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A Phenomenological Investigation of the Reporting Experience for Female Survivors of Sexual Assault on College Campuses

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A Phenomenological Investigation of the Reporting Experience for Female Survivors of Sexual Assault on College Campuses

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the University of New Orleans in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy in Counselor Education

by

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B.S., University of New Orleans, 2006
M.A., East Tennessee State University, 2008

May 2015
DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this dissertation to the women who participated in the present study: Jeané, Cassandra, Amanda, Sonia Jane, Alice, and Jasmine. Thank you immensely for sharing your experiences with me. Without your strength, this project would not have been possible. I will be forever grateful not only for the time you gave me, but mostly for the impression you left upon me. I wish you all the best in life, and I can only hope that this project was meaningful for you as well.
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ABSTRACT

A qualitative phenomenological design was used to explore the lived experiences of college women who reported sexual assault to law enforcement officials. Utilizing a feminist conceptual framework, the purpose of the present study was to identify the essence of the reporting experience for college women who experienced a sexual assault. Six college women agreed to participate in the study. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with open-ended questions to better understand the experience of the phenomenon under investigation. The Modification of the Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen Method of Analysis of Phenomenological Data (Moustakas, 1994) was utilized for analysis of the data collected in order to identify meaning units and themes. Four common themes emerged from the narratives of the six participants: Making the Decision to Report, Internal Experience of the Reporting Process, Following the Report, and Making the Report. The identified themes contributed to the participant descriptions, which highlighted the essence of the participants’ lived experiences of reporting sexual assault to law enforcement. The identified themes provided insight into how counselors can better serve college women who have reported or are considering reporting sexual assault to law enforcement officials. Implications for counselor educators, college counselors, and campus police and off-campus police officers were also addressed.

Keywords: sexual assault, college women, law enforcement, reporting, counseling, counselor education, feminism
CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

My road toward this proposed research study began when I started working on a college campus as a counselor. I began to notice the prevalence of sexual victimization among clients and, as one might suspect, it was unsettling. When I entered into my doctoral program, it was very clear to me that this would be my area of research, although the direction of my study was not as clear at the time as it is today. As I explored the research literature and continued to notice the trends, the lack of reporting of sexual assault became intriguing to me. Although substantial research exists pertaining to rape and sexual assault, the preponderance has utilized quantitative methodology.

In this chapter, a brief overview of the research is presented on sexual victimization, including research on self-blame, rape myth acceptance, and reporting trends. My conceptual framework for understanding the act of sexual victimization in our society through a feminist lens is explained. The significance, problem statement, and purpose of the study are offered. The research design is also briefly discussed. The chapter ends with the assumptions of the study and definitions of terms used in this study.

Background

The sexual victimization of women has gained much attention over the past four decades. Since the feminist movement began, it has become increasingly difficult for the general population to ignore the statistics on the abuses women face. As researchers have found that young women between the ages of 12 and 24 are at the greatest risk for sexual assault (Bachman & Satlzman, 1995; Black et al., 2011; Humphrey & White, 2000; Kilpatrick, Edmunds, & Semour, 1992; Smith, White, & Holland, 2003), much of the research pertaining to rape and
other forms of sexual assault has focused on college students. The incidence of these crimes among college students has been found to be higher than in the general population, with possibly 20 to 25% of women experiencing a sexual assault during their time on a college campus (Fisher, Cullen, & Turner, 2000; Koss, Gidycz, & Wisniewski, 1987; Thompson & Kingree, 2010; Zinzow, Resnick, McCauley, et al., 2010).

Sexual victimization can have a significant and long-lasting impact. The negative sequelae of these crimes can include fear, anger, self-blame, depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder (Kilpatrick et al., 1985; Miller, Markman, & Handley, 2007; Moor, 2007; Resick, 1993; Thompson & Kingree, 2010; Tjaden & Thoennes, 2006; Zinzow, Resnick, Amstadter, et al., 2010; Zinzow, Resnick, McCauley, et al., 2010). Survivors of rape also are at an increased risk for suicide compared to non-victims, with as many as one in five survivors attempting suicide (Kilpatrick et al., 1985). Sexual victimization often results in behavioral changes such as lowered sexual assertiveness (Katz, May, Sörensen, & DelTosta, 2010) and an increase in the use of drugs and alcohol, which have been associated with revictimization (Katz et al., 2010; Littleton, Tabernik, Canales, & Backstrom, 2009; McCauley, Calhoun, & Gidycz, 2010).

Because the experience of rape often has considerable impact on survivors, it is important to acknowledge that rape and sexual assault have been found to be the most under-reported of violent crimes (Fisher et al., 2000; Sable, Danis, Mauzy, & Gallagher, 2006; Tjaden & Thoennes, 2006). This is particularly true on college campuses. Koss et al. (1987) found that possibly as few as 5% of rape victims report the crime to university officials or the police, although some researchers have found the reporting rate to be higher (Sloan, Fisher, & Cullen, 1997). Fisher et al.'s (2003) findings were supportive of the 5% reporting rate for college
women. Several factors are linked to this trend in underreporting. According to the results of several studies, victims have stated that fear of retaliation by the perpetrator, fear the police would not believe them or would blame them, knowing their perpetrator, receiving negative feedback from friends or family, and feelings of self-blame and shame have all been given as major reasons why victims choose not to report (Clay-Warner & McMahon-Howard, 2009; Fisher et al., 2003; Koss et al., 1987; Sable et al., 2006). Findings of this nature have substantial implications for college students as well as university administrators and officials.

**Sexual Victimization on College Campuses**

The pioneering study by Koss et al. (1987) was one of the first to acknowledge the shortcomings of the research on the incidence of rape on a national level. As a result of their study, the victimization of female college students became a point of concern and an important topic of research with the finding that 27.5% of college women had experienced rape or some other type of sexual victimization since the age of 14. Since this more accurate perception of the incidence of rape was highlighted, particularly on college campuses, numerous studies (e.g., Black et al., 2011; Katz et al., 2010; Kessler, Sonnega, Bromet, Hughes, & Nelson, 1995; Kilpatrick et al., 1992; Littleton & Breitkopf, 2006; Littleton, Tabernik, et al., 2009; Miller et al., 2007; Moor, 2007; Resick, 1993; Thompson & Kingree, 2010; Tjaden & Thoennes, 2006; Zinzow, Resnick, Amstadter et al., 2010; Zinzow, Resnick, McCauley, et al., 2010) have been conducted to understand the emotional and behavioral responses of survivors of sexual assault.

Thompson and Kingree (2010) addressed the frequency of sexual victimization on college campuses and the associated negative outcomes by collecting data from first-year college females. Their intent was to understand the influence of negative cognitions (e.g., negative views of self and the world) on women who experienced sexual assault. They found that women who
reported experiencing sexual victimization also reported more depressive symptoms, alcohol-related concerns, and negative cognitions than female students who did not report victimization. Thompson and Kingree also found that those who reported victimization were more likely to report seriously considering suicide. Littleton and Breitkopf (2006) focused on the symptoms survivors experience after rape in an attempt to understand how coping styles affect their functioning. They found that those who blame themselves for the assault are more likely to employ an avoidance approach to coping, which can lead to complications in recovery. These findings are important to my proposed study in that they illuminate the significance of the survivor’s view of self.

Other factors that play a role in the survivor’s view of self are related to the potentially risky behaviors in which many college students take part. Littleton, Tabernik, et al. (2009) examined the growing tendency for college students to participate in “more casual relationships and sexual encounters” (p. 793) rather than in traditional romantically involved, dating relationships. They drew attention to the fact that more recent research indicated a decrease in percentages of the individuals romantically involved with their assailants, but noted that the overall rate of sexual assault among college women remained the same. They considered, “if sexual assaults among college students are happening less frequently in dating contexts than in the past, one possibility is that sexual assaults are becoming more frequent in contexts where casual sexual encounters occur” (Littleton, Tabernik, et al., 2009, p. 794). McCauley, Calhoun, and Gidycz (2010) found an association between heavy drinking and rape and that drinking to cope with victimization was associated with revictimization at times. Littleton, Grills-Taquechel, and Axsom (2009) acknowledged the prevalence of alcohol consumption associated with rape in their study that focused on non-impaired, impaired, and incapacitated college females. They
found that survivors who were assaulted while impaired or incapacitated indicated experiencing more self-blame than non-impaired survivors. These findings are important to the proposed study in that they address factors that negatively affect survivors’ views of self as they relate to feelings of responsibility for an assault; in other words, thinking that if different choices had been made, the assault would not have occurred.

**Self-Blame**

Self-blame plays a particularly important role in a survivor’s experience after a sexual assault. Miller et al. (2007) focused on the connections among sexual assault, self-blame, and revictimization, and thoroughly discussed the implications of self-blame, including that it “uniquely is detrimental to women following sexual assault” (p. 134). Fisher et al. (2003) discussed in detail the research on reporting sexual assault to officials, and assessed the factors involved in the willingness of individuals to report their victimization. These researchers found that when survivors blamed themselves for the crime committed against them, they were less likely to report the incident to police, even if they did tell someone close to them. Weiss (2010) addressed the role that shame plays in a person’s experience after rape. She described shame as a “debilitating emotion” that is a “culturally mediated response” (p. 303). Her findings suggested that shame is sustained due to the perception that “women are deserving, disgraced, and defamed by sexual victimization” (p. 303-304).

**Rape Myth Acceptance**

Rape myths are stereotypical beliefs pertaining to sexual violence that are false yet persistently and widely held by society (Brownmiller, 1975; Buddie & Miller, 2001; Lonsway & Fitzgerald, 1994). Burt (1980) was the first to focus on rape myth acceptance in American society, in an attempt to better understand the complex relationship between rape and attitudes
and beliefs pertaining to rape. Two major findings arose from Burt’s data: many Americans believe in rape myths; and perceptions of rape correlate with acceptance of violence, adversarial sexual beliefs, and sex role stereotyping. Years of research have suggested that there are four major categories of rape myths: (a) blame the victim, (b) express disbelief in claims of rape, (c) exonerate the perpetrator, and (d) claim that only certain types of women are raped (Bohner, 1998; Briere, Malamuth, & Check, 1985; Burt, 1980, 1991; Costin, 1985; Eyssel & Bohner, 2011; Gerger, Kley, Bohner, & Siebler, 2007; Lonsway & Fitzgerald, 1994; Payne, Lonsway, & Fitzgerald, 1999). Common rape myths include that a survivor asked for it, secretly enjoyed it, or lied about the crime occurring (Buddie & Miller, 2001). Concerns that these stereotypes will be believed often deter survivors from reporting crimes of sexual assault (Felson & Paré, 2005; Heath, Lynch, Fritch, & Wong, 2013; Sable et al., 2006).

Reporting

Although most survivors disclose their experience of sexual victimization to someone such as a female friend or family members (Ahrens, Campbell, Ternier-Thames, Wasco, & Sefl, 2007; Fisher et al., 2003; Ullman, 1996a), most still do not report their victimization to law enforcement officials (Black et al., 2011; Fisher et al., 2003; Kilpatrick et al., 1992; Sable et al., 2006; Tjaden & Thoennes, 2006). Despite the prevalence and impact of sexual victimization, it continues to be the most underreported of all violent crimes (Black et al., 2011; Fisher et al., 2003; Kilpatrick et al., 1992; Sable et al., 2006; Tjaden & Thoennes, 2006). Results of reporting rates vary by study and range from 5% (Koss et al, 1987) to 28% (Truman, Langton, & Planty, 2013). Koss et al (1987) found that approximately 5% of their female respondents who indicated they had been raped also indicated that they had reported the crime to police. A reporting rate of
5% was also found among the college women surveyed in the National College Women Sexual Victimization (NCWSV) study (Fisher et al., 2003).

Many reasons why women do not report sexual assault to law enforcement officials have been suggested. One of the most cited reasons is the fear of being blamed by others (Binder, 1981; Felson & Paré, 2005; Gunn & Minch, 1988; Kilpatrick et al., 1992; Sable et al., 2006). Other reasons for not reporting include, but are not limited to, self-blame (Gunn & Minch, 1988; Stewart, Dobbin, & Gatowski, 1996; Wiehe & Richards, 1995), shame (Sable et al., 2006; Weiss, 2010; Wiehe & Richards, 1995), guilt (Binder, 1981; Sable et al., 2006; Wiehe & Richards, 1995), embarrassment/humiliation (Bachman, 1993, 1998, Binder, 1981; Felson & Paré, 2005; Peretti & Cozzens, 1983; Sable et al., 2006), fear of reprisal (Bachman, 1993, 1998), denial (Fisher et al., 2000; Peretti & Cozzens, 1983), negative views of the criminal justice system (Bachman, 1993, 1998; Binder, 1981; Felson & Paré, 2005; Fisher et al., 2000; Kilpatrick et al., 1992; Stewart et al., 1996), knowing the assailant (Felson & Paré, 2005; Jones, Alexander, Wynn, Rossman, & Dunnuck, 2009; Sable et al., 2006), and uncertainty that a crime had occurred (Fisher et al., 2003).

Williams (1984) offered that, in order for women to report to law enforcement, they must self-identify as victims and also believe that they will be viewed as victims by others, particularly the police. Historically, women have been more likely to report sexual victimization to law enforcement if they did not know the offender (Chen & Ullman, 2010; Oros, Leonard, & Koss, 1980; Williams, 1984; Wolitzky-Taylor et al., 2011), if a weapon was present during the assault (Bachman, 1998; Chen & Ullman, 2010; Clay-Warner & McMahon-Howard, 2009), and if they were physically injured during the assault (Bachman, 1998; Baker & Peterson, 1977; Chen & Ullman, 2010; Clay-Warner & McMahon-Howard, 2009; Du Mont, Miller & Myhr,
The same predictors that have been found for female survivors in the general population apply to college women (Fisher et al., 2003; Thompson, Sitterle, Clay, & Kingree, 2007). College women are also more likely to report the crime if the incident occurred on the campus of the university or college they attend (Fisher et al., 2003).

**Conceptual Framework**

**Feminist Theory**

Feminist theory is fundamentally different from the traditional schools of thought, starting with its view of human nature. Many of the traditional psychological theories originated in a time when indisputable social arrangements were established based on one’s observed sex as female or male. Because of the dichotomous view of gender, it was determined that women and men were genetically predisposed to different personality styles and would therefore take different pathways through life (Corey & Herlihy, 2005; Worell & Remer, 2003). Worell and Remer (2003) identified six characteristics that correlated with the presence of gender and culture bias within a theory (i.e., androcentric, gendercentric, ethnocentric, heterosexist, intrapsychic, and deterministic). They advised that limitations imposed on women and other subordinate groups would be an issue in counseling, depending on the degree to which the characteristics were present within the theory applied.

Feminist theory offers a different experience in counseling than traditional theories offer. Worell and Remer (2003) identified four characteristics that align with the feminist perspective: gender-balanced, flexible/multicultural, interactionist, and life span oriented. Gender-balanced refers to the avoidance of stereotyping and stereotypical language in describing personality and behavior. It acknowledges that differences in women and men are due to socialization processes, not genetics. A theory that is flexible/multicultural is one in which concepts and strategies can be
adapted and applied to individuals, as well as groups, regardless of social location. A theory meeting this criterion would account for differences within and between groups and would acknowledge a range of gender roles and lifestyles for both women and men. This characteristic requires that interventions be chosen with sensitivity and awareness of the values specific to the client. An interactionist theory is one that takes into account the complex intersects between a person’s identity and a range of internal and external variables that play a role in a person’s development (Worell & Remer, 2003). Lastly, a life span perspective assumes that a person will continue to develop over her or his lifetime and that an ultimate desired state cannot be determined, especially by the therapist. Life span theories also support the belief that individuals can create change for themselves at any point in life rather than the assumption that behavior is determined during childhood.

A feminist therapist would consider these characteristics, along with the main principles of feminist theory and therapy, when conceptualizing a client through a feminist lens. According to feminist theory, the client would be viewed within her social context, and the intersectionality of the client’s multiple social locations would be acknowledged and seen as a contributing factor to her current experience within that social context (Corey & Herlihy, 2005; Worell & Remer, 2003). When working from this perspective with a female college student who has experienced a sexual assault, it is important to explore the social and cultural components of the client’s life while maintaining an awareness of one’s own personal biases.

Although there is no single definition of feminist theory, feminist writers have articulated certain core principles: the personal is political; personal and social identities are interdependent; definitions of distress and “mental illness” are reformulated; feminist therapists use an integrated analysis of oppression; the counseling relationship is egalitarian; and women’s perspectives are
valued (Corey & Herlihy, 2005, p.350-51). In considering the personal is political, the counselor would discuss with the client how sexual victimization is one form of violence against women and is inseparable from the social context (Worell & Remer, 2003). Feared and/or encountered negative responses from others (e.g., family, friends, and law enforcement) would be addressed as characteristics of a rape-prone society with a high proclivity for rape myth acceptance.

In accordance with the second principle, personal and social identities are interdependent, the client’s social locations would be identified and discussed, and their impact on the client’s perception and experience of sexual assault would be discussed. In keeping with the third principle, definitions of distress and “mental illness” are reformulated, any symptomology that the client experiences as a result of the sexual assault is normalized and recognized as means of coping with the trauma of the experience. Adhering to the fourth principle, feminist therapists use an integrated analysis of oppression, the concept of gender is addressed in terms of oppression, as well as how gender might contribute to the client’s understanding of the experience of sexual assault (Corey & Herlihy, 2005). In line with the fifth and sixth principles, the counseling relationship is egalitarian and women’s perspectives are valued, the counselor makes a point to inform the client of the collaborative nature of the working relationship and to assure the client that she is the expert regarding her experience. The counselor continues to reassure the client that, regardless of others’ views or perceptions of sexual assault, she defines her own experience of the assault, and she is encouraged to trust her instinct (Worell & Remer, 2003).

Throughout the process, the counselor stays focused on the client’s needs. Taking steps in treatment that the client is not ready to take could be harmful for the client. This can be difficult for counselors to adhere to at times, especially if they are passionate about seeing change. When
investigating the occurrence of rape and sexual assault through a feminist lens, one must first recognize that our society, as a whole, devalues women and their experiences. One must also acknowledge that rape is often condoned and at times supported. Survivors are often criticized and blamed for their victimization and too few perpetrators are held accountable for their actions. The extensiveness of resulting trauma from sexual victimization is highly influenced by society’s perception of rape, including acceptance of rape myths, gender role socialization, and the balance of power between women and men (Koss et al., 1994; Sanday, 1981a, 1981b; Worell & Remer, 2003). These are important concepts to understand when working with survivors of sexual assault.

**Significance**

With research suggesting that one in seven (Kilpatrick et al., 1992; Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000) to one in five women (Black et al., 2011) are raped in their lifetime, it is understandable that sexual victimization has become a salient topic in social and mental health research. Considering that 37.4% of female survivors experience their first completed rape between 18 and 24 years of age (Black et al., 2011), much attention has been devoted to the college student population (Fisher et al., 2000; Fisher et al., 2003; McCauley et al., 2010; Paul, Gray, Elhai, & Davis, 2009; Thompson & Kingree, 2010; Zinzow, Resnick, McCauley, et al., 2010). Given that sexual victimization has been found to be one of the most under-reported crimes (Fisher et al., 2003; Sable et al., 2006; Tjaden & Thoennes, 2006), research on reporting is vital. Although a significant amount of research has been conducted, most research on this topic is quantitative in methodology and tends to focus on the reasons why survivors have not reported rape and sexual assault (Clay-Warner & McMahon-Howard, 2009; Cohn, Zinzow, Resnick, & Kilpatrick, 2013; Fisher et al., 2003; Koss et al., 1987; Sable et al., 2006). This qualitative study was intended to
contribute to the counseling and higher education literature on college women who are survivors of sexual assault by illuminating survivors’ strengths, characteristics, and motivators for reporting this crime.

**Problem Statement**

It is estimated that one in four women in higher education institutions have experienced rape, attempted rape, or other forms of sexual assault (Koss et al., 1987). However, even with the high incidence rate of this crime, possibly fewer than 5% of survivors actually reported the incident to the police (Fisher et al., 2000). Women give a number of reasons why they choose not to report. Some reasons include, but are not limited to: fear of retaliation; others finding out; embarrassment; self-blame, particularly if the survivor was under the influence of drugs or alcohol at the time; and shame (Fisher et al., 2003; Littleton, Grills-Taquechel et al., 2009; McCauley et al., 2010; Miller et al., 2007). Although the high incidence of these crimes has been publicized, university officials often are unaware of the frequency of these crimes on their campuses, possibly due in part to the unwillingness of many survivors to report the crime. Consequently, the perpetrators are not held responsible for their actions. While many may think that sexual offenders perpetrate only one time, evidence indicates that many rapists are recidivists (Abel et al., 1987; Lussier & Cale, 2013; Neller & Petris, 2013). Thus, the lack of reporting is a threat to public safety since perpetrators cannot be held accountable for their crimes if law enforcement officials are not made aware of those crimes, which allows offenders potentially to offend again (Sampson, 2002).

