave me that soundboard that I needed, and I just kind of like let it out.

Disclosures to friends were often described as helpful in making sense of their experience. Celeste described how she disclosed for meaning-making and clarification of the experience: “I told my best friend… I was like, the weirdest thing happened ever.” Celeste’s friend aided her in defining her experience: “That doesn't sound just weird, that sounds wrong. And I was like, Yeah, probably.” April had a similar experience with her initial disclosure: “I told [my friend] because I knew something bad had happened, but I was trying to connect the dots because you're in a scramble after that happens.” Quinn found that the supportive responses she received from her friends validated her experience and confirmed that “it wasn't just in my head, that this happened.” Inez wanted her friends to validate her perspective:

I definitely think I was trying to see if they thought that it was weird too because I'm prone to anxiety, more of an anxious person, and I feel like I've maybe I could have been over-exaggerating it or something like that.

A few women who were not sure if experience qualified as sexual assault found that talking to a friend helped them understand the gravity of their experience. For example, Beth did not think her experience was serious enough to be considered sexual assault. Still, her friend “took it very seriously, and that made me take it more seriously.”
Hazel’s friends pointed out that she should not dismiss her experience or had no right to talk about it when she compared her experience to others’ experiences:

I told them, I was like, a lot of people have it worse. That wasn't bad I'm still alive kind of thing. They're like, “Hazel, just because it happened to someone else and it was worse, doesn't mean you can't pay attention to like what's going on with you. Your life, and in this situation, that was a really bad time for you.”

Yvonne’s friend used her own experience to confirm that Yvonne’s experience was sexual assault and that Yvonne was not to blame:

She told me, "I had a very similar instance." And it was her and I talking about what we've both went through. And she's kind of like, "You can acknowledge that with me, this happened. What's stopping you from acknowledging this?" She made me take a step back and think about it … it validated what I went through, and it made me feel like she really did understand what I went through because she went through it. It made me feel like it was that serious, or that it was enough to be considered as something serious. So, her talking to me about this and acknowledging it made me feel like, okay, maybe now I've recognized this, maybe I can talk to someone about this, and not feel this sense of, it was my fault, or it wasn't that.

Flo compared how receiving validation from others she was not close with, who were men, and did not expect to be on her “side” to her close friends, really helped her solidify that she was not to blame:

You know girlfriends want to support you and tell you, I think a lot of times, tell you what you want to hear. Even when it's maybe not the complete truth. They completely agreed that it was unacceptable, and that. Having that response from people who I wasn't as close with, and also them being men and saying this is unacceptable. That was ... Maybe it shouldn't have, but that also kind of encouraged me to accept and believe that it wasn't my fault and that he fucked up.

Although Ruby was blaming herself for the sexual assault even after her friends did not cast judgment or promote blaming in any way:

I felt really stupid, in a way, because I let it happen again. I let myself get that intoxicated which then led to that situation, once again, and I thought
I have grown up, I thought I'd grown out of that, and it was that instance where I realized I wasn't. They didn't make me feel I was stupid though, they listened to me, but my emotions were everywhere, kind of the situation of what they would reassure me, and I wouldn't listen. Those [responses] went in one ear and out the other.

Ruby did appreciate that her friends were “not blaming me, and that's been really helpful because they know that I do it enough to myself. But not saying, "Oh yeah, it's because you drink too much."

Even though their friends tried to show support, their responses sometimes fell short, leaving some wishing their friends would have been more supportive or helpful. For example, Flo, whose friends helped her report the assault, discussed how she didn’t quite get the support she needed:

I think that they were trying to show emotional support. They wanted to believe that that's the response that they would provide. But, they … I definitely could have used some more support from them … just listening and allowing me to process it verbally, and talk about it, and feel it even. Or, comforting me when I had breakdowns. Those sorts of things. Being more involved behind the scenes, versus being involved with the steps of doing something. I think that's really where the most support is needed.

Negative Reactions from Friends

Negative reactions from friends (61%, n=14) to the disclosure of sexual assault were characterized by being dismissive of the event, especially when it could be attributed to alcohol, and even going so far as denying it occurred. For example, Quinn’s friends acted like it was nothing: "Oh, you were just really drunk. It was just a stupid college mistake. It's okay. You probably said yes, and you're just regretting it."

Some tried to make meaning of why they received a dismissive response. Mary and Inez gave their perspectives on why their friends might have been dismissive. Mary said:
I mentioned it [to my friends and roommate]. And they were, "Wait, what? Are you kidding me?" and it never got brought up after that, because I think they were really uncomfortable. Her roommate, who she considers a feminist, had a similar response, “I’m so sorry.” And then we never talked about it again. Like it was weird, and it makes me wonder if she like, just didn't know what to say and, or like maybe something happened to her, and she doesn’t want to talk about it or something like that. So, it's weird because my, like, experience is telling men have been better, generally, my experience is telling women.

Mary went on to say that responses such as “I’m sorry that happened to you” might have indicated “that they like need to process on their own.” She felt that responses like that were “somewhat dismissive.”

Inez also reasoned why she received dismissive responses following her disclosure because of how she told them in a joking manner. Inez described the interaction as:

I told them, and they're like, "Oh, that's weird." But they didn't really think that it was that serious. Saying things like "Oh well, that's too bad. But it sounds like you had a good time." And I think it's because I didn't take it that serious either, but they like, I don't know, it was strange … they kind of like [said], "Oh, you're so slutty, you're so sexually empowered, look at you." But now looking back on it, I'm like, this is insane that it was just kind of put away. Yeah, it was really odd.

Since Inez received a dismissive reaction, she did not see it as a big deal; it somewhat confirmed to her that she was in control, “I think it made me feel okay and it made me validate a reason to go back to him to see him further.”

Those who were in the same friend group as their perpetrators, such as Gwen, Sabrina, and Hazel, felt as though they had to lay out their case, that their experience was wrong and that it was assault. They also felt like they were making their friends choose between them and their perpetrator. Gwen recounted that mutual friend’s reaction was:
kind of angry, but it wasn't at me, it was just angry at the situation because that was a hard position for him to be in. I wouldn't say he was very supportive of me either. He was just kind of like, it was that typical guy, the, ‘I wish that didn't happen, but I don't want to get involved either.’

However, “he did ultimately take my side, but I think in the beginning he was just kind of the, ‘I don't really know what's the truth,’” until he witnessed a later incident between her and her perpetrator. At that point, he offered her support by protecting her.

One of Sabrina’s friends, who was also friends with her same-sex perpetrator tried to dismiss the sexual assault, "Well, you were both really drunk. I'm sure that she didn't mean it like that." She was concerned about putting her friend in a position that required him to choose sides since they were all pretty close friends. Sabrina said since that initial reaction, he has been much more supportive, but she considered it a touchy subject due to the initial reaction – she had to convince him that it was wrong. She found herself trying to convince multiple friends because the perp told everyone they had consensual sex.

Sabrina spent a lot of time explaining how her experience was a sexual assault; she had to go into details because her friends were dismissive and thought she was overreacting about having sex with one someone from their friend group. One of Sabrina’s’s friends said she would “choose you over her any day,” but that had less to do with believing her and more to do with “well, you do more for me.”

While Gwen and Sabrina ended up receiving some support, Hazel experienced the loss of support. Her friend denied that the assault even occurred by defending the perpetrator and became angry with Hazel:

“No, I don't want to be involved in this.” I'm like, okay, well then like can we kind of move on? She goes, “No, because I don't believe you. He said he didn't do this.” I was like, “I have things to prove it to you.” She was
like, “I can't do this,” and then blocked me on everything. I was like, oh my gosh, what did I do? So, I was very upset with them for that.

Those who did not receive validation, but rather were questioned about the validity of the experience began questioning their truth or themselves. For example, Quinn tried to reach out to make sense of her experience. Rather than offering support, her friends questioned her certainty and reminded her that she was “really drunk that night.” As she was trying to make meaning of the experience, one friend questioned her:

… she questioned me like I had wanted it. She was like, "Are you sure you just weren't drunk, and you said yeah, and then you're just regretting it now, and that you were okay with it? And now you're just regretting it to cover up that you did it?"

When disclosing to her friends, Quinn was seeking support; she wanted to be heard and validated, she wanted to stop questioning herself:

I was just hoping to be able to talk to somebody, to get it off my chest and to have someone support me and validate me and what happened. That's not what I got. So that made me start questioning … I was already questioning, "Was I really that drunk? Did I really say no? Did I really do this?" And then when she told me, "Are you sure?" It was like, "Oh, am I sure?" That just made me question more.

In addition to questioning herself even more after speaking with her friend, she felt unsupported and let down. In a sense, she felt like her friend abandoned her when she needed her the most. Her friend made her feel “really shitty”:

She was like my best friend, and so it was really hard because I felt like I had kept this in for so long, and I was really looking for someone to support me and make me feel like it was okay. That I wasn't in the wrong, and it wasn't my fault, I wasn't this disgusting person that I thought I was for a long time. And it wasn't like that. I felt like she flipped on me.

Taylor described a conversation about her ongoing abusive relationship with her friend in which she was looking for validation that it wasn’t her fault. Taylor said that
although her friend did not come out and say, “this was your fault,” she still implied that Taylor could have stopped it if she wanted to, leaving Taylor frustrated:

She never said, "Oh. It's your fault because you said 'yes,'" but she did continue to say, "Just say 'no.' Just say 'no.'" That was mainly the point that she took. She never outright said, "This is your fault," or, "it happened because you eventually said 'yes,'" but in my opinion, it was implied that that's all I needed to do was say 'no,' and it wouldn't happen.

Paula tried speaking about it with her friends; however, she did not perceive it as important to them:

I would start to talk about it. But then, something else would pop up, and it would just get like brushed under. So, it would just kind of be a topic that wouldn't necessarily get talked about, just because something else came up that was of more importance to the other person or that was more squirrel, kind of thing.

Disclosing to Family

Disclosing to family members (74%, n=17), similar to disclosures with friends, included mixed responses, and sometimes both positive and negative connotations were included in the family member’s response. Of those who disclosed to their family members, 65% (11) received positive responses, and 76% (13) received negative responses. Positive responses were focused on understanding and empathy, emotional support, and validation, although validation was not always a positive experience, while negative responses were dismissive, questioning, and angry.

If a participant mentioned disclosing to multiple family members, they received varied responses from each member. For example, when Flo disclosed to her parents, spontaneously, and at the same time, she perceived positive responses from each. However, their responses were focused on different aspects:
[My mom] very much was just... She very much was focused on the emotional effect it had on me, which … Then my dad was more focused on are you affected physically, do you want to press charges, what can I do to help that. Very different approaches, both helpful.

Like Flo, who had little choice about telling her parents based on her circumstances, others also had little control over disclosing to their parents. Some were not given the opportunity to decide about telling one or both of their parents. For example, immediately after the assault, Lia called her sister for support, feeling unsure of what to do. Lia explained her situation, and her sister said she would call her back. Lia thought, “I guess this conversation is over,” but then her dad called. Lia’s sister had just called their dad and told him about Lia’s assault and her current situation. This situation was upsetting for Lia; however, she said, “a tiny part of me is grateful to her [sister] because it took off like that burden of me having to tell him.” Lia said in hindsight, her sister probably did not know what to do and was overwhelmed, so she phoned their father for help.

After April told her mother about her experience, she requested her mother not to discuss it with the rest of the family because she did not want to upset them. April’s mother disregarded her request and had a “family meeting” without April, during which she told April’s father and little sister. April still has not talked to her father about her assault. Her mother forced a conversation with April and her sister, which was not productive and seemed traumatizing to her little sister. Hazel’s ex-boyfriend told her mother out of concern for her mental well-being. On the other hand, Zelda’s mother offered to discuss the experience with her father, so she did not need to approach him about the subject, which was a relief for Zelda. Zelda did not think she could have
brought it up with her father because she hated talking about it and was scared to approach the subject with him.

**Positive Reactions from Family Members**

For those who spoke with a family member soon immediately or soon after the sexual assault, safety was a main concern. Family members wanted to make sure that they were in a safe environment, out of harm’s way. Elena called her mother the morning after her rape, her mother’s first response was concern for Elena’s safety. Elena’s mother was not locally available, so her mother wanted to make sure that Elena had someone physically there for her safety since her mother was unsure of what to do without physically being there:

My mom, she was just like … She didn't really give me a choice. She was just like, "I want to make sure you're safe." For her was, the biggest thing was safety because I just told her I called, and I was like, "Mom, I went to a party last night, and I was raped." And she did not even know what to do. I don't think my mom would ever think that something … You never think it's going to happen until it does happen. So, yes, my mom, I think for her, it was just mainly going be with people that are going to make sure that you're safe.

Lia’s sister was also concerned for her immediate safety. Similar to Elena’s mother, Lia’s sister was not in the same city/state. Lia’s sister was asking specific questions to help guide her to help, such as “what street signs can you see.” Lia’s sister tried to use the information provided to get her to a police station to report the assault and to get off the streets after running.

**Negative Reactions from Family Members**

Although receiving validation regarding the assault was generally perceived as positive, some responses were dismissive. Zelda was looking for acknowledgment and
empathy; however, her mother said: "Yeah, a lot of girls go through this," which left Zelda feeling disappointed. Taylor first disclosed her assault to her mother, who validated yet downplayed the assault:

The first person that I spoke to about it was my mom. Me and my mom have a relatively open relationship. It was something that obviously weighed heavily on me. I talked with her about my concerns about the situation. Most of the interaction that I got from her was what I would describe as removed. Where she was like, "Oh. It happens." You know what I mean? Where it was like she acknowledges that it happens, but there wasn't a lot of 'Oh. That's not okay' type of language that was discussed. Which …She wasn't wrong. I'm not saying that statement's untrue, but it didn't feel specifically directly supportive or necessarily unsupportive.

Similarly, Inez had a similar experience when she told her mother, who then shared a similar experience with her. Her mother’s story seemed to validate her experience, but not in the way she had hoped:

…she shared a similar experience with me, but she's really into Brene Brown and Byron Katie, and she's like, "Well, you're not a victim. You have to go through this, and you'll be powerful about it." So, it just further kind of validated that nothing that extreme that happened to me.

Zelda’s mother responded as though Zelda had control over the situation and could have stopped it at any point. Additionally, her mother suggested it was not such a big deal and that she needed to get over it, which made Zelda regret telling her.

[My mother] didn't necessarily blame me, but when I told her it had been going on for a year, it's not like she was blaming me, but she was telling me what I could have done. In that moment, it's like, "Yeah, I know I should have told him to stop. I know I should have told one of the other ladies in the class this was going on. Obviously, I didn't. Thank you, but I don't need suggestions for next time right now. I just need comforting."

[My mother] would definitely tell me like, "You need to move on." Or she'd be like, "Okay, if it's really that serious, we're gonna buy you a therapist." And it would be like, "Yeah, well, I probably need that, but the way you're sounding is that I don't, so I guess don't get me one. Sorry I brought it up."
The response Zelda received from her mother influenced her willingness to speak to her father about the experience. Her father did not push her into discussing the assault but wanted her to open up about it. But because of her mother’s response, she gave closed and dismissive reactions to her father, “I’m fine. I just want this to be over,” although she stated she really wanted the opportunity to “vent” to him. Looking back, she wished she could take it all back and had told her dad instead of her mother. She believes she told her father first, she would have received an empathetic response. However, because of her mother’s response, she shut down when she finally talked to her dad.

Similar to Zelda’s regret of disclosing to her mother first, Vanessa regretted talking to her sister about her experience due to her dismissive reaction:

[her sister] sat there and was like, "Wow." She didn't really say anything and, then, I was uncomfortable after that, and, then, I was like, "Oh, wow. Kind of wish I hadn't told you that." Yeah. It was the first time that I told someone about and not feel closer or more of connection and, then, it was really uncomfortable, and we haven't talked about it since.

Mary turned to her mother to help to make sense of not only the assault but a potential pregnancy as a result of the assault. However, instead of supporting her, Mary’s mother insisted she work this out on her own and not to speak of this to others, especially her father:

I felt really abandoned. Like, I felt super lost … [My mother] told me all these things like you have to deal with it yourself, don't tell your dad because he's going to freak out. Don't tell anyone. And, but like wanting me to deal with this situation myself.

Mary, years later, did tell her father. She said her father was “super supportive” and was glad that she opened up to him. They were both perplexed as to why her mother insisted that she not tell her father because he would be upset.
Taylor was frustrated with her mother, as her mother downplayed or excused the perpetrator’s behavior because she had been in a relationship with him and “He was such a nice person.” Taylor tried to reframe her mother’s thinking by responding, “Yeah. He also did some really fucked up shit, mom … He did some really messed up stuff in our relationship, though. That wasn't okay. I don't care that he's nice.” Her mother continued to neglect to consider the assault in later conversations by asking if Taylor had seen the perpetrator lately and wondered how he was doing.

Celeste did not initially tell her parents because she did not think she would get the support that she needed. Celeste said that was exactly what happened; her mother “brushed it off” as if it wasn’t an issue, which then prevented her from telling her dad. She did end up telling her father; he was “upset that I had never tried to talk to him” rather than concerned for her.

April kept her assault from her mother during their phone calls. She focused on “all the good things happening in [her] life.” However, during one call, she “finally broke down and told her,” although she refrained from saying it was assault or rape, just that “something really bad happened.” Her mother was furious that April was a “liar for months by not telling her what happened” and “how dare I lie to her.” April said that in later conversations, in which she discussed her experience in detail, her mother insinuated that April was to blame and had no right to be upset, stating that “You can't get upset. You picked him.”

Lia felt like she had no control following her assault. She was confused and felt like she was not being heard or considered in her father’s reaction:
I again felt like no control because I was saying like, dad don't come, like, don't. No. That's actually a bad idea. And he's like, I'm coming. And I was like, that's a terrible idea. And he's like, I'm coming. And I'm like, are you listening to me? Like that's something I felt like that whole like night was like, are the words I'm saying making sense? Like, do you comprehend? And he's like, I'm coming.

Additionally, Lia was concerned about her father’s behavior if he did show up, especially after he said, “I'm coming to DC right now… I'm going to kill him.” In that moment, she was concerned about the repercussions of her dad murdering her assailant. She told him, “I just lost like a piece of me. I feel like I don't want to lose you.” Looking back, she knew her father was trying to support her; however, she was having a hard time thinking ahead; she was trying to survive from moment to moment.

Hazel, who was assaulted three times, was initially questioned by her father after disclosing her first unwanted experience to him. At first, he walked away when she told him, then he came back to ask, “Well, why would you let it happen? Why would you do this?” As soon as the words left his mouth, he followed up with, “I'm sorry, I shouldn't have asked that.” She said it was reassuring that he realized that he messed up by questioning her in any way. She thought their bond became stronger after he retracted his questions, indicating his belief in her. Yvonne had a different experience with questioning. She felt as though she had to tell her mother every little detail to get her mother to believe her. This left Yvonne emotionally drained, especially discussing her experience over and over to varying degrees, only to be subjected to detailed questions by her mother:

I couldn't just say this happened. It made me feel so exhausted. Emotionally, I had already gone through [the assault]. I went through the trauma; I went through talking through it to one of my friends. I also talked to my therapist about it. And then I was like, this is my final letting
it out, and then I had to prove myself. And it was that sense of me having to tell [my mother] these little things is me having to prove myself. And as my mom, I shouldn't have to prove myself; you should just believe me. I felt like I needed to prove myself.

After Yvonne answered all of her mother’s questions the response she received or lack thereof, was disheartening:

She didn't really respond, and I think that's what hurt me more. I told her, she just looked at me and then moved on. And that made me feel like, what I, I didn't experience, and it made me feel like I was lying. She kind of just listened to me, and then she didn't say, "I believe you."

[Her mother’s response was] just blank, kind of just ... and the thing I think, so she's explained to me various times that when she has nothing nice to say, she doesn't say anything at all. So, when I see no response, I know there's judgment. And that's what hurt me the most, was that [my mother was] judging me, [my mother] shouldn't judge me.

Yvonne tried to talk to her mother on more than one occasion about her assault. At one point, Yvonne ended up becoming defensive and yelled, “Why can't you just tell me you believe me? That's all I need from you, and you can't even do that.” She thought she had gotten through to her mother, but Yvonne then mentioned: “But even to this day, I don't feel like she believes me when I talk to her about any sort of sexual assault that I've been through.”

Lia’s sister, who she spoke with immediately after the assault, posed several questions, trying to understand what happened. Lia said she thought her sister needed to hear the information to understand what was going on. Some questions focused on blaming her behavior with questions such as “why were you alone with him in his apartment?” “were you drinking?” “were you drugged?” Lia later stated that she had a rough time digesting the questioning response from her sister:

I think she knows what she should say and then she said the wrong things. And then now since she said like, okay, that was not your fault. And I'm
like, but in the moment, you like, I remember you said this, and I'm like, I don't try to fault her for it, but it's tough.

After Hazel’s second assault, she finally called her mother because she had anxiety attacks because of the assault. Her mother said, “I really hope you're not lying to me; I hope you're telling me the truth.” Hazel said once she got home and was able to see how distraught she was and believed her. However, when she told her dad, “he just looked at me, and he was like, what? He didn't want to believe it … it was hard for him to believe.” After talking to both of them face-to-face, they did believe her.

Hazel did not tell her parents about the third assault until after her ex-boyfriend called her mother out of concern and said it was “something he couldn’t handle.” When her parents approached her, they asked if she had proof, such as a police report or rape kit. She said she finally told them yes, even though she did not file a report. Soon after that conversation, she did tell her mother that she did not file a report when asked why she told them that she lied about the report she said: “you guys were all sitting there talking at me, and I just wanted it to be over.” Her mother was understanding of her decision not to report and realized why she lied to them. When Hazel later disclosed to her mother than she had aborted a pregnancy caused by the rape, her mother remained supportive, telling her that “we love you no matter what.”

Jane received a complex response from her sister. When she disclosed that she was assaulted by a man one of her sisters responded in a positive way, with belief and empathy, “Oh no, like that shouldn't have happened in the first place, but I believe you and I'm so sorry that you went through this.” Because Jane told her sisters around the same time, she also came out to her sister, telling her that she was now dating a woman.
Her religion, which her sisters adhere to, frowns upon her sexuality. Because she came out one sister tried to make sense of Jane being a lesbian:

So, one of them actually thought that because I had a poor experience with this man, that maybe that's why I identify the way that I do … Well, yeah, of course, you're not going to like men because of this [assault]… Her response made me feel like what happened wasn't as big of a deal, but I'm using it to pursue this ulterior lifestyle.

**Disclosing to Partner**

Nineteen of the participants disclosed their sexual assault a romantic partner, of those 63% (n=12) received positive responses, and 36% (n=7) received negative responses. One interesting note is that of those who disclosed soon after the assault to their partner at the time of the assault more were likely to receive negative responses, 80% (n=4). Disclosing to partners after experiences of sexual assault sometimes took place out of perceived necessity, such as issues with the intimacy of sexual acts. For example, Hazel told her partner when she was concerned that she might have a negative reaction while being intimate “I've told him, I was like, “Hey, if we're doing something, I freak out it's not your fault.” Celeste had a similar approach:

But before we even had sex, I told him I was just like, "Hey, I have weird quirks about being touched because I was sexually assaulted. And I just want you to be aware, don't take it personally. I'm working through this, it's pretty fresh and just be cool with it."

Keri contemplated whether or not to tell her partner about her assault; however, after experiencing flashbacks in his presence; she felt the need to explain her reaction in that situation:

I actually did have to have a conversation. I have a boyfriend I've been dating for a year and a half. At first, I was like, "I'm not going to say anything." It was a couple months after we started dating, so I was like, "Too soon for that." But I had an instant where we were actually making
out and fooling around, and then I had a flashback because it was in … my incident happened in a car, and we were in a car. And I panicked, and I had to stop, and I was like, "I can't." And I had an anxiety attack. So, after that, I definitely had to share. It wasn't that I didn't want to. I fully intended on having that conversation, but it came sooner than expected.

Gwen took a different approach. She decided to disclose to her partner, who she had just started dating very early in the relationship. “I was like, "Okay, I'm very much like if you can't accept me now, you're not gonna accept me three months from now, so I'm throwing everything on the table.” She said that it was uncomfortable, but she knew it was necessary.

**Positive Partner Responses**

Paula felt relieved when she told her partner. She found that this was an opportunity to talk about her experience in a way she had not been able to do so before; she was able to narrate without judgment and be completely open. She found that telling her partner had a “positive impact and lasting impact it's had in the relationship I have with him.” She appreciated his response that gave her control over her disclosure, and found it to be the best response she received:

> When I told him, he listened. He didn't ask a bunch of questions unless he was asking, "Are you okay?" He was saying, "You don't have to tell me all this. I still love you." And I'm like, "I know, but I want to." So, that was like a very defining moment in myself, my wanting to actually tell that story and to tell it in the detail that I did tell it. Yeah, that's the good one. That's the best experience I've had out of it so far.

Willow’s boyfriend had an idea that something had happened but did not want to push her to talk about it or ask her if she wasn’t ready to talk. She said he was understanding when she told him that he reinforced that it wasn’t her fault, which was really comforting.
April compared how two of her partners approached consent after her disclosure.

One only asked, “Are you good?” if she flinched during sex, and then kept going.

Compared to her current partner who she said really appreciates because of their approach to consent:

it's so cool, because every single thing is like, "Can we do this? Is this okay?" Or if I flinch, he's like, "Are you good? Do you want to stop and talk?" And I'm like, "Holy shit. This is so cool."

Paula felt that her partner really helped her process what she had experienced. Her boyfriend encouraged her to start counseling and has been really supportive every step of the way. She said she was grateful that her partner emphasized that it wasn’t her fault:

"You were there, but it was not your fault. Just because you were there does not mean automatically place blame." It's not like you walk into a robbery, and all of a sudden, you are part of the robbery.