**Purpose of the Study**

After a more accurate perception of the incidence of sexual assault was gained as a result of numerous studies, particularly on college campuses, many studies (e.g., Black et al., 2011;
Katz et al., 2010; Kessler et al., 1995; Kilpatrick et al., 1992; Littleton & Breitkopf, 2006; Littleton, Tabernik et al., 2009; Miller et al., 2007; Moor, 2007; Resick, 1993; Thompson & Kingree, 2010; Tjaden & Thoennes, 2006; Zinzow, Resnick, Amstadter et al., 2010; Zinzow, Resnick, McCauley, et al., 2010) have been conducted to understand the emotional and behavioral responses of survivors of this form of victimization. However, the majority of these studies are quantitative in nature, and few qualitative designs are phenomenological inquiries that focus on the experience of survivors of reporting the crime. The purpose of this study was to describe the phenomenological experience of college women who reported the crime of sexual assault to law enforcement officials. The study contributes to understanding survivors’ decision making processes in regard to reporting. For those who work with survivors, or know a survivor, hearing these stories will be helpful in reducing the stigma attached to sexual violation and improving understanding of the survivor’s experience.

**Overview of Methodology**

I conducted a phenomenological study to better understand the experience of reporting the crime of sexual assault for female college students. Moustakas (1994) emphasized the importance of adhering to the methods and procedures of a systematic study in order to derive valid scientific evidence from phenomenological inquiries. His methodology includes methods of preparation, methods of collecting data, and methods of organizing and analyzing data. Within methods of preparation, the first step is focused on discovering the topic of the study and the questions that have social meaning and personal significance. The second step is conducting a comprehensive review of the literature, and the third is to define criteria for locating and selecting qualified participants. Once the participants have been selected, the fourth step is initiated: participants are given information on informed consent, confidentiality, and
responsibilities of the researcher and the participants, consistent with the ethical principles that guide the research. Methods of validation are considered at this point.

Participants were delimited to women who had indicated that they experienced a sexual assault while in college between six months and five years ago and made the decision to report the crime to law enforcement officials. The sample size was delimited to six participants with the intent to increase the sample of participants if necessary until the point of saturation had been met (Creswell, 2007). However, increasing the sample size was not necessary. The initial participant was reached through a gatekeeper at one of the selected universities in southeast Louisiana, and the remaining five responded to flyers that were posted on the four campuses. Data was collected by conducting face-to-face, semi-structured interviews with each participant. Each initial interview lasted between 35 minutes and one hour and consisted of a series of questions that allowed me to gain a better understanding of the participant’s experience of reporting sexual assault. Each participant received a copy of her transcribed interview. A follow-up interview was scheduled and conducted two to four weeks after the initial interview to allow each participant further input or clarification of any response, as well as to substantiate findings from the initial interview. Each interview was audio recorded for verbal content, and the dialogue was transcribed to aid in the identification of themes.

Research Questions

The central research question for this study was “What is the lived experience of college women who have been sexually assaulted as they go through the process of reporting the crime?” Because research has shown that so few survivors tend to report the crime of sexual assault to law enforcement, my second central question was, “What contributed to college women’s decision to report their sexual assault to law enforcement?” These questions were formulated
specifically for a phenomenological research design because they imply that the participants have something in common as it relates to their experience (Creswell, 2007).

**Limitations and Delimitations**

One limitation to this study was that the results cannot be generalized to the wider population. However, generalizability is not typically associated with qualitative research methods due to the small participant samples (Creswell, 2009). Another limitation of this study was the possibility that participants were reluctant to disclose information due to the sensitive nature of the topic, sexual assault. A third limitation, one that is often associated with a phenomenological design, was the difficulty of ensuring pure bracketing. I minimized this limitation by disclosing and setting aside my personal views of sexual assault and survivors by consulting regularly with my dissertation chair and peer debriefer.

The study was delimited to six participants since the point of saturation was met (Creswell, 2007). Also, a second delimitation of the study was that participants must have been women who experienced a sexual assault while in college and reported the crime to law enforcement officials between six months and five years ago. A third delimitation was that I limited the geographic area to participants who reside in the southeast region of the state of Louisiana.

**Assumptions of the Study**

It was assumed that the conceptual framework for this study is sound and that the feminist theoretical foundation is well supported. Through a feminist lens, it was also assumed that, while survivors’ violations may have contributed to negative sequelae, survivors who agree to participate in this study will have demonstrated strength in making the choice to report the
crime of sexual victimization and have an experience to share. A third assumption was that the survivors who participate in this study would provide an honest description of their experience.

**Definition of Terms**

To provide clarity for certain terminology present in this study, I have provided a list of terms with definitions:

**Context:** The dynamics surrounding an individual that include factors of personal, social, political, cultural, and historical nature. *Social Context* refers to sociopolitical factors surrounding an individual, including gender, race/ethnicity, sexual/affectional orientation, and religion.

**Feminism:** A movement and a theory that advocates for social, political, and economic equality among women and men.

**Feminist Therapy Theory:** There is no single definition of feminist theory, however, feminist writers have articulated certain core principles: (a) the personal is political; (b) personal and social identities are interdependent; (c) definitions of distress and “mental illness” are reformulated; (d) feminist therapists use an integrated analysis of oppression; (e) the counseling relationship is egalitarian; and (f) women’s perspectives are valued (Corey & Herlihy, 2005). Feminist therapy theory centralizes gender and power as core constructs and conceptualizes women’s issues as a response to the oppressive nature of the dominant culture.

**Law Enforcement Officials:** Individuals who work for campus police, city police, and sheriff’s offices.

**Rape:** “Any completed or attempted unwanted vaginal (for women), oral, or anal penetration through the use of physical force (such as being pinned or held down, or by the use of violence) or threats to physically harm and includes times when the victim was drunk, high, drugged, or
passed out and unable to consent. Rape is separated into three types: completed forced penetration, attempted forced penetration, and completed alcohol or drug facilitated penetration. -- Among women, rape includes vaginal, oral, or anal penetration by a male using his penis. It also includes vaginal or anal penetration by a male or female using their fingers or an object. -- Among men, rape includes oral or anal penetration by a male using his penis. It also includes anal penetration by a male or female using their fingers or an object.” (Black et al., 2011, p. 17)

**Reporting:** Disclosure of personal details related to the crime of rape and/or sexual assault to law enforcement officials.

**Sexual Assault:** “Defined across a wide range of victimizations, separate from rape or attempted rape. These crimes include attacks or attempted attacks generally involving unwanted sexual contact between a victim and offender. Sexual assault may or may not involve force and includes grabbing or fondling. Sexual assault also includes verbal threats.” (Planty, Langton, Krebs, Berzofsky, & Smiley-McDonald, 2013, p. 2). Although some studies separate rape from sexual assault, rape will be considered a form of sexual assault for the purposes of this study.

**Sexual Victimization:** A term that is inclusive of both rape and sexual assault.

**Sequelae:** A secondary result or aftereffect of sexual victimization.

**Survivor:** A term that is used in the place of “victim” for an individual who has experienced a rape or other form of sexual assault. “Survivor” is used throughout this document because it is an empowering term that honors an individual’s strengths (Kelly, 1988). However, the term “victim” will also be used as it is often the language utilized in the literature.
CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

This chapter provides a review of the literature addressing sexual assault on college campuses and the survivors’ experience of the process of reporting crimes of this nature. The discussion begins with a general overview of gender-based violence from a feminist perspective, because the feminist perspective provides the conceptual framework for this study. The focus of the chapter then narrows to the issue of college women reporting sexual assault to law enforcement officials and ends with a discussion of studies that focus specifically on survivors’ interactions with law enforcement.

Feminist Perspective on Sexual Assault

Although there are a range of belief systems associated with feminism, the intent behind the movement is for women to have social, political, and economic rights equal to those of men, and for these rights to be equal among women of diverse backgrounds (Worell & Remer, 2003). Feminism is a worldview, a life philosophy, the groundwork for a theoretical orientation in counseling, and a platform for social justice advocacy (Chrisler, Golden, & Rozee, 2008; Evans, Kincade, & Seem, 2011; Worell & Remer, 2003). Although differing viewpoints exist on feminism, common themes may be found within the theory. For instance, “the personal is political” is a term coined during the second wave of the feminist movement through the establishment of consciousness raising groups (Evans et al., 2011). The term gave meaning to the experience of many women who had assumed their concerns stemmed from within and who, through discussion with other women, realized their issues were connected to their patriarchal social environment, which Brown (2010) defined as “a social hierarchy that systemically privileges all characteristics associated with masculinity via all institutions of a society” (p. 128).
In essence, women’s concerns were social issues for which resolution would be found in the political arena influenced by the patriarchal society (Faunce, 1985). The discriminatory acts and prejudiced attitudes that women faced then, and continue to face today, did not occur in a vacuum, but occurred within their socio-political context (Gillem, Sehgal, & Forcet, 2000; Worell & Remer, 2003).

Feminists also assume that gender, and therefore gender roles, are socially constructed. Chrisler et al. (2008) explained that being born female or male has varying meanings depending on the environment in which the individual is born and the time in history. Therefore, it is not so much biology that molds an individual; rather, external factors such as life events, institutional pressures, expectations, and interpersonal encounters all contribute to the whole person. More specifically, gender socialization occurs when the social influences of parents, peers, and the media coalesce with the way in which children begin to organize how they view themselves and the world around them (Basow, 2008). Gender roles are those behaviors and actions that are culturally approved by the dominant group and ascribed to individuals based on their biological sex at birth (Worell & Remer, 2003). Implicit guidelines pertaining to the importance of appearance for women and girls exist in most Western societies. Females are typically socialized to place emphasis on appearance and evaluation by others, to a much greater extent than males (Srebnik & Saltzberg, 1994).

The concept of power holds much meaning in feminist theory as it is integral to understanding the position that women hold in the societal hierarchy (Chrisler et al., 2008). Women tend to hold less power than men, which is a condition found throughout the world. Chrisler et al. (2008) stated:
Worldwide, there is a clear preference for male children (Unger & Crawford, 1992); women are paid less than men for the same work and have fewer opportunities for advancement; men control the U.S. Congress and every state legislature; they hold the top positions in nearly all U.S. corporations, and they are the majority of the faculty in U.S. universities; women do nearly all the house work and childcare; women and their children make up the majority of poor people in this country; and violence against women has been characterized as pandemic. (p. x)

Throughout history, various groups (e.g., women, people of color, sexual minorities, the elderly, individuals with disabilities) have been viewed as subordinate. In contemporary American society, to be born female automatically places girls and women in the non-dominant group due to widely held discriminatory beliefs that are upheld by the dominant group (Ostenson, 2008). Sexism, which can be understood as “a system of beliefs, policies, and practices designed to maintain male privilege and status which is manifested individually, institutionally, and structurally” (Gillem et al., 2000, p. 56), contributes to the general imbalance of power between the dominant (male) and subordinate (female) groups and supports the many forms of oppression women face.

Feminist thought asserts that violence against women, including rape and other forms of sexual assault, occurs within the social context, and one must understand this context to effectively comprehend a survivor’s experience (Worell & Remer, 2003). Just as gender roles are socially constructed by teaching young girls to be warm, sensitive, and caring; and young boys to be strong, independent, and tough, violent acts are assigned to men and victimization to women (Brownmiller, 1975; Gillem et al., 2000). This phenomenon is seen not only in the United States, but throughout the world (Rozee, 1993).
Sanday (1981b) examined the incidence, meaning, and function of rape in tribal societies to assess for cross-cultural variance in perpetration of rape. Her findings indicated that the incidence of sexual assault did vary cross-culturally, suggesting that the perpetuation of such crimes was dependent on the culture that was fostered by the tribal societies, which she defined as either ‘rape free’ or ‘rape prone.’ In her study, rape free societies were those in which rape occurred rarely or not at all and the sexes were complementary to one another. Although Sanday stated that the sexes may not have the same rights or privileges, each was seen as indispensable to the other. Rape prone societies were described as those with a high incidence of rape, where rape was considered a ceremonial act, or where men used rape as a form of punishment or as a threat. Sanday (1981b) indicated that rape prone societies were those in which the rape of women by men was either allowed or largely ignored.

In another cross-cultural study on rape, Rozee (1993) aimed to better understand and explain variations in the incidence, definitions, and consequences of sexual assault. Building on the findings of Sanday (1981b), Rozee expanded the definition of rape to include socially condoned rape, which led to the assertion that rape-free societies did not actually exist, as Sanday had suggested. When the absence of female choice was considered a distinguishing factor between sex and rape, Rozee discovered that rape occurred in all the societies in her study. Further, Rozee differentiated between normative (rape that is supported by societal norms) and non-normative (rape that is not condoned) rape and concluded that rape was often regulated, rather than prohibited, in the majority of her sample societies. These findings support the feminist perception that victimization occurs within a sociopolitical context, particularly when there is evidence to suggest that a culture supports sexual victimization.
Male violence toward women, particularly sexual assault, has been considered a blatant display of gender inequality for decades (Koss et al., 1994). According to Brownmiller (1975), men use the threat and/or act of rape as a weapon to keep women in a state of fear to enact control. The United States has long been considered a rape culture in that it is a society in which rape is often mis-defined and condoned; social constructs enable men to be perpetrators while women are often blamed for their assaults; and services for survivors, if offered, are often inadequate for a long-term recovery process (Brownmiller, 1975; Buchwald, Fletcher, & Roth, 2005; Sanday, 1981a; Worell & Remer, 2003). Sexual victimization and the resulting trauma are greatly influenced by societal beliefs regarding sexual assault, how women and men are socialized based on gender, and the imbalance of power that exists between women and men (Koss et al., 1994; Sanday, 1981a; Worell & Remer, 2003). Each of these concepts will be discussed in the following paragraphs as they pertain to sexual violence.

**Rape Myth Acceptance**

In her highly influential work, *Against Our Will*, Brownmiller (1975) discussed the prevalence of rape myths in Western society and how they contribute to the perpetuation of sexual victimization of women. Burt (1980) conducted a study that was the first of its kind to attempt to document the complex relationship between attitudes and beliefs related to rape in American society. The study was conducted from a perspective that was based in feminist theory and social psychology, and two major implications arose from the data: (1) many Americans believe in rape myths, and (2) perceptions related to rape are associated with other attitudes such as acceptance of violence, adversarial sexual beliefs, and stereotyping based on sex roles. Burt (1980) defined rape myths as “prejudicial, stereotyped, or false beliefs about rape, rape victims, and rapists” (p. 217). Lonsway and Fitzgerald (1994) believed that this definition was
insufficient, leading to inconsistent use and misinterpretation of the term. After a review of the
current literature of the time, these researchers redefined rape myths as “attitudes and beliefs that
are generally false but are widely and persistently held, and that serve to deny and justify male
sexual aggression against women” (p. 134). Earnshaw, Pitpitan, and Chaudoir (2011) also
addressed attitudes, attributions of fault, and emotions concurrently as they related to responses
to rape. Within attitudes, the researchers suggested that feminist beliefs and rape-myth
acceptance play an important role in determining attribution of fault for sexual assault.

Years of research not only support the prevalence of rape myths, but also suggest that
four general types exist: (a) blame the victim, (b) express disbelief in claims of rape, (c)
exonerate the perpetrator, and (d) claim that only certain types of women are raped (Bohner,
1998; Briere, Malamuth, & Check, 1985; Burt, 1980, 1991; Costin, 1985; Eyssel & Bohner,
2011; Gerger, Kley, Bohner, & Siebler, 2007; Lonsway & Fitzgerald, 1994; Payne et al., 1999).
At the center of these types of myths is the assumption that no crime has been committed, which
has vast implications for survivors of sexual assault as well as for those who perpetrate crimes of
this nature. While rape myths continue to be upheld, research in the field of sexual assault
continues to yield evidence that negates their validity. For example, a commonly held belief is
that rape occurs in dark alleys and is perpetrated by strangers. In a study conducted by the U.S.
Department of Justice, it was found that between the years of 2005 and 2010, 55% of
victimizations occurred at or near the victim’s home, and 78% of the victims knew their
offenders (Planty et al., 2013).

Another common rape myth is that women secretly want to be raped. This is simply not
the case as women do not wish to be raped nor do they bring it upon themselves because of their
dress or interactions with men (Worell & Remer, 2003). Fighting back may be perceived as
proof that a woman did not want to be raped; however, fighting back may not only not stop the rape from occurring but also may escalate the violence, contributing to greater negative outcomes (physical, mental) for the victim. A third example of a rape myth is that women lie about being raped (Lonsway & Fitzgerald, 1994). Although false allegations do occur, research indicates that these occur in only 2 to 8% of reports made to law enforcement (Lonsway, Archambault, & Lisak, 2009). Although other studies have suggested that the percentage of false allegations could be as high as 90% (Rumney, 2006), critics have attributed this higher statistic to police attitudes rather than women who falsely accuse (Lonsway et al., 2009; Lonsway & Fitzgerald, 1994).

Considerable research has been conducted over the years on rape myth acceptance (RMA; Basow & Minieri, 2011; Burt, 1980; Lonsway & Fitzgerald, 1994; Paul et al., 2009; Suarez & Gadalla, 2010), which is a construct that was created to explain a person’s agreement with inaccurate beliefs related to sexual assault. In a study addressing survivors’ perceptions of RMA by their peers, Paul et al. (2009) found that high levels of RMA have been associated with “stereotypical, negative attitudes toward sexual assault survivors.” Other researchers have found that women who had higher RMA levels were more likely to blame female survivors, took longer to identify when a man had “gone too far” in a rape vignette, and were less likely to believe they were vulnerable to sexual assault than their counterparts who rated lower in RMA (Bohner & Lampridis, 2004; Loiselle & Fuqua, 2007; Mason, Riger, & Foley, 2004). The perpetuation of rape myths serves two main purposes: (1) to justify and normalize the significant occurrence of rape, and (2) to focus attention onto the victim and away from societal structures that perpetuate sexual victimization by male aggressors (Payne et al., 1999). As long as women are blamed for their own victimization, societal structures such as patriarchy are not held
responsible for their harmful impact on the individuals within the system (Worell & Remer, 2003).

**Gender Role Socialization**

Learning begins at home and eventually moves outside of the home where it occurs through extended family, the school, and the greater community. Early socialization contributes to not only to one’s gender identity, but also to one’s expectations for self and others based on perceived gender (Evans et al., 2011). Although we live in a culture that continues to push for equality, research suggests that parents still have a tendency to reinforce stereotypical gender roles for their children. Wester and Trepal (2008) found that parents of newborn girls often viewed them as weak and fragile, more so than parents of baby boys. At the preschool level, children are often praised for gender-appropriate play and reprimanded for play that is inconsistent with assigned gender roles (Fagot & Hagen, 1991). Young boys are criticized more often than girls for gender inappropriate play, particularly by their fathers (Sandnabba & Ahlberg, 1999).

As children grow into adolescence and then adulthood, societal expectations uphold that women should be selfless, caring, and always willing to sacrifice personal needs for the needs of others, while maintaining a certain level of attractiveness to remain desirable to the opposite sex. Men are strongly encouraged to be providers for their assumed families and to remain emotionally restricted and logical. Assigning personal attributes based on gender is problematic in itself, and it contributes to inequality between men and women as gender-assigned personal attributes are not valued equally. In patriarchal societies, including the U.S., male born individuals are given a privileged position within society, and the institutionalization of gender
appropriate behavior and actions ensures that male privilege will be maintained, leaving women in a subordinate and marginalized position (Evans et al., 2011).

Evidence suggests that gender role socialization influences dating practices in the United States, which contributes to rape proclivity (Weis & Borges, 1977). Similarly, findings indicate that gender role socialization encourages acceptance of rape myths and victim blame, which then also normalizes the power differential in dating relationships, encouraging sexual aggression towards women (Burkhart & Fromuth, 1991). Worell and Remer (2003) listed several gender role prescriptions that have been assigned to women and that leave them prone to victimization:

1. Women are property of men,
2. Women are responsible for controlling men’s sexual behavior,
3. Women need to be protected by men,
4. Women should be kind, gentle, and physically nonaggressive,
5. Women should not be physically strong,
6. Women should always be polite,
7. Women should be dependent on men, passive, and childlike, and
8. Good women are virgins (p. 209).

Further, women who internalize these societal prescriptions believe that they cannot take care of themselves and should rely on the protection of others, specifically men (Weis & Borges, 1977). However, when the majority of victims of sexual assault are women and their perpetrators are typically men whom they know (Black et al., 2011; Kilpatrick et al., 1992; Planty et al., 2013), women begin to learn and accept they are more at risk for sexual assault because of their gender (Sanchez-Hucles & Hudgins, 2001). Women often take on responsibility for their assault because
they reacted toward the perpetrator with passivity and submission, just as they were socialized to do (Russell, 1984).

**Power Analysis**

As was noted earlier, power plays a major role in people’s lives, both those who have it and those who do not. Men typically have more power (economic, financial, physical, political) than women (Worell & Remer, 2003). Rozee (2000) defined ascribed power as power that is given to someone based on factors such as gender, race, age, and/or class and cannot be taken away. Although some women may have power in certain roles, their power does not match the power derived from the societal value placed on the male gender. Likewise, most ethnic minority men have less power than most White men; however, ethnic minority men in most cases will still have more ascribed power than ethnic minority women (Worell & Remer, 2003). This power structure can contribute to sexual victimization in different ways.