Quinn also felt supported by her partner, who respected her choice not to report and also reiterated that it was not her fault by stating, “No, that wasn't your fault. It's not your fault that you drank, and then something happened to you.” Inez felt that her partner had a true human reaction, something she felt like she was missing when she told others. “And they hugged me. That was nice rather than just the human disconnects and like, ‘That's fine.’”

Negative Partner Responses

Beth felt dismissed by her boyfriend when she would try and talk about her assault. Every time she brought it up, he would immediately change the subject. She wanted to talk about it, but her partner prevented her from doing so. “I wanted to talk about it, and I felt like it was necessary to explain my problems with relationships and stuff like that, so … Yeah, I didn't like that they didn't want to talk about it.”
Someone sexually assaulted Daisy while she was in a relationship with a different person. When she told her boyfriend about the assault, his response was to tell others that she had cheated. She was furious and hurt. She also felt forced to talk about the assault before she was ready, “I felt like I had to tell people. Because now they have this idea that I'm the bad guy in this thing.”

Jane disclosed to her girlfriend by framing it as a “non-consensual kind of thing.” She said they have not really talked about it because there have been more pressing issues related to family acceptance. She said she was not sure how open she would be with her partner about the assault. Although she has had negative reactions from others, she did not feel her partner would judge her in any way. She was more concerned with protecting her partner from hearing about a painful experience that her partner cannot fix.

A few women received complex reactions from their partners, especially in the way that they acknowledged her experience. Hazel and her boyfriend had both experienced a sexual assault. She said it was nice that early on, they could relate and made it easier for them to understand each other. However, he did not experience flashbacks and panic attacks the way she did. She said that ultimately took a toll on their relationship, and it became too much for him to handle.

Sabrina’s boyfriend at the time found out that she had been assaulted because he noticed some bruising on her arm and asked her about it. She told him about the assault, but his response was not what she expected, “…his response was, "Why does this always happen to me?" And I said, "What do you mean?" And he said, “Well, my last ex-girlfriend turned gay too.” And I was like, ‘No, that's not what happened.’” Sabrina said that response was really challenging to handle. She felt like there was a communication
issue. “Apparently, he didn't understand what I just said, like there must be something wrong. But what he was hearing was I cheated on you.” Her partner at the time had a difficult time processing the assault and cycled through blaming her, believing her, calling her a liar and denying that it happened. Based on his reaction, she started questioning herself:

It was just a thing that I think he didn't have a lot of power over me in ways that he wanted, and I let him have that … hold that over me because I was like, "Oh, maybe it was because I got too drunk that night, and she was my friend."

Sabrina’s boyfriend made her feel like she needed to make sure that he was okay because his response indicated that he needed comforting, to be told that everything was going to be okay for him. At the same time, his response made Sabrina question whether she should disclose to others:

I just need to focus on him and make sure that he's okay because obviously, this isn't something I can be telling everyone now. If that's the response I get from the person that I thought loved me more than anything in this world because I felt the same way about him, then I'm completely wrong about this, so I shouldn't be talking about it.

There were other occasions in which the participant had to console their partner after they disclosed their assault. Taylor felt the need to walk back her disclosure so that her boyfriend felt better:

I felt like I had to console them, instead of being like, "Oh. I thought we were talking about me. Yeah. That's so weird." That was exactly the way that it was, and the way that I felt like that information was too much for them, and then I had to immediately back-pedal. I worked through it, and it's not a big deal. I just wanted you to know and be aware. I had to immediately switch to a happy face and be like, "But it's okay!"

Taylor was never really able to unpack her assault with her boyfriend. She said they never had a real conversation about it. When she mentioned that when she mentioned “bits and
pieces,” those were well received. She thought that her boyfriend’s reaction was because it was brought up in a negative context, “like something bad happened, and they had to talk about it,” which could have put him on the defense, or they might have felt blindsided.

Daisy had a similar experience; however, her boyfriend responded with anger:

I had expressed to him what happened. I could tell he had anger. And I was like, "Okay. I don't know where this is coming from," and when we talked more, we found out that his mom was actually sexually assaulted by her father. And so, it was like really, really, really touchy for him. And obviously, I didn't know that. I was just trying to express why I was feeling a certain way. And so, it was hard for me because he kind of made it about himself.

She understood where his anger was coming from, now knowing his mother’s background. However, she was unable to bring up her issues without worrying about his reaction. She felt her experience had been placed on the back burner:

"Okay, you did have this very tragic thing happen. Obviously, you're going to be upset about anyone who does these things. I understand that part." But at the same time, I felt like he was taking away from what happened with me and my experience.

**Preferred Responses**

The participants received a variety of responses; however, many expressed that they wished they would have received different responses. Some, such as Celeste, would have appreciated “emotional support in the aspect of wanting to feel loved and protection.” Heartfelt validation was also something they had hoped for. For example, Yvonne wanted someone to validate her experience in a sincere way,

I believe you. Nothing is more powerful than letting someone know that they are believed. And what they … even just like, I believe you, what you went through is serious and hard, and I hear you, period.
When Paula told her friends about an encounter with her perpetrator, she said: “it felt good to tell them.” However, their response to “go beat his ass” made Paula “[feel] like kind of like... Their reaction made me make light of it.” She likened the reaction to how someone might respond when talking about a break-up. She said their reaction did not feel genuine, “[Their reaction was] just a thing that you say to make them feel better, not necessarily like, ‘This is something that was absolutely absurd, and he needs to pay for it.’, kind of thing.” Instead, Paula was hoping for a validating and emotionally supportive response:

I was looking for somebody to be like, "Wow, this was an absolutely horrible thing that happened to you. And I am so sorry that you had to deal with that. And I am here to offer you any of the support that you need. And let's go help you.", and all these different things, but that's not what I got at that time.

Taylor, too, wanted validation and confirmation. She was assaulted by her long-time partner, who manipulated and pressured her into sexual relations. When she did disclose, she received dismissive responses, and her behavior was blamed. She wanted someone to acknowledge that what she had experienced was wrong rather than offer her advice on how to prevent it from happening in the future. Because of the responses that she received; she began to question her own experience. She really wanted someone to understand the “complexities” of her experience since her boyfriend was assaulting her. She said she needed someone to step in and provide that validation:

I think I was looking for validation that what had happened wasn't okay or that it wasn't my fault. Something where it's like … You know .. You said 'no,' and the person continued to pressure you until you said 'yes' and that's not okay. It wasn't okay. That confirmation of like … I felt like it wasn't okay. I really wanted that validation that it wasn't okay.
Flo wanted someone to just listen, which would have allowed her the space to create an understanding of her experience, especially in an emotionally charged state of mind. Flo was having a difficult time processing the experience by herself, “I think also when you're so emotionally caught up in the situation, your scope of vision is super narrowed… Having someone just to listen, I think that kind of makes you more conscious of what you're saying and what you're thinking.”

When a friend assaulted Sabrina, her friends told her that it seemed that they would have to “pick sides,” either Sabrina or her perpetrator. This was not the response she was hoping for. Sabrina said, “I wish they wouldn't have made it about them because I don't want to think about it being about me, but it wasn't about them.”

Inez initially wanted her friends to validate that she was in control over the situation; essentially, she wanted to feel justified that it was not sexual assault. To do so, she sought out friends that would support her stance, “I talked to them because I knew that they would say [what I wanted to hear].” However, looking back, Inez wanted that in this instance, someone would have helped her acknowledge that something wasn’t right. More specifically, she wished that someone had said: “You actually were sexually assaulted.”

Several participants talked about how some of those who they disclosed to didn’t know how to react. As Taylor put it:

They just … I don't think that they were well equipped to one, understand; two, talk about it; and three, maybe talk about how that impacts our relationship. They just did not know how to handle tough, emotional conversations.
Similarly, Willow talked about how, although those to whom they disclose might not know how to respond, some were better at talking about it with her than others. She specifically points out that she was more likely to receive a dismissive remark than an actual conversation:

I feel like a lot of people talked to aren't really, they don't really know what to say kind of thing. I don't feel like anybody really knows what to say in those situations. But like some people try a little bit more like others, so it's kind of hard just because those responses like, oh that sucks, happens more than like an actual conversation about it.

Sabrina discussed that navigating the disclosure can be difficult for both sides. Those who she disclosed to didn’t quite know how to react; she did not want to tell them how to feel for her. Sabrina felt that the weight of guiding their response to the disclosure was on her; she felt that she had to guide others on how to respond. She was not sure how to talk to them about the experience or ask for what she needed since this was a novel experience. She wanted a genuine response without having to guide their response:

I think the hard part is that weird, "How do we go about it?" It's just as weird for them because they probably haven't had a bunch of people talk about it with them. It's almost like I'm supposed to instruct them on how to help me through my trauma, but I don't know how to because I've never had something like it. It's like, "Okay, so this is how to feel bad for me," which I'm never trying to do. I don't like feeling pity, and I think that's the hardest thing. It's like, "I'm not trying to make you feel bad for me,” But also, it's kind of nice being supported.

Yvonne found it frustrating that society does not know how to respond to survivors. She believed that people fall short of knowing how to respond to disclosures of sexual assault. She mentioned that although others appear to be open to supporting survivors, she did not find it authentic. She alluded to how rape myths dictate responses from other, indicating that when rape does not fit society’s definition of rape or that the
experience is not seen as traumatic enough, then others are less likely to support the survivor:

We suck when it comes to victims. We suck when it actually talking to victims. We're all computer warriors. We're all able to go online and say the statistics and say how we believe you. And go on Twitter and say, "If you've been raped, I'm here for you." But when it comes down to it, we're not here for victims, unfortunately. Unless it's some crazy story, we're not there. Even women and men who state that they're feminists or they're victim advocates, they're not there. And I think that's a huge flaw in our society, is that we talk about how gray rape is, how gray sexual assault is. And how we need to believe everyone and everything, but we don't. We don't practice what we preach.

**Barriers to Informal Disclosures**

Participants found several barriers that kept them from disclosing to certain people. This section will address Research Question 3: What are the barriers to disclosing sexual assault? Prior negative reactions to disclosure were also a factor, including negative reactions based on culture. Anticipated reactions from others was a major deterrent, fear of not being believed or fear that they would be viewed differently, and fear of blame.

Gwen was concerned that she would not be believed, “I would say one of the biggest factors was not the people who didn't believe me, or they thought I was lying, it was people just didn't want to deal with the drama of it.” Feeling as though they would not be believed because of self-blame was another factor that made the participants hesitant to tell others. For example, Ruby said, “It does hold a burden on [me], and admitting it to family would be extremely difficult to me… I feel ashamed talking about it.”
Concern for being blamed was not the only factor that acted as a barrier to disclosing. Olivia had a complex reason for not wanting to tell people because in addition to self-blame, she didn’t think others would understand and want more details than she wanted to give:

I felt so strongly that it wasn't an experience that most people were going to be supportive about, or that they'd want details, or that they wouldn't understand, and then also just that I still felt guilty, and I still felt like it was my fault … I was already blaming myself, so what's the point of talking to other people about it?

Secondly, Olivia did not want to disclose because of her relationship with the assailant. She was worried about maintaining the image of her assailant:

Like if I were to tell somebody, it would also feel like I was betraying the person who assaulted me, who was supposed to be my friend. So, not just like some random person, so anytime I think about the assault, it's like, "Oh, I shouldn't think badly of this person."

Prior to the assault, Flo was drinking, because of this, she did not want to tell her family in fear of being blamed for her behavior:

I definitely thought that they would have some difficulty, or that they would in some way victim blame, because... I thought I didn't want to tell them because I was expecting that they would question why I was drinking … Kind of say that I had done something to cause it to happen.

Some were concerned with her assault defining them. The participants feared that the disclosure would change others’ perceptions of themselves, or others would treat them differently following the disclosure. Participants were hesitant to disclose to maintain or control their image. For example, Ruby didn’t want to tell her friends about the assault to manage her image:

[Not telling others provides some] control over how they feel about me, or what they think of me. I feel how I acted that night could be seen as childish even more, and they would focus more on my behavior and not what happened, and it would just reassure that I'm too young to be there, I
don't belong there, this is not how we act kind of thing, and it was a lot of image. I did not want to admit to people what happened because I didn't want them to see me in that light.

Hazel was concerned about telling others because she felt she should be treated differently, “I just don't want them to feel sorry for me if that makes sense. I've had to move on. I mean, yeah, you can feel sorry for me, but don't treat me any differently kind of thing because I'm still here.”

In addition to maintaining their image and how others treated them, maintaining control over their narrative was a concern. Jane reasoned that she kept her assault to herself most of the time was two-fold, she wanted to be in control, and she did not want to be defined by her assault:

It's just I didn't want to give more power to the event than it needed to begin with, and so I didn't want that to be any type of identifier for me in my friend group, like, “Oh wow, she went through this thing, Like that's her, and she went through that.”

Also, Jane came out to her sister, telling her that she was dating a woman, which goes against her family’s cultural beliefs. She did not want to focus on her assault as a reason for being gay. Also, because of her sisters’ reactions, she did not want to tell her parents:

I don't want a chain that is connected to this one event, and this is why I turned out the way that I am. It's been difficult because I think this is an important thing that did happen to me, and I feel like I'm deliberately silencing myself because I don't want the wrong explanation. I know for sure I'm not telling parents. I don't think their understanding of who I am is authentic. And they're refusing to understand me in an authentic way. So, I think at least with certain!audiences, I know I'm going to stay silent.

Taylor indicated that she wanted her friends to see the seriousness of her experience. Looking back, she said she did not have the vocabulary that would elicit such a response; she did not label her experience as rape or sexual assault:
Then I was not as well educated on how to talk about things, so when I said that it happened, I didn't ever use the word 'sexual assault.' I never used the word 'sexual assault' or ‘rape’ … that may have brought more light to the severity of the situation.

After Taylor realized her experience had been sexual assault, she still did not refer to her experience as sexual assault or rape when talking to others. “Even later, those were not [labels] that I used because I felt like I was making it more serious than it actually was.”

She was worried her friends might have said she was over-reacting.

Negative reactions from others made it difficult to tell others. For example, Sabrina’s partner at the time made the disclosure about himself rather than focusing on her. When she met her current partner, she was hesitant to tell him:

"Oh, I don't want to put him through this yet." Of like putting him through the tribulations, the emotional difficulties. It's like, "Let's just have some nice innocent... Let's date each other." Which I know eventually you have to probably talk about that stuff, but I learned from my other boyfriend don't say things all the time. There are some things that you just can't say to certain people or at all, which really sucks, but you can't. If you think that'll make you feel better, sometimes it'll just make them feel worse, and sometimes it's not even worth it.

Some did not disclose or delayed their disclosure to protect others. Keri did not want her family to be concerned about her while at the same time maintaining her image, “I don't want them to be worried. I don't ever want to seem like anything less than strong and independent because I feel like I've definitely been through enough to earn the title of strong.” Gwen did not want my parents to burden or worry others. This occurred most with family disclosures. Gwen was worried about her parent’s reaction and also did not want to worry them:

I still have never told my parents. That's not for fear of them being like, "God, how dare you." My mom is so protective, and both of my parents
Discussion

The chapter examined women’s accounts with disclosing their sexual assault to informal sources. More specifically, the chapter explored positive, negative, complex, and preferred reactions of friends, family members, and partners. Additionally, the chapter discussed barriers women had when deciding to disclose their sexual assaults with others.

Almost all of the participants disclosed their sexual assault to a friend. Similar to results of Ahrens et al. (2007), many of the participants turned to their friends for their first disclosure. Participants turned to their friends to make sense of the experience. Prior research has indicated that friends are more likely than family members to engage in positive responses, such as emotional support (Ahrens et al. 2009; Filipas & Ullman, 2001; Ullman, 2010). In addition to emotional support, the study found that friends were more likely to offer validation and change the participants’ perspective, shifting blame from the victim. Specifically, friends were viewed as reassuring by validating the experience, by emphasizing that assault was not their fault, and even by changing their perspective, removing self-blame and reiterating the fact that the experience was an assault and not a misunderstanding. Friends were less likely to push the participants to talk about the experience when they were not ready to fully discuss the assault and assured them that they were in control of their story.

While the participants received several forms of positive feedback, they also received mixed and negative responses. Sit and Schuller (2018) reported that those who
were more likely to endorse rape myths were less likely to offer supportive responses. Some of their friends dismissed their experience by making light of the situation, sometimes jokingly. Other times friends dismissed the assault by chalking it up to a misunderstanding or by claiming that it happens to so many others. Receiving dismissive responses left the participants feeling unheard, as though their experience didn’t matter, and that it was not a big deal and that they should not worry about it. When the participants did not feel like their friends validated their experience or questioned them about the experience, the participants began questioning themselves. Dismissive reactions did not reduce the victim from engaging in self-blame, but rather victims continued or increased self-blame.

Self-questioning following a disclosure was particularly relevant when alcohol was involved. If a participant had been drinking prior to the assault, their certainty of the assault was questioned by others. In the study, common rape myths such as behavior blame (Payne et al. 1999), were frequent negative responses especially when alcohol was involved, Ullman & Peter-Hagene (2014) suggested that negative reactions, especially those that involved questioning the validity of the experience or victim blaming, are likely to lead to the victim blaming herself. The current study identified that when responses included victim blaming, participants’ self-blame was reinforced, or they began to self-blame. Participants who were questioned, especially when alcohol was involved, began to reason that they did something that caused the assault, such as flirting with the assailant beforehand, or even went so far as to believe that they wanted it to happen. Responses that questioned or blamed the victim could be seen as a way for their friends to protect themselves from the threat of sexual assault. By believing that the assault
occurred because of something the victim did, others might be able to believe that sexual assaults could be prevented if they avoid behaviors that their friend engaged in.

While nearly all participants disclosed their sexual assault to their friends, fewer disclosed to a family member. Additionally, when participants did disclose to a family member, they were met with more negative responses compared to when they disclosed to a friend. These findings complemented prior research, Filipas & Ullman (2001) and Ullman (2010) suggested that compared to disclosure reactions of friends, family members were more likely to engage in negative responses, such as blame, doubt, and have controlling reactions. Many times, family members were dismissive of or downplayed the experience. Dismissive responses were a common occurrence with mothers. It is possible that because the mothers have not developed the ego strength to challenge men’s rights over women’s bodies, or maybe because they too were assaulted at one time and no one believed them.

Participants received different responses depending on the type of partner to whom they disclosed. Many who disclosed to a current partner, who they were not involved with when the assault occurred, received support through empathy and validation. These partners were also understanding of how the assault could impact their intimate relationship and were receptive to changing how they approach sexual relations with the participants to accommodate her feelings and provide a safe environment. However, not all partners were supportive, some were dismissive in that they avoided conversations about the assault by changing the topic or not fully engaging the conversation.
Partners who the participant was dating at the time of the assault were typically much less supportive. Edwards et al. (2011) suggested that men are more likely to endorse rape myths, specifically blaming her behavior and lying about the assault, these beliefs could be the underlying cause for their partners' responses. Several of those partners reacted negatively and blamed the participant, typically her behavior. This occurred in two ways, first they suggested that she provoked the assault in some way, such as by leading the perpetrator on. Second, the participant’s partner accused her of cheating and using the excuse of an assault to cover up this transgression.

Participants also received complex reactions from partners who they were dating at the time of the assault. Ullman (2010) found that partners, compared to friends were more likely to engage in egocentric reactions. Specifically, partners engaged in focal shift, shifting the focus of the disclosure from the victim to themselves. Male partners made it about themselves, perhaps because their manhood is threatened by the event, so much so that women end up consoling their boyfriends when they were initially seeking support. These partners had reactions that took the focus off the participant’s experience and made the conversations about themselves. This type of reaction made the participants feel as though their partners’ needs were greater than their own. In a sense they had to put their emotions and reactions aside to take care of their partners’ needs. This type of reaction made the participant feel unimportant.

According to the women, one of the most impactful and helpful responses that they received was that of validation of their experience and of their thoughts about the experience. They appreciated when they weren’t questioned and felt believed. Many of the women received dismissive responses, such as “it happens all the time” or “it’s not a
big deal,” however they really wanted someone to not just acknowledge that an unwanted sexual experience occurred, but they wanted to be believed and validated that their experience was wrong and was considered sexual assault.

Participants cited several reasons that prevented them from telling others about their sexual assault. Fear of being blamed for their assault was one major factor and not being believed was another barrier for disclosure. This finding supports prior research regarding delayed or avoided disclosures due to fear of belief and blame (Ahrens et al., 2007; Zinzow & Thompson, 2011). Additionally, Ahrens (2006) suggested that negative reactions from friends and/or family have prevented future disclosures. Those who received a negative response, such as having the validity of their assault questioned or being blamed for their assault were likely to be hesitant to disclose to others or stop disclosing completely.

In sum, women received a range of positive, mixed, and negative responses to disclosing their sexual assault to friends, family members, and partners. The next chapter will examine formal reporting or formal disclosing of their sexual assault. Specifically, the next chapter will explore the participants’ interactions with police offices, Title IX, university victim advocates, mental health providers, and university mandatory reporters.
Chapter 9 – Formal Reporting

This chapter presents the results of the analysis of women’s accounts of formally reporting their sexual assault. Formal reporting focused on women’s experience with those of authority, such as the police or Title IX. Additionally, this chapter focused on women’s experiences with other formal resources such as victims’ advocates, mental health providers, and those affiliated with the university (e.g., resident advisor (RA), professors, teaching assistants). This chapter not only cover their interactions with and responses from formal reporting but also examines how the participants were encouraged to report and their reasons for not reporting.

Many women were encouraged by their family and friends to report the sexual assault, however few actually reported: 13% (n=3) reported to the police and 30% (n=7) reported to Title IX. I then examine the experiences and reactions from those to whom they formally reported. Additionally, I examine reasons why women didn’t report to these formal authorities. I also explore responses from other formal resources, such as victim advocates, mental health providers, and campus affiliates.

Encouraged to Report

Most women were encouraged to report their sexual assault to a formal authority, most often the police (78%, n=18), and several of the participants were encouraged by more than one person to whom they disclosed. This section will address Research Question 4: How did informal disclosures lead to or inhibit formally reporting a sexual assault? Daisy mentioned that several of her friends suggested reporting her sexual assault. She said they were respective of her decision to not report, but felt her friends revisited the topic too much which made her feel uncomfortable. Others took the advice
of their friends and family and did report. April discussed talking to her friend soon after it happened. After listening to her describe the experience, her friend told her “No, that’s rape” and told her “these are the steps you need to take” which included calling the police. April said that her friend was “just very matter of fact,” which is what she needed to hear. April hung up and called the police, however the experience was filed as a domestic dispute rather than rape.

Participants found it helpful when they were given choices regarding what they wanted to do next. Mary said that she appreciated that the victim advocate provided several options, including talking to the police. Elena’s friend offered her options, such as reporting to the police, going to the hospital, or even going home. Elena discussed how this was a helpful solution because she didn’t feel pressured to do anything, such as reporting, “I didn't know what I wanted to do, and I didn't want somebody to tell me what to do either.” Sabrina’s friends also respected her choice not to report, “Do you want to? We'll support you if you do. If you don't, we're not going to push it.” Sabrina said that because of their respectful response she felt supported.

Some participants were not provided with choices but were confronted with overbearing responses. Elena, who received choices from her friend was given no choice by her mother. Elena’s mother pushed for her to go to the police, “you need to get help… I want to make sure you are safe.” Immediately after the assault Lia spoke with her sister and father who both aggressively encouraged her to report the assault. Lia’s father demanded that she report her sexual assault to the police, she said she “again felt like I [had] no control.” He kept pushing her telling her “you’re going to the police,” leaving her feeling frustrated and unheard. Lia’s sister said “we're going to handle this the right
way… I know the right way,” which signified that they were going to the police. Lia said she was frustrated by the demanding response. She wanted to do what was best for herself and wanted the choice to report or not to report to be up to her.

A couple of the participants didn’t tell others the truth when asked if they had already reported the sexual assault. For example, Inez said her mental health provider asked:

“Did you report it?’ And I was like, "Yeah, totally." Did not override her for sure. And I was like, "Yeah, I totally did. It was terrible." And I think looking back on it, like me not telling you the truth was still me trying to not be vulnerable because I was like, I don't want to admit that I've made mistakes too.”

Hazel told her parents that she would file a police report after their initial discussion, which she said felt more like an intervention. She told them that she would file a report after their conversation because she no longer wanted to talk about the assault with her parents. Later Hazel’s parents wanted proof that her assault happened and demanded a copy of the police report, the rape kit results, demanding that “we need to see everything.” Hazel had to tell them that she didn’t file the report. Hazel explained to them why she felt the need to keep the truth from them, stating that they were “talking at her and she couldn’t handle it… and she just wanted [their conversation] to be over” at the time, then they no longer pushed the topic of reporting.

**Reporting to the Police**

Very few of the participants reported their experience to the police (13%, n=3). This section will focus on the narratives of the three women who reported their sexual assault to the police, which addresses Research Question 5: What are the experiences of formally reporting a sexual assault? The experiences discussed include city and university
police. The participants talked about being scared and intimidated when reporting, and one of them described it as an overall horrible experience. The participants did find some aspects as helpful and supportive.

Elena’s friends took her to the hospital the morning after it happened in the hopes of getting the morning after pill and a rape kit. She was told by the staff that they were unable to fulfill her requests, “I'm sorry, we don't have the morning after pill. We don't have anything.” The hospital called the police to report the rape. Three police officers arrived at the hospital, two male and one female. Elena said that once the police arrived, she was separated from her friends and “interrogated in [her] hospital room” instead of taking her somewhere where she “felt safe and comfortable.” Elena said the “biggest male” was the police officer she interacted with the most, which she said was intimidating. The other two officers spent time taking statements from her friends. Elena was overwhelmed during the questioning. She had asked her to write a statement within five minutes of their arrival and said they did not talk her through the process. She was handed a sheet of paper and told to “write down what happened.” She said they asked her to “do it again, because the first time wasn’t good enough.” They told her that she needed to be more specific.

In addition to feeling overwhelmed by how the police conducted the process she felt invalidated and that she was somehow to blame for the sexual assault. She said while she was writing her statement, they began with questions such as “were you drinking?” and “is this what you were wearing?” She said these questioned made it seem as if they thought “she had provoked [the assault] and that she had to make an argument for them believe her. The experience made her feel terrible:
It made me regret even saying something because I was just so scared, and I have never gone through anything like this. So, part going through it and not really remembering either, and then having to answer all these questions, and I’m just like, "I don't know." And then not validating the fact that it still did happen. They're just like, "Well you don't know, so it's hard for us to help you."

She was transferred, in the back of a police car, to a center that was equipped for recovering rape evidence and providing medication including the morning after pill. She said she felt uncomfortable and vulnerable during the physical examination. They stripped her down, took pictures of her body, and conducted a gynecological examination. She said that the victim advocate on site was helpful and stayed by her side, which made Elena feel supported. She also mentioned that she really appreciated when the female doctor took her time to explain and describe what would happen next when she completed the rape kit and performed the gynecological examination. She said she felt much more human and supported by those at the rape center than the police because they were walking her through the steps and not just focused on paperwork.

April had two experiences with reporting to the police, one with the city police and one with the campus police. April first went to the city police to report her sexual assault. She discussed that that she wanted to avoid the downtown police station because of its set up for reporting a crime. She said the lobby has a telephone that you use to connect to an officer working the station. The phone is located in the lobby, where there are several others waiting to report various crimes. She did not feel comfortable discussing her sexual assault on a phone in a police station lobby with several other people within earshot. April also discussed the confusion related to where to report a sexual assault. She said:
I didn't know what police station to go to, because [at the time of reporting] I didn't know that there's some that you go to if you're in a car accident… [other police stations] where you report things. I didn't know that. I thought it was like a one stop shop.

April found a police station nearby, however, she said “it didn’t look like anyone was there.” She said there was one police officer pulling in and she waved him down. She told the police officer she needed to report a rape, she said his response was off putting and unsure of how to handle the situation:

I told him what it was for. And he goes, "Oh." And he looked like ... I don't know. Like I said I shot a dog or something. He looked really ... I don't know what to do with you.

She said once she was inside of the police station the initial police officer, she met with brought out five additional police officers, all men, which she said was intimidating. She said she would have preferred to report to a woman, which she did request, but there was not one in the building, “you shouldn't have a token female in the room at all times. But have a couple there just in case, because [someone reporting a sexual assault] is going to happen.” After she provided a written report one the officers sat down with her to go over the report, however the response of the officer was not what she expected. She said, “So he's reading it, going, ‘Oh. Oh my god. Oh no.’ And facial expressions saying things the whole time. I wanted to smack him.” The police officer also told her that he had only he had only processed two sexual assaults, which did not give April the confidence that the report would be handled properly. April summed up her concern with filing a report with an inexperienced officer:

I'm telling myself you don't know what you're doing. So ... I mean, and everyone has to learn, but I don't want to be the learning curve. Because I'm thinking, "Is the paperwork going to get to the right place?" And clearly, he's not trained on facial expressions or how to say the right thing.
The officers told April that they would file the report, but also mentioned that there wasn’t much else they could do. She said they told her “We can't prove anything happened. You don't have pictures. You don't have physical evidence. You don't have a condom. Nothing. So, there is nothing we can do.” She said they told her “It's probably not going to have any impact on his life.” She asked if this report would show up on his future background checks. The officers told her “no,” which she was surprised to learn.

April also went to the campus police after a run in with him on campus. She said it seemed as though he either tried to intimidate her with his presence or was stalking her. She said in that instance she felt pure panic. She called her campus therapist who ran to find her on campus. She told her therapist that she wanted to report the incident, so she and her therapist headed to the campus police station. After speaking with officers at the station, they told her that there was nothing they could do since a crime was not committed on campus. She said, “they looked at me like I was wasting their day,” and was told by the police, again, that she didn’t have proof, so there wasn’t anything they could do. They said if she didn’t take pictures or have him on film, she couldn’t prove that anything happened. She was frustrated that she was expected to record the incident while she was panicking. The officer told her “It's like if you set your backpack down in the middle of the hall, and then get upset when someone walks by it,” which April found deeply disturbing and felt as though they were blaming the victim.

After the incident on campus, April went to court to request a restraining order. She said when she filed the restraining order, she felt intimidated, she met with an officer who “interrogated [her] like [she’s] the one who committed the crime.” She met with a court appointed advocate, who should have contacted her prior to the court date, at the
restraining order hearing. She was awarded the restraining order; however, she received a letter two weeks later stating that the perpetrator was challenging the order, stating that she lied under oath. Because of this, she had to go back to court. She was assigned another court advocate who did not communicate with her. The advocate did not keep her updated or inform her that the perpetrator hired a lawyer, so April was blindsided and not prepared when she walked into court. Although she had issues with many of the people she met with when she acquired the restraining order, she felt heard and supported by the judge during the second hearing who upheld the restraining order.

Like April, Flo also had some experience with both campus and city police. In addition, Flo discussed the court proceedings. After a few months Flo felt she had the strength to report her sexual assault. Since she was a student, she turned to the campus police. She took a couple of friends with her for support and to also provide statements. She approached the front desk of the campus police department and told the student worker that she needed to “report something, can I talk to someone?” The front desk worker asked if the crime occurred on campus. Technically the crime was not committed on campus, but at an affiliate location. The front desk worker told her that since the crime was not committed on campus, they could not help her. Flo:

…was so destroyed by it, because I had spent so much energy just preparing to even just go in and report it. I had these people here who were taking... I think a huge thing is I feel like a burden to the people who I was telling or asking help from… The message that I was getting was this is not significant enough for us to want to listen to it. I just remember this sinking feeling. I felt like I was going to puke, and... because, immediately, they didn't even... They wouldn't even take any more information.
She said as she and her friends began to leave, another worker came out to the lobby of the police station to ask what type of crime she needed to report, and Flo told them it was sexual assault. She appreciated that someone would take the report but said “it was just not handled well at all.”

Flo’s statement was taken by two female officers at the campus police station. Flo appreciated that female officers took her statement. She talked about how this instance of reporting was a “very long process.” She said they asked her to tell them everything she could remember and that they asked questions that “triggered new memories.” After the initial discussion, the officers took her written statement. She said the two female police officers “handled it better than [she] thought they would.” She recounted “Obviously, it’s not a comfortable situation, but I think they did what they could to make it as less uncomfortable as it could be.”

Her entire interaction with campus police was video recorded, which turned out to be helpful once the city police became involved. She said the city police arrived at the campus police station a few hours after she began the report. The city police said they were not going to have her retell her story, they said they had the recording and would call if they had follow-up questions. She was told to “go home, relax a bit if you can.” She found this response to be supportive. Before she left the campus police station, she was referred to Title IX and introduced to a campus victim advocate, who she found to be really helpful.

She later met with the detective assigned to her case. She said she was surprised to find him so helpful, “I was kind of expecting as a middle-aged white man for him not to be as supportive as he was.” The detective asked her a few follow up questions and
then asked what she wanted to have happen and included her in the entire process. She said, “He really tried to involve me with the whole process, which is so important, because again, any sort of control that we can grasp onto really helps.” She found this inclusion to be empowering. She was also connected to a victim advocate from the city, with whom she did not have a good experience. She felt they were not doing their job, since they “gave me her cellphone number, didn't respond to my calls or my texts.”

Flo said the district attorney who was assigned to her case also included her, as the detective did: “She definitely tried to involve me more, but that process is expected to take a lot longer.” However, Flo mentioned that she was not kept updated by the DA but was able to call her office for information. She said, “when I asked for information, she was very ready to give it.” Flo said that this was understandable keeping in mind the workload of the DA’s office.

The charges were changed from sexual assault to sexually motivated coercion since the assailant wanted to take a plea deal. This avoided a criminal trial, but still warranted a sentencing hearing. She said his attorneys were arguing for probation only. She found this punishment as unacceptable, especially since the charges were initially sexual assault, which carries a mandatory 35-year sentence if found or pled guilty. She acknowledged pressure from the judge and court as a whole to ask for a minimum sentence she would be comfortable with. She said she remembered speaking with the DA who asked, “what is the absolute least you would be able to find peace with, and let's ask for that, so you can be at peace.” When she addressed the court, she asked the judge to sentence him for the same amount of time that she has been “imprisoned by the conditions of my life that he created for me.” The judge stated that he was “really
impressed with my statement” and accepted her request for sentencing.” She mentioned that she felt, “the judge was... I think he did that because he wanted to give me some control back.”

Flo had a rather positive outlook on the way that the university police department, city police department, and the court proceedings were conducted, even though there were several uncomfortable discussions. She mentioned that there were certain issues that could be improved upon, such as department communication, but that overall, she appreciated the time and energy all of these departments put into her case. Flo’s positive experience with the university and city police departments was completely contrasted by her negative experiences with Title IX, which are described in the next section.

**Reasons for not reporting to the Police**

“... if the girls before me had said something like maybe this wouldn't have happened to me. [My sister asked me], are you mad at them? And I was like, no. Like I forgive them. Like I know they were in a tough spot. And I was like, I hope that the future girls forgive me.” Lia

This section will focus the reasons why victims did not report their sexual assault to either the law enforcement. This section will address Research Question 4: How did informal disclosures lead to or inhibit formally reporting a sexual assault? Several women said they did not report to the police because they were worried that the police would question their experience and would not be considered “real rape” or that the police would not believe their stories. Additionally, some were worried that the police would find a way to blame them for the sexual assault, such as because they were drinking at the time of the assault. Others said they did not report because too much time had passed
since the assault. Some decided not to report because they were protecting others, and in many cases, this was the perpetrator.

Similar to barriers cited when disclosing to informal others, another reason women did not report to police was because they were unclear if their experience could be considered sexual assault or rape. This was typically coupled with reasons such as that the perpetrator was their boyfriend, or it was not severe enough to be considered rape. For example, Taylor, who at the time didn’t have a label for the sexual assault, said “I don't even know if this is something that you can report. I didn't know if it was serious enough to report. I didn't know how to report it.” She went on to say that even later, after she had spoken to others who gave her perspective and told her that is was wrong and a sexual assault, she still did not consider it serious enough to report and she did not think it's “technically illegal.”

While Taylor did not have another experience to compare her assault to, Willow did. Willow, when she compared her sexual assault in college to being molested as a child said:

I don't want to say like, oh, it wasn't that extreme enough for me to talk to the police. But I know that since other more extreme cases have happened to me, I know the procedure already and I know that it's hard… I didn't think it was that serious. I didn't think it was as that serious of an offense that he would need jail time or anything like that.

Lia was worried about how the police would question her based on others’ accounts of reporting, “I've heard a lot of stories of the police being like, were you drunk? What were you wearing?” Lia said she was not ready to go through those questions. Jane did not report to the police because she questioned herself, stating “but I invited... Like I was the one that initiated all these things.” She thought that since she was
questioning herself, then the police would also question whether this would be considered a sexual assault and if this was a case of false reporting.

Keri discussed how she felt that reporting would not be easy because “it’s not enough to be like, “THIS is what happened. Because a lot of people don’t believe it.” She said because of this lack of belief she said “It falls a lot on the victim to prove that they didn't want that. Even though [the victim is] sitting in front of you saying, ‘Yeah, I didn't want that.’ And they're like, ‘Are you sure?’” Keri speculated that she might not be believed because of the stigmatizing beliefs held by others, specifically beliefs held by men:

I mean, considering most police officers are male. Most lawyers, statistically are male, so I think it can be difficult because there is such a stigma that we dress a certain way, we were acting a certain way, we led them on, we didn't actually say no. That one is... "Did she actually say no?"

Quinn also mentioned that she did not want the burden of proof that accompanies reporting, “I feel like when women report this, it's like where's your proof? How am I supposed to have proof? It was in a room, in a basement, how am I supposed to prove that years later?”

A few were worried about being believed or that police would doubt their experiences specifically because they had been drinking. Ruby, who was assaulted while she was drinking and questioned herself about the validity of the sexual assault, was worried that going to the police would have been difficult. She discussed how she thought the police would focus more on her underage drinking rather than the sexual assault:
Because there would be a lot of questions of the drinking, how much do you actually remember, and the fact that there was a lot of alcohol involved, and I was in the wrong with the alcohol because it was underage, I think that would have escalated those blaming feelings even more.

Gwen said that she did not want to report because she too questioned herself. She identified that since drinking and flirting were involved, she was not sure if they would believe her:

I had been drinking, and I was like, "Okay, he had been flirting with me for like a month where I knew he really likes me… You feel like you have to know exactly everything that happened. It's honestly kind of a blur sometimes, or there's parts that you're like, "I honestly don't know."

Other circumstances surrounding the assault and informal disclosures were considered in their decision to not report. Paula also discussed how the circumstances that surrounded the sexual assault kept her from reporting to the police, “I played in a role in it, too, in the fact that I was there. And I was drunk. And I let my guard down, kind of thing. So, that's part of the reasonings of why I didn’t report.” She also speculated that if she had reported the police would have been dismissive, stating that, “if I went to the police, they're going to say, ‘Why did you call us for something that's not this big?’” She likened this to how her friend’s dismissive response, “You’re making a mountain out of a molehill.” Taylor, too, recounted that because her mother and friend were dismissive, she did not believe that the police would be any different, “If your first line of defense doesn't believe you and they've known you a long time... You know... Why would a stranger believe you? Someone you don't even know.”

Some believed that because they did not know enough about the assailant, they did not have sufficient information to report the assault to the authorities. Zelda said the
fact that she did not know the assailant was the reason she did not report, “Like I didn't know his name, I didn't know anything about this person.” She felt that she did not have enough information to bring a case against him. One of the reasons that Keri cited was that she did not know the perpetrator either, “Even if I wanted to, I didn't have a name.” Because she was assaulted by a random stranger, she did not think the police could find him.

Among women who knew the perpetrator well, some were concerned about having a negative impact on the perpetrator’s life, especially when they blamed themselves. For Quinn, in addition to fearing that she did not have any “proof,” she did not want to go to the police because she did not want to “ruin his life, if it ended up coming to fruition. I didn't want to ruin his life because we were friends before that.” Jane mentioned that she did not want the assault to “be a defining factor for that person” and “didn’t want to hinder anything for him” because of his prominent position. Jane also discussed that she did not want to destroy his life because she wasn’t 100% sure how to define the experience. At that point she was still asking if she brought this upon herself.

Gwen was still second guessing herself because of the circumstances, which included drinking. Since Gwen did not have clarity over whether or not she did anything to provoke the assault she did not want to report out of concern for him, “Do I really want to ruin his life?” Sabrina mentioned that since she did not remember all the details, “I didn't want to ruin lives, and I didn't trust myself about what had happened, so I just didn't want to [formally report] and bring more people in because it was so messy.” Sabrina also mentioned that a girl from her hometown had falsely reported a sexual
assault, which impacted how she thought others would view her accusation, “What if people think I'm lying?”

**Title IX**

Nearly one third of the participants (n=7) reported their sexual assault to Title IX. This section will detail their experiences with formally reporting their sexual assault to Title IX, addressing Research Question 5: What are the experiences of formally reporting a sexual assault. The participants said that Title IX was a useful resource in that the office provides protection through no contact orders and academic accommodations. However, the participants found the reporting process to be invasive and especially did not like having to retell their sexual assault experience in detail. Several of the participants identified that the Title IX coordinators have a lack of empathy and have felt let down when Title IX did not follow through with setting up accommodations.

After being contacted by Title IX, Elena (who told a mandatory reporter) met with the Title IX coordinator. Elena said the Title IX coordinator worked with her “right away from the beginning to the very end of the investigation.” Elena said she was scared of meeting with the Title IX office in the beginning. Specifically, she was worried about being questioned and having to relive the experience of sexual assault, which left Elena feeling helpless. During the initial investigation interview with Title IX, Elena told them everything she remembered from that night answering as many questions as she could. During questioning, they asked her the same questions over and over, she said that it seemed like they were trying to catch her in a lie or find holes in her story:

“Were you drinking?” “Do you remember where you were?” “Do you remember everyone that was there?” So, they ask you questions, and it's
fine to ask one time, but when you ask multiple times, I feel as though they're trying to trip you up, and they're trying to see if it's a false report. When Elena was finished making her statement their response was “Well, there's really not much you can give because you were intoxicated. You were under the influence.”

After then initial investigation interview Title IX told her “I can't tell you that I believe you even if I do.” Being told that they couldn’t tell her if they believed her or not was devastating. Hearing that comment was “hard, it was very hard. Because I feel like even now, through advocacy work that I do, I still want that, “I believe you.” It's so important and to know that a person that is supposed to help me, is telling me, “I can't tell you that.”” She also mentioned that they told her that they would be working with the perpetrator as well, who also has access to their resources. She was taken aback by this, wondering “Why would he need your resources? He did this to me. I didn't do anything to him.” This made Elena feel terrible because “it made me feel as though I was equal to my perpetrator… It made me feel as though we're in the same boat and we were not in the same boat. My life was upside down within a day.”

Title IX contacted Elena and asked for another meeting after they met with the perpetrator. She was asked to recount her story again and answer the same questions. They told her that he was telling them that she “was all over him that night and things like that.” Elena said it was upsetting to hear what he was saying about her from the Title IX office. This was frustrating news to Elena who felt her truth had been questioned:

… knowing what he was saying and saying that I was lying and things like that, and then reiterating this information to me when they’re supposed to be making sure that I feel strong enough to stay in school was really hard.
Each time she had to return to the Title IX office she had to retell her story. They also referred her to the university victim advocate, who she then had to tell her story to. It was difficult for her to continuously relive her experience by repeating herself over and over. Elena describes the investigation process as shameful:

They point fingers at you rather than point fingers at the other person. They're like, “Well you were drinking. Well you were on drugs or you were...” So, and “You don't remember.”

Elena had also reported the sexual assault to the police, so she had two separate investigations that she was part of. It is necessary to note that criminal and Title IX investigations are separate, neither institution shares details of the investigation with the other. For a woman who reports to both law enforcement and Title IX, she is involved with two full investigations simultaneously. She recounted that the “criminal process was not as bad as the school investigation” because the Title IX office made her feel unimportant and unsupported. The Title IX coordinator made her feel like she was “just a number, just another case that they have.” The office was not empathetic, she said “I have walked out of that office feeling worse than when I walked in.”

Elena moved forward with a no contact order, which gave her some sense of security and safety during Title IX’s investigation. Once Title IX’s investigation was through they turned it over to the Office of Student Conduct. Title IX investigation took roughly 8 months. She was notified that the investigation had concluded, but that the Office of Student Conduct had not determined a sanction at that time. She was notified almost 5 months later that the Office of Student Conduct decided to expel the perpetrator for one year. Elena later found out that she had five days to appeal the sanction and request a harsher sanction. However, she was not made aware of this until after the five
days had passed. She asked for an appeal, because she wanted to feel safe on campus, but she was told they could not do anything because it had been too long. She told the Office of Student Conduct office that she was scared and if she were to see him on campus that would be terrifying. The Office of Student Conduct told her “Well maybe you should seek professional help for that because it's a big world, it's a scary world and if you feel that way here on campus, I can't imagine how you'd feel somewhere else.” Elena felt dismissed and demeaned by their response. In a sense she felt like they told her that it was not their problem anymore… “go to counseling services.”

While the investigation process was taxing on Elena, but she found the Title IX office was helpful in a few ways. Title IX referred Elena to the Disability Resource Center for academic assistance. The two offices worked together to make sure she had an opportunity to make up classes, assignments, and exams. Elena stated, “I knew going to the Title IX office for emotional support wasn't the best idea but going to them for academic support was a good idea.” Initially the Title IX office was responsive and aided her with her classes and coursework until the Title IX coordinator changed. Since the change Elena said her experience with the office has been a nightmare. The new Title IX coordinator, who she had not met in person, would not return her phone calls or emails for weeks. Elena sent very detailed emails, which gave the new coordinator some background and reasons why she was making requests for classes, however the responses from the coordinator was blunt. Elena was not the only one experiencing issues with the new coordinator, “[I] and some other survivors from the Title IX office that we worked with them for resources, same thing we all agree. Just because reaching out to them about classes, you won't hear back for about two weeks.” Elena mentioned that she does not
feel supported by the Title IX office because there have been multiple times that she has requested help or resources and did not get the help she needed in time:

[the lack of responses] makes me as a survivor, not want to ask for help. Because maybe my help, me asking for help, is a hassle. Maybe she doesn't deem that I need the help. It makes me question myself.

Part of the academic support provided by the Title IX office was to have them contact her professors regarding difficulties in class. Elena found it difficult to speak directly to professors about why she was having difficulty in their courses. Speaking to her professors about her circumstances has “given me an anxiety attack because I'm scared to do that, I'm scared of their reactions or I'm scared of whether or not they'll believe me.” When Title IX did not reach out to her professors for her it makes her life ten times harder.

When Daisy first met with Title IX, it did not go the way she wanted it to go. During the first meeting when she reported the sexual assault, she told them the full story, which was upsetting and an emotional drain. The Title IX coordinator took notes and asked questions throughout their meeting. Daisy said, “I'm like 99% sure I just went, and word vomited everything to them, and she just wrote everything down.” Daisy did not discuss with me the specific details of the meeting or investigation, but she did talk about how she went to the office to learn about what her options were, and that they expected her to file a report when she walked in the door:

It was just frustrating because I guess they just expected me to have a plan on what I wanted to do; I think. And then I went in like I don't know what I want, I just wanted to talk to somebody. Because it felt like they expected me to just be ready to file and stuff. They're like, "What do you want?" I was like, "I don't know."
Daisy did mention that the Title IX office offered her resources such as connecting her with a victim advocate, counseling services, and academic accommodations. Daisy did end up using the office for their academic support, for which she was initially grateful. The Title IX coordinator told her that they would contact her professors regarding her accommodations. However, when Daisy returned to her classes, she found out that the office had not been in contact with her professors. She spoke to her professors after class and told them that they should have received an email detailing the accommodations from the Title IX office. None of her professors had received any information from the Title IX office. She felt she then needed to explain her absences and ask them directly for accommodations. One professor told her “I don't know what that office is.” She then needed to explain the purpose of the Title IX office and the resources they provide. She said, “it was just a lot of work on my end that I didn't feel like ... I didn't think I had to do that.” The emails were eventually sent out to her professors, but that a significant amount of time had passed since she initially spoke to Title IX and her professors. She felt as if the Title IX office let her down and wasn’t supporting her in the ways they said they would:

I just literally felt irrelevant. I was just like, "You're supposed to be the office that is supposed to help me." And then I felt like they gave me all this false hope... If anything, it made things worse because then I just felt very ... I thought I was forgotten.

Daisy said that before her own experience with Title IX, she was a champion of the Title IX office, telling others of their resources and workshops. However, when she actually used the office she said “Man, that sucked.” She discussed how inconsequential she felt while working with the Title IX office:
I just wish they were more proactive about everything because I felt like I was just ... It literally felt I was just a file put into the charts and when it was my turn to be sent stuff, it was my turn and that was that. It didn't feel personalized in any way. And it was just really awkward already being in the office because it's like I'm obviously here for exactly what you think I am and it's just very strange already. I just wish it was more you are important; we're going to do all these things for you. Holding true to the things they said they were going to do.

Daisy said that because she had a poor experience with Title IX, she had not told her friends that she even went to their offices. She did have a friend who was contemplating going to Title IX for their resources. She told her friend to avoid Title IX, if she wanted academic accommodations because of her experience, and that she should go directly to the Disability Resource Center (DRC) and “figure it out from there.” Daisy had a much better experience working with the DRC than she did working with Title IX. She would only work with the DRC moving forward because she could not rely on Title IX for support.

When Gwen first met with Title IX, she said that they “put you in this big conference room to talk” which made her “feel really small” and “vulnerable.” Gwen discussed how difficult it was talking about the sexual assault. When she reported that “it was probably the most detailed” account she had given about the assault. She said that she spoke to someone she didn’t know in a very detailed way about something that was very sensitive, which made her emotional and full of anxiety. Title IX was less supportive than she expected, “Not that they weren't supportive, but I definitely did not feel like they helped me.” Before she left that she filed a no contact order with them, which she found to be helpful and made her feel safer. She wished they had offered her a flyer with other resources they had access to and a description of what those resources offer. Instead of a
flyer, they just rattled off a bunch of resources with little to no explanation of what those resources actually do, which was not helpful.

Celeste did not formally report her sexual assault through the Title IX office. Rather, she approached the Title IX coordinator after training session. Celeste gave her details about the assault and the coordinator discussed her options with reporting and timeframes for reporting. Celeste said the coordinator told her “If you are not going to report than there is nothing we can do. And also, that person isn't a student on campus so there's nothing we can do.” Celeste said she was not surprised by this response and she did not see a reason to formally report since the perpetrator was not a student.

April’s initial Title IX meeting focused on the details of her sexual assault, which she expected. She thought the entire interaction seemed “very procedural.” She said, ‘I don't mind procedural, but be a little human about it, not a robot.” April would have appreciated some empathy from the Title IX coordinator. She did not feel important and lost in the fold while she was there. April described the office as cluttered, stacks of paper everywhere, she said the coordinator was handling phones calls and messages during their meeting, while April was describing details. April mentioned that it would have been nice to have five minutes of one on one time with the coordinator. April just sat in her office crying and reading through Twitter while she waited for the coordinator to finish a phone call. April said she did not seem to matter to them. While April did not have a great experience during the meeting, she indicated that the no contact order was reassuring to her in that it prevented him from being in her classes. The no contact order made her breathe a little easier.
While all other participants who spoke about Title IX had negative interactions with them, Flo said her experience was helpful and she felt supported by the coordinator. Flo was the only participant that discussed having an all-around positive experience with Title IX. Flo met with Title IX after meeting with a victim advocate, who spoke to Title IX on her behalf. She sat down with the coordinator and discussed the options for reporting and was asked what she would like to happen. She told Title IX that she would like to file a formal report with their office. The Title IX coordinator took her detailed statement and asked several clarifying questions to get all of the information that they needed for the report. The Title IX coordinator contacted the witnesses that Flo mentioned to get their statements and invited the perpetrator in for an interview as well. Since there was also a criminal investigation, the perpetrator declined the meeting with Title IX. The Title IX coordinator made sure that Flo knew what to expect and outlined the resources the office provided. Flo appreciated the academic accommodations, since she had fallen behind in her classes. The Title IX coordinator “was really great about reaching out to my professors, and not telling them about my situation.” Flo appreciated not having to meet with her professors to discuss her situation herself. The Title IX coordinator put Flo in touch with the DRC for further academic assistance. Flo found the DRC to be a great resource and said it really helped her get back into her classes.