Men can use the power of their role to coerce women into sexual acts or use their physical power to overcome women through sexual aggression. A woman has fewer options for reporting sexual assault if the man holds economic power over her, and because women have less value than men in the social hierarchy, it is more likely that they will not be believed and may even be blamed for their assaults (Koss et al., 1994). Women who are affiliated with other or multiple social locations (racial minority, sexual minority, low socioeconomic status, differently abled) have less power than middle-class, heterosexual, White women due to prejudicial attitudes and stereotyping (Worell & Remer, 2003).

**Rape Reform**

The rape reform movement began to gain momentum in the 1970s when feminists partnered with law enforcement to advocate for significant changes to federal and state laws to
broaden the definition of rape and alter rape trial procedure (Goldberg-Ambrose, 1992). Weis and Borges (1973) discussed the “classic rape” situation as one in which the victimization could be considered a rape only if it was perpetrated in a deserted public space by a violent stranger, the act was reported by the victim immediately after it occurred, and the victim could show evidence of the attack as well as of resisting the attack. The credibility of rape allegations, and thus the rape victim, was determined based on the elapsed time between the victimization incident and its report, corroboration of the incident, the amount of resistance the victim displayed against the attacker, and the character of the victim (e.g., previous sexual encounters; Bachman, 1993). This placement of responsibility onto the victim has contributed to a blame-the-victim mentality that has been viewed by survivors and advocates alike as a form of revictimization by the criminal justice system (Tomz & McGillis, 1997).

**Sexual Assault in the United States**

**National Statistics**

In 1987, a groundbreaking study was published by Koss, Gidycz, and Wisniewski that drew attention to the true scope of rape in the United States. The researchers proposed their study as a means to counteract limitations and inadequacies of prior studies on the prevalence of rape that queried only respondents who had reported the crimes to the police. It was suspected that the number of incidents was much greater that what had been reported, and a national sample of women and men from universities across the United States was gathered to test this assumption. Although it was considered a limitation of the study, the use of college students was important in that they represented 26% of the general population 18 to 24 years of age.

Although the researchers called for female and male participants, the questionnaires were constructed to assess the sexual victimization of women and perpetration of rape and other forms
of sexual assault by men. Using the Sexual Experiences Survey (SES; Koss & Oros, 1982), they found that 27.5% of college women had experienced a rape or attempted rape since the age of 14, and that 38 of every 1,000 women had experienced a sexual assault within the last six months. This prevalence rate was significantly higher (10 to 15 times greater) than that found by the National Crime Survey (NCS), which had been the preferred instrument in measuring rape prevalence. It is also important to note that, of the male participants who reported committing a crime, practically none had been associated with the justice system (Koss et al., 1987). The information gathered from this study emphasized the shortcomings of the leading forms of measurement at that time, and offered a more accurate representation of the incidence of rape and sexual assault on college campuses.

Several other national studies have been conducted since the pioneering study by Koss and colleagues (1987), and many have produced similar findings. Kilpatrick et al. (1992) discussed the results of two surveys that indicated that 13% of the women who participated had experienced at least one forcible rape in their lifetimes, which equates to approximately one in eight women. After distribution by age, it was found that approximately 22% of the victims experienced a rape between 18 and 24 years of age. Because this study was not specifically focused on the college population, it is not possible to determine how many of the participants were attending college at the time of the incidents. Nevertheless, the results were similar to those of Koss et al. (1987) and contributed to the literature in support of the high incidence rate of sexual victimization.

To gain a better awareness of violence against women, the National Institute of Justice and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention jointly sponsored a study called the National Violence Against Women (NVAW) survey that was reviewed by Tjaden and Thoennes (2000).
The findings indicated a high incidence rate of sexual assault in the general population, and included the experience of attempted rape in the lifetimes of the women surveyed. According to the NVAW, 18% of the women surveyed had experienced an act that met the legal definition of rape or attempted rape, with 22% reporting that they were “forced to do something sexual” in their lifetime (p. 4). The age at which women were raped for the first time was also reported; 29.4% of the women surveyed experienced their first rape between the ages of 18 and 24 years, which is the traditional age of college students (Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000). As with the findings of Kilpatrick et al. (1992), whether participants in this age group were attending college was not indicated.

The surveys used in the above-described studies were composed of behaviorally specific questions, an influential factor in conducting sexual violence research, which was mentioned by Tjaden and Thoennes (2000) as a contributing factor to the difference in findings between the Bureau of Justice Statistics’ National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS; Bachman, 1994) and the National Violence Against Women (NVAW) survey (Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000). The importance of graphic, behaviorally specific questions was further explained by Fisher et al. (2000) who suggested that a limitation to many prior studies was “the failure to use question wording or sufficiently detailed measures that prevent biases that might cause researchers to underestimate or overestimate the extent of sexual victimization” (Fisher et al., 2000, p. 2). It was conjectured that many participants in studies of this nature might not fully understand or consider the act committed against them as an act of sexual violence; therefore behaviorally specific questions were “designed to leave little doubt in the respondent’s mind as to what [was] being measured” (Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000, p. 5).
More recently, results from the National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey (Black et al., 2010) yielded results that were consistent with those of prior studies (e.g., Kilpatrick et al., 1992; Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000). Black et al. (2010) found that nearly 1 in 5 women and 1 in 71 men have been raped at some point in their lives. They also found that sexual violence victimization tends to happen early in the lifespan, with 37.4% of survivors experiencing their first completed rape victimization between 18 and 24 years old. For women, 79.6% experienced their first completed rape before the age of 25, and 42.2% experienced it prior to turning 18. Over one-third (35.2%) of women who reported experiencing the first completed rape at 17 years old or younger also experienced a completed rape as an adult, as opposed to 14.2% who did not report being raped prior to 18 years old. Statistics such as these give credence to the need for more research on sexual assault of minors and the traditional college age population.

**Sexual Victimization on College Campuses**

In an attempt to overcome the limitations of earlier studies, Fisher et al. (2000) established the National College Women Sexual Victimization (NCWSV) study. They used behaviorally specific questions to screen participants; follow-up interviews were scheduled for those who met the required criteria. The researchers also incorporated a comparative component funded by the Bureau of Justice Statistics to assess for influence of survey methodology on rape statistics using the screening questions and incident report of the National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS) which, according to Tjaden and Thoennes (2000), had received much criticism. The researchers stated that 2.8% of the women surveyed indicated that they had experienced a completed or an attempted rape over the course of the academic year; the victimization rate was 27.7 rapes for every 1,000 female students. If rapes and attempted rapes were to occur at the
same rate, this would mean that potentially to 20% to 25% of female college students would experience an act of this nature while in school (Fisher et al., 2000). Findings from the NCWSV study were consistent with those of Koss et al. (1987), suggesting that little has changed in the incidence of these crimes. It was also found, due to the comparative component, that the incidence rates from the NCVS were considerably lower than those found in the NCWSV, which indicated the importance of the behaviorally specific questions (Fisher et al., 2000).

An important question that was posed to respondents of the NCWSV study was whether or not they viewed the sexual experience as rape (Fisher et al., 2000). Based on the incidents that were categorized as completed rape by the researchers, 46.5% of the women surveyed stated they did view the incident as rape, 48.8% stated they did not, and 4.7% stated they did not know. Fisher et al. (2000) acknowledged that this finding could lead some to speculate that researchers have not found the appropriate means of measuring incidence of rape. However, the researchers also highlighted that there are many reasons why women may not want to consider their experiences as rape. Examples included a lack of understanding of the legal definition of rape, hesitancy to label someone they know as a rapist, embarrassment, and self-blame (Fisher et al., 2000).

Binge drinking and casual sexual encounters have become more commonplace than in past decades and are often seen as a typical behaviors among college students nationwide (Littleton, Tabernik, et al., 2009; McCauley et al., 2010). Ullman (2003) found that in as many as half of the incidents of rape that occurred, alcohol had been consumed by the victim, the perpetrator, or both. In a later study, Ullman and Najdowski (2010) found that women who had been drinking prior to their assault were more likely to receive negative reactions from others, to experience self-blame and depressive symptoms, and to use alcohol and other substances as
coping mechanisms than those who had not been drinking, which was consistent with their previous findings. Limitations to this study existed, however. Because the sample was taken from the Chicago metropolitan area, the sample was not representative of the general population. Survivors were also questioned only about their most severe assault, so it is unclear how experiencing multiple instances of rape would have affected the results. Also, alcohol use was measured by participant self-report, which could lack accuracy.

Littleton, Grills-Taquechel, et al. (2009) conducted a study to better understand the differences in the sexual assault experiences of non-impaired, impaired, and incapacitated victims. Their findings also suggested that victims who were impaired or incapacitated at the time of the sexual assault were more likely to experience self-blame and to perceive stigmatizing views from others. They were also less likely to describe themselves as romantically involved with their assailants. Because the victim would often describe her assailant as an acquaintance, the researchers speculated that in some cases the sexual victimization may have been planned by the assailant in order to take advantage of the victim’s intoxicated state or she was given alcohol and/or drugs to facilitate that assault. Alternatively, some assaults may have been a crime of opportunity where the victim was chosen by the perpetrator when she appeared intoxicated or impaired.

For many college students, the lines are blurred as to what is considered a normal sexual encounter and what is considered rape. In an effort to better understand college students’ views of rape and hooking up behavior, which is becoming increasingly common for college students, Littleton, Tabernik, Canales, and Backstrom (2009) sampled 109 women from a university, instructing them to describe an event they considered rape and one they considered a bad hook-up. Findings based on the written narratives concluded that a significant number of the
participants failed to acknowledge that a rape does not necessarily have to be violent in nature and did not initially recognize that a rape could occur during a hook-up. However, a significant portion of the participants did indicate that victimization did not occur solely at the hands of strangers. The researchers suggested that while some female students are gaining a more appropriate awareness of what constitutes rape, many still do not see rape as a possible outcome of heavy drinking and casual sex, which indicated that more education for students is needed in this area. Further, results of this study indicated that approximately 45% of the respondents who reported experiencing a sexual assault and 65.8% of rape victims indicated that they had engaged in binge drinking prior to their victimization (Littleton, Tabernik, et al., 2009), which correlates with other research findings on the association between drinking and sexual assault.

**Impact on Mental Health of Sexual Assault**

Rape and other forms of sexual assault have been linked to several mental health concerns. Studies have shown that sexual victimization is linked to high rates of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD; Kessler et al., 1995). According to results of one study, almost one-third (31%) of rape victims developed PTSD at some point in their lives following the rape event, and they were 6.2 times more likely to develop PTSD and 5.5 times more likely to currently have PTSD than their counterparts who had not experienced sexual victimization (Kilpatrick et al., 1992). In a separate study that focused on the relationship between the type of rape (forcible rape, FR; incapacitated rape, IR; or drug/alcohol facilitated rape, DAFR) and PTSD and major depressive episode (MDE), results indicated that all three rape tactics were associated with PTSD and MDE (Zinzow, Resnick, McCauley, et al., 2010). Although a history of FR was associated with the highest risk of PTSD and MDE, women with a history of IR and/or DAFR were two to four times as likely to develop those mental health concerns as women who did not experience
rape. These findings were consistent with the results of other studies (e.g., Thompson & Kingree, 2010; Zinzow, Resnick, Amstadter et al., 2010).

Depression is a common response to sexual assault. Zinzow Resnick, McCauley et al. (2010) found a high incidence of depression post-assault, and Kilpatrick and colleagues (1992) found that 30% of survivors experienced at least one major depressive episode in their lives post-assault, compared to 10% for women who were never victimized. Thompson and Kingree (2010) surveyed college women and found that those who reported sexual victimization also reported more depressive symptoms, as well as alcohol-related issues, than their counterparts who had not been victimized. The researchers surmised that part of the reason for increase in depression and alcohol related problems was that they found that women who were victimized also had more negative cognitions. From their findings they concluded that negative cognitions play a major role in post-assault trauma. The experience of rape has also been linked to suicide: 33% of women who experienced rape indicated that they had seriously considered suicide, as opposed to 8% of non-victims (Kilpatrick et al., 1992). In another study by Kilpatrick et al. (1985), results indicated that as many as one in five survivors of sexual victimization attempted suicide, as opposed to 2.2% of non-victims. Additionally, Kilpatrick et al. (1992) found that the majority of mental health concerns for survivors began post-assault.

Alcohol and drug use/abuse have been linked to sexual victimization. Victims of rape were 5.3 times more likely to have used prescription drugs non-medically, 3.4 times more likely to have used marijuana, 6.0 times more likely to have used cocaine, and 10.1 times more likely to have used hard drugs other than cocaine when compared to non-victims (Kilpatrick et al., 1992). Given that sexual victimization has been linked to increased alcohol and drug use (Thompson & Kingree, 2010), use of substances has also been associated with revictimization.
Sexual victimization is far reaching and has been linked to multiple emotional and behavioral responses. One particularly detrimental and common response of women who are victimized is to blame themselves. Miller and colleagues (2007) described self-blame as uniquely harmful to women due to associated increased risk for revictimization. They determined that survivors’ perceptions of the rape event and responsibility were directly related to the sociocultural context, leaving women more vulnerable to revictimization. Katz et al. (2010) found similar results pertaining to self-blame and revictimization. They surveyed undergraduate college women at two different times within the same academic year. Those women who reported sexual victimization earlier in the year were more likely to report victimization later in the year. They also found that greater self-blame was simultaneously associated with lower levels of sexual refusal assertiveness (SRA) and asserted that both greater self-blame and lower SRA increase the risk of revictimization in the first year of college. Sexual victimization accompanied by internalization of societal rape myths can damage a survivor’s sense of self and lead to self-devaluing responses such as self-blame, guilt, and shame (Moor, 2007).

Shame is commonly associated with the experience of rape and other forms of sexual assault (Koss et al., 1987; Vidal & Petrak, 2007; Weiss, 2010). The definition of shame itself
has been met with much disagreement and confusion, leading to studies on its specific meaning (Tangney, Miller, Flicker, & Barlow, 1996). Shame often has been associated with other negative emotions such as guilt and embarrassment (Tangney, Mashek, & Stuewig, 2005). Tangney and colleagues asked a group of undergraduate students to write narratives about an experience in which they felt shame, guilt, and embarrassment, respectively, and then rate each. Although all were found to be experienced in social contexts, 10.4% of guilt experiences and 18.2% of shame experiences were reported to have occurred when the participants were alone. Embarrassment was reported to be the least intense emotion of the three and was often associated with light-heartedness and laughter with little focus on apologies or making amends. Shame, on the other hand, was described as a more intense, negative emotion that was often associated with long-lasting feelings of responsibility and regret. Participants also indicated feelings of anger and disgust towards themselves, accompanied by feelings of inferiority to others which seemed more intense than similar feelings of guilt (Tangney et. al, 1996).

These findings regarding shame and guilt appear to be congruent with the reports of victims of sexual victimization who have described their experiences as humiliating and dehumanizing and accompanied by feelings of shame and self-blame (Littleton & Breitkopf, 2006; Miller et al., 2007; Negrao, Bonanno, Noll, Putnam, & Trickett, 2005; Ullman, 1996b). Intense emotional responses to sexual victimization can have a great and enduring impact on victims’ mental and emotional health. Research has shown that shame is one of the most influential emotional responses to sexual assault, often contributing to depression, anxiety, eating disorders, and PTSD (Andrews, 1995; Lee, Scragg, & Turner, 2001; Swans & Andrews, 2003; Vidal & Petrak, 2007; Weiss, 2010).
Weiss (2010) conducted a study on the effects of shame using the final narratives from the National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS) which asked victims to describe their sexual assault experiences. Based on the responses given by the female participants where shame was indicated, three categories of victims were delineated: the deserving victim, the disgraced victim, and the defamed victim. Participants who fell into the “deserving victim” category often held themselves responsible for what had happened to them, particularly if alcohol was used prior to the victimization or if they believed they could have avoided the assault. The “disgraced victim” category consisted of women who were humiliated by the experience or had concerns that others would view them negatively. In the final category, characteristics of the “defamed victim” included fear of others finding out, stigmatization, and rejection, contributing to the emotional response of shame. Weiss found that responses to sexual victimization such as these often left victims feeling too ashamed to report their sexual assault to the police.

Disclosure and Reporting of Sexual Victimization

Disclosure

Disclosure refers to informing others of one’s traumatic experiences through written or spoken word (Ullman, 2011). Although the majority of survivors do not report to law enforcement (Black et al., 2011; Fisher et al., 2003; Kilpatrick et al., 1992; Sable et al., 2006; Tjaden & Thoennes, 2006), most do reach out and disclose in an informal manner to gain support and assistance (Ahrens et al., 2007; Fisher et al., 2003; Ullman, 1996a). Orchowski and Gidycz (2012) surveyed college women and found that the majority of their respondents indicated that they disclosed to a female friend, many disclosed to a family member, and none reported to police. These findings were consistent with other studies that have indicated that female survivors tend to reach out to friends and family or other people in their lives instead of formal
support services (Ahrens et al., 2007; Rickwood, Deane, Wilson, & Ciarrochi, 2005; Ullman, 1996a).

Non-disclosure can be detrimental to one’s health (Sinclair & Gold, 1997) and appropriate disclosure and help-seeking can have psychological and physiological benefits (Pennebaker, Kiecolt-Glaser, & Glaser, 1988; Rickwood et al., 2005). However, disclosure is a complex process and survivors can be greatly affected, positively and/or negatively, by their disclosure experience (Ullman, 2011). Ullman suggested that, although much more research is needed pertaining to disclosure, non-experimental research on sexual assault disclosure indicates that characteristics of the survivors and the disclosure itself can affect survivor outcomes. Those characteristics highlighted for further research included voluntariness of the disclosure, detail of the disclosure, response from others to the discloser, and demographics and coping strategies of the discloser. Ullman found that disclosures that were voluntary, described with greater detail, and were met with a positive response from others yielded better outcomes for survivors.

**Reporting**

Despite the prevalence of sexual victimization and the impact sexual victimization has on women, it continues to be the most underreported of violent crimes (Black et al., 2011; Fisher et al., 2003; Kilpatrick et al., 1992; Sable et al., 2006; Tjaden & Thoennes, 2006). Estimates from the early 1990s indicated that approximately 16% of survivors of rape reported the crime to law enforcement officials (Kilpatrick et al., 1992). According to the most recent National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS), the overall rate of rape and sexual assault rose to 1.3 victimizations per 1,000 persons age 12 and older in 2012, up from 0.9 victimizations per 1,000 in 2011 (Truman et al., 2013). Further results indicated that only 28% of rape and sexual assault victimizations in the general population were reported to the police, which also increased from
27% in 2011. These results are similar to those from previous years the NCVS was conducted; however, the results from other studies vary.

Results from the National Violence Against Women Survey showed that approximately one in five women (19.1%) who were raped as adults reported the crime to law enforcement officials (Tjaden & Thoennes, 2006). Results from a national representative sample of 3,001 women indicated that 15.8% of rapes were reported to police (fewer than one in six), and as few as 1 in 10 women reported to police if they were incapacitated or under the influence of drugs and alcohol at the time of the assault (Wolitzky-Taylor et al., 2011). Wolitzky-Taylor et al. (2011) found that the percentage of reports rose to 21.3% when the survivors labeled their experience as rape. Results from a portion of the National College Women Sexual Victimization (NCWSV) study indicated that while about 70% of incidents were reported to someone other than police (friends, family members), fewer than 5% of completed or attempted rapes were reported to law enforcement officials, which was consistent with Koss et al.’s (1987) findings that also indicated a 5% report rate for college students (Fisher et al., 2003).

**Barriers to Reporting Sexual Assault**

Sexual victimization goes unreported to law enforcement for many reasons. Intrapsychic reasons include self-blame (Gunn & Minch, 1988; Stewart et al., 1996; Wiehe & Richards, 1995), shame (Sable et al., 2006; Weiss, 2010; Wiehe & Richards, 1995), guilt (Binder, 1981; Sable et al., 2006; Wiehe & Richards, 1995), embarrassment/humiliation (Bachman, 1993, 1998, Binder, 1981; Felson & Paré, 2005; Peretti & Cozzens, 1983; Sable et al., 2006), fear of reprisal (Bachman, 1993, 1998), and denial (Fisher et al., 2000; Peretti & Cozzens, 1983). Fear of being blamed by others has often been cited as a reason for not reporting (Binder, 1981; Felson & Paré, 2005; Gunn & Minch, 1988; Kilpatrick et al., 1992; Sable et al., 2006; Tomlinson, 2000),
particularly when the survivors were engaged in drinking and/or drug use prior to the assault (Stewart et al., 1996; Wiehe & Richards, 1995). Other reasons given for not reporting were related to environmental factors such as the survivor having had a prior relationship with the assailant (Felson & Paré, 2005; Jones et al., 2009; Sable et al., 2006) and women holding negative views of the criminal justice system (Bachman, 1993, 1998; Binder, 1981; Felson & Paré, 2005; Fisher et al., 2000; Kilpatrick et al., 1992; Stewart et al., 1996).