Flo filed a no contact order with Title IX, which was reassuring at first. Flo discussed how she thought he did not really understand what the no contact order meant. He would see her on campus or around the dorms and wave and he would try to have conversations with her friends. While the no contact order did not seem to influence his behavior, Flo found the no contact order as constricting, “It wasn't effective, and it was
also difficult [to adhere to].” The no-contact directive included limiting the times that
either of them could go get dinner, which meant that sometimes she could not get dinner
because of her work schedule. Flo said that the no contact order was in place to minimize
contact, but “essentially what was happening, that I was having my eating privileges
limited.” Flo contacted Title IX to discuss the issues with mealtimes, but terms that were
in place ended up being the best solution, so nothing was changed.

Flo also discussed her experience with Office of Student Conduct. She said after a
three-month investigation Title IX turned over the documents to the Office of Student
Conduct the only information included were her and the perpetrator’s statements. She
said “[The Office of Student Conduct] had to do a completely separate investigation. Re-
interviewing people, retaking statements, re-everything. They did not get any from the
Title Nine office.” She said her experience with the Office of Student Conduct was
“terrible.” She initially felt as if they were “babying” her and treating her “like a victim
instead of a survivor.”

She mentioned that when working with Title IX she would call and ask about
updates, she would be given any relevant information or told there was no news at that
time, which she found understandable. However, when she contacted the Office of
Student Conduct for updates she was met with frustration on their end, she said that those
working in the Office of Student Conduct “really made me feel like I was wasting [their]
time.” She had to push for information and ask when steps would be taken, “otherwise, it
would never be finished.” The Office of Student Conduct did not involve her in the
investigation. They asked her for her friends contact information so they could take
statements from them, however, her friends had not heard from the office. Flo sent emails
and called to “get any sort of information” and push the investigation forward. The Office of Student Conduct told her that they would contact her when they had information or needed something from her, which Flo found their response as “borderline aggressive” and dismissive.

Flo was told that the Office of Student Conduct would inform her if he would be attending classes, so that she would be prepared to see him or be able to make changes accordingly. At the start of the semester they had not contacted her, she hoped that the lack of contact indicated that there would not be an issue, he would not be attending classes. Flo was shocked to watch the perpetrator take a seat directly in front of her during her first class of the semester. She panicked and left the classroom and immediately called student conduct, she was frustrated that they had not warned her. Their response was “oh, if you feel unsafe, we can have someone escort you to and from your classes.” She was frustrated by their response, “The issue was not that I thought he was going to hurt me, the issue was that I had extreme PTSD and seeing him was a huge trigger.” She said that “They were just offering solutions to the wrong problems. And, not offering solutions to the problems I was saying, this is what I'm experiencing, this is what I need.”

The Office of Student Conduct investigation dragged on for a long time. He was given extension after extension, which was aggravating to Flo. The office would inform them both that appeals to the investigation needed to occur by certain dates. During an interaction with the Office of Student Conduct, Flo was told that they were fairly certain that he would not appeal, and not to worry about what would happen if he did. She specifically asked what would happen if he did appeal, but they would not tell her
anything other than “this is what we think is going to happen…” that he wouldn’t appeal. She called the office a week after the deadline to confirm that he had not submitted an appeal since they had not contacted her. However, the office did not return her call until a week later, two weeks after the deadline, to let her know that he appealed the day before. Flo was frustrated, “What's the point of having deadlines if... because he has money, they don't apply to him.” Flo felt as though the Office of Student Conduct was more concerned about protecting the university, and therefore more lenient with the perpetrator:

They were super protecting him and protecting all of his rights. They even told me we're not going adhere to the deadline, because... Or, we're not going to let you do this because we don't want to step in his toes and then have him turn around and file counter charges or something.

His appeal meant that there would be a student conduct trial. Due to all of the delays and extensions the student conduct trial did not take place until a year after the assault had occurred.

The trial process, in Flo’s words, “It was awful. It was so awful.” She said that she and the perpetrator were both given an opportunity 24 hours prior to the trial to make an appointment to look through all of the evidence submitted. She met with someone at the Office of Student Conduct at the end of the day before her morning trial. Flo said she began looking through the documents before her appointment started. As she was examining the evidence, she was told by the person handling the case “I haven't even looked at this yet.” Flo was shocked and angry, she said:

I was like, this is my life. This is something that's so important to me. This is the most important thing to me right now, and you're not allowing me to be involved in the process, also you're not even doing your job.
Also, during this meeting she was told about the process of the trial. She would be seated first, behind a screen so that she would have no contact with him. This did not occur, by the time someone came to find her and seat her they had already seated the perpetrator. Furthermore, Flo was upset that the caseworker was sitting next to the perpetrator instead of her. Flo felt as if she had been lied to, “Seeing him was obviously a huge deal. Her sitting next to him versus next to me is not a big deal, but why didn’t she tell me that's the way it was going to be?” She was told that during the hearing if she had something to say in response to a comment during the trial, she could write it on a piece of paper and hand it to the caseworker. During the trial the perpetrator made a false comment, so Flo wrote that on a piece of paper and slid it to the caseworker, as she had been instructed to do. However, the interaction with the caseworker was quite different, grabbed the paper and flipped it over super hard and threw it back over the other side of the screen. Then, afterwards when we broke [the caseworker] told me you can't be sliding me papers, because it looks like we're colluding. I said okay, well that's what you told me to do. We're not colluding, you're representing me, essentially.

The panel deciding the case found enough evidence to find the perpetrator responsible, “the equivalent of guilty.” The sanction that the panel found appropriate was a one-year suspension, which would start at the beginning of the following semester. The perpetrator was able to attend classes for a whole school year after she reported it to the university. The investigations by the university, Title IX and Office of Student Conduct, resulted in a simple one-year suspension. However, the perpetrator did not return to campus since he was found guilty and sentenced to prison shortly after the end of the student conduct trial.
Victim’s Advocate

University victim advocates are available on campuses to aid victims of sexual assault, among other offenses. The university victim advocates aid students by acting as a personal advocate, providing information on victim rights, assistance with reporting (on and off campus), and referrals and explanations of university agencies and services. University victim advocates are focused on the well-being of the student. Their services are free to all students are considered a trauma-informed support service. Meetings with a victim advocate are confidential. While referrals are not necessary to meet with a victim advocate, many have been referred through various channels, such as university counseling services, university police, and Title IX offices. Twenty-two percent (n=5) of the participants utilized the university victim advocate as a resource. Participants who met with a victim advocate had positive experiences. The participants appreciated the support and tangible services offered by the victim advocates. A few had hesitations about talking to a victim advocate. Additionally, some identified shortcomings of the office.

Many of those who met with a victim advocate discussed how nice it was to have someone they could open up to without having to feel pressure to make choices such as during formal reporting. April mentioned that she really appreciated the connection she had with the victim advocate she worked with:

She was the one who was very human, and she was like, "Hey. If you're stressed right now, there's stress balls over there. And there's tea." And it was a very welcoming environment. And then she was just human with me.
While some of the participants’ informal disclosures to friends and family members were dismissive, they found that their interactions with the university victim advocate as genuine and supportive. For example, Mary felt heard when she talked to the victim advocate. Mary said she really had not opened up about the sexual assault with others and when she did, they were rather dismissive. Conversely, Mary’s experience with the victim advocate was supportive and encouraging:

I don't think I've had a situation talking to someone where I've been, I felt more okay talking about it, like, it was crazy. She was like, you are a survivor of rape. And she said that, and I was like, oh my God. Like, I was like, absolute breakdown and, but it was like, it was really empowering, and I got home, and I felt like I finally like, instead of just like, kind of like reaching out, like, trying to like figure out, like test the ice, like I made like a solid step.

Other participants appreciated that the victim advocate gave them options on what steps could be taken, if she wanted to. For example, Mary felt respected when she was given options:

The victim advocate was super, super cool because she was like, you can talk to me, and we can go all the way with this, like to the police if you want, or we can literally just, it can all just stay right here. So that was... that resource is incredible.

Similarly, Flo discussed that she found the victim advocate helpful because they walked through all of the available resources. When she met with the victim advocate, they discussed options for reporting and at the end of the conversation Flo moved forward with reporting to the Title IX office. She said the victim advocate reached out to Title IX and explained everything for her, she said “luckily, I didn't have to reach out [to Title IX]. [Title IX] reached out to me. Which is super helpful. Not to have to take that step.”
Participants also felt supported when the victim advocate made themselves available through check-ins and an open-door policy. Elena said she always felt welcomed in the victim advocate’s office, “even if it was just to say ‘Hello.’” Elena said that she liked that the victim advocate would reach out and check-in with her via text messaging. April, too, valued how the victim advocate would reach out to her, just to check in, “I liked that she did follow ups. Like follow up phone calls… she left messages, just saying, "Hey. I just wanted to make sure you're okay, because we talked ..." I loved that.”

Some participants talked about how they valued the reciprocity in their conversations with the advocates, which led to their trust with the victim advocate. April said, “she talked a little bit about her past experiences, which made me feel better that this wasn't just a random person who applied online.” Elena said that these reciprocal conversations made her feel like she was someone Elena could trust, “she was amazing, and she shared her story with me, and I shared my story with her, and it's just that trust that you find.”

Participants were encouraged by friends to meet with a victim advocate and others have encouraged their friends to meet with a victim advocate. April’s friend also had previously worked with a victim advocate, because of this April felt comfortable meeting with an advocate knowing what to expect. Mary has encouraged others to utilize the victim advocate services, “I've taken friends there since then… Just to like to talk it out and get options, because I don't have answers to a lot of the questions that they have.”

While many had positive experiences with the victim advocate, others were overwhelmed with discussing their sexual assault with someone else. This was an issue
for those who initially reported to the Title IX office and were then referred to the victim advocate. For example, Daisy found it difficult to open up with someone else after leaving the Title IX office, she said “I just felt weird because I didn't like having to feel like I had to open up again to this new person. I already just word vomited it to someone else… I was already distraught.”

The participants often indicated that they wished the victim advocate’s office had more consistency. The participants appreciated that the victim advocates offered so much support, however, the turnover rate left them feeling frustrated. For example, Mary wished they had a consistent person in that victim advocate position “because it changes like once every like semester or two, which is rough.” Mary said that she could understand the high turnover rate, citing that the type of work could be demanding such as “taking all these stories and constantly digesting them.” She also believed that the program could be better funded so that there would be more than one victim advocate on campus, because she found the victim advocate program an “incredible resource.”

**Mental Health Professionals**

Mental health services were utilized by the majority of participants (70%, n=16). Participants sought out counseling as a resource to help with the negative emotions they experienced following the sexual assault. Some participants pursued treatment on their own, others were encouraged by friends, family, or partners, some were referred by the police, Title IX, or victim advocates, and some were already seeing a counselor for “unrelated issues.” Some participants found that counseling was beneficial and felt support from their mental health care provider. Others felt as if they were going through the motions by attending therapy sessions. Participants identified frustrations they had
with mental health services, such as the lack of resources available specific to their needs, feeling like the sessions were not helpful, and high turnover rates of counselors.

Participants who utilized the student counseling center often said they felt supported, heard, and validated. Many participants did not immediately seek out counseling services following their sexual assault. However, many of them started counseling services because the emotions and stress they felt later were too much to handle. For example, Gwen who began to have panic attacks in public spaces went to student counseling services to help alleviate the feeling of panic. She found that their sessions were useful, “I think they're helpful in what I needed at that moment. At that moment I needed to not have my lungs stop, you know?”

Daisy said that she appreciated feeling heard, which she found comforting. Daisy mentioned that she had been raped in one of their earlier session but didn’t talk about that further. She said she respected her counselor for not pushing the issue:

I told him I was raped. And, then, we didn't talk about it again for a couple of months. And he ... there were a few times, he'd ask every once in a while, “Oh, are you comfortable talking about this,” and I was like, “No.”

She said she did open up about her sexual assault later and felt supported when she talked about her sexual assault. She said that her counselor “never pushed me to talk about the sexual assault more than I wanted to.”

Taylor, who was still in a relationship with her perpetrator, at the time of the sexual assault, said when she told her counselor about her sexual assault, her counselor was the first person to tell her “That's not okay. That shouldn't have happened to you.” She said her counselor’s response was validating and reassuring. Taylor said that her counselor concentrated on constructive ways that Taylor could focus on when discussing
or thinking about her sexual assault outside of therapy. She said they worked on “not only preventing this from happening again, but also talking about feeling violated and how to talk to people about that and establishing boundaries and clear consent and all those things...” She said they also discussed how to talk to her partner about consent and making sure he understood how she felt. In addition, her counselor offered to practice the discussion with her, which Taylor found very helpful.

Olive did not want to discuss her sexual assault with her counselor, who she was seeing for “academic stuff.” She said they spoke about it for a bit, but Olive did not want to continue. Olive stated that she “didn’t feel comfortable with her” to discuss the assault further. Olive said she wished she could find someone who she would be comfortable with “just someone who maybe could help me be more at peace with that, I think would be nice.”

Paula met with two counselors, one on campus and one off campus. She found both helpful but said the counselor she met with off campus was able to really focus on the sexual assault. She said she believed that because the sexual assault happened while she was in school, she found it more difficult to talk to the counselor on campus. She thought that if she focused on the sexual assault with the campus counselor she would have been pushed to report to Title IX or the university police, which she did not want to do. Jane also sought out mental health services on and off campus. She started speaking to a “trained listener” on an app called 7 cups which provides free support for emotional stress. She felt that she could open up on 7 cups because it was anonymous and nonjudgmental. Because she had a positive interaction on the app, she said that gave her the confidence to go to counseling on campus. When she did speak to a counselor on
campus she felt as though the counselor only offered her resources such as Title IX. When Jane said she was not interested in reporting they “put that issue to rest” and focused on another topic altogether.

Frustration with student counseling service resulted from high turnover and scheduling issues. Elena was frustrated with scheduling and the number of counselors she had to talk to at the student counseling services. She was having a difficult time following her sexual assault, and she thought if she could tell her story that she would feel better. She talked about how it was upsetting that she could only make an appointment every three weeks because they were booked. During her time working with the counseling center she met with five different counselors. She mentioned that it was difficult to have to retell her story each time she would see a new counselor. It was hard for her to meet with new counselors so often, and she felt like she did not matter when they would end the session abruptly, like they weren’t hearing her or meeting her needs:

…they learned my story, five minutes of me telling it and then they're like, "Well, this is what you should do."... And that's hard because they don't know everything, they've barely met me, five minutes ago, so… I think for them, after me telling my story, those same people that I met with ... Not the same. The different counselors that I met with there, they all told me the same thing. They were just like, "How does that make you feel?" "Well it makes me feel bad", and they're like, "Oh, I understand that. I get it." And they tell you, "What are you doing right now to take care of yourself?" They're like, "Maybe you should go to do yoga or do this or that." I'm like, "I have problems. I need your help." And they were all the same, like, "Okay, I'm sorry I have to cut you off. But I have another appointment." Things like that. And it makes you feel as though you're wasting their time even.

She also found it troublesome that none of the counselors she saw specialized in PTSD, which she said did not make her feel welcomed or that they could help her.

Additionally, Elena also tried a support group, which was a general support group for
stress and did not focus on sexual assault, at the counseling center. She said that was a terrible experience, she said “like I was the only one with a traumatic experience, so I felt like I brought down the group in a way” because everyone else was talking about school stress, such as stress from class work or roommate disagreements.

Vanessa was also frustrated with an initial experience at student counseling services. She said the counselor seemed dismissive, she said her counselor “gave me a bunch of handouts about anxiety and I was like, ‘This is so ... this is not what I want.’” Venesssa ended up returning to student counseling services a year later and had a much better experience. She speculated that the response she received from her counselor on her initial visit could be because Vanessa did not open up enough, “Well, I didn't tell her anything useful, so she didn't give anything.”

Celeste was referred to a counselor off campus after she decided to tell her professor. Before Celeste fully disclosed her sexual assault to her professor, she stopped Celeste and informed her that she was a mandatory reporter. Celeste did not want to formally report to the police or Title IX, so she did not disclose anything further. Her professor did put Celeste in contact with an off-campus counselor. Celeste called her counselor “a badass lady,” and said she was very supportive and validating. She said her counselor was able to help her connect the dots of her experience. For example, her counselor helped her reframe her perspective, “Oh not this weird experience happened but I was sexually assaulted.” Her counselor also supported Celeste’s decision not to report, which she found reassuring. Celeste said that her counselor gave her the tools she needed for “emotional management and be able to recognize, and my own feelings, and work towards not feeling so crappy.”
Hazel met with a counselor in her hometown, who she stayed connected with during her time on campus. She found comfort in her counselor and she appreciated that her counselor worked with her remotely when needed. She said one aspect of her sexual assault that her counselor helped her understand or become comfortable with was memory loss. She asked her counselor “why I didn't remember everything, like I still don't, and it will still come back sometimes.” Her counselor told her that she would remember small bits and pieces when she is ready to handle them. Her counselor was sure to normalize her experiences and reassured Hazel that everyone experiences trauma differently. Hazel found this to be helpful, especially when she was confronted by others about why she did not act this way or that way following the assault. Hazel appreciated that her counselor was able to give her tools to navigate discussing her sexual assault with others.

Vanessa spoke with a psychiatrist off campus about her sexual assault, however she found the session to be “super uncomfortable.” Vanessa at the time did not label her experience as sexual assault or rape but said that she felt as though the psychiatrist believed she was raped, even if Vanessa didn’t want to acknowledge it. Vanessa said "Holy shit. This is another person that also thinks I was raped, I was like, "Fuck." It just was like getting more real.”

Zelda did not find counseling helpful. Her parents urged her to meeting with a therapist, but she said, “it felt so dumb.” Zelda did not think her sexual assault was serious enough to warrant counseling. One exchange with her therapist focused on Zelda not wanting to be in counseling:
I know you've met with people who have gone through way more serious stuff." And she'd be like, "Everyone's pain is different. We all have pain over stuff." But I don't know, I felt so dumb going into therapy at that point because everyone's telling me to move on.

Zelda would tell herself “you do not want to deal with all of this…just get through the hour of therapy and you can go home.” She said her relationship with her therapist “felt fake.” She didn’t think that she was important to her therapist:

I knew she had plenty of other patients, so it was like, "You're gonna forget about this by the end of the day. I need someone that actually cares about me. I know this is your job. I'm literally paying you to listen to me right now. Even if you did tell me I'm so sorry, I wouldn't care and that wouldn't be validation to me because you know you have to say that to me."

Zelda was not satisfied with therapy, she didn’t find it supportive or validating, but did acknowledge that it was somewhat helpful being about to talk about the sexual assault:

Telling anyone about it was a little satisfying. But yeah, it didn't help me ... I think had I not ever talked to anyone about it would still be crawling inside me, so obviously letting it out helped a little bit. But it wasn't the validation that I needed.

**Other University Affiliates**

Participants also turned to other university affiliates to discuss their sexual assault. This typically occurred when the participants needed resources or support. Residential assistants were sought out for support and guidance. Professors and teaching assistants were approached for academic accommodations. While faculty and staff are considered mandatory reporters, there was little adherence to this rule.

**Residential Assistant**

One participant, Elena discussed her sexual assault with her resident assistant (RA) in her dormitory, knowing that her RA was a mandatory reporter. Elena went to her
RA for emotional support, which she did receive in addition to tangible resources. Elena stated that her RA was “was amazing… and supportive… She went out of her way to make sure that I was okay, even after I told her what had happened.” Elena’s RA contacted her supervisor to report the assault who then in turn spoke to Title IX. Elena wanted the support of some authority figure to be involved for support, stating that what she, herself, was doing was “not enough for me to feel better.” She believed that an authority figure would be able to get her access to resources on campus that would help her start to “rebuild [her] life.”

**Professors and Teaching Assistants**

A few of the participants (22%, n=5) discussed their sexual assault with their professors. The reasons for talking to their professors about the sexual assault included accommodation requests and explanations of absences. The responses they received from their professors and teaching assistants (TAs) were mixed. Professors varied in their degree of support and knowledge about campus resources and some professors and TAs were dismissive of the report/disclosure of sexual assault.

Daisy spoke to a few of her professors to discuss her absences. She approached them because she said “I didn’t want to just show up to class...” after missing several classes. She believed that in those smaller classes she would be asked where she had been, so by meeting with her professors ahead of time she thought she could avoid answering in front of her classmates. She let her professors know that she had met with Title IX. She said most of them understood, she said that once she told them she had visited the Title IX offices she didn’t need to explain much… “things clicked for them.” One professor, who she felt comfortable with, made her feel supported not only in a
tangible sense but also by providing emotional support. She said this professor told her that “you’re going to be okay” and to “let [Daisy] know if she needed anything and that we’ll figure it out.” Daisy found this to reduce some anxiety she had about returning to her class.

Daisy met with a second professor who she didn’t know as well as the first, and who she found to be more invasive. Daisy recounted:

So, it was just kind of a weird thing. And [the professor] was trying to be supportive and stuff, but it's just because I didn’t feel that close with him. And then he did end up asking questions like, "Do you see this person on campus?" or "Oh, do you think you're going to walk and see them?" … it was just like weird. And he was like, "You don't have to answer if you don't want to." And I was like, "You shouldn't be asking me."

Olive discussed her sexual assault with her academic adviser, who was in charge of research location placement. She said she went to him specifically to avoid working in the same location as her assailant. She found her advisor’s response as supportive, and ultimately it was “the best-case scenario reaction.” Her advisor’s response was:

Extremely apologetic, sad, very understanding, pretty much the type of reaction that you'd want to get from someone. Very comforting, made me feel like even though he would never force me to go back there and understood if I needed to turn down the position, but also was really angry that I would even have to think about turning down the position for that reason.

Olive did not want to report her experience to Title IX. She appreciated the fact that her academic advisor, despite the university having a zero exceptions policy on mandatory reporting, did not report it, he was like, “Fuck them, you are what's important.” She felt heard and supported because “he didn’t force me to talk to an admin [or anyone else affiliated with the university or police].
Celeste was shocked by one of her professor’s negative responses. Celeste told her professor why she was absent and having a hard time keeping up with course work. Celeste let all of professors know that she was focused on finishing and graduating. Celeste said that after disclosing this personal information that made her feel vulnerable, her professor told her that “life happens, it’s just something we deal with.” This dismissive response from her professor was upsetting to Celeste. She speculated that perhaps her professor had a “personal trauma and that’s how she dealt with it.” Celeste was “jarred” that a female faculty member would be so dismissive.

During her semester in one of her classes Celeste was being verbally and digitally harassed by another student. She approached her TA for help, asking for a different lab partner, she stated that “This is the last thing that I need right now. He is trying to send me nudes.” Her TA “Just stick it out through the rest of the semester,” which found to be dismissive and rude. Celeste said after talking to her professors and TA she had a “revelation that this is my burden to bear so it's not really something that the faculty will support me on… [she told herself] to keep doing what you’re doing to graduate and get by.” Celeste said that her professors did not offer any support other than extending her deadlines, except one who told her that she might want to speak to someone in counseling services. Not one of her professors discussed talking to Title IX.

The third professor that Daisy told did not know what the Title IX office was or what they did. After explaining to her professor what Title IX’s role is, and that is why she had to go talk to them about it, she said her professor then understood why she was meeting with them. Daisy was hoping that she would only have to mention Title IX to the professors, and they would understand without further explanation or questioning.
Yvonne, who did not talk to her professors, felt strongly about the message the university was sending to victims. She said she would feel more comfortable discussing her experience with resources and faculty if there was a shift in the climate on campus as it pertains to sexual assault victims, saying that “Nothing would make me prouder than our president coming out and saying, ‘I believe our victims.’ That to me is beautiful. That is having our teachers telling us, ‘We believe you.’”

**Clubs on Campus**

A club on campus participates and supports several events throughout the year to raise awareness of sexual assault on campus. The club signs around campus stating their message to students that “we believe you” and “believe survivors.” Some of the participants mentioned the signs during their interview. Quinn saw a one of the signs in a parking garage on campus. She said that seeing things like that around campus are helpful to her in an indirect way and make her feel supported. She said, that seeing those signs around campus “is just like really meaningful if you aren't someone that talks about things a lot with people. Or if no one knows [about your sexual assault].”

Paula discussed that after seeing one of the signs with her friend, he made a dismissive and rash comment about the sign, which sparked a conversation about sexual assault. She implied that several women have been assaulted and he may never know if a woman who he is talking to had been assaulted. He asked her what she meant by her statement, so she disclosed her sexual assault to him. She said “he was like trying to get every single last pebble out of it. And I was like, ‘That's not the way that you go about this.’” Because she gave him core details about her assault the conversation left her feeling “dirty…unclean… and gross.”
Yvonne said that at one point she participated in the club. She joined because she thought they were a group that empowered women and support victims of sexual assault. However, after joining in their activities she observed that within the group, specifically within the leadership of the group, there was a different message being sent. She said they “don’t practice what they preach.” Within the group there is a one-upmanship dynamic. She said that rather than feel supported by the group, she noticed that women in the group only wanted to talk about sexual assault “not in a way to empower others. It's not in a way to fix the situation, it's just to talk about it.” Yvonne said they would ask her about her story but then immediately follow her story with their story. She said it felt insincere, as if they asked her only for an opportunity to talk about theirs. Additionally, she thought that their responses to others’ stories didn’t matter as much or their experience was dismissed, unless the other’s assault was worse than theirs. She mentioned that the “worse than theirs” seemed to be based on rape myths, citing “being violently beaten and raped by a stranger” as the “gold standard.”

**Discussion**

This chapter examined women’s accounts of reporting their sexual assault to formal sources. More specifically, this chapter explored interactions with police officers, Title IX, university victim advocates, and other university affiliates. Additionally, this chapter discussed their experiences with encouragement from informal disclosures to report to the police and reasons why women did not formally report their sexual assault.

The majority of women were encouraged to report their sexual assault to the police by at least one person to whom they informally disclosed. Women often did not appreciate when others strongly encouraged or demanded that they report the sexual
assault to police, reporting that this response left them frustrated with the other person. Some who were pressured to report their sexual assault to the police lied to the informal source about reporting, typically with family members. Of those who lied about reporting they often cited that they did not want to further discuss the sexual assault or continue to feel the pressure to report from their family. In contrast, women felt supported and appreciated it when friends and family offered them choices about what they could do next, which included reporting to the police.

Only 13% of women in this qualitative study reported their sexual assault to the police, which is similar to the observations of previous studies which identified only a small fraction, 10-12% of women who experienced sexual assault formally reported to law enforcement (Fisher et al., 2003; Wolitzsky-Taylor et al., 2011). While prior research indicated that women are more likely to report to law enforcement when the perpetrator is a stranger (Fisher et al., 2003; Wolitzsky-Taylor et al., 2011), two-thirds of the women who reported in this study were sexually assaulted by their partner. Women described reporting to the police as a difficult process, not only emotionally but logistically as well. When women reported their sexual assault at a police station they had a challenging time navigating the procedure of reporting such as figuring out where they needed to report.

Those who did report to law enforcement indicated that they felt overwhelmed, anxious, intimidated, and scared when interacting with the police. When the police officer interviewing the women was a male, women were more likely to discuss feeling intimidated by the officer. During the initial statement interview women felt that they were often and repeatedly asked questions that conformed to rape myth, such as “Were you drinking?” and “Is this what you were wearing?” The women found these types of
questions lead them to feel as though the police were trying to identify ways they may have provoked the sexual assault, blaming the victim in some sense. When women were asked these questions they also felt as though the burden of truth was on them, as though they had to prove to the police that a sexual assault had occurred.

In contrast, when women were included or kept up to date on the process of a police investigation, they found this as helpful and empowering. Women also appreciated it when they did not need to recount the assault over and over. When the women were asked to repeat their story multiple times, they became overwhelmed, uncomfortable, and unimportant.

Women identified several reasons for not reporting to law enforcement. Some of the most common reasons for not reporting were fear of being blamed, including questioning their behavior, not being believed, and protection of others. Women were concerned that the police would question their behavior, especially if they were drinking. This concern led them to believe that the police would use this as justification that their experience was not “real rape.” “Were you drinking?” and “Did you say no?” were common questions that women thought they would be asked should they report. Fear of being blamed or not being believed are common reasons that have been identified throughout prior research (Fisher et al., 2010; Fisher et al., 2003; Miller et al., 2011; Weiss, 2009).

These fears of being blamed or not being believed when reporting sexual assault to law enforcement are similar to what has been captured in police reports. Previous research that has assessed the influence of rape myths in police reports. Shaw, Campbell, Cain, and Feeney (2017) found that statements in police reports often denied or justified the sexual assault based on circumstances surrounding the sexual assault. For example,
Shaw et al. (2017) highlighted that police records have included language indicating that the victim was lying, that she was not injured (at all or enough), she was not upset enough, and did not act like a victim. It is possible that the women’s perception of how they thought they would be questioned would actually come to fruition had they reported. Venema (2019) identified that if a victim had been drinking at the time of the sexual assault, the law enforcement officer would be less likely to call a detective to move the case forward. To avoid these negative responses by law enforcement officers women simply did not report.

Protecting others by not reporting often occurred when women did not feel confident with their perception of events. Those who were concerned with “ruining” the perpetrator’s life were women who had doubts about the validity of their sexual assault, often times through self-blame or by not identifying their experience as serious enough to report. Not reporting sexual assault because they did not believe that the experience was serious enough has also been well documented in prior research (Fisher et al., 2010; Fisher et al., 2003; Weiss, 2010). However, focusing on protecting the perpetrator has not been examined in depth. It is possible that the power difference between the two could be guiding this decision to not report, for example protecting the perpetrator in turn protects the victim from retaliation. For those who were in a relationship with the perpetrator, not reporting was not only a way to maintain the relationship, but also not reporting prevent the relationship from transforming. Hirsch and Kahn (2020) suggested that labeling and reporting sexual assault transforms the relationship you have with that person. Specifically, their partner is now considered a sexual predator.
Women who reported their sexual assault to Title IX had rather negative experiences and responses from the Title IX coordinator who was often described as lacking empathy. During the initial interview many women indicated that the line of questioning posited by the Title IX coordinator was invasive and felt that they were trying to convince Title IX to believe them. Previous research has identified that negative responses, such as blaming or questioning the victim, have reinforced self-blame and increased negative cognitions (Ahrens, 2006; Ullman & Najdowski, 2011; Ullman & Peter-Hagene, 2014). However, this study identified that being asked to recount one’s sexual assault in detail and being asked questions by Title IX that are intrusive, and victim focused were associated more strongly with frustration towards Title IX than with self-blame. It is possible that women who acknowledged their experience as sexual assault or rape were less likely to blame themselves, and also less likely to accept blame from others.

Also, it is possible that women had misconceptions of how the Title IX handles sexual assault reports, which could also account for frustration. This was an issue for a few of the women who went to Title IX for advice on what they should do. When women who were not ready were told that Title IX could do nothing for them unless they reported, they felt pressured into reporting prematurely when they only wanted information.

Women found the interactions with Title IX coordinators as procedural and lacking emotional support. Furthermore, women experienced undue anxiety and stress caused by Title IX beyond the investigation process. Several felt let down by the inefficient tangible support (e.g., academic accommodations) and lack of communication.
from the Title IX office. Failing to provide the support and resources had negative effects on the women who were reliant on those resources.

When reporting to less formal authorities (i.e., university victim advocates and mental health providers) women felt much more supported and believed. Similar to the results of this study, Patterson and Tringali (2015) identified that university victim advocates were perceived as supportive without blame or judgement. Siegal et al. (1989) and Ullman (1996) suggested that women were more likely to report to an authority member that they found trustworthy. This could be why women were much more likely to talk about their sexual assault with a mental health provider and university victim advocate than with law enforcement. Additionally, women did not feel that they needed to argue to be believed like they did with law enforcement and Title IX. The positive responses from their interactions with university victim advocates and mental health professionals were similar to positive informal disclosures reactions.

Responses varied for those who reported to university affiliate who were mandatory reporters. Those who reported their sexual assault to a professor did so to address their academic needs, typically to account for lack of attendance or missed coursework. Although all professors, teaching assistants, and residential assistants are mandatory reporters, the only occurrence of mandatory reporting included the residential assistant. A couple of professors were unclear of the Title IX office or the function of Title IX, let alone of their responsibility as a mandatory reporter.

Women did appreciate when faculty members were open to adjusting assignment due dates and make-up work. Others felt supported when their professor or advisor had positive reactions. However, several interactions with faculty or staff were not as
positive. Some professors and teaching assistants were dismissive and neglectful. These
negative reactions from university affiliates added undue stress.

In sum, women who reported to formal authorities such as law enforcement and
Title IX, were often met with questions that made them feel vulnerable, frustrated, and
unsupported. However, when women reported to mental health professionals and
university victim advocates, they were more likely to feel supported and believed. It is
possible that women felt that they could talk more openly with university victim
advocates and mental health providers because their services are confidential, whereas
Title IX and law enforcement interactions are not.
Chapter 10 – General Discussion

This dissertation analyzed the experiences of college women who had experienced sexual assault via a quantitative online survey followed by in-depth interviews with a subset of survey participants. The online survey examined how attributions of blame for the sexual assault and informal social reactions following disclosure of sexual assault impacted their psychological well-being. This research first investigated how attributions of blame are influenced by characteristics of the sexual assault (e.g., relationship to the perpetrator, a tactic used during the sexual assault), beliefs in rape myths, and informal social reactions. Next, this research examined how dimensions of well-being (e.g., self-esteem, general distress, depression, and anxiety) were impacted by attributions of blame and informal disclosure reactions. Also, the mediating role of attributions of blame was assessed to investigate the relationship between informal social reactions and factors of well-being.

The findings from this survey study aided in shaping some aspects of the second component of this dissertation, the in-depth interviews. The purpose of these interviews was to elaborate on the findings of the survey study. These interviews focused on women’s experiences disclosing their sexual assault to family, friends, partners, the police, Title IX, mental health providers, and others. These interviews centered around decisions to disclose/report or not to disclose/report and the reactions from those to whom they disclosed or reported. The interviews also examined how reactions from others impacted future disclosures/reports.

This chapter reviews the key findings for each study and how they inform one another, discusses their implications, and describes directions for future research and
limitations of the current research. First, I will present the key findings from the survey, followed by the key findings from the in-depth interviews. Finally, I will focus on how the interview findings shed light on the results of the survey.

**Attributions of Blame**

The survey portion of this study examined how sexual assault characteristics, rape myth beliefs, and informal social reactions impacted attributions of blame for a sexual assault. I begin by reviewing the impact of sexual assault characteristics, which include whether or not the perpetrator was a romantic partner vs. someone else, tactics used by the perpetrator, circumstances surrounding the assault, and whether or not the woman labeled the event as an assault. The results indicate that being assaulted by one’s partner vs. some other type of perpetrator did not impact attributions of blame.

When a woman was sexually assaulted while intoxicated, she was more likely to blame her behavior and character, which supports prior research by Littleton et al. (2009), suggesting that victims are more likely to blame themselves when alcohol is involved. This increased likelihood of self-blame could be possible because this is an action or decision the victim made prior to the assault. The victim could believe that if they had taken precautions or avoided alcohol, then they would not have experienced sexual assault (Littleton et al., 2009).

Women who were physically forced or coerced during sexual assault were more likely to blame the perpetrator for their actions. Instances in which the victim perceives that she may not have control, she would be more inclined to blame the perpetrator who was in control of the situation. Perception of lack of control and sexual assault tends to adhere to beliefs in rape myths. Because their experience fir a specific schema of rape
myth, it could have been easier for them to identify that they were not at fault (Ryan, 2011).

Labeling their experience as rape increased the likelihood that the victim would blame their behavior, character, and the perpetrator, while labeling their experience as sexual assault indicated that they would be more likely to blame their behavior and the perpetrator. These findings confirm previous research; Bondurant (2001) implied that acknowledged rape victims were more likely to engage in self-blame as well as perpetrator blame, compared to unacknowledged rape victims. It is possible that once a victim labels her experience as rape or sexual assault, they have had time to reflect on the experience and apply meaning. For those who had more time to contemplate and discuss their experience with others, they are more likely to have attributed blame, regardless of the target of blame. However, the attribution of blame is not set in stone, nor is it cut and dry. A victim can ascribe blame to both herself and the perpetrator, and that blame can shift over time. For example, in the days following a sexual assault, a victim might try and explain the unwanted sexual experiences on behaviors she engaged in, such as drinking. However, at a later date, she might, through various avenues such as discussing the event with others, find the perpetrator is to blame (Ahrens et al., 2007). Additionally, victims do not find fault with only one target, as discussed in the interviews. In contrast, a victim blames the perpetrator she still blames herself for being in that situation, (i.e. “he shouldn’t have done that, but I shouldn’t have been there”).

As expected, those who endorsed rape myths also engaged in behavior self-blame and character self-blame. Surprisingly, the endorsement of rape myth did not relate to perpetrator blame. Concerning informal social reactions, women who received more
positive informal reactions to their sexual assault disclosure were less likely to engage in
self-blame. Unexpectedly, women who received more positive reactions to their
disclosure were also less likely to blame the perpetrator. Lastly, women who had been
sexually assault prior to college or experienced more than one sexual assault while in
college were more likely to blame the perpetrator.

Lonsway and Fitzgerald (1994) suggested that rape myths can provide a
protective function by allowing one to explain an unwanted sexual experience as
something that could be avoided. Lonsway and Fitzgerald (1994) focused on others’
perceptions of results; however, the findings of this research imply that sexual assault
victims also adhere to rape myths. For example, beliefs in rape myths could be a way for
those who have experienced an unwanted sexual assault to identify aspects of their
assault that might justify their experience, such as drinking, being alone with the
perpetrator, or being in a relationship with the perpetrator. Additionally, Ryan (2001)
suggested that rape myths restrict the definition of sexual assault by limiting the
acceptance of what is and is not considered sexual assault. For example, a common rape
myth script is “if a woman does not fight back or scream” then the experience cannot be
considered rape. Or, if a woman is considered promiscuous, this could be considered an
open invitation for sex and, therefore, cannot be considered rape. These narrowed
parameters that define rape can make it difficult for victims to identify their experience as
sexual assault or rape if their experience does not meet society’s definition of rape.

Although prior research regarding rape myth has specifically concentrated on self-
blame, this dissertation included perpetrator blame to provide a well-rounded
investigation of the association between rape myth and attributions of blame. The current
study did not find a significant relationship between rape myth and perpetrator blame. Rape myths tend to focus more on the behavior or character of the victim rather than the actions taken by the perpetrator. These victim-focused rape myths provide the scaffolding for victims to find fault in their actions rather than focusing on the perpetrator’s behavior. It is also possible that when trying to make sense of the situation, the victim’s actions or inactions could be more salient, making it easier to self-blame.

Informal social reactions impact a victim’s perception of sexual assault (Hassija & Gray, 2012). As informal social reactions also impacted hypothesized attributions of blame. Victims who received more positive reactions from their informal disclosures (e.g., friends, family, partners) were less likely to blame their behavior nor their character. Similarly, victims who received more negative responses were more likely to engage in self-blame. These findings reflect prior research, Ullman and Najdowski (2010) found that many victims of sexual assault tend to blame themselves after the unwanted sexual experience, and negative social reactions to victim’s disclosures can strengthen those self-blaming cognitions. Ahrens (2006) also suggested that negative responses can lead the victim to feel responsible for the sexual assault, that she might have contributed to the unwanted sexual experience in some way. Contrary to my hypothesis, a surprising finding of the study was that positive social reactions were related to a decrease in perpetrator blame. Overall, these findings indicate that, regardless of the attribution target (e.g., self or perpetrator), after informally disclosing about their unwanted sexual assault and receiving positive reactions levels of blame decrease.

The survey measured informal reactions on a continuous scale ranging from negative to positive, which did not capture the nuances of informal social reactions. In
contrast, the in-depth interviews provided women with an opportunity to describe how others reacted to their disclosures in their own words. The results of the in-depth interviews illuminated how the various subtypes of social reactions impact the victim’s attributions of blame, not only for informal disclosures but formal reporting as well.

Women reported in the interviews that they often turned to their friends, partners, and family members to discuss their experiences. As identified in the survey data, positive social reactions were related to less self-blame; this finding was mirrored in the interviews. Following a sexual assault, women identified that they were experiencing confusion regarding the experience. Perhaps this confusion impacted their attribution of blame during the early timeframe following the sexual assault, as they would often engage in self-blame. Women discussed how they would often disclose to others to make meaning of their experience. Following the sexual assault, victims did not label their experiences like rape or sexual assault but were uneasy or felt uncertain about the situation. For example, victims would disclose to a friend and use their reaction to gauge the severity of their experience. This search for meaning-making frequently occurred when women did not believe their experience was considered “real” rape or sexual assault and blamed themselves.

Informal responses to sexual assault disclosures were positive, negative, and mixed. These findings were consistent with prior research examining how positive, negative, and mixed disclosures impact subsequent disclosures (Ullman & Filipas, 2001). In addition to responses, victims found that just talking about their experience, in general, helped them make sense of their experience. Disclosures aided in the meaning-making
process, which provided victims with the opportunity to really focus on the experience and form attributions of blame.

The interviews revealed how subcategories of responses, including validation, blaming, and questioning, impacted attributions of blame and perception of the unwanted sexual experience. Variations of validations impacted attributions of blame based on the context of the reactions. For example, validation reactions shifted, sustained, or intensified self-blame, based on the type of acknowledgment received. Reactions that were interpreted as blaming or questioning were most often founded on rape myths, focused on her behavior.

Validating responses were interpreted as positive or negative based on the context of the reaction. Validation was perceived as positive when reactions focused on how the victim’s experience was wrong and not their fault. These positive validations often included a clear assertion that the victim’s experience was considered rape or sexual assault. Furthermore, in some cases, the person to whom they disclosed made sure to define and explain why the victim’s experience was rape. These positive validations were identified as being supportive and encouraged women to shift their perspective away from self-blame. Victims were open to shifting blame or ascribing blame to the perpetrator when they framed their experience as rape, which was the result of positive validation disclosures. Victims who felt that they were believed found this particular response supportive and were likely to acknowledge earlier that they had experienced a “sexual assault.” Additionally, they were more likely to shift the attribution of blame from themselves to the perpetrator.
However, even after receiving positive validation, the victims still engaged in self-blame. For example, some victims who were validated and told their experience was considered rape or sexual assault acknowledged that the perpetrators actions were wrong, essentially shifting blame to the perpetrator. However, the victims still identified how their behaviors could have led to the sexual assault. Negative attributions still existed following positive validation, such as being believed and having changed their perspective. That is to say, that even in the face of support through validation, women still question their role in the sexual assault.

Victims also received negative validation; this was typically in the form of a dismissive response. While those to whom they disclosed identified that an unwanted sexual experience had occurred, they also dismissed the experience by suggesting that “it happens” to all women, that the experience was not a big deal, or the experience was a misunderstanding. Reactions that were dismissive or downplayed the experience were not found to be helpful nor supportive. Women tended to continue to engage in self-blame since they were not encouraged to do so otherwise. For victims who were, to some degree, engaging in self-blame and not having their perception challenged, their belief that their actions helped to facilitate or misconstrue the sexual assault were unchanged. Furthermore, being told that their experience was not a big deal led them to find ways to dismiss the experience themselves. This often occurred through self-blame and identifying behaviors that might have facilitated the sexual assault.

Negative responses such as blaming the victim and questioning the victim’s experience often resulted in women feeling unsupported and likely to question their own experiences, such as engaging in behavior self-blame. Those who questioned the
authenticity of the victim’s sexual assault typically ignored the actions of the perpetrator and focused on the victim’s behavior, such as drinking, flirting, and being alone with the perpetrator. When others pointed out, rather than question, that the victim’s behavior could account for the unwanted sexual experience some victims accepted this blame as the explanation of their experience. Women frequently had their experience questioned, especially when alcohol was involved, similar to the findings of Payne et al. (1999). Some victims who experienced questioning responses from other, such as “why were you there” or “why didn’t you just stop it,” questioned their own behavior. These questioning responses either reinforced or instigated self-blame. However, some victims recognized that their experience was not their fault, dug in their heels, and maintained that they were not to blame for the sexual assault.

As previously discussed, based on survey data, social reactions did relate to attributions of blame. However, an alternate hypothesis examined the inverse relationship, which was not supported, although other research has speculated that the relationship between post-assault cognitions, including attributions of blame, and social reactions are reciprocal (Hassija & Gray, 2012; Ullman & Najdowski, 2011). The finding from the study indicated that attributions did not influence social reactions. That is to say that the attributions of blame a victim held did not influence the type of reaction they received. However, an interesting finding in the interviews was that self-blame was seen as a barrier when considering whether or not to disclose to others about their unwanted sexual assault. Victims who believed they were somewhat at fault for the sexual assault were reluctant to tell others about their experience. This was consistent with prior research examining reason why victims do not or delay disclosure, such barriers include
fears of being blamed for the assault or not being believed (Ahrens et al., 2007; Zinzow & Thompson, 2011). This was most relevant when they believed that whoever they told would also blame them for the experience.

**Psychological Well-Being**

Another focus of this dissertation was the influence of attributions of blame and informal social reactions on aspects of psychological well-being. Contrary to my hypothesis, attributions of blame did not mediate the relationship between informal social reactions and factors of psychological well-being. Therefore, this discussion will focus on the separate relationships of attributions of blame and informal social reactions with psychological well-being. Sexual assault has been linked to negative psychological well-being outcomes, such as depression, anxiety, substance abuse, PTSD, disordered eating (Dworkin et al., 2017; Eisenberg et al., 2016, Leone & Carroll, 2016).

This research analyzed the effects of informal social reactions and attributions of blame on factors of psychological well-being. Women who received more positive informal reactions to their disclosures of sexual assault were more likely to have higher self-esteem and less general stress, depression, and anxiety. Women who engaged in blaming their character had lower self-esteem, more general distress, anxiety, and depression. Women who blamed the perpetrator were more likely to have symptoms of depression and anxiety. Surprisingly, behavior blame did not have effects on factors of psychological well-being.

While little research has included an assessment of the impact of perpetrator blame, the current research identified a positive relationship between blaming the perpetrator and depression and anxiety. That is, the more one blames the perpetrator for
the sexual assault, the more likely they are to experience depression and anxiety. It is possible that the higher levels of depression and anxiety related to perpetrator blame could be the result of perceived lack of control. Prior research has found mixed relationships between both behavior and character self-blame psychological outcomes. Behavior self-blame has been linked to more distress following a sexual assault (Ullman et al., 2007), while other studies found no link between behavior self-blame and distress, PTSD, nor depression (Breitenbecher, 2006; Hassija & Grey, 2013). Behavior blame has been linked to higher self-esteem (Jones & Elliott, unpublished; Koss et al., 2002). The current study did not find an association between behavior blame and psychological well-being outcomes.

Conversely, this study found that character self-blame had a negative relationship with all measures of psychological well-being, lower levels of self-esteem, increased general distress, depression, and anxiety. The results of this study reflect previous work that identifies a positive relationship between character self-blame and psychological outcomes of depression, anxiety, and PTSD (Hassija & Gray, 2013). Additionally, research has demonstrated that character self-blame has a greater negative impact on psychological well-being following a sexual assault, compared to behavior self-blame, which was the case for this research as well (Breitenbecher, 2006; Peter-Hagene & Ullman, 2018; Ullman et al., 2007). It has been speculated that behavior self-blame could serve as a protective function, believing that one can prevent future sexual assaults by avoiding behavior they identified as enabling the previous sexual assault, leading to positive post-assault recovery (Breitenbecher, 2006; Hassija & Gray, 2013).
Positive informal social reactions were related to optimistic psychological well-being outcomes, increased self-esteem, decreased general distress, depression, and anxiety. These findings support prior research that those who receive positive social reactions tend to be healthier physically and mentally (Ahrens et al. 2009; Filipas & Ullman, 2001; Peter-Hagene & Ullman, 2018).

The in-depth interviews illuminated how reactions, specifically perceived support or lack of support, to sexual assault disclosure could impact well-being. Positive informal reactions, such as emotional support, often decreased stress experienced after a sexual assault. Emotional support was interpreted as a positive reaction and was most commonly provided by friends, which has been noted in prior research (Ahrens et al., 2009; Filipas & Ullman, 2001). Emotional support often included feeling heard and empathy. Additionally, emotional support was often coupled with positive validations. Victims who received positive validation experienced a feeling of relief and reduction in stress because they were no longer tormented by feeling of “it was all in [their] head” and that they weren’t making a mountain out of a mole hill.

Focal shift, an egocentric response, involved the person to whom the victim disclosed to turning the disclosure about her sexual assault into their own issue, essentially diverting attention to themselves (Ahrens et al., 2009; Ullman, 2010). This was most commonly seen when disclosing to partners. For example, following a disclosure, focal shift responses included “why does this always happen to me” or becoming upset due to an unwanted sexual experience the recipient had or someone close to the recipient. Family members also engaged in focal shift, becoming angry with the victim for not telling them sooner. This type of focal shift caused undue stress on the
victims. In these cases of focal shift women felt as though they needed to shift their attention and comfort the recipient. Victims were left feeling neglected, unimportant, and upset because they were seeking support but instead had to put aside their needs to attend to another’s needs.

Offers of tangible help were common subsequent to responses of validation and also perceived as both positive and negative (Ahrens & Aldana, 2012). Victims perceived that the offer of tangible aid was positive when victims were provided with options of tangible aid, such as reporting to the police, Title IX, or mental health providers. Additionally, victims were grateful when others told them that they would be supportive regardless of their decision. Women also appreciated when they were informed of resources and not pressured into utilizing those resources. Because of this support, which could be considered as having agency, victims felt less stress and anxiety about having to make immediate decisions. However, when victims felt forced or pressured into using tangible aid, they interpreted this as a negative reaction. Women felt a sense of loss of control when they were strongly encouraged or demanded to utilize these tangible resources. This perceived loss of control was anxiety provoking and frustrating. Victims experienced a loss of control during the sexual assault. When others pressure or force the victim to report this can also add to the perception of loss of control.

Blaming the victim or questioning the victim’s experience typically had a negative impact on their well-being. Some victims were prompted by others to discuss every little detail to make others believe them. This left the victims feeling emotionally drained, stressed, and often time frustrated. The stress of having to recount details and relive the assault compounded with the stress and anxiety victims were already
experiencing following the sexual assault, which increased their overall stress levels and anxiety. Victims who were not believed were frustrated and angry with these reactions. For example, reactions that indicated that the victim was lying about the assault left them feeling stressed out, and elicited anger and frustration towards the person to whom they disclosed.