According to Kilpatrick et al., (1992), the majority of survivors indicated their greatest concern about reporting was being blamed or negatively evaluated by others (69%) and that they would be more likely to report a rape if their names and addresses would be withheld from the media. Wolitzky-Taylor and colleagues (2011) also found that survivors regularly indicated that their largest apprehensions about reporting were that they feared being blamed for the assaults and were concerned family and others would find out about the incident if it was reported. When those who did not report were asked for specific reasons, the most common response was fear of reprisal from the perpetrator, which might suggest a lack of trust that the legal system would be able to protect them if the report was made. The researchers suggested that “[p]revention and education programs that provide realistic information about potential advantages to safety after reporting may increase reporting” in such cases (Wolitzky-Taylor et al., 2011, p. 822). Survivors were also asked about their experience of reporting: 70.3% indicated that they were believed and their reports were taken seriously by police, 60.4% of the respondents indicated that they were at least somewhat satisfied with the treatment they received from police, and 84% stated they would report the crime again. Additionally, the reason given most frequently for reporting to the police was to stop the crimes from happening to others.
Felson and Paré (2005) found that survivors of sexual assaults were more likely than victims of physical assault to say they did not report the crime to police for the following reasons: they did not think the police would do anything, they thought they would not be believed, they were concerned about reprisal, and they were too embarrassed. Survivors were likely to experience more embarrassment and to consider the crime too minor when the offender was known to them as opposed to being a stranger. Women who endorse rape myths are less likely to report sexual assault to law enforcement officials. In a study that surveyed incarcerated women who were survivors of rape, it was found that while the participants endorsed fewer rape myths overall, women who endorsed higher levels of rape myth acceptance (RMA) were less likely to have reported the crime to police (Heath et al., 2013).

Sable et al. (2006) conducted a study on college students’ perceived importance of barriers to reporting rape and other forms of sexual assault with the purpose of exploring gender differences in perceptions. They found that the convenience sample of students surveyed indicated that shame, guilt, and embarrassment, confidentiality concerns, and fear of not being believed were viewed as the leading barriers to reporting for both female and male victims; however, men rated these barriers significantly higher than women. The following barriers scored significantly higher for women than they did for men: fear of retaliation, financial dependence on the perpetrator/perpetrator interference in seeking help, does not want family member or friend to be prosecuted, lack of resources to obtain help, and cultural or language barriers to obtaining help. The findings suggested that despite rape reform research and legislation, many of the same barriers to reporting exist that were in place prior to the rape reform movement. These findings were consistent with results of other studies, previously
discussed, that found the role of shame, guilt, and embarrassment to be highly influential in the reporting process.

According to Fisher et al. (2003), college women did not report incidents of sexual victimization to police, whether on- or off-campus, for a number of reasons. Some women indicated that they did not believe the incident was serious enough for a report (81.7%) or were unsure if a crime or harm was intended (42.1%). Some gave reasons that pertained to police involvement: 30% did not report because they did not think the police would consider it serious enough and 20% did not report because they assumed the police would not want to be bothered and/or did not believe they had adequate proof the crime occurred. Other reasons given for college women not reporting included not wanting their families (18.3%) and others (20.9%) to know about the incident and they were concerned their assailants and/or others would retaliate (19%). Although variations did occur, these results remained fairly consistent across different types of victimization.

Fisher et al., (2003) also found that characteristics of the victimization, offender and victim, and context were influential in disclosure of the incidents to police. College women were more likely to report to police when the incidents were more serious, such as when a weapon was used, if the victim defined the incident as rape, or if the event happened on campus. Threats of sexual victimization were more likely to be reported than sexual contacts other than rape. Incidents involving strangers were much more likely to be reported than those involving perpetrators known to the women. With respect to race/ethnicity, when the victim and the assailant differed in racial/ethnic background the crime was more likely to be reported than when their race/ethnicity was the same. African American students were more likely to report the crime to police than victims who were White non-Hispanic or of other racial/ethnic backgrounds.
If the victim and the offender were under the influence of alcohol and/or drugs, the incident was less likely to be reported to campus officials but more likely to be reported to individuals other than police and campus authorities.

When the different types of sexual victimization were considered, Fisher et al. (2003) found it difficult to discern what prompted college women to report to police. However, reporting seemed to be structured by the victim’s perception that she would be believed by law enforcement officials, meaning the victim could prove that it occurred (had an injury) and the perpetrator was a stranger. When reporting to campus authorities and to those other than the police (such as friends), whether or not injuries were sustained, the relationship of the victim to the perpetrator, and the presence of alcohol and/or drugs were important factors. Nevertheless, the precise impact of these factors on reporting was not always clear.

Predictors of Reporting Sexual Assault

Williams (1984) suggested that two conditions need to be met before a woman can report rape to police: she must self-identify as a victim of sexual assault and she must believe that she will also be perceived as a victim by family, friends, and especially the police. Oros et al. (1980) found a correlation between the amount of force asserted during a rape and how women labeled themselves post-assault; women were more likely to consider themselves as victims if they had been subjected to physical violence, and were less likely to label themselves as victims if they were acquainted with the perpetrator (as cited in Williams, 1984). Baker and Peterson (1977) found that women were more likely to label themselves as victims if they had been beaten, become pregnant, contracted a sexually transmitted disease, and/or had to go to the hospital. Bachman (1998) found that the only factors that seemed to increase the likelihood of reporting sexual assault to police were that the victim sustained physical injuries during the assault and
that the perpetrator used a weapon. Du Mont et al. (2003) examined the practices of reporting to police among sexually assaulted women who sought services at a hospital-based sexual assault care center in Canada in 1994. They found that women who were clinically injured were 3 1/2 times more likely to report the sexual victimization to the police than those who were not injured.

The research on reporting rape and other forms of sexual assault can sometimes be contradictory. However, findings for predictors of reporting generally fall into three categories: the victim-offender relationship, characteristics of victim and offender, and situational characteristics (Clay-Warner & McMahon-Howard, 2009). Clay-Warner and McMahon-Howard applied the Classic Rape model and Black’s Theory of Law to data taken from the NCVS to test multiple hypotheses pertaining to predictors of reporting rape. Four of their five hypotheses related to the Classic Rape model were supported. There was an increased likelihood of reporting if the rape occurred in public or if the offender unlawfully entered the victim’s residence. Also, the likelihood of reporting increased three times if a weapon was used during the incident.

Likewise, if serious injury was sustained by the victim, the incident was more likely to come to the attention of the police, either reported by the survivor or by a third party. Consistent with previous research, they found that a victim was more likely to report if the assault was committed by a stranger as opposed to an intimate partner. Findings from this study were consistent with previous findings that have indicated that women are more likely to report a rape if the circumstances of the incident align with those of the “classic rape” scenario (Williams, 1984).

Wolitzky-Taylor et al. (2011) examined several variables as potential predictors of reporting rape to police. They found that women who were raped by strangers were more likely
to report the crime, which they indicated was consistent with findings of previous studies stemming from the 1980s. They found that rape by an intimate partner was not associated with reporting, which they surmised may indicate the presence of traditional societal beliefs (i.e., rape myths) pertaining to sexual assault which are consistent with the stereotype that rapes are committed by strangers. Also, those women who were raped by strangers were less likely to indicate that they were “very” or “somewhat” concerned about being blamed for the assault, suggesting that self-blame may be influenced by the relationship to the offender, which then influences the decision to report. Wolitzky-Taylor et al. (2011) also found that more recent rapes, defined as occurring after 1980, were more likely to be reported than earlier rapes. The researchers speculated that the change in reporting could be due to an increase in public awareness and policy change, although they suggested that more research be conducted in this area.

Chen and Ullman (2010) analyzed narratives from the National Violence Against Women Survey and found similar results that suggested women were more likely to report to police if the victimization was perpetrated by a stranger, with weapons present, and/or if injury occurred as a result of the assault. They also found that women were more likely to report to police when they believed their life was threatened, potentially due to an elevated distress level post-assault and a perception that the assault was more serious. This is consistent with previous findings (Clay-Warner & McMahon-Howard, 2009; Williams, 1984) that women are more likely to report a sexual assault that shares characteristics with the “classic rape” scenario.

Consistent with the research on female sexual assault survivors in the general population, factors that influence reporting for college women include the nature of the crime, the victim-offender relationship, whether or not an injury occurred, the presence of a weapon, location of
the incident, and association with alcohol and/or drugs (Thompson, Sitterle, Clay, & Kingree, 2007). College women who are raped by strangers are much more likely to report the crime than those who are raped by intimates or acquaintances (Fisher et al., 2003). Likewise, college women who sustained an injury from the assault are more likely to report to police than those who did not and those who experienced an assault where a weapon was present are also more likely to report to law enforcement officials (Bachman, 1993; Fisher et al., 2003; Pino, 1999). Finally, college women were more likely to report to police if the sexual assault occurred on-campus, as opposed to away from campus (Fisher et al., 2003).

**Qualitative Studies of Survivors of Sexual Victimization**

Heath, Lynch, Fritch, McArthur, and Smith (2011) conducted a qualitative study with 74 incarcerated women who experienced sexual victimization prior to incarceration. They were asked open-ended questions pertaining to their level of rape myth acceptance (RMA), disclosure patterns, and reporting to law enforcement officials. Their findings were consistent with prior research (Ahrens et al., 2007; Ullman, 1996a) in that the majority of the women disclosed to someone other than the police (e.g., family and friends). Many of the women expressed emotional reactions as reasons they did not report to police or disclose to others (Heath et al., 2011). Further, the participants indicated that they chose not to disclose due to feelings of embarrassment and shame, as well as fear of the perpetrator. For those who did disclose and/or report to police, the most frequently stated reason was to protect others from future assaults and to denounce the offender, which was also consistent with prior research (Wolitzky-Taylor et al., 2011). Findings indicated that many of the reasons given for not reporting indicated a presence of RMA (Heath et al., 2011). Many women described their rationale for not disclosing by giving reference to concepts associated with RMA such as self-blame, shame, questioning whether or
not a rape had actually occurred, and feeling more comfortable if they were able to show evidence that a rape had occurred (e.g., injury, physical evidence).

Even though research has found that African American women experience sexual victimization at a frequency similar to that of White women (Black et al., 2011), African American women differ substantially in the recovery process due to the quality of services available to them, given the historical and contemporary issues Black individuals face in society (Walker, 1995; Washington, 2001). Washington (2001) conducted a qualitative study to better understand the influence of age, race, gender, and sexual orientation on the services provided post-assault. Twelve African American women who were survivors of sexual assault were interviewed. Disclosure patterns among the women were addressed: of the 12 women, seven did not disclose to anyone until three to 25 years later and five disclosed to someone immediately. Of the five who did disclose, all disclosed to family or friends and only one sought legal assistance. Although reasons varied for the seven women who chose not disclose the victimization, themes for nondisclosure did emerge:

- inadequate or inappropriate sexuality socialization, community or origin issues stemming from real or perceived White racism, belief in a “strong” Black woman and “weak” White woman dichotomy, historical and lived memory of racism in the criminal justice system, and White domination of the helping professions (i.e., health and crisis intervention services) (p. 1264)

The reasons given for nondisclosure provide insight into the added concerns for African American women and women of color from different cultural backgrounds.

Greeson and Campbell (2011) conducted a qualitative study that aimed to highlight a survivor’s agency within the legal and medical systems. For the purpose of their study, agency
was established as an inclusive term that emphasized the survivors’ choices and their attempts to shape their own experiences with the systems in which they were seeking assistance. The researchers interviewed 20 adult women who were survivors of sexual assault and had sought medical and legal assistance following their victimization. They found that survivors expressed their agency in three different ways: compliance with the system, defiance through noncompliance with the system, and defiance through challenging the system. Each method utilized was directly related to the desired outcome for interacting with the system. Thirteen of the 20 women were compliant with the system, meaning that they followed the recommended processes of the systems in order to have their goals met. Seven of the 20 survivors chose not to comply with the system’s course of action and were categorized as defiant through noncompliance (Greeson & Campbell, 2011). Although defiance can be described as willful and self-defeating acts, the term was used here to illustrate that the survivors had personal “goals and needs that were in opposition to the way in which the legal and medical systems had responded to their cases” (Greeson & Campbell, 2011, p. 588). Nine of the 20 survivors in the study responded by defiance through challenging the system, which was considered a different style of defiance than by noncompliance. The survivors in this case were dissatisfied by the system’s response to their situation and made an attempt to change and/or questioned the system’s course of action. This study was one of the first of its kind to focus on the survivor’s experience when interacting with the legal and medical systems; prior research had focused primarily on systems personnel response to victims. This study is similar in design to my proposed study in that it focuses on the survivors’ experience within the legal system; however, it differs in that my study will focus solely on the law enforcement and participants will be delimited to college women who are survivors.
After a review of the literature, I was unable to find a qualitative, phenomenological study that focused on the shared experiences of college women who reported their sexual victimization to law enforcement. Most studies pertaining to rape and sexual assault were quantitative in nature and ranged widely in sample size. Many studies have been conducted with college students, specifically college women, and most highlighted statistics pertaining to incidence rates, post-assault sequelae and long-term consequences of sexual assault, and reasons women do not report crimes that are sexual in nature. I believed that my study would contribute a different perspective to the literature on sexual victimization, as well as to the counseling literature, as counselors will benefit from a better understanding of the experiences of college women who report sexual victimization to law enforcement officials.

**Chapter Summary**

Many women will be faced with sexual victimization at some point in their lives. While there is a vast amount of literature pertaining to sexual victimization, research is lacking that addresses the phenomenon of reporting crimes that are sexual in nature for college women. Counselors should be aware not only of reasons women do not report sexual victimization to law enforcement officials, but also of reasons why they do and what that experience can entail for them. This chapter emphasized a feminist perspective on reasons for the sexual victimization of women as well as statistics associated with sexual victimization in the general population and for college women. Studies similar in design to my proposed study were highlighted.
CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

This chapter includes a discussion of the design of the study, and begins with the rationale for a phenomenological methodology. The research questions are stated and a description of the participants is provided. Also included in this chapter are a discussion of the procedures, the role of the researcher, and data collection. Finally, data analysis and validation procedures are addressed.

Rationale for Phenomenological Design

Phenomenology is a qualitative research method that focuses on identifying and describing the shared, lived experiences of several individuals as they encounter a phenomenon (Creswell, 2007, 2009). The purpose of a phenomenological study is to reduce individuals’ experiences with a phenomenon to a textural and structural description that will reveal the true essence of the experience. In order for a reduction of experiences to occur, the researcher must bracket, or set aside, her or his own experiences and presuppositions (Creswell, 2007).

I conducted a phenomenological research study to better understand the lived experience of college women in reporting the crime of sexual assault to law enforcement. Advantages to a phenomenological study include the rich data that are collected from the participants and the in-depth understanding of their experiences of a phenomenon, including their thoughts and feelings. Emotions and thoughts can be discussed in depth and the experience of the phenomenon can be investigated thoroughly (Creswell, 2009). Likewise, phenomenological analysis has an advantage in that analyzing data can begin as soon as the first interview has concluded. The most widely acknowledged disadvantages to qualitative research are the difficulty of ensuring pure bracketing of the researcher’s understandings, judgments, and biases, and the inability to
generalize the data to the general population (Creswell, 2007, 2009; Moustakas, 1994). Despite these disadvantages, I chose to conduct a study with this particular design, as is explained in the following paragraphs.

To justify the use of phenomenological design, it is important to first discuss how I made the decision to use this methodology. As discussed by Creswell (2009), identifying the philosophical worldview is important in determining appropriate methodologies. Creswell defined worldview as “a basic set of beliefs that guide action” (p. 6). He listed four different types of worldviews: postpositivism, constructivism, advocacy/participatory, and pragmatism. Postpositivism tends to represent the traditional forms of research that align with quantitative methodologies and typically remain philosophically deterministic in that causes determine outcomes or effects. Accordingly, the problems studied by researchers of the postpositivist worldview often are focused on identifying and assessing causes that shape outcomes.

In the pragmatic worldview, focus tends to be on actions, situation, and consequences, rather than on causative conditions as found in the postpositive worldview (Creswell, 2009). Pragmatists, instead of limiting themselves in choice of research methods, use any and all approaches available to gain knowledge about a problem. Pragmatism does not subscribe to any one philosophy, thus allowing researchers to draw as needed from both qualitative and quantitative measures. As discussed by Creswell, pragmatism allows for the use of many approaches when gaining knowledge of an issue and is often found in mixed methods designs.

Social constructivists believe that individuals want to understand the world around them and often come to hold beliefs based on experiences and interactions with others. The goal of research under constructivism is to rely predominantly on participants’ perceptions of their experiences. Broad and open ended questions are used to allow for thorough discussion and
meaningful interpretation of participants’ experiences. Constructivism is often present in qualitative research designs and bears some similarities to the philosophy of phenomenology.

The advocacy and participatory worldview became relevant during the 1980s and 1990s as individuals began to address the perceived ethnocentric assumptions that were inherent in the postpositivist perspective (Creswell, 2009). Ethnocentric assumptions “imposed structural laws and theories that did not fit marginalized individuals in our society or issues of social justice that needed to be addressed” (p. 9). Many did not believe that the social constructivist viewpoint did enough to advocate for marginalized and disenfranchised groups and an action agenda. According to Creswell, researchers of the advocacy/participatory viewpoint believe that research should be closely concerned with a political agenda and should contain an action agenda which supports political reform. Specific issues such as empowerment, inequality, and oppression are addressed, and the researcher monitors procedures and works collaboratively to avoid any form of further marginalization. Because the advocacy/participatory worldview is focused on those in our society who may be disenfranchised, theoretical perspectives such as feminist theory, racial discourse, and critical theory are often integrated into philosophical beliefs to create an image of the issues being addressed (Creswell, 2009).

Creswell (2009) suggested additional factors when determining the research design: the personal experiences of the researcher, the research problem, and the audience for whom the report will be written. I considered all four approaches as well as the additional factors suggested by Creswell.

As a counseling professional who has an understanding of the frequency and overall impact of sexual victimization on girls and women and who also subscribes to a feminist ethos, I believe sexual violence perpetrated against women is an important issue that should be
thoroughly addressed in our society. The ground-breaking study published in 1987 by Koss et al. was one of the first to acknowledge the shortcomings of the research on the incidence of rape and sexual assault at a national level. Their findings indicated that 27.5% of college women had experienced rape or some other type of sexual victimization since the age of 14. With a more accurate perception of the incidence of sexual assault that was highlighted in this study, numerous other studies (Black et al., 2010; Fisher et al., 2000; Kessler et al., 1995; Kilpatrick et al., 1992; Thompson & Kingree, 2010; Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000; Zinzow, Resnick, Amstadter, et al., 2010; Zinzow, Resnick, McCauley, et al., 2010) have been conducted to understand the emotional and behavioral responses of survivors of sexual assault. However, the majority of existing studies are quantitative in nature, with few qualitative designs that were specifically phenomenological and focused on the experience of reporting the crime from the survivors’ perspectives. For this reason, I chose a phenomenological design which is based in an advocacy/participatory worldview.

**Research Questions**

To define the essence of the lived experience of college women who made the decision to report a sexual assault, the central question posed for my study was “What is the lived experience of college women who have been sexually assaulted as they go through the process of reporting the crime?” The literature indicated that the majority of survivors decide against reporting the crime of sexual assault (Fisher et al., 2000; Sable et al., 2006; Tjaden & Thoennes, 2006); thus, my second central question was “What contributed to college women’s decision to report their sexual assault to law enforcement?”
Participants

The number of participants in a phenomenological design can vary; however, Dukes (1984) recommended that interviews be conducted with 3 to 10 participants (as cited by Creswell, 2007). Prior to the onset of the study, I approximated that the number needed would be no less than six participants before the point of saturation was met (Creswell, 2007). To fulfill the criteria requirements for my research sample, each participant must have experienced a sexual assault between six months and five years prior to the initial interview while enrolled at a university and reported the crime of sexual assault to on-campus or off-campus law enforcement officials. Six women who met the criteria agreed to participate in the study. All six women were current college students and were from three different universities. Access to the initial participant was provided by a gatekeeper who agreed to assist with the study prior to conducting the interviews. The identified gatekeepers from the other universities were unable to provide participants. However, the gatekeepers from all four universities agreed to assist with posting flyers and provided instructions on how to follow protocol for obtaining permissions on each respective campus.

Once permissions were granted, the gatekeepers or the researcher posted flyers (see Appendix A) in the designated areas on each campus. Within a week of flyers being posted, inquiring women, as well as men, began to contact me for information pertaining to the study. As potential participants contacted me, I discussed the criteria for the study to determine if they were eligible to participate. The first five women who met the criteria and agreed to participate were scheduled for an initial interview. During one initial interview it was determined that the participant did not meet the criteria, at which time the interview was discontinued. In order to reach the minimum number of participants for the study, the sixth person who had utilized the
flyers to contact me and who met criteria for participation was scheduled for an initial interview. The next four women who contacted me after the initial six were informed that the number of participants had been met and were asked if they would consider participating if more participants were required. They all agreed to do so; however, their participation was not necessary. Those who contacted me after those four were informed that the number of participants had been met and I was no longer scheduling interviews for the study.

**Participant Profiles**

**Jeané**

Jeané is a 22-year-old African American woman who experienced a sexual assault her sophomore year in college. Jeané had been on campus for only a short period of time prior to the assault, as she had transferred from another university out of state the previous semester. Jeané awoke after her assault with no knowledge of what had happened to her and a badly broken ankle. She never regained her memory of what occurred that night. Jeané left a few days after the assault to return home to have surgery on her ankle. She returned to campus a couple months later and soon contacted her campus police to report the assault. Campus police referred her to the city police. At the time of the assault, Jeané was focused on her studies and becoming active on campus. She currently attends the same university where she remains active and continues to seek therapy. She still sees the perpetrator on campus.