**Formal Reporting**

The survey focused on informal social disclosures and reactions; however, to provide a thorough understanding of social reactions the in-depth interviews also addressed formal reporting to law enforcement and the Title IX office. Victims who reported to law enforcement, Title IX, and Office of Student Conduct acknowledged that they had been raped or sexually assaulted. Victims who reported to law enforcement and Title IX were almost always met with negative interactions. Specifically, the procedures of police officers and the Office of Title IX were perceived as questioning and blaming the victim. Women discussed how they felt the need to persuade these formal authorities that a sexual assault occurred and that they were not the cause of the assault.

The interview processes for law enforcement were invasive and identified that there was a lack of empathy on the part of the person of officer(s). Victims often felt intimidated when reporting to police officers, who were mostly men. Those who felt as though they were being interrogated described the experience as anxiety provoking and stressful. An interesting observation was that those who interacted with male police officers also perceived the interaction as an interrogation. While reporting to law enforcement, victims were repeatedly asked the same questions, many of which questioned the behavior of the victim. This repetitive behavior also occurred with the
Title IX coordinator. Victims identified that when they were asked the same questions over and over that the police or Title IX were trying to catch them in a lie. Victims often felt that the questions from the police and the Title IX coordinator were accusatory in nature. Which many felt frustrated with and unsupported by the institutions that they thought would help them.

Issues identified with the Title IX office went beyond the stressful initial investigation meetings. Victims were usually surprised by the procedures of the office. It was noted that the confusion was due to the way the university promotes Title IX on campus, as a support for students. The Title IX office is promoted as a support center for those who have experienced any sort of sexual misconduct, violence, or assault. Victims believed that they would be able to go to Title IX to learn about their choices and resources. However, for those seeking information they were caught off guard when they were told they couldn’t be helped unless they filed a report. It is important to note that the Title IX promotional material, including campus required training presentations and online videos, suggest that victims can request that Title IX involve the police in the investigation. However, the video does not disclose that Title IX and law enforcement conduct two separate investigations, and information is not shared between the two entities.

For those who filed a report with Title IX so that they would have access to campus resources, many were let down by the office. Victims suggested that Title IX office did not make them a priority. Victims felt like a file on a desk lost amongst other files. The office did not keep the victims in the loop regarding the investigation, which many found to be aggravating. For those who reached out for updates their inquiries were
not addressed for weeks. The lack of communication went beyond updates regarding investigations. Women reported that the office failed to communicate in a timely manner ensuring that victims were receiving the resources they needed from the office, such as academic assistance.

Victims received an array of positive negative and mixed responses from informal disclosures. Reactions from friends tended to be more positive, more likely to change the perspective of the experience, shifting blame away from the victim. One of the most common negative reactions a victim received was a dismissive or negative validation. These negative reactions most commonly resulted from disclosing to family member, however, several of their friends also dismissed the sexual assault. The relationship status of the partner was related to the type of response provided; their current partner was more likely to have positive reactions, compared to ex-partners who the victim was dating at the time of the assault. Reports to law enforcement and Title IX were interpreted as difficult and frustrating experiences, often coupled with blaming or questioned the victim’s actions. Whereas, interactions with the university victim advocate and mental health providers were interpreted as helpful and supportive. In the next section I will discuss implications for this research and additional considerations of future research.

Implications

Negative responses to sexual assault disclosure were related to lower levels of self-esteem, increased general distress, and greater symptoms of depression and anxiety. This finding is consistent with current literature on the consequences of social reactions on psychological well-being. This finding emphasizes the need for social change, specifically a universal need for educating others on sexual assault, dismantling of rape
myths, raising awareness of how best to support victims of sexual assault, and appropriate responses to sexual assault disclosures. An emphasis needs to be made on how reactions to disclosures impact the victim’s perception of the sexual assault and their psychological well-being. For example, although possibly well-intended, responses that minimize the victim’s experience are not helpful or productive for the victim. Negative validation or dismissive reactions do nothing to negate the victim’s experience with self-blame.

This research implies that victim re-traumatization is an important factor to consider when reacting to a sexual assault disclosure. This was often an issue when reactions included continued questioning of the experience, instances of victim blaming, and not believing the victim. Barriers that victims mentioned were an indicator of reactions that should be avoided when someone discloses a sexual assault. Many identified the fear of being blamed or not believed. These reactions were also cited as frequent negative responses. Educating others on rape myths and definitions of rape could greatly impact how others respond, specifically reducing blame and asking the victim to retell their experience. Additionally, by avoiding these reactions the victim could be less likely to experience re-traumatization, reducing the likelihood of negative psychological outcomes.

Reactions from friends had a great impact on how the victim interpreted the experience; friends were often chosen to help make meaning of the experience. Reactions that were dismissive or downplayed the event were considered frustrating and unhelpful. Additionally, victims were less likely to stop engaging in self-blame. It is possible that their friends did not know how to respond due to lack of experience with understanding
the definition of sexual assault, rape myth, or the needs of the victim. Therefore, it is
important that college students understand how negative validation responses hinder the
victim from acknowledging their experience as sexual assault or rape, which in turn does
not reduce self-blame which is related to negative psychological outcomes.

Reactions from parents often led to aggressive encouragement of reporting. As
mentioned by the victims in this study they found it most helpful when others offered
them options for reporting among other resources; this was most often from a friend. The
victim’s family members on the other hand were, in some cases, adamant that the victim
report, even when the victim explicitly stated that they did not wish to report. This lack of
consideration for the victim’s decision or wishes caused undue stress on the victims. It is
important for others to understand that the victim’s decisions are important to their
mental health. Having their choices challenged in an aggressive way does not change
their decision. It is possible that victims who experience the loss of autonomy are less
likely to report their sexual assault to any authority. It is imperative that others be
educated on the importance of autonomy of the victim.

Reactions from partners tended to be avoidance of the subject altogether. Victims
in this study chalked up the avoidance response to “not knowing how to respond.”
However, this perception by the victim was mostly related to the reactions of their partner
compared to others to whom they disclosed. Avoiding the discussion of their sexual
assault was not beneficial to the victim or the relationship. Many times, the victim
identified that they felt unimportant, their experience didn’t matter, or that they were
unheard. Some of the avoidant response increased self-blame, as the victim worried that
their partner thought the victim provoked the assault, which caused stress for the victim
and put a strain on their relationship. It is critical that others understand the value of 
listening and engaging in discussions of sexual assault with their partner. These 
discussions could alleviate stress and perhaps issues with intimacy.

Training focused on the findings of this study, specifically education on 
appropriate responses to sexual assault victims, should be required for those who would 
work with sexual assault victim in any capacity. Based on negative interactions identified 
in this study, law enforcement and Title IX coordinators should be strongly encouraged to 
immediately implement this type of training. As Title IX offers multiple educational 
presentations regarding definitions of sexual assault and sexual misconduct, sexual 
consent, and the importance of bystander intervention, this would be an excellent 
opportunity to discuss social reactions to disclosures of sexual assault. These 
presentations are part of student and employee orientations, as well as, online modules 
required for all students.

Specific to law enforcement, based on the findings of this study, female officers 
should be available to aid in reports of sexual assault. Victims were more comfortable and 
less intimidated when reporting to female officers. Oehme, Stern, and Mennicke (2015) 
suggested that when the presence of female officers on campuses increased, the number 
of reports for sexual violence also increased. This could indicate that the more female 
staff members that are present, the more comfortable women are with reporting their 
assault. It is possible that victims feel as though they can relate better to a female 
authority figure. Essentially, a female police officer could be viewed as more empathetic 
or perceived as potentially treating the victim in a less hostile manner. Training all
officers on how to respond to reports of sexual assault or acts of sexual violence could provide some degree of decency to victims.

The Title IX office is a subsidiary of the Office of Civil Rights. Specifically, Title IX focuses on discrimination based on sex, including sexual misconduct and sexual violence. The Office of Civil Rights does not have detailed guidelines for a Title IX investigation. However, a Title IX investigation should “ensure an adequate, reliable, and impartial investigation of complaints, including the opportunity to present witnesses and other evidence” (United States Department of Education Office for Civil Rights, 2017, p. 3). These rough guidelines leave it up to the universities to determine the best tactics for investigating sexual assaults. Since the Title IX procedures are at the university’s discretion, they should be receptive to accept feedback from those who utilize the resource and adjust procedures or protocols based on that feedback. In addition to protocol adjustments, universities and Title IX offices should provide an accurate depiction of the procedure of reporting and how the office works with student resources.

This research identified that mandatory reporters had various response, many ignoring their duty to report the sexual assault to the university or being unaware of the procedures or to whom they needed to report. However, victims appreciated that they were not forced to report. Perhaps faculty should no longer be mandatory reporters, but rather be equipped with information on resources and be willing to connect victims to those resources. Victims could feel more comfortable about approaching faculty members to discuss academic caused by the sexual assault without fear of having to report the sexual assault. Therefore, victims would be able to get the immediate aid they need academically without the fear of being involuntary pushed into an investigation that they
may not want or are ready for. Forced reporting, as noted previously, is considered a loss of control by victims, which can be related to negative psychological outcomes.

University victim advocates were identified as the most supportive among all the types of people to whom the women made formal reports, offering positive validation, emotional and tangible support. Because of the positive reactions from university victims’ advocates, victims were encouraged to stop blaming themselves and assured that their experience was rape or sexual assault. These reactions helped the victim acknowledge that their experience was rape or sexual assault, reducing self-blame and negative psychological outcomes. Another factor that victims appreciated about the university victim advocate was that they did not have to repeat their experience, reducing the likelihood or re-traumatization. University victims’ advocates also offered resources to the victims in a way that made the victim feel in control by simply going over the resources and explaining the function and process for each one. Because of these perceived positive aspects of the university victims’ advocate, the education needed for societal change should be modeled after their training and behavior. Additionally, as a benefit for universities, funding for the position should be expanded to increase the number of victim advocates on campus as well as preventing frequent turnover.

In addition to suggesting how others should respond to disclosures of sexual assault, this research indicates that victims need to prepare for reactions to sexual assault disclosure, specifically to protect their well-being. University victims’ advocates aid victims by helping them discuss their sexual assault with others, such as friends. These opportunities helped victims framed their account when disclosing to others that led to more positive reactions. Being able to identify important pieces of their experience, even
using the terms rape or sexual assault, made it easier for others to identify the gravity of the experience. Victims identified not having a vocabulary that included definitions of sexual assault or rape, which in turn made it difficult to talk to others about their experience. Additionally, this lack of vocabulary was often related to dismissive reactions from others. It seems necessary to educate all on the definitions of sexual assault and rape along with what rape myths exist and the negative consequences of adhering to rape myth beliefs. This could make it easier for victims to discuss their assault in a way that would elicit positive responses and gain access to the support they need.

**Limitations and Future Research**

This study had a few limitations that should be considered. First, this study collected cross-sectional data, therefore correlational by nature, which limits the identification of temporal precedence and causal statements. Thus, causality could not be inferred from the survey results. To this effect, interpretations of results expressed plausible casual directions for the model proposed as well as the alternative models tested. Because of this, the findings of this study can only establish correlational relationships between rape myth, attributions, social reactions, and well-being outcomes. Future research might include longitudinal studies to go beyond correlational data and identify causality, specifically focusing on the mediating effect of attributions of blame. This mediating effect could be time sensitive, understanding the meaning making process and how that evolves based on disclosure reactions would greatly impact this line of research.

Second, data were collected from female students at a western university and are not representative of all female university students. Additionally, the sample was
overwhelmingly Caucasian and heterosexual. Future research should strive to include a more diverse sample, including male and nonbinary victims, which would be more representative. As the focus of this research was to examine the experiences of university students the data do not represent the greater population of women. On the same note of generalizability, this study focused on one Title IX office, which might not represent all Title IX offices. This is especially true since each university has discretion over how the Title IX offices function.

Additionally, selection effects need to be taken into consideration. These selection effects could have occurred during both the survey and in-depth interview recruitment. This could have the greatest impact on the interviews since participants were recruited during the survey. Participants were asked if they would consider taking part in an in-depth interview focused on sexual assault disclosures. For example, the study might be more biased towards those who were more comfortable discussing their experience(s). Therefore, this study could be missing out on the experiences of those who were uncomfortable discussing their experience or those who have not disclosed their experience to others.

Third, the data in this dissertation are retrospective with varying gaps of time between the assault and data collection. Both the survey and the in-depth interview questions required participants to recount experiences with sexual assault, cognitions surrounding the assault, and their sexual assault disclosures. Additionally, for those who had multiple experiences with sexual assault the survey requested that they focus on one particular experience. It is possible the circumstances and details from other unwanted sexual experiences were included when reporting information regarding the focal sexual
assault. This cross contamination could also be present in the social reaction survey data. The interview questions asked participants to recall several disclosure decisions and disclosure reactions that might have occurred over the course of several years. Since participants were asked to focus on multiple accounts it was possible that important information was not mentioned.

While relationships between the victim and the individuals to whom they disclosed were identified, this study did not assess the strength of those relationships. It is possible that the strength of their relationship influenced the disclosure experience. For example, a long-time close friend might have a different reaction to a sexual assault disclosure than a more recently acquired friend. Additionally, the strength of the relationship could dictate whether or not the victim was comfortable disclosing to that person. This factor would be relevant in a college setting due to shifts in locations and relationships with others.

Another consideration for future research is to examine the explanation for sexual assault reactions from those to whom the victim discloses. Collecting data from people who receive disclosures of sexual assault could illuminate the thought processes behind positive and negative reactions, which could inform efforts to improve reactions. As this research indicates, the type of response victims receive impact their attributions of blame and psychological well-being. For example, what are the underlying factors that influence how someone would respond to a sexual assault disclosure? This study identified that victims often receive dismissive or negative validation reactions, perhaps because there are personal or conditional reason that one would give this type of response. The relationship between the chosen reaction and beliefs in rape myth by the disclosure
recipient could be a factor. Other considerations might include the confidante’s history with sexual assault, and (of those who had been assaulted themselves) the reactions they received when they disclosed. Understanding how reactions are formed by confidantes could offer insight into how to educate the public on best practices for responding to sexual assault victims who choose to disclose to them.

**Conclusion**

This dissertation was an effort to examine how social reactions to disclosures of sexual assault relate to attributions of blame and psychological well-being using a multi-method approach. Findings of this research indicate that attributions of blame are linked to psychological outcomes following a sexual assault. Furthermore, social reactions to sexual assault disclosures have an important relationship with attributions of blame and psychological outcomes follow a sexual assault.

As sexual assaults continue to be a serious problem at universities, in addition to prevention programs, universities should offer education that provides students, faculty, and staff the tools necessary to appropriately respond to someone who has disclosed a sexual assault. It is important to consider how the reactions of others impact the well-being of victims of sexual assault. Given the rate of sexual assaults on campus and its known negative impact on psychological well-being, it is crucial that universities develop and expand resources that that are effective at meeting the victim’s needs, especially those that provide positive social reactions and reduce self-blame.
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doi:10.1177/0886260506286842


doi:10.1177/0886260506286842


### Tables

Table 4.1

*Frequencies of Sample’s Race/Ethnicity*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>66.5%</td>
<td>266</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latina</td>
<td>11.5%</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latina/White</td>
<td>2.3%</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>5.5%</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian/White</td>
<td>3.5%</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>3.0%</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black/White</td>
<td>0.8%</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>7.0%</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* n = 400
### Table 4.2

Frequencies of Assault Characteristics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Experienced more than one sexual assault</td>
<td>160</td>
<td>40.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experienced sexual assault prior to college</td>
<td>171</td>
<td>42.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Labeled experience as sexual assault</td>
<td>272</td>
<td>68.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Labeled experience as rape</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>27.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Tactic**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tactic</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Physical force</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>25.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coercion</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>15.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intoxication</td>
<td>176</td>
<td>44.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Relationship to perpetrator**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Relationship to perpetrator</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Partner</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>14.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friend</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>16.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stranger</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>23.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acquaintance</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>16.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Just met</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>24.3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. n = 400*
### Table 4.3
CFA Rape Myth Subscales

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Latent Variables and Indicators</th>
<th>RMSEA</th>
<th>CFI</th>
<th>SRMR</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>She lied</td>
<td>.051</td>
<td>.989</td>
<td>.027</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. A lot of times, girls who say they were raped agreed to have sex and then regret it.</td>
<td>.734</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Rape accusations are often used as a way of getting back at guys.</td>
<td>.777</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. A lot of times, girls who say they were raped often led the guy on and then had regrets.</td>
<td>.586</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. A lot of times, girls who claim they were raped have emotional problems.</td>
<td>.539</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Girls who are caught cheating on their boyfriends sometimes claim it was rape.</td>
<td>.766</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 with 3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>She asked for it</td>
<td>.037</td>
<td>.981</td>
<td>.031</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. If a girl is raped while she is drunk, she is at least somewhat responsible for letting things get out of hand.</td>
<td>.609</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. When girls go to parties wearing slutty clothes, they are asking for trouble.</td>
<td>.772</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. If a girl goes to a room alone with a guy at a party, it is her own fault if she raped.</td>
<td>.531</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. If a girl acts like a slut, eventually she is going to get into trouble.</td>
<td>.724</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. When girls get raped, it’s often because the way they said “no” was unclear.</td>
<td>.483</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. If a girl initiates kissing or hooking up, she should not be surprised if a guy assumes, she wants to have sex.</td>
<td>.565</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>He didn’t mean to</td>
<td>.081</td>
<td>.950</td>
<td>.041</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. When guys rape, it is usually because of their strong desire for sex.</td>
<td>.586</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Guys don’t usually intend to force sex on a girl, but sometimes they get too sexually carried away.</td>
<td>.595</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Rape happens when a guy’s sex drive goes out of control.</td>
<td>.581</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. If a guy is drunk, he might rape someone unintentionally.</td>
<td>.686</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. It shouldn’t be considered rape if a guy is drunk and didn’t realize what he was doing.</td>
<td>.346</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. If both people are drunk, it can’t be rape.</td>
<td>.315</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 with 3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W asn’t really rape</td>
<td>.017</td>
<td>.991</td>
<td>.024</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. If a girl doesn’t physically resist sex—even if protesting verbally—it can’t be rape.</td>
<td>.313</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. If a girl doesn’t physically fight back, you can’t really say it was rape.</td>
<td>.591</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. A rape probably doesn’t happen if a girl doesn’t have any bruises or marks.</td>
<td>.471</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. If the accused “rapist” doesn’t have a weapon, you really can’t call it rape.</td>
<td>.689</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. If a girl doesn’t say “no” she can’t claim rape.</td>
<td>.591</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 with 3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Note.** CFA = Confirmatory Factor Analysis. Standardized factor loadings are reported in the Table. All standardized factor loadings at \( p < .001 \).
Table 4.4

**Confirmatory Factor Analysis for Rape Myth Created from Items**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor Loadings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. A lot of times, girls who say they were raped agreed to have sex and then regret it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Rape accusations are often used as a way of getting back at guys.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. A lot of times, girls who say they were raped often led the guy on and then had regrets.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. A lot of times, girls who claim they were raped have emotional problems.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Girls who are caught cheating on their boyfriends sometimes claim it was rape.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. If a girl is raped while she is drunk, she is at least somewhat responsible for letting things get out of hand.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. When girls go to parties wearing slutty clothes, they are asking for trouble.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. If a girl goes to a room alone with a guy at a party, it is her own fault if she raped.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. If a girl acts like a slut, eventually she is going to get into trouble.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. When girls get raped, it’s often because the way they said “no” was unclear.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. If a girl initiates kissing or hooking up, she should not be surprised if a guy assumes, she wants to have sex.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. When guys rape, it is usually because of their strong desire for sex.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Guys don’t usually intend to force sex on a girl, but sometimes they get too sexually carried away.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Rape happens when a guy’s sex drive goes out of control.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. If a guy is drunk, he might rape someone unintentionally.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. It shouldn’t be considered rape if a guy is drunk and didn’t realize what he was doing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. If both people are drunk, it can’t be rape.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. If a girl doesn’t physically resist sex—even if protesting verbally—it can’t be rape.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19. If a girl doesn’t physically fight back, you can’t really say it was rape.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20. A rape probably doesn’t happen if a girl doesn’t have any bruises or marks.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21. If the accused “rapist” doesn’t have a weapon, you really can’t call it rape.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22. If a girl doesn’t say “no” she can’t claim rape.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2 with 5</td>
<td>.385</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 with 9</td>
<td>.414</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 with 10</td>
<td>.126</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 with 14</td>
<td>.472</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 with 15</td>
<td>.349</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15 with 14</td>
<td>.266</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16 with 17</td>
<td>.489</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18 with 19</td>
<td>.454</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* CFA = Confirmatory Factor Analysis. Standardized factor loadings are reported in the table. All standardized factor loadings at \( p < .001 \). Model fit. RMSEA = .048, CFI = .881, and SRMR = .062.
Table 4.5

Confirmatory Factor Analysis of Informal Social Reactions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor Loadings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Told you it was not your fault.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Reassured you that you are a good person.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Listened to your feelings.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Showed understanding of your experiences.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Was able to really accept your account of your experience.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Seemed to understand how you were feeling.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Helped you get information of any kind about coping with the experience.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Provided information and discussed options.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Told you to stop talking about it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Tried to discourage you from talking about the experience.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Told you that you could have done more to prevent this experience.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Told you that you were irresponsible or not cautious enough.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Told you that you were to blame or shameful because of this experience.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Told you that you were a terrible person and you got what you deserved.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. Encouraged you to keep the experience a secret.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1 with 2 | .531 |
3 with 5 | .658 |
4 with 6 | .607 |
7 with 8 | .740 |
11 with 12 | .563 |

Note. CFA = Confirmatory Factor Analysis. Model fit. RMSEA = .106, CFI = .939, and SRMR = .049. Standardized factor loadings are reported in the Table. All standardized factor loadings at $p < .001$. 
Table 4.6
Confirmatory Factor Analysis for Behavior, Character, and Perpetrator Blame

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Latent Variables and Indicators</th>
<th>RMSEA</th>
<th>CFI</th>
<th>SRMR</th>
<th>Factor Loadings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Behavior Blame</td>
<td>.072</td>
<td>.941</td>
<td>.042</td>
<td>.479</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. I made out with them.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.706</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. I didn't scream.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.378</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. I flirted with and/or teased them.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.540</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. I went back to their apartment (house or room) or my apartment (house or room) with them</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.574</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. I was alone with them.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.567</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. I didn't run away.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.611</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. I didn't communicate clearly enough with them.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.551</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. I didn't break up or end the relationship with them.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.430</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. I ignored my feeling that something was wrong or that I was in trouble.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.660</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 with 3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.368</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 with 4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.233</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 with 5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.277</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 with 6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.399</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Character Blame</td>
<td>.078</td>
<td>.958</td>
<td>.035</td>
<td>.626</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. I am a bad person.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.830</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. I am stupid.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.657</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. I got what I deserved.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.716</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. I am weak.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.668</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. I am reckless.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.759</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. I am I.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.714</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. I am a poor judge of character.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.660</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. I have poor judgment.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.812</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. I can’t take care of myself.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.377</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. I am unassertive.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.377</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. I made a rash decision.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.596</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 with 3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.250</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 with 8</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.281</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 with 8</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.367</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perpetrator Blame</td>
<td>.072</td>
<td>.960</td>
<td>.034</td>
<td>.625</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. He or she was aggressive.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.690</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. He or she is cruel or mean.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.789</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. He or she is manipulative.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.637</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. He or she is a bad person.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.621</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. He or she didn't listen to me.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.596</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. He or she is domineering.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.528</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. He or she is a jerk.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.632</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. He or she is impulsive.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.803</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. He or she used physical force or threatened to physically force me.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.488</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. He or she is self-centered.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.442</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. They isolated me from other people.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.504</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. He or she has a strong sex drive.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.488</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. CFA = Confirmatory Factor Analysis. Standardized factor loadings are reported in the Table. All standardized factor loadings at \( p < .001 \).
Table 4.7
Confirmatory Factor Analysis of Blame Attribution Concurrent Model

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Latent Variables and Indicators</th>
<th>RMSEA</th>
<th>CFI</th>
<th>SRMR</th>
<th>Factor Loadings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Behavior Blame</td>
<td>.070</td>
<td>.961</td>
<td>.034</td>
<td>.414</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. I made out with them.</td>
<td>.479</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.479</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. I didn't scream.</td>
<td>.474</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.474</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. I flirted with and/or teased</td>
<td>.489</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.489</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>them.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.489</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. I went back to their</td>
<td>.605</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.605</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>apartment (house or room)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>or my apartment (house or</td>
<td></td>
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<td>.605</td>
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<tr>
<td>room) with them.</td>
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<tr>
<td>5. I was alone with them.</td>
<td>.678</td>
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<tr>
<td>6. I didn't run away.</td>
<td></td>
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<td>.678</td>
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<tr>
<td>7. I didn't communicate clearly</td>
<td>.361</td>
<td></td>
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<td>.361</td>
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<tr>
<td>enough with them.</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. I didn't break up or end the</td>
<td></td>
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<td>.361</td>
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<tr>
<td>relationship with them.</td>
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<tr>
<td>9. I ignored my feeling that</td>
<td>.667</td>
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<td>.667</td>
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<tr>
<td>something was wrong or that</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>.667</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I was in trouble.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.667</td>
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<tr>
<td>1 with 3</td>
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<td>1 with 4</td>
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<tr>
<td>2 with 6</td>
<td>.317</td>
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<td>4 with 5</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Character Blame</td>
<td>.078</td>
<td>.958</td>
<td>.035</td>
<td>.630</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. I am a bad person.</td>
<td>.794</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.794</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. I am stupid.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.794</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. I got what I deserved.</td>
<td>.667</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. I am weak.</td>
<td>.714</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>5. I am reckless.</td>
<td>.686</td>
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<td>.686</td>
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<tr>
<td>6. I am I.</td>
<td>.749</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.749</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. I am a poor judge of</td>
<td>.673</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>character.</td>
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<tr>
<td>8. I have poor judgment.</td>
<td>.801</td>
<td></td>
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<td>.801</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. I can’t take care of myself.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>.728</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. I am unassertive.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>11. I made a rash decision.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1 with 3</td>
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<td>5 with 8</td>
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<tr>
<td>6 with 8</td>
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<td>7 with 8</td>
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<td>.331</td>
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<td>Perpetrator Blame</td>
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<td>.034</td>
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<td>1. He or she was aggressive.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. He or she is cruel or mean.</td>
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<td>3. He or she is manipulative.</td>
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<td>4. He or she is a bad person.</td>
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<td>5. He or she didn't listen to me.</td>
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<td>.616</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. He or she is domineering.</td>
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<tr>
<td>7. He or she is a jerk.</td>
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<td>8. He or she is impulsive.</td>
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<tr>
<td>9. He or she used physical</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.508</td>
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<tr>
<td>force or threatened to</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.508</td>
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<tr>
<td>physically force me.</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.635</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. He or she is self-centered.</td>
<td>.789</td>
<td></td>
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<td>.789</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
11. They isolated me from other people.
12. He or she has a strong sex drive.