**Cassandra**

Cassandra is a 26-year-old Caucasian woman who is currently a graduate student and who experienced a sexual assault her junior year of college at a different university than the one she attends now. Cassandra described the sexual assault she experienced as “a date rape” and explained that she had gone on a few dates with the perpetrator prior to the assault. She stopped
seeing him because he became verbally and physically abusive. Initially, she did not want to report the sexual assault. However, the perpetrator’s continued harassment left her feeling unsafe, which prompted her to contact campus police some months after the assault. Cassandra was active on her campus and was greatly enjoying her college experience. She chose the pseudonym, Cassandra, because her experience in reporting reminded her of the Greek myth of Cassandra who was blessed by Apollo with the gift of knowing the future and then cursed so that no one would ever believe her, all because she would not sleep with him.

**Amanda**

Amanda is a 23-year-old biracial women who experienced a sexual assault her sophomore year in college. The assault took place in the parking lot of the local grocery store she had visited countless times before. She reported to the local sheriff’s office the following day with the loving support and guidance of her mother. Because the perpetrator was a fellow student at her university, she also reported to campus police. Amanda was enjoying her college experience much more than her high school years, yet she was also experiencing difficulty related to some major life stressors at the time of the assault. She currently attends the same university and will soon graduate.

**Sonia Jane**

Sonia Jane is a 20-year-old biracial woman who experienced a sexual assault the second semester of her freshmen year of college. Sonia Jane was attending college as an out-of-state student and was working her way through school to help her parents pay the bills. Although she saw herself as missing out on parts of the college experience, she was enjoying herself very much and had a high GPA. The day of the assault, Sonia Jane had been out with friends enjoying a festival. That night she was kidnapped and assaulted by multiple individuals. Sonia Jane went
to campus police the following day solely with the intent to request transportation to the hospital. She was interviewed on campus before the campus police sent her to the hospital in an ambulance, where she was interviewed again by a city police officer. She currently attends the same university and advocates for gender equality.

**Alice**

Alice is a 19-year-old Hispanic woman who experienced a sexual assault just after returning to school for the second semester of her freshmen year. Alice moved from out-of-state and was excited about school. Her first semester was particularly stressful due to being so far away from her family for the first time, in addition to a significantly negative experience with her roommate. The night of the assault Alice went to a house party with some friends, where she was introduced to the perpetrator by a friend. After leaving the party, she was assaulted by the perpetrator in two different locations before he would return to his residence. Alice reported the crime to campus police exactly one month later. She currently attends the same university and was an anonymous participant in the on-going campus adjudication process at the time of the interviews. She still sees the perpetrator on campus.

**Jasmine**

Jasmine is a 19-year-old African American woman who experienced a sexual assault her freshmen year of college. As an out-of-state student, Jasmine was enjoying her college experience and was very active on campus. The night of the assault she was with her friend at the house of an acquaintance. The perpetrator propositioned her for sex, and when she refused he became more aggressive. Jasmine locked herself in the bathroom out of fear for her safety. With encouragement from her friend and mother, Jasmine made the report to campus police a few weeks later. She continues to be an active student and currently attends the same university.
Six participants were interviewed for this study, all of whom were current students who had experienced a sexual assault and reported the assault to law enforcement officials between six months and five years prior to data collection. Personal characteristics demographics are presented in Table 3.1.

Table 3.1

*Personal Characteristics Demographics*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Jeané</th>
<th>Cassandra</th>
<th>Amanda</th>
<th>Sonia Jane</th>
<th>Alice</th>
<th>Jasmine</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Currently:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race/Ethnicity</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Biracial</td>
<td>Biracial</td>
<td>Hispanic/ Latina</td>
<td>African American</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic Status</td>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>Graduate Student</td>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>Sophomore</td>
<td>Sophomore</td>
<td>Sophomore</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type of Assault</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>Completed Rape</td>
<td>Stalking, Groping, &amp; Harassment</td>
<td>Completed Rape</td>
<td>Completed Rape</td>
<td>Attempted Rape</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>At the time of the assault:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic Status</td>
<td>Sophomore</td>
<td>Junior</td>
<td>Sophomore</td>
<td>Freshmen</td>
<td>Freshmen</td>
<td>Freshmen</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Procedures**

Approval to conduct the study was obtained from the University of New Orleans Institutional Review Board (IRB; see Appendix B) was contacted prior to recruiting participants. Because participants were invited to participate through university channels, I received IRB approval from each of the institutions where I contacted gatekeepers, prior to meeting with
participants. Those participants who expressed interest in participating were read an oral script that described the purpose of the study, expectations for participants, and confidentiality (see Appendix C). At the onset of the first scheduled interview, participants were informed of the measures taken to guarantee confidentiality and were asked to sign an informed consent form (see Appendix D). The informed consent included the following: (a) purpose, description, risks, and benefits of the study; (b) confidentiality statement; (c) data collection procedures; (d) withdrawal procedures; (e) post interview follow-up information; (f) referral procedure for counseling services in the event services are requested; and (g) my contact information, university faculty contact information, and UNO IRB contact information.

Due to the sensitive nature of the topic under investigation, additional consideration was given to potential risks of the interview and referral procedures for mental health services during discussion of informed consent. With each participant, I addressed potential symptoms of distress, counseling services that were available at her respective university, and means to identify additional services if needed. To receive IRB approval from one of the universities, it was required that the IRB contact information for that university also be included in the informed consent. The contact information was added to the informed consent and that form was provided to students from that particular university. After the consent form was read and signed during the first meeting, participants were asked to complete a short questionnaire that described their personal characteristics (see Appendix E).

University employees including counselors, violence prevention coordinators, women’s resource personnel, and police officers at the four chosen southeastern Louisiana universities were contacted via email, phone, or personal introduction and informed of the purpose and procedures of the study. Employees were invited to participate in the role of gatekeeper and to
acted as a liaison between the researcher and potential participants. Gatekeepers who expressed interest in assisting in recruitment of participants were informed of the specified criteria for potential research participants and were sent an email explaining the procedure (see Appendix F). Those who agreed to assist with the study were given handouts that provided the researcher’s contact information, a summary of the study, and a description of participants’ role in the research (see Appendix G) for distribution to potential participants. The gatekeepers were then asked to assist the researcher in distribution of the handouts to students they viewed as viable potential participants for my research study.

So that university personnel were able to protect the confidentiality of the participants, personnel needed to contact the students regarding participation in the study, and then students were responsible for contacting me for more information. Identification of one participant by a gatekeeper speaking to a self-identified survivor of sexual assault with whom the gatekeeper had contact was confirmed. The gatekeepers were asked to post flyers (see Appendix A) within and around their departments if they believed they needed or wanted to advertise for more participants. Some gatekeepers were not allowed to post flyers within their departments and advised the researcher on how to obtain approval from the appropriate channels to post flyers in particular areas on each of the selected campuses.

**Role of the Researcher**

As a qualitative researcher, I am the key instrument for this study. I was the one to conduct the interviews, observe the participants’ behavior during the interviews, and examine documents associated with services accessed by the participants. I also analyzed the data collected. Therefore, it was important that I maintain an awareness of my assumptions and biases throughout the research process. Moustakas (1994) discussed the Husserlian concept of the
Epoche as “freedom from suppositions” (p. 85). In the Epoche, prejudgments, biases, and preconceived notions are set aside, or bracketed, to perceive a phenomenon through fresh, naïve eyes. Although Moustakas admitted to the difficulty of this process, he believed that with practice one can do fairly well in locating this transcendental state. In regard to conducting phenomenological research, Creswell (2007) explained the bracketing process as the researcher describing her or his own experience with and views of the phenomenon and then purposefully setting them aside for the duration of the research process.

My first bias is one that is aligned with my chosen profession. I am a licensed professional counselor who works in a university counseling center at a regional four-year university. During my time in this position, I have worked with a number of student clients, the vast majority of whom are female, who have experienced sexual assault. I listen to the accounts of sexual assaults and what the survivors experience after the assault. Many clients choose not to report these crimes for their own personal reasons, which align with the barriers to reporting found in the research (Bachman, 1998; Wolitzky-Taylor, 2011). Some of my clients who did report stated that it was a difficult process at times. According to their reports, they were sometimes met with support and sometimes met with blame and accusations. Unfortunately, I am not surprised to hear of negative responses received by women who report sexual assault, but this awareness leaves me with the assumption that the women who do report exhibit strength in reporting the crime. For me, the prevalence of sexual victimization in our society is astounding and it is a concern deserving of more attention. Given that women are victimized so much more often than men, it is hard to ignore the suggestion that this is a crime rooted in gender-based oppression.
A second bias I must note pertains to my outlook on life which is heavily influenced by a feminist perspective. Within the feminist ethos, sexual victimization is seen as a form of gender-based violence in that women are disproportionately targeted by male offenders because women are not viewed as equal to men. Violence and aggression toward women can occur in many forms and at times are so commonplace that the scope and impact are not fully acknowledged. Sexual victimization and other forms of oppression have lasting implications and can contribute to many negative mental health outcomes for women.

Further, I believe that if the general population has a better understanding of what sexual assault actually is and is not, less sexual victimization will occur and victims will not be held responsible for the crime. Sexual assault is often mis-defined, which I believe is due to the societal phenomenon of Rape Myth Acceptance (RMA). Acceptance of rape myths has been found to contribute to a survivor’s choice not to report the crime of sexual assault (Felson & Paré, 2005; Heath et al., 2013; Sable et al., 2006). When crimes such as rape and other forms of sexual assault are not reported, offenders are not held responsible for their actions. The likelihood is increased that these individuals will perpetrate again, potentially allowing more women to be victimized, which contributes to the continually high incidence rate of crimes of this nature.

To avoid researcher bias in this study, as the data were collected and themes were identified, I used different methods of validation (clarifying researcher bias, member checking, external audits, peer debriefing) to ensure that my experiences in working with survivors and personal perspectives remained separate from those of the participants in order to accurately identify the essence of this phenomenon (Creswell, 2007).
Moustakas (1994) acknowledged the importance of the concept of the *Epoche*, also known as bracketing, to ensure that the researcher sets aside her or his biases as much as possible to gain a fresh perspective on the phenomenon being examined (Creswell, 2007). Just as I listed my biases above, to the best of my ability, I believe I remained cognizant of my biases by setting them aside so that I was able approach the research in such a way that my beliefs did not interfere. I also consulted with my dissertation chair prior to the interviews to discuss feelings and potential biases that arose as I approached data collection. I continued to consult with my chair and my peer debriefer throughout the data collection and analysis processes to ensure that I remained unbiased in my role as researcher.

**Data Collection Methods**

For survivors who agreed to participate in my study, interviews were scheduled to take place at a private location of each participant’s choice that ensured the participant felt safe and that the information obtained in the interview remained confidential. Data were collected by conducting face-to-face, semi-structured interviews with each participant (Creswell, 2007). All initial interviews were completed in less than an hour and consisted of open-ended questions that were determined prior to the meeting (see Appendix H). The selected questions focused on gaining insight into each participant’s full experience related to the sexual assault, her beliefs about sexual assault, and her experiences when reporting. Other questions were asked at my discretion to gather pertinent information. Follow-up interviews were conducted after the initial interview to allow each participant to give further input or clarification and to substantiate the findings from the initial interview. Five of the six participants participated in follow-up interviews approximately four weeks after the initial interview. Due to issues with the remaining participant’s email account and scheduling conflicts, her follow-up interview was conducted
approximately eight weeks after the initial interview. Each participant was able to provide further input and substantiate findings. Each interview was audio recorded for verification of verbal content. I transcribed each interview to allow for the identification of themes (Creswell, 2007). I used Microsoft Word to transcribe the interviews by hand to allow for data analysis.

Data Analysis

An abbreviated version of the Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen method of analysis, as discussed by Moustakas (1994) and Creswell (2007), was used as a guide when analyzing my data. This method began with bracketing my experience with the phenomenon so the focus of the research could remain on the participants.

After I bracketed my personal experience and biases and conducted the interviews, each interview was transcribed. Each transcript was read with the purpose of identifying significant statements that address how the participants experienced the reporting process, a procedure referred to by Moustakas (1994) as horizomentalization. Each statement was considered as it related to the description of the experience. All relevant statements were recorded, and non-repetitive, non-overlapping statements called meaning units were listed. Then, the statements were categorized into groups called themes, and the Highlight feature, accompanied by the Comment feature, within Microsoft Word was used to document themes. Initially, each theme was color-coded on the transcription; however, due to the limitations in color coding options, the meaning units and themes along with their supporting quotes were placed into a table format for ease of viewing.

The themes identified and derived from the transcriptions were used to provide a “textural description” of what the participants experienced (Creswell, 2007; Moustakas, 1994). Textural description refers to what participants stated happened. Examples of the textural
descriptions were provided using verbatim quotes and include what was said to them during the reporting process and the feelings they experienced during the process. The “structural description” of the phenomenon was created next, providing a detailed explanation of how the phenomenon occurred (Creswell, 2007). Examples of structural descriptions included the location where the report was made, to whom the report was made, and/or duration of the reporting process. A textural-structural description of each participant’s experience was then constructed (Moustakas, 1994).

In accordance with Moustakas (1994), this same process was conducted for each participant’s transcript. To complete the analysis, the textural-structural descriptions from each participant were used to write a composite textural-structural description of the phenomenon to identify the essence of the experience for the group as a whole (Moustakas, 1994).

Validation

To verify the data collected, I used multiple validation strategies (Creswell, 2007). As the interviews were completed, documentation from the departments where the participants sought services was collected, when available. Participants were unable to provide documentation from their interactions with law enforcement officials or hospital visits. Printed material was obtained from campus police departments and university counseling centers which assist students who have experienced a sexual assault. The documentation collected from the listed sources was important because it provided another source of information that contributed to the identification of themes.

A second strategy of validation that I used throughout the data collection and analysis process was member checking (Creswell, 2007). Participants were contacted after the transcriptions and analyses were completed and invited to review the transcriptions and examine
the findings. Because there were only six participants, after all participants had been interviewed each participant was contacted once analysis of her individual data was completed. The written analysis was emailed to the participants. All identifying information was removed from the transcript to protect confidentiality, and each transcript was titled with a pseudonym of the participant’s choosing. Participants were given the opportunity to meet again to discuss the analysis if they so desired; however, none of the participants requested a follow-up meeting.

A third strategy of validation that I used was an external auditor to review how the study was conducted, as well as the final product, to assess for accurate interpretations and data-supported conclusions (Creswell, 2007). I recruited an associate to read through my composed descriptions with the aim of supplying a different perspective on the findings. The person who was chosen as the external auditor for this study is a qualitative researcher who holds a doctoral degree and has expertise in phenomenological research. To further reduce potential bias, this person had no connection to my research study prior to the request for services. The auditor signed a confidentiality statement before data were discussed (see Appendix I).

A forth validation strategy I used was peer debriefing (Creswell, 2007). I chose this method because the focus of my research is a sensitive topic, and I viewed it as necessary for someone to objectively monitor my experience as the researcher. I believe it is important to make sure that someone holds me accountable for managing my biases, as well as emotions, appropriately, given the nature of the phenomenon under observation. I called upon a peer whom I know and trust to ask the difficult questions about my research, as well as provide a listening ear when needed. The identified peer and I both kept written documentation of our “peer debriefing sessions” (Creswell, 2007, p. 208). In conjunction with this method, I also kept a
personal journal to document thoughts and feelings I interpreted as related to the research process. The peer debriefer also signed a confidentiality statement before data was discussed.

**Summary**

In this chapter, I presented the design of this phenomenological study. Included were a discussion of phenomenological design and a justification for its use. Research questions, participants, and procedures were addressed in detail. Data collection, the data analysis plan, and validation procedures were also explained.
CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

The purpose of the study was to illuminate the shared experience of college women who reported the crime of sexual assault to law enforcement officials. In order to determine the essence of the participants’ experiences, a phenomenological design was utilized and conceptualized through the feminist ethos. Interviews with survivors of sexual assault were conducted in a semi-structured format to better understand the phenomenon of reporting the crime. Each interview was transcribed verbatim, and the transcripts were emailed to the participants to check for accuracy and to clarify any misstatements. An abbreviated version of the Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen Method of Analysis of Phenomenological Data was used to analyze the data, which provided structure for the data analysis process (Creswell, 2007; Moustakas, 1994).

In chapter four, a summary of the data analysis procedures for the study is provided first. An analysis for each of the six participants narratives is presented, which includes the textural, structural, and textural-structural descriptions for each of the participants. Following is the composite textural-structural description for all of the participants, which speaks to the essence of the participants’ experiences for the group as a whole. Next, the validation strategies are summarized, and then a discussion of the findings as they answer the research questions is provided. A discussion of the additional findings is included to end chapter.

Summary of Data Analysis Procedures

An in-depth analysis of the transcribed interview for each participant was conducted. In order to protect the confidentiality of the participants, each woman was given the opportunity to choose a pseudonym to be used throughout the study and all identifying information was
removed or altered. The participants’ experiences are discussed in the same sequence as the interviews were conducted, beginning with Jeané and ending with Jasmine. Following the steps of the Modification of the Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen Method of Analysis of Phenomenological Data, each transcript was read carefully with the intent of identifying statements considered significant as they appeared related to the description of the experience of reporting sexual assault to law enforcement. Each transcript was read multiple times and equal value was given to each statement, a process known as horizontalization (Moustakas, 1994). As I read each transcript, I highlighted the significant statements, called meaning units (Moustakas, 1994), and labeled each using the Comment feature in Microsoft Word. Then the meaning units were copied from the original transcript to a one-column table for ease of viewing. As the number of meaning units began to grow, themes started to emerge (Moustakas, 1994), at which point a second column was added to label themes. From there, the rows of the table documenting the meaning units were moved to be grouped by themes.

Textural descriptions were written for each participant using verbatim quotes to illustrate each woman’s lived experience in reporting sexual assault to law enforcement officials. The textual descriptions were reviewed and used to compose the structural description of each participant’s experience (Moustakas, 1994). The structural descriptions gave detailed explanations of how the phenomenon occurred and how each woman was made meaning of the experience (Creswell, 2007; Moustakas, 1994). From the textural and structural descriptions of each participant’s transcriptions, a textural-structural description was formed that provided the essence of each experience (Moustakas, 1994). After a textural-structural description was written for each participant, a composite textural-structural description of all participants’ experiences
was created that integrated “all individual textural-structural descriptions into a universal
description of the experience representing the group as a whole” (Moustakas, 1994, p.122).

Participant Descriptions

Jeané

Jeané was the first participant interviewed and was the only participant recruited by a
gatekeeper. The analysis of her interview transcript revealed four themes with twelve meaning
units (see Table 4.1). The first three themes (Making the Decision to Report, Internal Experience
of the Reporting Process, and Following the Report) contribute to the textural description, and
the final theme (Making the Report) contributes to the structural description of the experience of
reporting sexual assault to law enforcement officials for Jeané.

Textural Description for Jeané

Making the decision to report. Theme one, Making the Decision to Report, discusses
the events that contributed to Jeané making the decision to report. Theme one consists of three
meaning units: (a) Delays in Reporting, (b) Encouragement from Others, and (c) Reasons to
Report.

Jeané described the reasons for the Delays in Reporting and explained that she did not
immediately realize that she had been sexually assaulted. When she woke the following morning
she found that her ankle was badly injured and she was having difficulty walking. She was taken
to the hospital by campus police. Jeané explained:

Well, I was more focused on my ankle. So the woman who was working at the front desk
saw me coming in. And she, - My ankle was three times the size, and I couldn’t walk, and
she saw that. So, I hadn’t left my room and I didn’t really intend to go anywhere, um, and
she came up to check on me, and basic - She was like, you need to go to the hospital. So,
they called campus police to take me to the hospital about my ankle, and then when I went to the hospital, (pause) I was trying to tell… my parents what happened, and (pause)
- And I didn’t really know. So, um, (pause) naturally they were… freaking out. And that’s when I told the doctor. When I…explained it to him, and he was like, well you were probably…sexually assaulted. (pause) But then I found out that there was only one hospital in [city] that can do rape kits, and it wasn’t the one I was at.

Jeané’s doctor graduated from her university and he asked if he could contact the school on her behalf. Jeané stated, “I said I didn’t really care if he did. I didn’t intend to do anything because I didn’t know.” It was not until the next day that Jeané was examined for sexual assault.

Table 4.1

Themes and Meaning Units for Jeané

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes (Textural)</th>
<th>Meaning Units</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Making the Decision to Report</td>
<td>Delays in Reporting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Encouragement from Others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reasons to Report</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internal Experience of the Reporting Process</td>
<td>Perceptions of Off-Campus Police</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Defending Herself to the Officers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Responses to Reporting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>View of Reporting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Following the Report</td>
<td>Campus Adjudication Process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Learning the Police Did Not Follow Protocol</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Details Still Unknown</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes (Structural)</th>
<th>Meaning Units</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Making the Report</td>
<td>Contribution to the Report: Campus and Off-Campus Police</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Police Actions: Campus and Off-Campus Police</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Physical Space</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Initially, Jeané did not want to report the sexual assault because she did not know exactly what happened to her. Her ankle was badly broken and she needed to return home out of state to have surgery to repair the damage, which caused her to miss most of the semester. Jeané never regained her memory of that night and was still hesitant to report. She explained, “I was so scared that I would be in trouble if that isn’t what happened, that I couldn’t say that, and also… afraid to admit that could have happened to me. I didn’t want to accept it at that point.” Jeané returned to campus a couple months later.

Jeané received Encouragement from Others and made the decision to report soon after her return to campus. She stated, “A lot of people had encouraged me to, you know, if I was going to do something.” She also spoke about the encouragement she received from her counselor. She explained, “The original reason I even went to the hospital was because, um… [counselor] encouraged me. She was like, well, this probably wasn’t the first time this happened, and if they can get away with it then it probably won’t be the last.”

Jeané identified multiple Reasons to Report the sexual assault once she returned to campus. She explained her return:

I had decided that I didn’t want to lose a semester because…I transferred, and I wanted to be serious about school and graduate. Um, but when I came back - When it came to coming back… I was really, really terrified (laughs), and I just kept having panic attacks, and I was really scared to even leave my room or go anywhere. Um, but I went to classes and stuff, but then, (pause) I was going to class one day and I ran into one of the guys. And he just… looked at me (pause), and I decided right then that… I didn’t (pause) - Like, that I needed to say something because I didn’t want to…be in this position where I was afraid to go to class.
She was concerned about the other women who might experience a sexual assault if she did not say something. She explained:

I had this day where I was going to class, and I was... terrified, and I didn’t even want to walk across campus, and I was scared, and in my head I was like, I need to... do something, not only for me but also because this probably isn’t the first time this happened and if I don’t say anything then they can do it again. And so that was a big motivation for me, was like, I don’t want this to happen to anyone else, so I’m going to say something and put myself at risk.

Jeané was also bothered by the response she received from others who were with her the night of the assault. She had just recently met the people she was with that night and they did not seem to understand what happened. She stated, “Just the fact that they, the people that were there with me, didn’t even (pause) care, too. ... I just felt like they didn’t - Like they didn’t care; like nobody believed me.”

After seeing the perpetrator on campus, Jeané made the decision to report to law enforcement. She explained:

I mean, it was mostly just running into him on my way to French class and realizing… - And he looked at me, and he looked sort of surprised to see me, and I just felt… so, (pause) like, weak. And, um, I guess that was mostly it.

**Internal experience of the reporting process.** Theme two, Internal Experience of the Reporting Process, addresses how Jeané experienced reporting the sexual assault. Theme two includes four meaning units: (a) Perceptions of Off-Campus Police, (b) Defending Herself to the Officers, (c) Responses to Reporting, and (d) Views of Reporting.
Jeané had very negative Perceptions of Off-Campus Police. The campus police contacted the city police who interviewed Jeané regarding the assault. The city police officers arrived some hours later. Jeané explained how she did not believe that she was being taken seriously and they acted as if they did not believe her. She stated, “I mean, basically, they accused me of drinking too much, which is not what happened because I literally had one drink.” She continued, stating “Well, they kind of made me feel like I was wasting their time. Like, they had better things, more important things to be doing than talking to me.” Jeané explained that not only did she not think they believed her, but that she would be to blame if something did happen.

Jeané described a particularly difficult point when reporting. She explained that the officers contacted the perpetrator and had him come to the station. They asked her questions regarding the assault with the perpetrator present. She described the scenario:

The fact that they just had him there and were talking to him and telling me what he said was like, (pause) - That might have been one of the worst parts, despite [the officer] telling me that he drank too much and didn’t know how he got home and got his clothes off. And his general demeanor, and just being really (pause) - I don’t know how to describe it, outside of saying he was an asshole. Jeané explained, “For the amount of time they were there, I got spoken to very little.” She also believed they were pushing her to doubt what she knew to be true. She understood their actions to mean that they could not do anything for her.

During the interview, Jeané recalled Defending Herself to the Officers. She heard from the officers repeatedly that she should have reported sooner. She described her response and stated, “I was like, I wasn’t here. I was in another state getting surgery on my ankle that was broken when you were telling me nothing happened to me.”
Jeané described her Response to Reporting. She explained that she did not feel safe during the process. Her general response was:

I just felt like nobody believed me, and like it wouldn’t, it didn’t matter. And then I was doubting myself. (...) At the end… I felt bad that… I made the campus police stay there and made this big deal at school, and… I… used people’s time.

Jeané discussed her View of Reporting and described it as “just terrible.” She explained feeling uncomfortable and stated, “It was really uncomfortable. Well, first, there were three male officers, and I was reporting a sexual assault, and I felt extremely uncomfortable.” Along with the difficulty of the process, Jeané also felt like it was a waste of her time.

**Following the report.** Theme three, Following the Report, addresses what occurred following the reports she made to campus and off-campus police. Theme three consists of three meaning units: (a) Campus Adjudication Process, (b) Learning the Police Did Not Follow Protocol, and (c) Details Still Unknown.

Jeané discussed the Campus Adjudication Process that she experienced. She explained that the university scheduled a misconduct hearing after she reported the sexual assault to campus police and her mother contacted the Dean of Students. She explained that they initially scheduled the hearing while she was out of town for spring break. She reported:

I really needed to go home because I needed to not be here for a little while, and then they were like, well, you can just call in, and I just thought that didn’t make any sense for me to just call in because I thought it would seem like I didn’t, like I wasn’t taking it seriously, so I said no, I’d rather do it when I get back.
She described the hearing as “incredibly disorganized.” She discussed the questions she was asked regarding her medication and sexual history at the hearing and described the questioning as “really weird.”

She was never contacted by the university following the misconduct hearing and was never informed of the panel’s decision. She still sees the perpetrator on campus.

She described the adjudication process and what followed. She stated:

[It was] also terrible because, it was like - At that point, I was just like, well… (pause) - I just felt like it didn’t matter at all, like, anything that happened to me. Like, I was realizing that I would never find out what happened, and I didn’t think there was anything I can do, basically, further. I - So I started going to counseling for myself because I didn’t think - I just didn’t think there was anything I was going to be able to do. And it really - It was a really bad feeling for me, for my school to kind of just... seem to not care. Like, and I see the people that were in the hearing and part of it, like the administration, and, um, (pause)... all the time because they’re administration and I’m fairly involved in campus stuff,… but you know, no one’s ever said anything to me about it again.

She continued her description, stating “I just felt like I was constantly being violated at school and nobody cared.”

Jeané described Learning the Police Did Not Follow Protocol from her psychologist while in counseling. She explained:

He was telling me that that’s, you know, if I was in another state, then when I went to the hospital… a doctor would have been there, like him, and the police there and I was just really upset that there was this procedure that was supposed to happen and just didn’t
happen at all, and I had to actively seek these things out on my own. So, that was… frustrating for me.

She also described Details Still Unknown by indicating that some report had been filed, but she was not sure what exactly. She stated:

So they gave me my stuff back, and they gave me… a case number because I guess they filed something but not anything, and then that was the end of it. Um, and the campus police… took me back to my dorm, and as far as reporting to the police, that was the last time I talked to them.

**Structural Description for Jeané.**

**Making the report.** Theme four, Making the Report, describes the events that took place as Jeané made her report. Theme four includes three meaning units: (a) Contribution to the Report: Campus and Off-Campus Police, (b) Police Actions: Campus and Off-Campus Police, and (c) Physical Space.

Jeané discussed her Contribution to the Report: Campus and Off-Campus Police. While Jeané was at home recovering from her surgery, she wrote a letter to campus police regarding the assault. She never heard from them. When she returned to campus and made the report, she was informed that the letter had been sent to the wrong department. Campus police referred her to make her report to the city police and contacted them on her behalf. While they waited the few hours for city police to arrive, Jeané directed an officer to the house where the assault occurred since she could not remember the address.

When the city police officers arrived, she tried to answer their questions the best she could. She stated, “I was just saying,... I didn’t know. I didn’t know what happened. I was just saying what I did know.” Just as she tried to give the nurses the clothes she was wearing when
she was assaulted, she tried to give her clothes to the officers to possibly collect evidence. She had kept the clothing in a bag and hoped the articles of clothing might be of some use. Her discussion with the officers was the last time she spoke to city police.

Jeané took further issue with Police Actions: Campus and Off-Campus Police. Whereas campus police had been helpful in providing transportation to different places she needed to go, she explained that it took hours for the city police to arrive to interview her at the campus police station. While she waited, she could hear campus police officers outside the door talking, but no one was talking to her. She stated that when the first two city officers arrived, they asked her repeatedly if she has been raped. They then called the detective who worked crimes of a sexual nature. She reported the officers also contacted the perpetrator and asked him to come to the station. Jeané explained that the officer informed her that they spoke with the perpetrator and he said that nothing happened, and if she could not tell them what happened, then there was nothing they could do for her. They returned her clothes and gave her a case number. Campus police drove her back to her room. She did not hear from city police again.

Jeané described the Physical Space. She explained that she initially was sitting in what seemed like a “spare room” in the campus police department. She described the room, stating, “There was a table but there was also like a vending machine, I think, and there were tools and signs that they keep up for around campus that were sitting there.” She was then transferred to another room for the interview that was more like an office and “really cramped.”

**Textural-Structural Description for Jeané**

The experience of reporting for Jeané was far from positive or beneficial for her. From a textural perspective in Making the Decision to Report, she delayed reporting because initially she was more focused on getting treatment for her broken ankle. She was also unable to remember
the details of the assault, which left her doubting herself and fearful of making the report. With the encouragement from others, Jeané decided she should report because she was tired of feeling afraid on her campus and she was concerned for the other women she feared might be assaulted as well. Jeané vividly described her Internal Experience of the Reporting Process. She had very negative perception of the city police officers and did not believe that she was being taken seriously when being interviewed by them. She felt blamed for the incident and she could see the officers did not believe her and were pushing her to doubt her own experience. She defended herself to the officers when pushed. She felt unsafe and as if she was a waste of time for the officers and for other personnel who helped her through the process. Reporting was a very difficult and uncomfortable process for Jeané, which was compounded by the events Following the Report.

From a structural perspective, the experience of Making the Report consisted of her contribution to the report, the actions of the police officers, and the physical space where she was kept and interviewed. Jeané went to campus police a couple months after the sexual assault to report the incident. Campus police contacted the city police who arrived some hours later to take the report. While waiting, Jeané took a campus police officer to the house where the assault occurred and then continued to wait at the station after they returned to campus. Initially, two officers from the city police arrived to take her statement, and then they called the detective. Once the detective arrived she was interviewed in the presence of three male officers who asked her repeatedly if she had been raped. Because she never regained her memory of the night in question, she could not answer the question specifically. Jeané explained to them what she knew and gave them the clothing she was wearing when she was assaulted as evidence. The officers had the perpetrator report to the station for questioning and then continued to interview Jeané in
the presence of the perpetrator. The officer informed Jeané that the perpetrator reported nothing happened between them and unless she could definitively say that she was raped then there was nothing they could do. She did not tell the officer that she was raped. The officers returned her clothing, gave her a case number, and left. She never heard from the officers again. The aforementioned experience contributed to her overall description of the reporting process as “terrible”.

Cassandra

Cassandra was the second participant interviewed. Analysis of her transcript revealed four themes and nine meaning units, which can be found in Table 4.2. The first three themes (Making the Decision to Report, Internal Experience of the Reporting Process, and Following the Report) contribute to the textural description for Cassandra, and the last theme (Making the Report) addresses the structural description.

Table 4.2

Themes and Meaning Units for Cassandra

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes (Textural)</th>
<th>Meaning Units</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Making the Decision to Report</td>
<td>Delays in Reporting</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Reasons to Report</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internal Experience of the Reporting Process</td>
<td>Perceptions of Officers: Campus and Off-Campus Police</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Defending Herself to the Officers</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Responses to Reporting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Following the Report</td>
<td>Personal Impact of Reporting</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes (Structural)</th>
<th>Meaning Units</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Making the Report</td>
<td>Contribution to the Report: Campus and Off-Campus Police</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Police Actions: Campus and Off-Campus Police</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Physical Space</td>
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</table>
Textural Description for Cassandra

Making the decision to report. Theme one, Making the Decision to Report, discusses how Cassandra came to her decision to report the sexual assault to law enforcement officials. Theme one includes two meaning units: (a) Delays in Reporting and (b) Reasons to Report.

Cassandra discussed the Delays in Reporting, explaining that she did not immediately report the sexual assault for different reasons. She and the perpetrator had gone on a couple of dates before the night he raped her. She explained, “His father is a very prominent…psychiatrist, um, so I was afraid to really do, do anything at first.” She was also concerned that because she did not go to the hospital, there was no physical evidence. She described the perpetrator as a barrier as well. She stated, “He was very manipulative. And he was like, you know, no one will believe you.” She also spoke about acceptance of the fact that she was raped. She stated, “And it’s a hard thing to even just - You have to accept it first, kind of.”

She was concerned not only about being believed, but also about her family. She described her concerns:

I was scared about no one believing me, my mother being upset, and my father going to kill this guy (chuckles). Because, like I was saying, he’s into vigilante justice. He would kill him in a heartbeat for hurting his only daughter.

Cassandra also considered the outcome of going to court over the matter. She believed that because there was no evidence, it would be his word against hers and she did not want to “waste the money on a court fee or anything.” She spoke about her decision not to pursue a case:

You know what, I needed to focus more on building myself back up instead of having that type of experience where they’re like, well what were you wearing at this time. You know? Um, why did you choose to go in the car with him? You know, no one witnessed
him slap me. Um, I didn’t have anything that, you know - Innocent until proven guilty. I had nothing that would prove it beyond a reasonable doubt. So, I took it very logically. I stepped out of my emotions and took it very logically and thought - I wouldn’t do it again because it would have just taken up time and money, and he would have won the case. His dad had enough money to hire a lawyer that would be able to easily dismiss any of my claims because they weren’t necessarily like, oh your jeans are ripped, well sometimes people have rough sex, you know. So, um, I, uh, I decided against it, and I agree with that decision.

She was also concerned that her extended family would learn what happened to her.

Cassandra discussed her Reasons to Report the sexual assault to law enforcement. She explained that had he left her alone, she never would have gone to the police. However, his continued harassment left her feeling unsafe. She stated, “I was afraid that he was coming after me again.” She also reported to the police for protection. She explained, “I wanted some sort of protection from it occurring again. I didn’t need retribution.” She further explained, “I just wanted him to stop, so I went to try to get a restraining order.”

**Internal experience of the reporting process.** Theme two, Internal Experience of the Reporting Process, addresses what Cassandra experienced while making the report to campus police and to the city police. Theme two includes three meaning units: (a) Perceptions of Officers: Campus and Off-Campus Police, (b) Defending Herself to the Officers, and (c) Responses to Reporting

Cassandra described her Perceptions of Officers: Campus and Off-Campus Police. She initially went to campus police because she lived so close to the station on campus. She explained that, when she made the report, the officer wanted to “blow it over.” She explained,
“They asked all the questions that, I feel, a misogynistic man would ask.” She described the officers’ actions:

Because we had couple dates at first, and so that’s why it would be hard because I knew him, and no one believes date rape’s real. I feel. Like, you have to be attacked with a gun, in the middle of the night for someone to take you seriously. Um, because if you knew the person, it’s like, well, what did you do to make him act that way? And it’s pretty terrible, and that was kind of how they acted with me.

She believed that the officer who interviewed her thought it was her own fault that she was raped.

Cassandra felt as if the officer treated her “like a child” or a student who had done something wrong. She explained:

He asked the simplest questions. He acted like I was wasting his time because it happened so long ago and I didn’t tell anyone. He was acting like I was wasting his time, that I was out of my mind that I would think something would happen again, you know, oh these are just text messages, you know, but - You know, and so he was just treating me as if I was wasting his time.

She reported that the officer did not “seem to identify, or connect, or have that compassion” that she needed when making the report. She also believed his recommendations for her were based on her gender. She stated, “And he just seemed like I should be this pristine little girl and just stay in-doors and go to class.” In the end, the campus police did provide her with some protection in that they banned the perpetrator from campus. She stated, “So, they did handle it; they did accomplish what I was asking.”
Cassandra also went to the city police to report the harassment with the hopes of getting a restraining order. She met with a female police officer whom she viewed as much more understanding. Although the officer was nice and respectful to her, they explained that there was nothing they could do because she had no physical proof other than text messages. She explained, “The woman was trying to help me, but she was like, legally, we really can’t.” Cassandra reported that she did “get the blow off” from the city police, but they did not treat her harshly as campus police had done.

Cassandra discussed Defending Herself to the Officers on campus when filing the report. When the officer asked her why she came to them instead of telling her mother, she was appalled. She stated the following:

I was like, my mother? I’m a grown woman (...) but that is not what this is about. This is about me being physically in danger. I feel physically in danger. My mom’s not going to be able to take a man out.

She went on to explain to the officer that she would tell her mother when she was ready to tell her that she had been raped and continued to emphasize that she needed protection. The officer told her that she should have changed her number, and Cassandra explained the multiple reasons why she could not and would not change her number. She also explained to the officer how she would continue to live her life despite his opinion on the precautions she should take as a female.

Cassandra described her Responses to Reporting. She explained that she became very angry with campus police. She stated, “I was seeing red at the end of that (laughs). I was like, this is what, what my tuition goes to!?”. She further explained that she resented the treatment she received. She reported that felt small and stated, “It made me feel like, um, it was my fault, when
I know it wasn’t.” She described her overall view, stating, “What needed to happen, happened, but the process was humiliating.”

**Following the report.** Theme three, Following the Report, describes Cassandra’s experience following the report and includes one meaning unit: Personal Impact of Reporting. Cassandra explained that her beliefs about police officers have changed. She explained, “Honestly, I don’t call the police for anything anymore.” She also took time to educate herself on legal proceedings of sexual assault cases. Looking back, she would not report her sexual assault to law enforcement officials.

**Structural Description for Cassandra**

**Making the report.** Theme four, Making the Report, addresses the structural details of Cassandra’s reporting process. Theme four consists of three meaning units: (a) Contribution to the Report: Campus and Off-Campus Police, (b) Police Actions: Campus and Off-Campus Police, and (c) Physical Space.

Cassandra discussed her Contribution to the Report: Campus and Off-Campus Police. She explained the she initially went to campus police approximately four months after the sexual assault and asked if she could file a report with them. She was unsure since the rape did not occur on campus and the perpetrator was not a student. She explained:

I didn’t go into detail with them. I just said, well he raped me, he sexually assaulted me, and, um, now he’s harassing me, and he knows where I live, and he knows where I go to school, and he knows my major,

She explained to the officer who interviewed her that she did not want to press charges, but she did want protection on campus. She was able to provide a picture of the perpetrator to campus police so that they could identify him should he return to campus.
Cassandra reported to the city police four to five weeks after reporting to campus police because the harassing and threatening behavior escalated. She went to the city police seeking a restraining order and did not intend to tell them about the rape after her experience with campus police. When asking for the restraining order, she showed the officer the threatening text messages. When told the text messages were not enough evidence, she questioned the officers and then informed them that she had pictures she had taken of her injuries from when he attacked her. She eventually disclosed that she was sexually assaulted, but she refused to allow them to add it to the report for fear that the State would take on the case.

Cassandra spoke about Police Actions: Campus and Off-Campus Police. When she reported to campus police, the officer initiated the interview by asking what happened. When Cassandra explained that she had been physically and sexually assaulted and was being harassed at the time, the officer asked why she came to them instead of telling her mother. She explained that this officer asked questions regarding her behavior and the choices she made. The officer spoke about the timeliness of the report. Cassandra stated, “They were like, you didn’t report it right away so it’s really not our problem.” Cassandra explained that the officer told her that she needed to change her number and gave her advice on how to protect herself. She stated:

So, and he pushed it so hard; he pushed - He pushed a lot of like, well, don’t wear any more short skirts, and I was like, I’m not wearing a short skirt! (laughs) Like, you know? He pushed, you know, like, be in bed by 8:00, like, stuff like that.

The officer also spoke about his son and how he would let his son go out because it is safer for men. At the end of the interview, the officer informed Cassandra that they could not press charges but they could try to keep him off campus. They accepted the picture she provided and told her to contact them if he came on campus so they could escort him off.
The city police officer spoke with Cassandra in a different manner. When she showed the officer the line of threatening text messages, the officer empathized with her and apologized for their inability to help her. She explained how the evidence that Cassandra had would not be admissible to court and that it was not enough for the department to grant a restraining order. The officer recommended that she consider wearing a wig at times to “not look like” herself when out. The officer also told her to keep them informed if his behavior escalated further.

Cassandra described the Physical Space of the campus police department, beginning with the glass window that people approach when entering the facility. She explained that she was interviewed in an office that felt like a professor’s office.

**Textural-Structural Description for Cassandra**

The experience of reporting for Cassandra was mostly negative. From a textural perspective in Making the Decision to Report, Cassandra initially delayed reporting to law enforcement because she was concerned no one would believe her. The perpetrator informed her of his father’s prominent position in the community, which heightened her concerns regarding others believing her. In addition to the concern for her family, Cassandra also had difficulty accepting that she could have been sexually assaulted. Cassandra described her Internal Experience of the Reporting Process as she expressed her overall negative perception of the campus police officers. Cassandra felt as if the officers were blaming her for the sexual assault. She detected the misogyny present in the officer’s line of questioning and felt as if she were being reprimanded by an instructor. The officer was harsh with her and offered no emotional connection through the reporting process. She defended herself to the officer when her actions were questioned at times during the interview. She viewed the officers from the city police as more helpful, but it was still evident that she would not receive the protection she was seeking.
Her response to reporting was mainly that of outrage, as well as feeling small, blamed, and dismissed. She shared her negative views of police officers Following the Report, which contributes to no longer calling them for assistance.