Note. CFA = Confirmatory Factor Analysis. Standardized factor loadings are reported in the Table. All standardized factor loadings at $p < .001$. 

Table 4.8
Confirmatory Factor Analysis of Psychological Well-being Concurrent Model

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Factor Loadings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Self-Esteem</td>
<td>1. On the whole, I am satisfied with my life.</td>
<td>.654</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. At times I think I am no good at all. (R)</td>
<td>.711</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. I feel that I have a number of good qualities.</td>
<td>.661</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4. I am able to do things as well as most other people.</td>
<td>.674</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5. I feel I do not have much to be proud of. (R)</td>
<td>.783</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6. I certainly feel useless at times. (R)</td>
<td>.713</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7. I feel that I am a person of worth, at least on an equal plane with others.</td>
<td>.728</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8. I wish I could have more respect for myself. (R)</td>
<td>.595</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>9. All in all, I am inclined to feel that I am a failure. (R)</td>
<td>.807</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>10. I take a positive attitude toward myself.</td>
<td>.790</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distress</td>
<td>1. nervous</td>
<td>.536</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. hopeless</td>
<td>.805</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. restless or fidgety</td>
<td>.566</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4. so depressed that nothing could cheer you up</td>
<td>.800</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5. that everything was an effort</td>
<td>.754</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6. worthless</td>
<td>.785</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7. I with 3</td>
<td>.304</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Depression</td>
<td>1. Loss of sexual interest or pleasure</td>
<td>.416</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Feeling low in energy or slowed down</td>
<td>.691</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. Thought of ending your life</td>
<td>.610</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4. Crying easily</td>
<td>.621</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5. Feeling being trapped or caught</td>
<td>.753</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6. Blaming yourself for things</td>
<td>.745</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7. Feeling lonely</td>
<td>.723</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8. Feeling blue</td>
<td>.850</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>9. Worrying too much about things</td>
<td>.686</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>10. Feeling no interest in things</td>
<td>.813</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>11. Feeling hopeless about the future</td>
<td>.806</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>12. Feeling everything is an effort</td>
<td>.836</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>13. Feeling worthless</td>
<td>.304</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anxiety</td>
<td>1. Nervousness of shakiness inside</td>
<td>.787</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Trembling</td>
<td>.762</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. Suddenly scared for no reason</td>
<td>.801</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4. Feeling fearful</td>
<td>.794</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5. Heart pounding or racing</td>
<td>.811</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6. Feeling tense or keyed up</td>
<td>.778</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7. Spells of terror or panic</td>
<td>.840</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8. Feeling so restless</td>
<td>.678</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>9. Feeling something bad is going to happen</td>
<td>.815</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>10. Thoughts and images of a frightening nature</td>
<td>.707</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4 with 3</td>
<td>.549</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Correlations | Self-Esteem with Distress                                          | -.793 |
|             | Self-Esteem with Depression                                        | -.739 |
|             | Self-Esteem with Anxiety                                           | -.542 |
|             | Distress with Depression                                           | .890  |
|             | Distress with Anxiety                                              | .677  |
|             | Depression with Anxiety                                            | .813  |

Note: Model fit. RMSEA = .074, CFI = .956, SRMR = .042. Standardized factor loadings are reported in the Table. All standardized factor loadings at p < .001.
Table 4.9

Confirmatory Factor Analysis for All Latent Variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor Loadings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Rape myth</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. A lot of times, girls who say they were raped agreed to have sex and then regret it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Rape accusations are often used as a way of getting back at guys.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. A lot of times, girls who say they were raped often led the guy on and then had regrets.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. A lot of times, girls who claim they were raped have emotional problems.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Girls who are caught cheating on their boyfriends sometimes claim it was rape.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. If a girl is raped while she is drunk, she is at least somewhat responsible for letting things get out of hand.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. When girls go to parties wearing slutty clothes, they are asking for trouble.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. If a girl goes to a room alone with a guy at a party, it is her own fault if she raped.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. If a girl acts like a slut, eventually she is going to get into trouble.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. When girls get raped, it’s often because the way they said “no” was unclear.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. If a girl initiates kissing or hooking up, she should not be surprised if a guy assumes, she wants to have sex.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. When guys rape, it is usually because of their strong desire for sex.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Guys don’t usually intend to force sex on a girl, but sometimes they get too sexually carried away.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Rape happens when a guy’s sex drive goes out of control.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. If a guy is drunk, he might rape someone unintentionally.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. It shouldn’t be considered rape if a guy is drunk and didn’t realize what he was doing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. If both people are drunk, it can’t be rape.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. If a girl doesn’t physically resist sex—even if protesting verbally—it can’t be rape.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19. If a girl doesn’t physically fight back, you can’t really say it was rape.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20. A rape probably doesn’t happen if a girl doesn’t have any bruises or marks.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21. If the accused “rapist” doesn’t have a weapon, you really can’t call it rape.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22. If a girl doesn’t say “no” she can’t claim rape.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 with 5</td>
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<td>7 with 9</td>
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<tr>
<td>7 with 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 with 14</td>
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<tr>
<td>12 with 15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15 with 14</td>
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<tr>
<td>16 with 17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18 with 19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Social reactions</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Told you it was not your fault.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Reassured you that you are a good person.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Listened to your feelings.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Showed understanding of your experiences.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Was able to really accept your account of your experience.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Seemed to understand how you were feeling.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Helped you get information of any kind about coping with the experience.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Provided information and discussed options.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Told you to stop talking about it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Tried to discourage you from talking about the experience.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
11. Told you that you could have done more to prevent this experience.  - .912
12. Told you that you were irresponsible or not cautious enough.  - .935
13. Told you that you were to blame or shameful because of this experience.  - .970
14. Told you that you were a terrible person and you got what you deserved. (R)  - .964
15. Encouraged you to keep the experience a secret.  - .938

   1 with 2  .531
   3 with 4  .562
   3 with 5  .657
   4 with 6  .605
   7 with 8  .739

Behavior blame
1. I made out with them.  .435
2. I didn't scream.  .450
3. I flirted with and/or teased them.  .474
4. I went back to their apartment (house or room) or my apartment (house or room) with them  .512
5. I was alone with them.  .589
6. I didn't run away.  .669
7. I didn't communicate clearly enough with them.  .394
8. I didn't break up or end the relationship with them.  .678
9. I ignored my feeling that something was wrong or that I was in trouble.  
   1 with 3  .392
   1 with 4  .246
   4 with 5  .299
   2 with 6  .336

Character Blame
1. I am a bad person.  .635
2. I am stupid.  .805
3. I got what I deserved.  .667
4. I am weak.  .722
5. I am reckless.  .672
6. I am naïve.  .751
7. I am a poor judge of character.  .682
8. I have poor judgment.  .799
9. I can’t take care of myself.  .719
10. I am unassertive.  
11. I made a rash decision.  
   1 with 3  .234
   5 with 8  .305
   6 with 8  .248
   7 with 8  .336

Perpetrator Blame
1. He or she was aggressive.  .169
2. He or she is cruel or mean.  .675
3. He or she is manipulative.  .800
4. He or she is a bad person.  .626
5. He or she didn't listen to me.  .638
6. He or she is domineering.  
7. He or she is a jerk.  .581
8. He or she is impulsive.  .522
9. He or she used physical force or threatened to physically force me.  .626
10. He or she is self-centered.  .802
11. They isolated me from other people.  
12. He or she has a strong sex drive.  
Self-esteem
1. On the whole, I am satisfied with my life. .653
2. At times I think I am no good at all. -.710
3. I feel that I have a number of good qualities. .661
4. I am able to do things as well as most other people. .675
5. I feel I do not have much to be proud of. -.784
6. I certainly feel useless at times. -.715
7. I feel that I’m a person of worth, at least on an equal plane with others. .727
8. I wish I could have more respect for myself. -.596
9. All in all, I am inclined to feel that I am a failure. -.806
10. I take a positive attitude toward myself. .790

Distress
1. nervous .535
2. hopeless .806
3. restless or fidgety .564
4. so depressed that nothing could cheer you up .800
5. that everything was an effort .754
6. worthless .786

Depression
1. Loss of sexual interest or pleasure .419
2. Feeling low in energy or slowed down .690
3. Thought of ending your life .610
4. Crying easily .620
5. Feeling being trapped or caught .753
6. Blaming yourself for things .749
7. Feeling lonely .722
8. Feeling blue .847
9. Worrying too much about things .686
10. Feeling no interest in things .814
11. Feeling hopeless about the future .805
12. Feeling everything is an effort .836
13. Feeling worthless .814

Anxiety
1. Nervousness of shakiness inside .786
2. Trembling .762
3. Suddenly scared for no reason .800
4. Feeling fearful .795
5. Heart pounding or racing .811
6. Feeling tense or keyed up .788
7. Spells of terror or panic .839
8. Feeling so restless .679
9. Feeling something bad is going to happen .816
10. Thoughts and images of a frightening nature .708

Note. Model fit. RMSEA = .041, CFI = .883, SRMR = .053. Standardized factor loadings are reported in the Table. All standardized factor loadings at p < .001.


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<th>4.</th>
<th>5.</th>
<th>6.</th>
<th>7.</th>
<th>8.</th>
<th>9.</th>
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<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Rape myth</td>
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<td>2.</td>
<td>Social reactions</td>
<td>-.02</td>
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<td>--</td>
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<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Behavior blame</td>
<td>.15**</td>
<td>-.20***</td>
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<td>4.</td>
<td>Character blame</td>
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<td>-.23****</td>
<td>.71***</td>
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<td>5.</td>
<td>Perpetrator blame</td>
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<td>-.13***</td>
<td>.28***</td>
<td>.25***</td>
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<td>6.</td>
<td>Self-esteem</td>
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<td>-.30***</td>
<td>-.43***</td>
<td>-.12**</td>
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<td>.20***</td>
<td>-.70***</td>
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<td>8.</td>
<td>Depression</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>-.30***</td>
<td>.38***</td>
<td>.49***</td>
<td>.26***</td>
<td>-.69***</td>
<td>.80***</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>Anxiety</td>
<td>-.00</td>
<td>-.25***</td>
<td>.35***</td>
<td>.45***</td>
<td>.25***</td>
<td>-.52***</td>
<td>.64***</td>
<td>.78***</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4.11

Means and Standard Deviations of Factors.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
<th>Minimum</th>
<th>Maximum</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Self-esteem</td>
<td>2.77</td>
<td>.56</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distress</td>
<td>2.42</td>
<td>.82</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Depression</td>
<td>2.28</td>
<td>.75</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anxiety</td>
<td>1.94</td>
<td>.76</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>She lied</td>
<td>1.80</td>
<td>.92</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>She asked for it</td>
<td>1.50</td>
<td>.65</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>He didn’t mean to</td>
<td>2.22</td>
<td>1.10</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not really rape</td>
<td>1.13</td>
<td>.37</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total rape myth</td>
<td>1.63</td>
<td>.57</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Behavior blame</td>
<td>3.02</td>
<td>1.21</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Character blame</td>
<td>2.49</td>
<td>1.26</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perpetrator blame</td>
<td>3.60</td>
<td>1.31</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social reactions</td>
<td>3.28</td>
<td>1.57</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. n = 400
### Table 4.12

**Correlation between Latent Variables and Observed Variables.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Experienced a sexual assault prior to college</th>
<th>Experienced more than one sexual assault</th>
<th>Labeled their experience as sexual assault</th>
<th>Labeled their experience as rape</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Graduate student status</th>
<th>White</th>
<th>Heterosexual</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rape myth</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>-.20***</td>
<td>-.05</td>
<td>-.07</td>
<td>-.06</td>
<td>-.04</td>
<td>.20***</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social reactions</td>
<td>-.05</td>
<td>-.07</td>
<td>-.03</td>
<td>-.14**</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partner</td>
<td>-.05</td>
<td>.11**</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>.23***</td>
<td>.17**</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>-.03</td>
<td>-.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tactic phys. force</td>
<td>.10*</td>
<td>.14**</td>
<td>.21***</td>
<td>.31***</td>
<td>.11*</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>-.11*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tactic coercion</td>
<td>.09</td>
<td>.21***</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>.12**</td>
<td>.11*</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>-.11*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tactic intoxication</td>
<td>-.02</td>
<td>-.04</td>
<td>.10*</td>
<td>.14**</td>
<td>-.08</td>
<td>-.05</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Behavior blame</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>.13**</td>
<td>.21***</td>
<td>.25***</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>-.06</td>
<td>-.05</td>
<td>-.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Character blame</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>.15**</td>
<td>.17***</td>
<td>.26***</td>
<td>-.04</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>-.12*</td>
<td>-.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perpetrator blame</td>
<td>.16***</td>
<td>.25***</td>
<td>.43***</td>
<td>.35***</td>
<td>.20**</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>-.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-esteem</td>
<td>-.02</td>
<td>-.11*</td>
<td>-.03</td>
<td>-.07</td>
<td>.16***</td>
<td>.12*</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>.13**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distress</td>
<td>.10*</td>
<td>.15**</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>.11*</td>
<td>-.12*</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>-.19***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Depression</td>
<td>.11*</td>
<td>.16***</td>
<td>.11*</td>
<td>.17***</td>
<td>-.11*</td>
<td>-.08</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>-.15**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anxiety</td>
<td>.18***</td>
<td>.19***</td>
<td>.13*</td>
<td>.18***</td>
<td>-.15**</td>
<td>-.12**</td>
<td>-.03</td>
<td>-.15**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Note.** *p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001*
Table 5.1

*Rape Myth “She Lied” Regressed on Blame Attribution*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Behavior Blame</th>
<th>Character Blame</th>
<th>Perpetrator Blame</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>b</td>
<td>SE</td>
<td>b</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rape myth: “She lied”</td>
<td>.15**</td>
<td>(.07)</td>
<td>.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>(.05)</td>
<td>-.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduate</td>
<td>-.08</td>
<td>(.07)</td>
<td>-.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>-.06</td>
<td>(.06)</td>
<td>-.12*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heterosexual</td>
<td>-.11</td>
<td>(.06)</td>
<td>-.13*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* Model fit. RMSEA = .04, CFI = .88, and SRMR = .06.
### Table 5.2

**Rape Myth “She Asked for It” Regressed on Blame Attribution**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Behavior Blame</th>
<th>Character Blame</th>
<th>Perpetrator Blame</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>b</td>
<td>SE</td>
<td>b</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rape myth: “She asked for it”</td>
<td>.16**</td>
<td>(.06)</td>
<td>.17*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>(.05)</td>
<td>-.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduate</td>
<td>-.09</td>
<td>(.07)</td>
<td>-.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>-.06</td>
<td>(.06)</td>
<td>-.12*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heterosexual</td>
<td>-.11</td>
<td>(.06)</td>
<td>-.13*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* Model fit. RMSEA = .04, CFI = .88, and SRMR = .06.
Table 5.3

*Rape Myth “He Didn’t Mean to” Regressed on Blame Attribution*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Behavior Blame</th>
<th>Character Blame</th>
<th>Perpetrator Blame</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$b$</td>
<td>SE</td>
<td>$b$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rape myth: “He didn’t mean to”</td>
<td>.22** (.06)</td>
<td>.16** (.06)</td>
<td>-.02 (.06)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>.09 (.05)</td>
<td>-.01 (.05)</td>
<td>.23*** (.06)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduate</td>
<td>-.08 (.07)</td>
<td>-.04 (.06)</td>
<td>-.05 (.06)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>-.07 (.06)</td>
<td>-.13* (.05)</td>
<td>.08 (.05)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heterosexual</td>
<td>-.11 (.06)</td>
<td>-.12* (.05)</td>
<td>-.10 (.05)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Model fit. RMSEA = .04, CFI = .88, and SRMR = .06.
Table 5.4

*Rape Myth “Not Really Rape” Regressed on Blame Attribution*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Behavior Blame</th>
<th>Character Blame</th>
<th>Perpetrator Blame</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>b</em></td>
<td><em>SE</em></td>
<td><em>b</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rape myth: “Not really rape”</td>
<td>.18** (.06)</td>
<td>.15* (.06)</td>
<td>-.02 (.06)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>.06 (.05)</td>
<td>-.03 (.05)</td>
<td>.23*** (.06)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduate</td>
<td>-.08 (.07)</td>
<td>-.04 (.06)</td>
<td>-.05 (.06)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>-.06 (.06)</td>
<td>-.12* (.05)</td>
<td>.08 (.05)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heterosexual</td>
<td>-.11 (.06)</td>
<td>-.13* (.05)</td>
<td>-.10 (.05)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. Model fit. RMSEA = .04, CFI = .88, and SRMR = .06.*
Table 5.5

**Rape Myth Regressed on Blame Attribution**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Behavior Blame</th>
<th>Character Blame</th>
<th>Perpetrator Blame</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>b</td>
<td>SE</td>
<td>b</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rape myth</td>
<td>.18**</td>
<td>(.06)</td>
<td>.16*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>(.05)</td>
<td>-.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduate</td>
<td>-.08</td>
<td>(.07)</td>
<td>-.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>-.06</td>
<td>(.06)</td>
<td>-.12*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heterosexual</td>
<td>-.11</td>
<td>(.06)</td>
<td>-.13*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. Model fit. RMSEA = .04, CFI = .88, and SRMR = .06.*
Table 5.6

*Social Reactions Regressed on Blame Attribution*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Behavior Blame</th>
<th>Character Blame</th>
<th>Perpetrator Blame</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>b</td>
<td>SE</td>
<td>b</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social reactions</td>
<td>-.21*** (.06)</td>
<td>-.20*** (.05)</td>
<td>-.17*** (.05)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>.07 (.05)</td>
<td>-.02 (.05)</td>
<td>.23*** (.06)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduate</td>
<td>-.09 (.07)</td>
<td>-.05 (.05)</td>
<td>-.04 (.06)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>-.05 (.06)</td>
<td>-.11* (.05)</td>
<td>.09 (.05)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heterosexual</td>
<td>-.07 (.06)</td>
<td>-.09 (.05)</td>
<td>-.09 (.05)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* Model fit. RMSEA = .05, CFI = .90, and SRMR = .06.
Table 5.7

*Relationship to Perpetrator Regressed on Blame Attribution*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Behavior Blame</th>
<th>Character Blame</th>
<th>Perpetrator Blame</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$b$</td>
<td>SE</td>
<td>$b$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partner as perpetrator</td>
<td>.36*</td>
<td>(.15)</td>
<td>.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>(.01)</td>
<td>-.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduate</td>
<td>-.19</td>
<td>(.14)</td>
<td>-.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>-.10</td>
<td>(.10)</td>
<td>-.21*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heterosexual</td>
<td>-.12</td>
<td>(.10)</td>
<td>-.19</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* Model fit. RMSEA = .05, CFI = .90, and SRMR = .06.
Table 5.8

**Sexual Assault Tactic Used Regressed on Blame Attribution**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Behavior Blame</th>
<th>Character Blame</th>
<th>Perpetrator Blame</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>b</em></td>
<td><em>SE</em></td>
<td><em>b</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical force</td>
<td>.23*** (.06)</td>
<td>.15** (.05)</td>
<td>.45*** (.05)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coercion</td>
<td>.09 (.06)</td>
<td>.09 (.05)</td>
<td>.19*** (.05)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intoxication</td>
<td>.26*** (.06)</td>
<td>.26*** (.05)</td>
<td>.07 (.05)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>.05 (.05)</td>
<td>-.03 (.05)</td>
<td>.17** (.06)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduate</td>
<td>-.09 (.07)</td>
<td>-.05 (.06)</td>
<td>-.04 (.05)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>-.07 (.06)</td>
<td>-.12* (.05)</td>
<td>.05 (.05)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heterosexual</td>
<td>-.05 (.06)</td>
<td>-.08 (.05)</td>
<td>-.03 (.04)</td>
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</table>

*Note.* Model fit: RMSEA = .06, CFI = .89, and SRMR = .06.
Table 5.9

*Sexual Assault Characteristics Regressed on Blame Attribution*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Behavior Blame</th>
<th>Character Blame</th>
<th>Perpetrator Blame</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<td></td>
<td>(b)</td>
<td>(SE)</td>
<td>(b)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prior sexual assault</td>
<td>-.02 (.06)</td>
<td>-.01 (.05)</td>
<td>.10* (.05)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Experienced more than one assault</td>
<td>.05 (.06)</td>
<td>.10 (.05)</td>
<td>.16*** (.05)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Considered sexual assault</td>
<td>.15* (.07)</td>
<td>.07 (.06)</td>
<td>.29*** (.05)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Considered rape</td>
<td>.25*** (.06)</td>
<td>.23*** (.06)</td>
<td>.19*** (.05)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>.03 (.05)</td>
<td>-.06 (.04)</td>
<td>.16*** (.05)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduate</td>
<td>-.09 (.06)</td>
<td>-.05 (.05)</td>
<td>-.04 (.16)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>-.07 (.06)</td>
<td>-.13* (.05)</td>
<td>-.05 (.05)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heterosexual</td>
<td>-.03 (.06)</td>
<td>-.06 (.05)</td>
<td>-.03 (.04)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* Model fit. RMSEA = .05, CFI = .90, and SRMR = .06.
### Table 5.10

**Full Regression Model for Blame Attribution**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Behavior Blame</th>
<th>Character Blame</th>
<th>Perpetrator Blame</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<td></td>
<td>$b$</td>
<td>$SE$</td>
<td>$b$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rape myth</td>
<td>.20***</td>
<td>.16**</td>
<td>.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social reactions</td>
<td>-.15**</td>
<td>-.15**</td>
<td>-.10**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partner perpetrator</td>
<td>.12</td>
<td>-.02</td>
<td>.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical force</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>.31***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coercion</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>.11**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intoxication</td>
<td>.19***</td>
<td>.19***</td>
<td>.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexual assault prior to college</td>
<td>-.03</td>
<td>-.02</td>
<td>.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than one sexual assault</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>.09</td>
<td>.12**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Labeled experience as sexual assault</td>
<td>.16*</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>.25**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Labeled experience as rape</td>
<td>.14*</td>
<td>.17**</td>
<td>.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>-.04</td>
<td>.13**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduate</td>
<td>-.07</td>
<td>-.04</td>
<td>-.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>-.05</td>
<td>-.11</td>
<td>.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heterosexual</td>
<td>-.05</td>
<td>-.09</td>
<td>.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* Model fit. RMSEA = .05, CFI = .88, and SRMR = .06.
Table 6.1

*Social Reactions Regressed on Psychological Well-Being*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Self-esteem</th>
<th>Distress</th>
<th>Depression</th>
<th>Anxiety</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$b$</td>
<td>$SE$</td>
<td>$b$</td>
<td>$SE$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social reactions</td>
<td>.18***</td>
<td>(.05)</td>
<td>-.21***</td>
<td>(.06)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>.14***</td>
<td>(.05)</td>
<td>-.11*</td>
<td>(.04)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduate</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>(.05)</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>(.05)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>.11*</td>
<td>(.05)</td>
<td>-.18***</td>
<td>(.05)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* Model fit. RMSEA = .05, CFI = .92, and SRMR = .05.
Table 6.2

Attributions of Blame Regressed on Psychological Well-Being

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Self-esteem</th>
<th>Distress</th>
<th>Depression</th>
<th>Anxiety</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Behavior blame</td>
<td>.13</td>
<td>-.21</td>
<td>-.14</td>
<td>-.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Character blame</td>
<td>-.55**</td>
<td>.61**</td>
<td>.59**</td>
<td>.52**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perpetrator blame</td>
<td>-.05</td>
<td>.14</td>
<td>.18**</td>
<td>.20**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>.15**</td>
<td>-.12**</td>
<td>-.13***</td>
<td>.15**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduate</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>-.02</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heterosexual</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>-.15***</td>
<td>-.10*</td>
<td>-.10*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Model fit. RMSEA = .04, CFI = .90, and SRMR = .05.
Table 6.3

*Social Reactions and Attributions of Blame Regressed on Psychological Well-Being*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Self-esteem</th>
<th>Distress</th>
<th>Depression</th>
<th>Anxiety</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$b$</td>
<td>$SE$</td>
<td>$b$</td>
<td>$SE$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social reactions</td>
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<td>-.11* (.05)</td>
<td>-.16*** (.04)</td>
<td>-.13** (.05)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Behavior blame</td>
<td>.14 (.21)</td>
<td>-.22 (.22)</td>
<td>-.15 (.21)</td>
<td>-.15 (.23)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Character blame</td>
<td>-.54** (.19)</td>
<td>.60** (.20)</td>
<td>.57** (.18)</td>
<td>.51** (.20)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perpetrator blame</td>
<td>-.03 (.08)</td>
<td>.12 (.08)</td>
<td>.16* (.07)</td>
<td>.19* (.08)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>.14** (.05)</td>
<td>-.12** (.04)</td>
<td>-.12*** (.04)</td>
<td>-.14** (.05)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduate</td>
<td>.03 (.04)</td>
<td>.02 (.05)</td>
<td>.01 (.05)</td>
<td>-.03 (.05)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>.02 (.05)</td>
<td>.01 (.05)</td>
<td>.03 (.05)</td>
<td>.01 (.05)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heterosexual</td>
<td>.08 (.05)</td>
<td>-.14** (.05)</td>
<td>-.10* (.04)</td>
<td>-.09* (.05)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* Model fit. RMSEA = .04, CFI = .90, and SRMR = .05.
Table 6.4
Mediation Model

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social reactions → Behavior → Self-esteem</th>
<th>b</th>
<th>se</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Social reactions → Character → Self-esteem</td>
<td>.141</td>
<td>.12</td>
<td>.226</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social reactions → Perpetrator → Self-esteem</td>
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<td>.02</td>
<td>.496</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social reactions → Behavior → Distress</td>
<td>.071</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>.531</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social reactions → Character → Distress</td>
<td>-.120</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>.235</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social reactions → Perpetrator → Distress</td>
<td>-.016</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>.316</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social reactions → Behavior → Depression</td>
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<td>.09</td>
<td>.459</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social reactions → Character → Depression</td>
<td>-.123</td>
<td>.09</td>
<td>.150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social reactions → Perpetrator → Depression</td>
<td>-.020</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>.182</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social reactions → Behavior → Anxiety</td>
<td>.114</td>
<td>.15</td>
<td>.456</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social reactions → Character → Anxiety</td>
<td>-.152</td>
<td>.13</td>
<td>.249</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social reactions → Perpetrator → Anxiety</td>
<td>-.028</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>.207</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Model fit. RMSEA = .041, CFI=.864, and SRMR = .057.
Appendix A

Modified Sexual Experiences Survey

The following questions concern sexual experiences that you may have had that were unwanted. We know that these are personal questions, so we do not ask your name or other identifying information. Your information is completely confidential. We hope that this helps you to feel comfortable answering each question honestly.