Cassandra’s account of Making the Report contributes to her structural description. Approximately four months after the sexual assault occurred, Cassandra went to campus police to seek protection from the perpetrator. She explained to the officer that she had been physically and sexually assaulted by the perpetrator and that his continued harassment made her fearful for her safety. She also supplied the officers with a picture of the perpetrator to assist with the ban from campus. The officer responded to her requests by asking why she came to them and not her mother, enlightening her on how he treated his son, as well as offering recommendations on how to protect herself, such as changing her phone number, when to be in bed, and what to wear. In the end, campus police did issue a ban from campus against the perpetrator. When reporting to city police, Cassandra asked for a restraining order and also tried to offer evidence of the harassment. The city officers informed her that there was nothing they could do for her without more substantial evidence. They also recommended that she try to not look like herself when she went out.

**Amanda**

Amanda was the third participant interviewed and the analysis of her transcript revealed five themes consisting of fourteen meaning units. The identified themes and supporting meaning units can be found in Table 4.3. The first three themes (Making the Decision to Report, Internal Experience of the Reporting Process, and Following the Report) contribute to the textural description, and the last two themes (Initiating the Reporting Process and Making the Report) address the structural description for Amanda.
### Themes and Meaning Units for Amanda

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes (Textural)</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>Encouragement from Mother</td>
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<td>Reasons to Report</td>
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<td>Perceptions of Officers: Campus and Off-Campus Police</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Police Actions: Campus and Off-Campus Police</td>
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**Textural Description for Amanda**

**Making the decision to report.** Theme one, Making the Decision to Report, addresses the events that contributed to Amanda making the decision to report. Theme one consists of four meaning units: (a) Delays in Reporting, (b) Encouragement from Mother, and (c) Reasons to Report.

Amanda mentioned her Delays in Reporting. She did not report her sexual assault until the day following the assault. She explained, “I thought it was my fault and because nothing had actually, that I hadn’t actually been raped, that it wasn’t something that had to be reported or that it wouldn’t be reported.” She went to work the day following the assault and made the report
after leaving work. She also discussed the Encouragement from Mother. She explained that her mother was very supportive and stated, “My mom said, no, you have to say something, you have to - We have to report it.” She further explained her mother’s concern for her safety, stating “I agreed with her when she said, this shouldn’t have happened [Amanda]. You could’ve been hurt.”

Amanda discussed her Reasons to Report. She expressed her concerns about seeing the perpetrator. She stated, “I just thought, what if he turns up? He said he’s a student here. He said he’s a student on campus. What if he turns up at school and I don’t know what happened.” She wanted to report for her mother as well. She explained, “I could see that she was thinking that it could have been rape, and I couldn’t just do - I couldn’t not do it just for me; I had to do it for her, too, for her peace of mind.”

**Internal experience of the reporting process.** The second theme, Internal Experience of the Reporting Process, discusses how Amanda experienced reporting the sexual assault. Theme two includes three meaning units: (a) Perceptions of Officers: Campus and Off-Campus Police, (b) Responses to Reporting, and (c) Views of Reporting.

Amanda’s Perceptions of Officers: Campus and Off-Campus Police varied. She reported to the Sherriff’s Office first because of her mother’s relationship with the officer. The officer who came to her mother’s home to take the report was a friend of the family and Amanda knew him. She explained that he was nice when taking the report. She stated, “the officer from [off-campus], he was good about it. I mean, part of it probably was that he knew us, but probably because he’s seen a lot of other stuff like that happen.” The officer made a joke about Amanda’s involvement in the sexual assault and she explained, “I knew he was just trying to make light of
it to make me feel better because he saw how upset I was. It was probably the worst thing he could have done was make a joke.”

When she reported to campus police, her experience was different. She spoke about the time taken with her. She stated, “I guess they were either busy or in a hurry because there wasn’t much time taken with it in comparison to the [off-campus] officer where I lived.” She shared her beliefs about campus police based on the interaction and stated, “I guess the college campus police they don’t see as much, so I guess they don’t know how to handle it.”

Amanda described her Responses to Reporting, expressing multiple and sometimes conflicting feelings. She explained feeling nervous toward the beginning and also feeling numb and unsure of how to feel. She discussed her feelings of guilt, stating, “I felt guilty. And even though I think it’s not your fault. This isn’t something you can control. I felt like it was.” She expressed feeling lucky when reporting to off-campus police because she knew them personally, which was followed by feelings of fear when she learned the perpetrator would be informed that a complaint was filed against him. She explained:

I think that part scared me more. Or at least knowing that he knew I was pressing charges scared me... Because if he was telling the truth and if he was a student, then what’s to say he wouldn’t find me on campus.

Amanda explained her thought process when taking the report to campus police. She stated:

I kept thinking I don’t want to have to explain this again. I don’t want to have to talk about it again. But I did want to talk about it again. I didn’t want someone to know what had happened, but I didn’t know what to say.

She further described her response when the campus police did not interview her. She explained, “On one hand there was some relief when they didn’t ask me anything about the papers I had
handed them. On the other, there was some disgust that they hadn’t taken more care.” Amanda reported that she did feel more secure at the time because someone else knew what happened.

Amanda discussed her Views of Reporting on those days. She explained that although the process was “kind of hard,” it was “not as traumatizing as, I guess, some people think it would be.” She reflected on how much worse the process would have been for her if she would have had to go to the police station to make the report. She explained:

That was good. Because I think that if I had to go to the police station, it would have been worse because more people would have known. More people would have wondered what happened, why I was at the police station. (...) To actually seen me go to the police station, I think that would have - That part would have been more scary. Having them come to me where I felt safe, that part helped.

She described the process on campus as “a lot less formal.”

**Following the report.** Theme three, Following the Report, describes what occurred following the report Amanda made to campus and off-campus police. Theme three consists of four meaning units: (a) General Views of Reporting Process, (b) Expectations about Reporting, (c) Personal Impact of Reporting, and (d) Details Still Unknown.

Amanda described her General Views of Reporting Process. She explained that “it’s not always so scary to report.” When asked what she would choose to share with others, she explained her views further:

Filing the report is not the worst part. It’s not the worst thing that’s happened to you that day. Or any day. Or that could happen to you any day. Report. Even though it makes it real, makes it out there, makes it so someone else knows about it. It also means that someone else knows about it. That someone else knows something happened to you, that
you’re not, (pause) you’re not alone in your head. Someone else probably understands and that these people have seen this before. You’re not the only person they’ve seen this happen to before. We’re not in the 1950s where a woman getting sexually assaulted was a scandal and the woman’s fault; it’s not that anymore. People don’t think that way anymore. You’re not alone. Just because you keep it to yourself; you’re alone if you do - if you don’t say anything.

Amanda also shared her Expectations about Reporting. She explained that her expectations had much to do with her experience of reporting. She addressed the role that television shows played in her understanding of the process. She stated, “I used to watch Law and Order: Special Victims Unit, and the victims always seemed so traumatized, even the ones who had only been grabbed like I had been.” She also expected to be interrogated, which she acknowledged did not happen. Her family affiliation with police officers also played a role in her view of the reporting process. She explained:

On one hand maybe I’m just overly used to a certain amount of attention from police officers because that’s how I grew up and that’s how it still happens now. (...) I just kind of expected more from the campus police, too, because I knew two of the officers here had graduated from [my father’s] class as well.

Amanda discussed the Personal Impact of Reporting she experienced. She explained how she felt at the time and stated, “To be honest, I had already had a lot of crap going on already. It was just one more thing.” She described that she did not feel unsafe having reported and she did not really think or talk much about the assault or reporting after her report concluded. She described Details Still Unknown, speaking about the report she gave to campus police. She stated, “I don’t know if they even read the paper; I just figured they added it to their files.”
Initiating the reporting process. Theme four, Initiating the Reporting Process, addresses the factors that contributed to the initiation of Amanda’s reporting experience. Theme four includes two meaning units: (a) Mother’s Involvement and (b) Affiliation with Police Officers.

Amanda spoke in great detail regarding her Mother’s Involvement in her reporting process. She explained that after she informed her mother of the sexual assault, her mother left work early and went directly to the grocery store where the assault occurred and started investigating. Because she knew the manager, she was allowed to see the security camera footage and based on Amanda’s description, she identified the perpetrator. It was at that time they discovered he had been following not only Amanda around the store, but other women as well, and he had also left the store for several minutes after Amanda left when he was supposed to be working.

Her mother then went home and called Amanda to her apartment where she spoke with her about writing her statement and making an official report. The following day her mother contacted the Sherriff’s Office and requested an officer she knew in the special victims’ unit to report to her house to take Amanda’s statement. She also requested that Amanda not wait too long to submit her report to campus police.

Amanda explained her Affiliation with Police Officers. Because her parents were once police officers, she grew up around officers and played with children of other officers. The family had a number of friends who had been or were currently police officers. Amanda explained that she knew the officer who interviewed her and had known him for a long time. When discussing her relationship to the officers, she stated, “We weren’t just some other victim;
we were their kids’ friends. We were another officer’s kid, even though my parents weren’t officers anymore.”

**Making the report.** The fifth theme, Making the Report, addresses what occurred as Amanda made her report to campus and off-campus police. Theme five includes two meaning units: (a) Contribution to the Report: Campus and Off-Campus Police and (b) Police Actions: Campus and Off-Campus Police.

Amanda discussed her Contribution to the Report: Campus and Off-Campus Police. She explained that she spoke with off-campus police the day following the assault after she got off of work. She requested to meet them at her mother’s apartment, where she presented the officers with the written statement she had completed prior to their arrival. In their presence she rewrote her statement and answered the officers’ questions. Three days later she took the documents she received from the off-campus officer to campus police. She explained to the person at the desk that there had been an incident involving a fellow student and she wanted to provide them with the report in the event something else happened. As she recalled, she handed the paperwork to a woman she believed to be a secretary and left.

Amanda also discussed the Police Actions: Campus and Off-Campus Police. She explained that the requested officer came to her mother’s apartment where she felt comfortable. She stated that the officers wasted no time and came right away. At the beginning the officer made a joke. Amanda explained:

He was just saying, Aww, what’d you do [Amanda]? Um, - I just know that it had to do with, you know, basically what I was thinking. You know, what did you do to - Did you - Were you flirting with him?
The officer had his materials organized and ready to begin the report. Amanda explained that he wanted her to answer some questions, allowed her to write her statement again, took her written statements, and asked her to take the copy of the report to campus police. He also informed her that the perpetrator would be sent a notice to inform him that charges were being brought up against him. Campus police did not ask Amanda any questions and to her knowledge did not review the report. She explained that the woman who took the report “just said okay, and put it to the side.”

**Textural-Structural Description for Amanda**

From a textural perspective, Amanda’s process of Making the Decision to Report was brief as she reported to the sheriff’s office the following day. She discussed her perceived delays in reporting, stating that she saw herself at fault and because she was not raped, the assault was not something to be reported. She explained that the support and encouragement from her mother was highly influential in making the report to police. Amanda agreed with her mother’s view that something worse could have happened and decided to report not only for herself but also for her mother. Amanda’s Internal Experience of the Reporting Process was influenced by her perceptions of the officers, which differed between off-campus and campus police. She described the interviewing officer from the sheriff’s office as nice and more attuned to her needs, even after he made a joke regarding her role in the sexual assault. She assumed that campus police must have been busy and less knowledgeable about sexual assault due to their inaction when submitting the sheriff’s office report. Amanda’s response to reporting consisted of many different and sometimes conflicting feelings, and although she did not view reporting as traumatizing, she did find that it was a somewhat difficult process.
Following the Report, Amanda surmised that reporting is not always scary or the worst part of the experience. She acknowledged her expectations about reporting were influenced by the attention from officers she was accustomed to receiving. Based on her interpretation of TV dramas, she also expected to be interrogated and traumatized; she experienced neither. Amanda discussed the virtually insignificant impact of reporting as “one more thing” she had to deal with at that particularly difficult time in her life. However, she was bothered by the fact that she never heard from campus police again and was still uncertain of what happened to the report she submitted.

From a structural perspective, Amanda’s mother was instrumental in Initiating the Reporting Process. Her mother logistically started the investigation and made the appropriate contacts to particular police officers with whom she had a professional relationship. Her mother also asked her to make a written statement before she was interviewed by the officers and requested that she take the sheriff’s office report to campus police quickly. In addition to her mother’s role, Amanda’s and her family’s affiliation with police officers was assistive in expediting the process and receiving supportive services from the sheriff’s office.

When Making the Report, Amanda met with the officers at her mother’s home the day following the assault. After her mother contacted the sheriff’s office, the officers arrived at her mother’s home promptly with the requested officer present. The officer started the interview with a joke at Amanda’s expense, but the rest of the interview remained professional. She submitted to the officer her written statement that she had completed the previous night and answered a few remaining questions posed by the officer. He then gave her time to write an additional statement. The officer informed Amanda that he would have to send a notice to the perpetrator telling him to cease contact with her and informing him of the charges being filed against him. He also gave
her a copy of the report to submit to campus police, which she did two days later. Amanda was unsure if the person who accepted her report was actually an officer or an administrative assistant. Regardless, the individual took the report and put it to the side without asking questions. The attention she received from campus police was considerably different than that of the sheriff’s officer.

Sonia Jane

Sonia Jane was the fourth participant interviewed, and the analysis of her interview showed five themes consisting of fifteen meaning units (see table 4.4). The initial three themes (Prior to Reporting, Internal Experience of the Reporting Process, and Following the Report) discuss the textural description of Sonia Jane’s experience reporting sexual assault to law enforcement officials. The final two themes (Obstacles to Reporting and Making the Report) address the structural description.

Textural Description for Sonia Jane

Prior to reporting. Theme one, Prior to Reporting, discusses the events that led to Sonia Jan reporting the sexual assault to police. Theme one consists of two meaning units: (a) Delays in Reporting and (b) Seeking Help.

Sonia Jane discussed the Delays in Reporting, as she did not intend to report to law enforcement. Following the sexual assault, Sonia Jane initially did not know what to do. She went to work the following morning and explained, “I just… hopped on the bus in the morning because I had to go to work.” After work, she “went to sleep for a few hours.” She described Seeking Help because she was in physical pain from her sexual assault. She went to her campus police station because she thought they could give her a ride to the hospital. She explained, “So I
know… okay, [campus police] is responsible, like they’ll… you know, they’ll help with that at least.”

Table 4.4

*Themes and Meaning Units for Sonia Jane*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes (Textural)</th>
<th>Meaning Units</th>
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<tr>
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<td>Delays in Reporting</td>
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<td>Seeking Help</td>
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<tr>
<td>Internal Experience of the</td>
<td>Perceptions of Officers: Campus and Off-Campus Police</td>
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<td>Responses to Reporting</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Views of Reporting</td>
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<td></td>
<td>View of Working with the Sketch Artist</td>
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<tr>
<td>Following the Report</td>
<td>General Views of Reporting Process</td>
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<td>General Views of Police Officers</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes (Structural)</th>
<th>Meaning Units</th>
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<tr>
<td>Obstacles to Reporting</td>
<td>Physical Injury Sustained During the Sexual Assault</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Knowledge of Resources</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Memory Loss</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Making the Report</td>
<td>Contribution to the Report: Campus and Off-Campus Police</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Police Actions: Campus and Off-Campus Police</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Assistance from Personnel</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Working with the Sketch Artist</td>
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**Internal experience of the reporting process.** Theme two, Internal Experience of the Reporting Process, addresses Sonia Jane’s experience while reporting the sexual assault. Theme two consists of four meaning units: (a) Perceptions of Officers: Campus and Off-Campus Police, (b) Responses to Reporting, (c) Views of Reporting, and (d) View of Working with the Sketch Artist.
Sonia Jane discussed her Perceptions of Officers: Campus and Off-Campus Police. She described the officer behind the desk at the campus police station, stating, “The guy who was answering the desk was such a fucking dick;… he was being so rude.” After disclosing her reason for requesting transportation to the hospital, Sonia Jane was interviewed by campus police. She had not intended to provide a statement to campus police, but she saw that campus police wanted their own statement. She described, “Yeah, it was like they wanted their own statement before they would really let me go to the hospital.” She did not hear from campus police regarding her statement after she left, which contributed to her perspective that nothing was done with the statement she gave the officers. She stated, “And they never did anything with [the statement].”

Sonia Jane was interviewed at the hospital by an officer from the city police department. She described the city police officer, stating, “she was just… really rude.” It also seemed to her that the officer saw her as being at fault for the assault. She reported, “She kind of, I felt like was implicating that I… - it was my fault because I was drinking and because I had smoked a bowl or whatever before.” She continued to explain how the officer made her feel bad, stating, “I feel like she made me feel bad for… not having everything… all together, like, I didn’t have a perfect picture.” She also indicated the police officer was accusatory, explaining, “I felt like she was accusatory, kind of. That’s how it felt from her.”

Sonia Jane discussed her Responses to Reporting. Initially she felt shaken by the process, and then she began to feel annoyed. After exhaustion set in, she reported, “I was just done.” She further explained, “I felt like it was going nowhere.” After giving her statement to campus police, Sonia Jane did not want to discuss the details again with the officer from city police. She described her perspective, stating, “I didn’t want to rehash the story. Like, can someone else just
do this? Because I’ve already done this… 25 times today.” She also explained that the officer was upsetting her with her questions.

Sonia Jane explained her Views of Reporting and described the process as upsetting and annoying. She explained that “nothing happened from it” when considering the reporting process as a whole. She further described the process as not helpful, and she stated, “It wasn’t really helpful; it didn’t actually help me at all.” In thinking about the purpose of reporting, she explained, “I thought it was useless.” She also discussed her View of Working with the Sketch Artist. She described the difficulty, and explained, “It was really hard because… everything was a blur. So to tell someone… who was trying to, you know, make a photograph in your mind when everything is fluid and moving. It’s not, it’s not easy.” She believed the sketch artists worked with her. She stated, “They worked with me more than the officer did, I would say.” She also shared her belief about sketch artists:

I feel that if you’re a sketch artist, you’re probably trained to… know different questions about… a person’s facial features. Like,… was the face more… Like, they can kind of lead you almost, I felt like.

Sonia Jane described her overall experience with the sketch artists and stated, “it was nerve-racking, but it was, it was okay.”

**Following the report.** The third theme, Following the Report, discusses her general views of reporting and officers following her report. Theme three consists of two meaning units: (a) General Views of Reporting Process and (b) General Views of Police Officers.

Sonia Jane gave her General Views of Reporting Process and discussed that reporting is not going to fix the problem of rape. She explained, “And reporting is, like, it’s not going to fix the problem. It’s not going to, it’s not going to fix it, I don’t think.” She also explained that
reporting would not “make [rape] go away.” She explained how rapists are not caught and stated, “Half the time, or more often than not, rapists aren’t caught, and once they are, they are seldom prosecuted.” She shared that she believes rape goes unreported due to rape culture and explained, “I think so many rapes go unreported because of rape culture as a whole and victim blaming and slut shaming.” She went on to highlight the still-present need for reporting to the system. She stated, “You have to report it because you want, you know, you want to go through the system, you want to put that in the system.” She also included her view that reporting will not make the rape better. She stated, “[Reporting is] not going to make the rape better. It doesn’t help with that.” She indicated that she is unsure what will help.

Sonia Jane also shared her General Views of Police Officers. She described her overall view of officers:

Officers aren’t always [understanding]. They’re not always supportive, and sometimes they are, like, misogynistic douchebags and they do think it’s your fault, and they will blame you, so, which shouldn’t be right.

She then explained that officers should not be employed in law enforcement if that is their mindset.

**Structural Description for Sonia Jane**

**Obstacles to reporting.** Theme four, Obstacles to Reporting, describes the factors that prohibited Sonia Jane from reporting to law enforcement. Theme four includes three meaning units: (a) Physical Injury Sustained During the Sexual Assault, (b) Knowledge of Resources, and (c) Memory Loss.

Sonia Jane described the Physical Injury Sustained During the Sexual Assault. She expressed that she initially went to the campus police station because of her injuries. She explained that she
felt disoriented and explained, “I was… super out of it.” She continued to explain the pain and stated:

I was in a lot of pain, like, just everywhere hurt. Like, you know when you get in a car accident? You’re really sore… everywhere hurt, my head hurt… my back… my shoulders, probably where they grabbed me,… really hurt.

She also discussed her Knowledge of Resources. Sonia Jane was not from the area and was uncertain of the local hospitals since she had never been to any of them. However, she had learned previously that students could get a medical transport to the hospital by campus police.

Sonia Jane discussed her Memory Loss. When being interviewed at the hospital, Sonia Jane explained that there were details of the sexual assault that were not fresh in her mind and details she could not recall. She explained the following:

Like, how I got in the van I was unsure about and I still don’t… know how I got out of the van, like, if they dropped me off or if I… got out myself and ran…. I have no idea, and I don’t think I’ll ever know that because it’s been… a year and a half, so.

The officer contacted her some days later by phone asking if she remembered anything more. Sonia Jane explained that at the time she did not.