1. Since enrolling in college has someone fondled, kissed, or rubbed up against the private areas of my body (lips, breast/chest, crotch or butt) or removed some of my clothes without my consent (but did not attempt sexual penetration)?
   a. Yes
   b. No

   If yes – Has this happened more than once?

   If yes – for the following questions, please focus on the easiest to recall occurrence.

2. Which, if any, of the following occur leading up to or during this experience?

3. They told me lies, threatening to end the relationship, threatening to spread rumors about me, making promises I knew were untrue, or continually verbally pressuring me after I said I didn’t want to

4. Showing displeasure, criticizing my sexuality or attractiveness, getting angry but not using physical force, after I said I didn’t want to.

5. Taking advantage of me when I was too drunk or out of it to stop what was happening

6. Threatening to physically harm me or someone close to me.
7. Using force, for example holding me down with their body weight, pinning my arms, or having a weapon.

8. Since enrolling in college has someone had oral sex with me or made me have oral sex with them without my consent?
   a. Yes
   b. No

   If yes – Has this happened more than once?
   If yes – for the following questions, please focus on the easiest to recall occurrence.

9. Which, if any, of the following occur leading up to or during this experience?
   a. They told me lies, threatening to end the relationship, threatening to spread rumors about me, making promises I knew were untrue, or continually verbally pressuring me after I said I didn’t want to
   b. Showing displeasure, criticizing my sexuality or attractiveness, getting angry but not using physical force, after I said I didn’t want to.
   c. Taking advantage of me when I was too drunk or out of it to stop what was happening
   d. Threatening to physically harm me or someone close to me.
   e. Using force, for example holding me down with their body weight, pinning my arms, or having a weapon.

10. Since enrolling in college has a man put his penis into my vagina or butt, or someone inserted fingers or objects without my consent?
    a. Yes
b. No

If yes – Has this happened more than once?

If yes – for the following questions, please focus on the easiest to recall or most memorable experience.

11. Which, if any, of the following occur leading up to or during this experience?
   a. They told me lies, threatening to end the relationship, threatening to spread rumors about me, making promises I knew were untrue, or continually verbally pressuring me after I said I didn’t want to
   b. Showing displeasure, criticizing my sexuality or attractiveness, getting angry but not using physical force, after I said I didn’t want to.
   c. Taking advantage of me when I was too drunk or out of it to stop what was happening
   d. Threatening to physically harm me or someone close to me.
   e. Using force, for example holding me down with their body weight, pinning my arms, or having a weapon.

12. Thinking back over easiest to recall or most memorable experience you just reported on, what was your relationship with person or persons who did this to you?
   a. Stranger
   b. Current or Ex Romantic Partner
   c. Non-Romantic Friend
   d. Roommate
   e. Acquaintance
f. Coworker

13. Since you began college, would you say you have been sexually assaulted?
   a. Yes
   b. No
   c. I don’t know

14. Since you began college would you say that you have been raped?
   a. Yes
   b. No
   c. I don’t know
Appendix B

Extent of disclosure

1. Have you told anyone about your experience?

2. Mentioned in passing / Made a vague reference to it

3. Said what happened and talked about it in detail

4. Who was the first person you talked to about your experience?
   
   a. Friend
   b. Partner (Boyfriend/Girlfriend/Spouse)
   c. Parent
   d. Sibling
   e. Other relative
   f. Mental health professional
   g. Clergy
   h. Police
   i. Crisis center
   j. Title IX
   k. Victim’s advocate
   l. Professor/Teaching Assistant (T.A.)
   m. Residential Assistant (R.A.)
   n. Support group
   o. Other – Please state their relationship to you

5. Did you find this discussion about your experience helpful?
   
   a. ***Likert 1 to 5*** or ***Yes/No***
6. How long did you wait to talk about this experience for the first time?
   a. One day
   b. One week
   c. One month
   d. Six months
   e. One year
   f. More than one year

7. Have you talked about your experience with others?
   a. Yes
   b. No

8. Have you discussed this experience with the authorities (i.e., Title IX, Victims Advocate, Police)?
   a. Yes
   b. No
Appendix C

Updated Illinois Rape Myth Scale

Please indicate how strongly you agree or disagree with each of the following statements.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

*She asked for it*

1. If a girl is raped while she is drunk, she is at least somewhat responsible for letting things get out of hand.

2. When girls go to parties wearing slutty clothes, they are asking for trouble.

3. If a girl goes to a room alone with a guy at a party, it is her own fault if she is raped.

4. If a girl acts like a slut, eventually she is going to get into trouble.

5. When girls get raped, it’s often because the way they said “no” was unclear.

6. If a girl initiates kissing or hooking up, she should not be surprised if a guy assumes she wants to have sex.

*He didn’t mean to*

7. When guys rape, it is usually because of their strong desire for sex.

8. Guys don’t usually intend to force sex on a girl, but sometimes they get too sexually carried away.

9. Rape happens when a guy’s sex drive goes out of control.

10. If a guy is drunk, he might rape someone unintentionally.
11. It shouldn’t be considered rape if a guy is drunk and didn’t realize what he was doing.

12. If both people are drunk, it can’t be rape.

*It wasn’t really rape*

13. If a girl doesn’t physically resist sex—even if protesting verbally—it can’t be considered rape.

14. If a girl doesn’t physically fight back, you can’t really say it was rape.

15. A rape probably doesn’t happen if a girl doesn’t have any bruises or marks.

16. If the accused “rapist” doesn’t have a weapon, you really can’t call it rape.

17. If a girl doesn’t say “no” she can’t claim rape.

*She lied*

18. A lot of times, girls who say they were raped agreed to have sex and then regret it.

19. Rape accusations are often used as a way of getting back at guys.

20. A lot of times, girls who say they were raped often led the guy on and then had regrets.

21. A lot of times, girls who claim they were raped have emotional problems.

22. Girls who are caught cheating on their boyfriends sometimes claim it was rape.
Appendix D

Sexual Victimization Attributions Scale

The following set of questions are going to ask you about what you think caused the unwanted sexual experience(s) you reported above. If you have had more than one such experience, please refer to the experience easiest to recall or most memorable.

I think this unwanted sexual experience happened to me because…

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Completely True</th>
<th>Somewhat True</th>
<th>Slightly True</th>
<th>Slightly Untrue</th>
<th>Somewhat Untrue</th>
<th>Completely Untrue</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Perpetrator Blame*

1. He is aggressive
2. He is cruel or mean
3. He is manipulative
4. He is a bad person
5. He didn’t listen to me
6. He is domineering
7. He is a jerk
8. He is impulsive
9. He used physical force or threatened to physically force me
10. He is self-centered
11. He isolated me from other people
12. He has a strong sex drive
Character Self-Blame

1. I’m a bad person
2. I am stupid
3. I got what I deserved
4. I am weak
5. I am reckless
6. I am naïve
7. I am a poor judge of character
8. I have poor judgement
9. I can’t take care of myself
10. I am unassertive
11. I made a rash decision

Behavior Self-Blame

1. I made out with him
2. I didn’t scream
3. I flirted with and/or teased him
4. I went back to his apartment (house or room) or my apartment (house or room) with him
5. I was alone with him
6. I didn’t run away
7. I didn’t communicate clearly enough with him
8. I didn’t break up or end my relationship with him
9. I ignored my feeling that something was wrong or that I was in trouble
Appendix E

Social Reactions Questionnaire (SRQ)

The following is a list of reactions that other people sometimes have then responding to a person with this experience. Please indication how often you experienced each of the listed responses from other people.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>0</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>A little</td>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td>Very much</td>
<td>All of the time</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Emotional Support/Belief*

1. Told you that you were not to blame
2. Told you that you did not do anything wrong
3. Told you it was not your fault
4. Reassured you that you are a good person
5. Held you or told you that you are loved
6. Comforted you by telling you it would be alright or holding you
7. Spent time with you
8. Listened to your feelings
9. Showed understanding of you experience
10. Reframed the experience as a clear case of victimization
11. Saw your side of things and did not make judgments
12. Was able to really accept your account of your experience
13. Told you he/she felt sorry for you
14. Believed your account of what happened
15. Seemed to understand how you were feeling
Distraction

1. Told you to stop talking about it
2. Tried to discourage you from talking about the experience
3. Told you to go on with your life
4. Encouraged you to keep the experience a secret
5. Distracted you with other things

Tangible Aid/Information Support

1. Helped you get medical attention
2. Provided information and discussed options
3. Helped you get information of any kind about coping with the experience
4. Took you to the police
5. Encouraged you to seek counseling

Victim Blaming

1. Told you that you could have done more to prevent this experience from occurring
2. Told you that were irresponsible or not cautious enough
3. Told you that you were to blame or shameful because of this experience
4. Told you that you were a terrible person and you got what you deserved.
Appendix F

Symptom Checklist-90 Revised Depression

Below is a list of some of the ways you may have felt or behaved. Please indicate how often you have felt this way during the past week by checking the appropriate space.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rarely or none of the time (less than 1 day)</th>
<th>Some or a little of the time (1–2 days)</th>
<th>Occasionally or a moderate amount of the time (3–4 days)</th>
<th>Most or all of the time (5–7 days)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. Loss of sexual interest or pleasure
2. Feeling low in energy or slowed down
3. Thoughts of ending your life
4. Crying easily
5. Feeling being trapped or caught
6. Blaming yourself for things
7. Feeling lonely
8. Feeling blue
9. Worrying too much about things
10. Feeling no interest in things
11. Feeling hopeless about the future
12. Feeling everything is an effort
13. Feeling worthless
Appendix G

Symptom Checklist-90 Revised – Anxiety

Below is a list of some of the ways you may have felt or behaved. Please indicate how often you have felt this way during the past week by checking the appropriate space.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rarely or none of the time (less than 1 day)</th>
<th>Some or a little of the time (1–2 days)</th>
<th>Occasionally or a moderate amount of the time (3–4 days)</th>
<th>Most or all of the time (5–7 days)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. Nervousness or shakiness inside
2. Trembling
3. Suddenly scared for no reason
4. Feeling fearful
5. Heart pounding or racing
6. Feeling tense or keyed up
7. Spells of terror or panic
8. Feeling so restless
9. Feeling something bad is going to happen
10. Thoughts and images of a frightening nature
Appendix H

Posttraumatic Diagnostic Scale (PDS-5)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>0</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>A little</td>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td>Very much</td>
<td>All of the time</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. Unwanted upsetting memories about the trauma.

2. Bad dreams or nightmares related to the trauma.

3. Reliving the traumatic event or feeling as if it were actually happening again.

4. Feeling very EMOTIONALLY upset when reminded of the trauma.

5. Having PHYSICAL reactions when reminded of the trauma (for example, heart racing).

6. Trying to avoid thoughts or feelings related to the trauma.

7. Trying to avoid activities, situations, or places that remind you of the trauma or that feel more dangerous since the trauma.

8. Not being able to remember important parts of the trauma.

9. Seeing yourself, others, or the world in a more negative way (for example, “I can’t trust people”, “I am a weak person”).

10. Blaming yourself or others (besides the person who hurt you) for what happened.

11. Having intense negative feelings like fear, horror, anger, guilt, or shame.

12. Losing interest or not participating in activities you used to do.

13. Feeling distant or cutoff from others.

14. Having difficulty experiencing positive feelings.

15. Acting more irritable or aggressive with others.
16. Taking more risks or doing things that might cause you or others harm (for example, driving recklessly, taking drugs, having unprotected sex).

17. Being overly alert or on-guard (for example, checking to see who is around you, being uncomfortable with your back to a door).

18. Being jumpy or more easily startled (for example, when someone walks up behind you).

19. Having trouble concentrating.

20. Having trouble falling asleep.

21. How much have these difficulties been bothering you?

22. How much have the difficulties been interfering with you everyday life (for example relationships, work, or other important activities).
Appendix I

Rosenburg Self-Esteem Scale

Below is a list of statements dealing with your general feelings about yourself. Please indicate how strongly you agree or disagree with each statement.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. On the whole, I am satisfied with my life.
2. At times I think I am no good at all. (R)
3. I feel that I have a number of good qualities.
4. I am able to do things as well as most other people.
5. I feel I do not have much to be proud of. (R)
6. I certainly feel useless at times. (R)
7. I feel that I’m a person of worth, at least on an equal plane with others.
8. I wish I could have more respect for myself. (R)
9. All in all, I am inclined to feel that I am a failure. (R)
10. I take a positive attitude toward myself.
Appendix J

Kessler Psychological Distress Scale (K6)

During the last 30 days, about how often did you feel…

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>None of the time</th>
<th>A little of the time</th>
<th>Some of the time</th>
<th>Most of the time</th>
<th>All of the time</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. …nervous?

2. …hopeless?

3. …restless or fidgety?

4. …so depressed that nothing could cheer you up?

5. …that everything was an effort?

6. …worthless.
Appendix K

Demographic Information

1. Gender

2. What is your age in years?

3. Which of the following best represents your racial or ethnic heritage?
   a. Non-Hispanic White or Euro-American
   b. Black, African American, Afro-Caribbean
   c. Latino or Hispanic American
   d. East Asian or Asian American
   e. South Asian or Indian American
   f. Middle Eastern or Arab American
   g. Native American of Alaskan Native
   h. Other (please specify)

4. What is your class ranking at UNR?
   a. Freshman
   b. Sophomore
   c. Junior
   d. Senior
   e. Graduate Student

5. What is your sexual orientation?
   a. Heterosexual (straight)
   b. Homosexual
   c. Bisexual
d. Other, please specify

6. If you have any additional thoughts about topics covered in this survey or your experience in this research, please share them below.
Appendix L

Survey Recruitment Email

Hello ${m://FirstName}!

We are contacting all female students at UNR to ask you to consider completing a brief survey about your sexual experiences while in college. This study is sponsored by the UNR Social Psychology PhD Program.

The survey should take most students approximately 15 minutes to complete and will provide us with valuable feedback regarding your experiences here at UNR.

If you participate in the full survey, you can enter a drawing to win one of five $50 gift cards.

CLICK the following link to access the survey

${l://SurveyLink?d=Take the Survey}

The survey includes sections that ask about your personal beliefs regarding social situations and sexual behavior. This survey will also ask about any personal encounters with unwanted sexual experiences. Some language in this survey is explicit and some people may find it uncomfortable, but it is important that we ask the questions in this way so that you are clear what we mean. Information on how to get help, if you need it, appears at the beginning and end of the survey.

We will protect the confidentiality of your answers. When you complete the survey the link with your name, email and IP address will be broken so that no-one will be able to connect these with your survey answers. The results will be presented in summary form, so no individual can be identified.
Please ask questions about anything you do not understand, before deciding whether to participate. If you have any questions or concerns about this research, please contact the primary researcher, Ann E. Jones in the Department of Social Psychology by email, ajones@nevada.unr.edu. You may also contact the principal investigator, Dr. Marta Elliott, Department of Sociology, University of Nevada, Reno at (775) 784-4884, or by email at melliott@unr.edu.

Thank you in advance for your time and cooperation.

Ann E. Jones, MA, PhD Candidate of Social Psychology

Marta Elliott, PhD; Professor of Sociology and Social Psychology

Follow the link to opt out of future emails:

${l://OptOutLink?d=Click here to unsubscribe}$
Appendix M

Informed Consent

University of Nevada, Reno

Consent to Participate in Research

PARTICIPANT REQUIREMENTS

To participate in this study, you must be a woman who is at least 18 years old and has personally experienced an unwanted sexual encounter(s) or sexual assault. We are broadly defining such experiences so as to include a range, not only limited to events that might be classified as rape.

You will be asked to complete a series of questions pertaining to sexual encounters that you have experienced, in addition to questions about mental well-being.

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. Please ask questions about anything you do not understand, before deciding whether to participate. If you have any questions or concerns about this research, please contact the contact the primary researcher, Ann E. Jones in the Department of Social Psychology by email, ajones@nevada.unr.edu. You may also contact the principal investigator, Dr. Marta Elliott, Department of Sociology, University of Nevada, Reno at (775) 784-4884, or by email at melliott@unr.edu.

Resources available for students who have encountered unwanted sexual experiences or sexual assault:

- Sexual Assault Support Services (SASS) (Crisis Call Center) can be reached at (775) 784-8090 or (800) 273-8255.
UNR Counseling Services: You may call 775-784-4648 for an appointment or simply walk in for urgent care. Pennington Student Achievement Center Suite 420.

UNR Victim Advocate: can be reached at the Sexual Assault/Sexual Misconduct Hotline (775-771-8724) or by email CampusAdvocate@crisiscallcenter.org.

Clicking “I AGREE” below means that you have read and understand the research study, including the above information, and that you voluntarily agree to participate.
Appendix N

End of Survey

Thank you for participating in our study. If you have any questions or concerns about this research, please contact the primary researcher, Ann E. Jones in the Department of Social Psychology by email, ajones@nevada.unr.edu. You may also contact the principal investigator, Dr. Marta Elliott, Department of Sociology, University of Nevada, Reno at (775) 784-4884, or by email at melliott@unr.edu.

If you are experiencing anxiety or discomfort after completing some of the questions that examined your experiences, attitudes, and/or behaviors, then the following resources are available for you:

RESOURCES AVAILABLE FOR STUDENTS WHO HAVE ENCOUNTERED AN UNWANTED SEXUAL EXPERIENCE

- Sexual Assault Support Services (SASS) (Crisis Call Center) can be reached at (775) 784-8090 or (800) 273-8255.

- UNR Counseling Services: You may call 775-784-4648 for an appointment or simply walk in for urgent care. Pennington Student Achievement Center Suite 420.

- UNR Victim Advocate: can be reached at the Sexual Assault /Sexual Misconduct Hotline (775-771-8724) or by email CampusAdvocate@crisiscallcenter.org.

CLICK HERE to enter your contact information into the $50 gift card drawing.

The information you provide will not be connected to your responses in this survey.
Appendix O

Semi-Structured Interview Questions – Those who have reported

Thank you for coming. I am Ann E. Jones and I am a doctoral candidate in Interdisciplinary Social Psychology. During this interview, I will ask you to reflect on your experiences with talking with others about your unwanted sexual experience. This information will be used primarily for my dissertation but also for publications. This interview is confidential. I will not use your name or any other identifying information in the manuscripts. I want you to feel comfortable and be honest about your perspectives. There is no judgment about anything you say. Also, you can choose not to answer any question you do not feel comfortable discussing. You are also free to end the interview at any point if you feel uncomfortable and you will still receive the money for the interview. This interview will be audio recorded and transcribed. Do you agree to be audio-recorded? (participants will verbally agree to be audio recorded).

Please take a few minutes to read the consent form in front of you. Do you have any questions? Do you verbally consent to participate?

I would like to start with your college experience.

1. How would you describe your overall experience here at UNR? Do you like going to school here?
2. Is there anything you would change about your experience so far?
3. What is your major?
4. What has been your favorite class you have taken?

Now, we will start to talk about some of your experiences following your most memorable unwanted sexual experience. I really want to understand your perspectives
and points of view. I would like to start with discussing the first person you talked to about your unwanted sexual experience.

1. Did you tell anyone about your unwanted sexual experience?
2. Please tell me about your first experience of disclosing.
3. Who did you tell?
4. What was your relationship with this person?
5. How close were/are you to this person?
6. How soon after the experience did you tell someone?
7. Did not tell -
8. How was your disclosure received? – How did they respond to what you told them?
9. Was this a positive experience?
10. What made this a positive/negative experience?
11. How did this make you feel?
12. Were they encouraging? If so how?
13. Were they discouraging? If so how?
14. Is there something you wish they had done differently?
15. Have you told anyone since telling your ______?
16. What are some of the reactions you have had from others after telling them about your experience?
17. Did anyone encourage you to you to report?
18. By reporting I mean telling an authority such as Counselor, law enforcement, victim’s advocate, Title IX.
19. Did you or your _____ want to report the experience?
20. Did you initially want to report – before talking to your _____?
21. Did they encourage you to report?
22. How did they encourage you?
23. Did anyone try talk you out of reporting?
24. What did they say about you wanting to report?
25. How did you feel when they tried to talk you out of it?
26. Did you find it easy to report the experience?
27. What made it easy – easy to find resources
28. What made it difficult?
29. Finding resources
30. Knowing where to go and who to talk to
31. Were you worried about their response to you?
   a. Treated
   b. Believed
   c. Judged
32. What was your experience with reporting like?
33. Who did you report your experience with (Counselor, law enforcement, victim’s advocate, Title IX)?
34. What was their response to you?
35. Were they receptive? Helpful?
36. How were they helpful?
37. How did they make you feel?
38. Did you feel believed?
39. What did they do to make you feel believed or supported?
40. Is there anything you wish they would have done that they didn’t?
41. What could they have done differently?
42. Overall, how was reporting helpful to you?
43. Overall, how was reporting not helpful?
44. What do you think could have made the experience of reporting easier?
45. Do you wish you could change anything about your experience with talking about your experience with others?

..................................................................................................................

a. Friends
b. Family
c. Authorities

46. What would you change?
47. Would you still report your experience?
48. Is there anything else about your experience of talking to others about your experience that you would like to talk about?

I would like to thank you for your time.
Appendix P

Semi-Structured Interview Questions – Those who have not reported

Thank you for coming. I am Ann E. Jones and I am a doctoral candidate in Interdisciplinary Social Psychology. During this interview, I will ask you to reflect on your experiences with talking with others about your unwanted sexual experience. This information will be used primarily for my dissertation but also for publications. This interview is confidential. I will not use your name or any other identifying information in the manuscripts. I want you to feel comfortable and be honest about your perspectives. There is no judgment about anything you say. Also, you can choose not to answer any question you do not feel comfortable discussing. You are also free to end the interview at any point if you feel uncomfortable and you will still receive the money for the interview. This interview will be audio recorded and transcribed. Do you agree to be audio-recorded? (participants will verbally agree to be audio recorded).

Please take a few minutes to read the consent form in front of you. Do you have any questions? Do you verbally consent to participate?

I would like to start with your college experience.

1. How would you describe your overall experience here at UNR? Do you like going to school here?

2. Is there anything you would change about your experience so far?

3. What is your major?

4. What has been your favorite class you have taken?

Now, we will start to talk about some of your experiences following your most memorable unwanted sexual experience. I really want to understand your perspectives
and points of view. I would like to start with discussing the first person you talked to about your unwanted sexual experience.

1. Did you tell anyone about your unwanted sexual experience?
2. Please tell me about your first experience of disclosing.
3. Who did you tell?
4. What was your relationship with this person?
5. How close were/are you to this person?
6. How soon after the experience did you tell someone?
7. How was your disclosure received? – How did they respond to what you told them?
8. Was this a positive experience?
9. What made this a positive/negative experience?
10. How did this make you feel?
11. Were they encouraging? If so how?
12. Were they discouraging? If so how?
13. Is there something you wish they had done differently?
14. Have you told anyone since telling your ______?
15. What are some of the reactions you have had from others after telling them about your experience?
16. Did anyone encourage you to you to report?
17. By reporting I mean telling an authority such as Counselor, law enforcement, victim’s advocate, Title IX.
18. Did you or your ____ want to report the experience?
19. Did you initially want to report – before talking to your _____?
20. How did that change?
21. Did they encourage you to report?
22. How did they encourage you?
23. What happened after their encouragement?
24. Did anyone try talk you out of reporting?
25. What did they say about you wanting to report?
26. How did you feel when they tried to talk you out of it?
27. Did you try to report the experience?
28. What made it easy – easy to find resources
29. What made it difficult?
30. Finding resources
31. Knowing where to go and who to talk to
32. Were you worried about their response to you?
   a. Treated
   b. Believed
   c. Judged
33. Who did you try or plan to report your experience with (Counselor, law enforcement, victim’s advocate, Title IX)?
34. What were some of the factors that kept you from reporting?
35. What do you think could have made the experience of reporting easier?
36. Do you wish you could change anything about your experience with
talking about your experience with others?

a. Friends
b. Family
c. Others

37. What would you change?
38. Would you still report your experience?
39. Is there anything else about your experience of talking to others about your experience that you would like to talk about?

I would like to thank you for your time.