Making the report. Theme five, Making the Report, describes the events that took place as Sonia Jane made her report to campus and off-campus police. Theme five consists of four meaning units: (a) Contribution to the Report: Campus and Off-Campus Police, (b) Police Actions: Campus and Off-Campus Police, (c) Assistance from Personnel, and (d) Working with the Sketch Artist.

Sonia Jane discussed her Contribution to the Report: Campus and Off-Campus Police. She explained that she initially went to campus police at approximately 9:00 or 10:00 pm the
night following the assault and spoke to the officer behind the desk whom she asked to have someone take her to the hospital. When asked the reason, she informed the desk officer that she was raped. She was then interviewed by several officers and gave her statement multiple times. She explained, “I had to talk to… a bunch of [university] police officers over and over again.”

When asked, she declined to see the residential assistant on duty. She also gave her written statement to campus police. She explained, “And I was just… getting really annoyed because I had to, like, do… two written statements and repeat it over and over and over again before they would… take me to the hospital.” In the follow-up interview, Sonia Jane clarified that she gave one written statement to campus police and another written statement to the city police officer.

Sonia Jane was interviewed by a city police officer while she was at the hospital. During the interview, she told the officer to look for her wallet. She explained, “I was like, I’m telling you! Like, this is a one-of-a-kind wallet…. If you find this wallet, you’ll find the people…. I’m telling you.” She described waiting at the hospital for a long time while the paperwork was completed. When the officer came to her residence on campus a week or two later, she did not want to tell her story again. She stated, “then I was just like, why are you… - I told this story… five million times…. My story’s not just going to change… if that’s what you’re asking.” She informed the officer that she was okay and that she already completed her portion of the police report.

Sonia Jane described the Police Actions: Campus and Off-Campus Police. She explained the desk officer’s initial actions stating, “He didn’t want to help me…. he was doing something on the computer.” Once she told him her reason for being there, she saw that the desk officer’s attitude changed and he called the other officers. She reported that campus police contacted her
resident assistant and she spoke to multiple officers before they called the ambulance. She
explained the following:

I remember, first it was a guy who I told the story to, and I think he was the first one to
make me write it out, and then I think there were two girl officers, and then another guy
before they let me leave, or before they called the ambulance.

She reported that she believed it was also campus police who let the city police officers into her
room.

She also spoke about the officer she met with at the hospital. She explained the officer
would not listen to her about the wallet. She also explained how the officer questioned her
memory. She stated, “she was like, oh, so you don’t - So what do you mean? So you don’t
remember what, like you can’t give me a description… of these people? You don’t remember
exactly what happened?” She was also questioned about her actions. Sonia Jane explained, “The
police officer was just like, oh, and so you were drinking? And what else were you doing?” A
week or two after she made the report at the hospital, the officer who interviewed her at the
hospital was let into her residence while she was sleeping. She wanted to make sure Sonia Jane
was okay because she had not been in consistent communication with the police officer. Sonia
Jane explained, “She probably called me three or four times, and I talked to her twice.” While in
her room the officer asked if she remembered anything more and the officer wanted to know if
she was going to do more with her report. Sonia Jane remembered attempting to contact the
officer by phone, but the officer did not answer. She did not hear from the officer again after she
came to her room.
Sonia Jane spoke about receiving Assistance from Personnel when making her report. While at the hospital, the advocate assisting Sonia Jane spoke to her regarding her perception of the officer’s behavior. She explained:

And then one of the advocates who was there… who gets called in… for sexual assault people,… she was just like… - She took me aside, and she was like, I’m really sorry that this officer is acting like this…. I don’t condone… what she’s saying to you and I think she’s being very rude, but I mean, I have a different standpoint than she does. I think what she, she doesn’t mean to act like this, but her job is to collect evidence and to write down… solid facts.

She also stated that the nurses informed her of the flashbacks she may experience. Sonia Jane discussed Working with the Sketch Artist. When reporting at the hospital, Sonia Jane attempted to give a description of the perpetrators to a sketch artist. She was able to remember only some details and stated, “Everything was a blur.” The sketch artists asked her questions about the perpetrators, and she was unable to answer some questions.

Textural-Structural Description for Sonia Jane

Sonia Jane was the only participant interviewed who never intended to report her sexual assault to law enforcement officials. From a textural perspective in Prior to Reporting, she did not know what to do as she was initially very overwhelmed by emotion due to the egregious assault she experienced. Still unsure the morning following the assault, she went to work and tried to get some sleep once she returned home that afternoon. She ultimately decided to go to campus police that night to get transportation to the hospital for medical treatment. What followed contributed to Sonia Jane’s Internal Experience of the Reporting Process. The initial officer she approached for assistance was rude and she could see that he did not want to help her.
until she disclosed her reason for requesting transportation to the hospital. The officers on campus wanted their own statement before they would let her leave, and she assumed they never did anything with it since the sexual assault was out of their jurisdiction. The officer who interviewed her at the hospital and then intermittently contacted her the following two weeks was also rude. She felt the officer was implying that the assault was her fault and became upset with her when Sonia Jane could not remember certain details. Working with the sketch artist was very difficult because many details were unclear. However, Sonia Jane saw that the sketch artist was trying to work with her more so than the officer did, which made the experience tolerable.

Sonia Jane increasingly became annoyed by the officers with whom she was working and with the process in general. After hours of being interviewed and testing at the hospital, she became emotionally exhausted and tired of reporting the same details repeatedly. The officer’s questions began to upset her so much that she found it difficult to even speak to her. Over the days following the initial report, she began to feel as if reporting was pointless and the process was going nowhere. Following the Report, she expressed the importance of understanding that officers will not always be supportive and are often misogynistic. She also expressed her belief that reporting to law enforcement will not reduce the frequency of rapes as rapists are seldom caught and even less often prosecuted. She also indicated that reporting rape will not “make the rape better.”

From a structural perspective, the physical injuries she sustained during the assault, along with her limited knowledge of resources in the area and loss of memory, worked against her as Obstacles to Reporting, making the reporting process more difficult. Once she disclosed to the campus police officer her reason for requesting a medical transport, she was interviewed by multiple officers to obtain her statement, which initiated the process of Making the Report. Sonia
Jane gave her verbal statement multiple times to campus police and also gave a written statement before they called the ambulance to take her to the hospital. When interviewed at the hospital she gave the city police officer her statement, both verbally and in written form again, and told the officer to look for her one-of-a-kind wallet. The officer did not seem interested in the wallet and asked questions focusing on her inability to remember details and her use of substances prior to the assault.

While in the hospital, the nurses normalized her inability to remember details and told Sonia Jane to expect flashbacks. The victim’s advocate who was present for the exam took Sonia Jane to the side and apologized for the officer’s actions and tried to offer support. The sketch artists asked her to describe the perpetrators’ looks and tattoos. They understood and did not press when she was unable to give them details. The officer called her a few times after the initial interview in the hospital and asked for more information, which Sonia Jane informed her she did not have. A couple weeks after the initial interview, the city police officer was granted access to her room on campus by campus police to make sure she was okay and ask if she had more information. She informed the officer that she still did not. Sonia Jane tried to call the officer once after she came to her room. The officer did not answer or returned her call. She never spoke to the officer again.

**Alice**

Alice was the fifth participant interviewed. The analysis of her transcribed interview revealed fifteen meaning units grouped into four Making the Decision to Report, Internal Experience of the Reporting Process, and Following the Report) support the textural description of Alice’s experience, and the final theme (Making the Report) support the structural description (see Table 4.5).
Table 4.5

*Themes and Meaning Units for Alice*

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**Textural Description for Alice**

**Making the decision to report.** The first theme, Making the Decision to Report, addresses how Alice came to her decision to report the sexual assault to law enforcement officials. Theme one includes three meaning units: (a) Delays in Reporting, (b) Encouragement from Others, and (c) Reasons to Report.

Alice spoke about the Delays in Reporting. She explained that she initially did not want to charge the perpetrator and stated, “I didn’t want to charge him, like, through… [city] PD. I didn’t even want to charge him here [on campus].” She expressed concern regarding the
university’s view of sexual assault, stating, “I was afraid that… they were going to be like, oh, well, you can’t just say yes and decide that it’s rape.” Alice disclosed a previous incident she had experienced in high school and explained that school personnel had seemed to side with the other party involved. When considering reporting the sexual assault, she initially waited to report because she didn’t want to relive her previous experience. Alice also expressed her fear of the perpetrator’s report if he was interviewed. She explained, “I was afraid that they were going to talk to him, and he was going to be like, no, we just had sex, like, because, I mean, I don’t know if he thinks that.”

Alice described the Encouragement from Others she received. She explained that once she told her friends about the sexual assault, they encouraged her to report. They said to her, “you need to report it.” She continued to explain that others want the crime to be reported by saying, “everybody wants you to report it, you know, because they want them to be found guilty and be in trouble.”

Alice also discussed her Reasons to Report. Initially she explained that she thought what happened to her was not fair. She also wanted to inform others of the frequency with which sexual assault occurs and explained, “I wanted to tell the police because I wanted to shed even, like, one more little beam of light on how often it happens.” Alice was concerned with the accuracy of the statistics on sexual assault. She stated, “I thought that if it’s just one more person reporting it, that’s just a little bit more of a statistic that is more accurate.” She explained that she did not report for herself, stating “I wasn’t doing it for myself because I really didn’t want to have to deal with it.”

Alice was not interested in being known for being assaulted; she wanted to be a number. She explained, “I really did just want to be a number. Just, you know, one in however many girls
gets raped.” She also wanted others to understand that sexual assault happens in different ways and varies from the stereotypical assault. She explained, “Obviously mine was weird because it was… in two rooms, but just to let them know that it happens like that sometimes.” Alice also did not report for personal benefit.

Another factor that contributed to Alice’s decision to report was the perpetrator’s actions, which she discussed in the following statement:

I think the thing that put me over the edge to… to tell was because I saw him… in the [central student building], and… I was really angry (laughs) because I don’t like him, and… - He wasn’t looking at me, so I flicked him off, like, with both my hands, but then he turned around and I still had my fingers up, and I was like, uh, well, oh well. And the next day I saw him leaving the cafeteria as I was going in, and I was laughing with my friends, and we were just talking or whatever, and he just looks at me, so I dropped my smile, but he… grinned at me, and I was like, okay, I’m done. I don’t want to do this anymore. You… suck. So, I think that’s, that’s actually what made me… tell, too.

She went on to explain that she felt obligated to report and stated, “I felt, like as a citizen, obligated to report it because I know some girls can’t, and they shouldn’t have to if they don’t want to.” Alice felt able to report at the time and expressed concern for others the perpetrator might harm. She explained, “I mean, it’s not just me that, like, that that could be happening to. Like, he could be doing it to other people.” Alice thought she could handle reporting, and so she did.

**Internal experience of the reporting process.** Theme two, Internal Experience of the Reporting Process, describes how Alice experienced reporting the sexual assault to campus police. Theme two includes six meaning units: (a) Perceptions of Campus Police, (b) Responses
to Reporting, (c) Views of Self While Reporting, (d) Views of Reporting, (e) Remembering the Sexual Assault, and (f) Methods of Coping.

Alice discussed her Perceptions of Campus Police. Alice was under the impression that the campus police were knowledgeable about the issues related to sexual assault. She explained, “I understand… the police here understand that [sexual assault] happens. Like, they’re not dumb.” She described the police as nice, and she stated, “Overall they were kind about it, and they handled it delicately and precisely.” Alice explained that the police “were helpful through the process” and described them as having a realistic view of sexual assault.

Alice had a generally favorable view of the officers’ actions. She noted her perception of the lieutenant’s actions, stating “I don’t know, it was a tad patronizing.” However, she viewed the officers offering supportive services as nice and explained, “it was nice that they offered the counseling services, you know, they had the building director come down.” She saw that the police were taking her seriously and stated, “They were like, oh… this is a serious thing, not like a stolen ID or wallet.” Alice also made note of what the officers did not do, such as not asking accusatory questions. She described their behavior, stating “They were never like, and you took him to your room? And like, you had how much to drink?” She further explained the police did not act accusatory and said, “I didn’t feel like they were like, and you did this…. They weren’t accusing me of anything.”

Alice spoke about her Responses to Reporting. She mentioned her emotional stability during the interview, and explained “I was a little less emotionally stable at the time, so I cried a little bit.” It started getting late while she was reporting, and she was ready to be finished with the process. She explained, “I mean, I didn’t really want to talk to her because it was late at night… and I just was kind of over it by then.” Although she was ready to leave, she still wanted
to give the full story and explained, “I wanted to tell the truth and… tell it fully.” At a certain point during the interview, she wanted to go home and she stated, “at that point, I was just like, okay, like, I’ll just finish this up. I want to go home.” Following the interview she explained how she felt relieved. She reported, “it was a really, really big weight off my chest.” She also spoke about the empowerment she experienced and specified, “And at the time I felt… really empowered. Like, I was like, yeah! I’m going to tell on him, and get him in trouble!”

Alice described her Views of Self While Reporting. Throughout the reporting process, Alice stated that she viewed herself as a victim and knew she was not to blame for the sexual assault. She stated, “I know it’s not my fault, like, I know that I’m a victim, and I didn’t do anything wrong.” Although she was speaking up on the issue, she explained how she was not a spokesperson for reporting sexual assault and stated, “I’m not trying to say that I’m a spokesperson for this at all because I definitely am not.” She also discussed feeling as if she was being dramatic about going through the prolonged reporting experience.

Alice discussed her Views of Reporting and described the discomfort she experienced during the reporting process. She explained, “It was uncomfortable because I had to recount it.” She also indicated that it felt as if she was being interrogated in the interview space because of its condition, which she described as “dirty and gross.” Alice described the retelling as strange and explained that “retelling the whole thing… from the beginning to end was very strange.” She described her experience recounting the sexual assault and further explained that “recounting it and having somebody be like, okay (and acts like she writing), write, write, write, was really awkward.” Alice described the overall experience as positive and stated, “Yeah, it’s overall, I guess, positive, if I could use that to describe it.” She also stated that the reporting process “wasn’t bad.”
Alice spoke about Remembering the Sexual Assault. She explained that she had some difficulty remembering the details in chronological order:

I had a bit of trouble… remembering it all in order because… sometimes I would just… see… I don’t know, my tissue box was right next to me when it was happening, and I’d be like, oh, that happened right there… or like, I would see… a red drink, and I’d be like, uh! I drank that that night.

She had not attempted to think about the night entirely and explained, “I never… I guess fully made myself think about the entire… night.” During the interview she explained that she wanted to continue with the interview while she was “clearly remembering everything.”

Alice discussed her Methods of Coping. She spoke about coping with the process by reminding herself that she did not do anything wrong. She reported, “I have to remember that I didn’t do anything wrong, which helps me. Pretty much… I guess, grounds me.”

Following the report. Theme three, Following the Report, discusses what occurred following the report Alice made to campus police. Theme three consists of three meaning units: (a) Expectations about Reporting, (b) Campus Adjudication Process, and (c) Personal Impact of Reporting.

Alice spoke of her Expectations about Reporting. She explained, “I expected that, just because I’m a rape victim” when referring to the lieutenant’s patronizing behavior. She did not expect the police to be helpful and stated, “They were helpful through the process, which I was not expecting because through other times I had to go to [university] PD.”

Alice spoke about going through the Campus Adjudication Process and discussed her cloudy view of the ongoing process. She explained, “You know, now, of course it’s cloudy
because it’s still, the investigation is still happening, and he still goes here.” When reflecting on being in the adjudication process, Alice stated the following:

When I think about it, which is about every ten minutes (laughs), - I’m like uh, oh, okay! This is happening! Oh my gosh! And then I’m like, well, it has to happen, you know? I mean, you can’t turn back now, and even if you could, why?

In the follow-up interview Alice discussed the embarrassment that she feels as the investigation continues and the emotional exhaustion of having to continue to remind herself that she did nothing wrong and that she is not lying about experiencing the sexual assault. She stated, “It makes me feel crazy.”

Alice explained the Personal Impact of Reporting she experienced. She named multiple feelings as she described the impact of her reporting experience. She explained feeling scared and said, “But, before that, I mean, I was really scared, and after, now, I’m still really scared of it all.” Alice stated that she has felt fine since reporting and also felt stronger for reporting. She explained, “It makes me feel stronger because I know that I was capable of doing it because I did, and I am.” Alice also experienced negative feelings associated with others knowing about the sexual assault. She explained:

It also… makes me feel patronized even when no one’s talking about it to me, just because I’m like, I know people think about it…. I know that sometimes… you try not to cross work with life, but… I know, like, the sergeant who I reported to thinks about it. Like, I know my counselor thinks about it…. That makes me feel weak sometimes.

She also reported that she sometimes feels awkward when campus police officers acknowledge her. She described the experience:
Sometimes when I see the cops it’s a little awkward because they’re like, hi [Alice]! I’m like, I don’t really want people on campus to know you know my name. Because then… people are like, why does she know your name? You know,… that’s always a little awkward. I mean, it’s, it’s the… lieutenant, or whoever’s in charge, and she knows a lot of people just from everything… - When that happens, I’m like, hi, okay, bye now, I’m leaving (laughs).

Structural Description for Alice

Making the report. The fourth theme, Making the Report, describes the events that took places as Alice made her report. Theme four includes three meaning units: (a) Contribution to the Report, (b) Police Actions, and (c) Physical Space.

Alice spoke about the Contribution to the Report she made to campus police. She explained the timeline to making the report and stated, “It was like, 10:30 [p.m.]. It was exactly a month after.” When she arrived at the station, she informed the officer that she needed to make a police report. When they asked the reason for the report, she informed the officer that she needed to report a sexual assault. She was provided paper. She recalled writing on the paper and explained, “I don’t know what I wrote on it, but - I think it was just my name and what I was reporting.” She told the officers the scenario of the assault and then she wrote her own statement. When asked if she needed a break during the interview, she told the officer that she wanted to continue. She explained, “I was like, no, I’m fine, and I can just keep going.” She wanted to finish the interview and stated, “I was like, no, I want to… finish it up.” She was asked if she was interested in receiving services on campus, and she declined some services.

Alice described the Police Actions. When she arrived at the campus police station, an officer asked the reason for her report. Once she informed the officer that she was filing a sexual
assault, the officer initiated the process of filing a report. Alice stated, “They were like, oh okay. And so they gave me a little paper... and then they got, like, a female officer, and they took me to a back room… and they were like, what happened?” As Alice informed the officer as to what happened, the officer expressed that she was a victim in the case. The officer continued and explained that Alice was not to blame, nor was she at fault for what occurred as the officer wrote down the statement.

Alice became tearful when recounting the details of the assault to the officer, who responded by asking if she needed anything. She described her behavior, “the first time I… got a little choked up…. It only happened twice when I was recounting it, but… the first time it happened she was like, it’s okay, like, do you need a break? Do you want water? Do you want anything? Do you want coffee?” The officer who interviewed her also offered to stop the interview and resume later. Alice stated, “she was like, you don’t have to… - you can stop here and you can come in tomorrow or you can just stop right here and it will be the end of it now.” The officers then reviewed the statement for accuracy. She stated, “Then they reviewed the statement with me that they wrote down to make sure that what they wrote down was what I said and was accurate, and it was.” At that point the officer asked her to write a statement of her own. The officers reviewed her written statement and the officer informed her that the statements were identical.

After the interview was complete, the police offered counseling. Alice stated, “They were like, we have to offer counseling. They were like, do you want to talk to a counselor.” Alice was already seeing a counselor and asked to speak with her counselor. The officer informed her that her counselor was not on duty at the time, but they scheduled an appointment with her counselor for the following day. The officers had her speak to the lieutenant, also. Alice discussed hearing
from the lieutenant, and stated, “She just spoke to me about how, you know, it’s not my fault and
take her new self-defense class and I’m brave for doing it.” The police called the director of the
building where Alice lived. After the interview was complete, the police offered for her to stay or
leave when she wanted. She explained, “They offered everything… through the night, like, you
can stay here as long as you want, you can leave whenever you want.” The campus police also
offered to move her out of her room. Alice described the Physical Space of the room where she
was interviewed as “really dirty and gross.” She also recommended that “in the back they should
probably make that room not so dirty.”

**Textural-Structural Description for Alice**

The reporting experience was for Alice was, overall, supportive. From a textural
perspective, she discussed her process of Making the Decision to Report and explained how she
delayed reporting out of concern for how she would be perceived by the university. With
encouragement from others, she discussed her personal reasons for reporting to campus police.
Alice knew she did nothing wrong and saw reporting as her responsibility. Alice described her
Internal Experience of the Reporting Process, explaining her view of the officers as nice, helpful,
and knowledgeable regarding sexual assault. She knew that she was not responsible for the
sexual assault and saw herself as the victim in the situation. The reporting process was
uncomfortable for Alice, and she felt interrogated in the space. However, she also saw it as a
positive experience due to the support she received. Reporting was exhausting for Alice, and
once it was complete she felt relieved and empowered. Remembering the sexual assault was
difficult as she had not made herself think about it fully prior to reporting. In order to stay
connected to the process she continued to remind herself that she did nothing wrong and she
needed to push forward. Following the Report, Alice was an anonymous participant in the
adjudication process. She gave her statement to conduct personnel at her university who then used the statement to send the perpetrator to a misconduct hearing. The process was still ongoing which clouded her perspective on the matter and contributed to her feelings of fear. After reporting to campus police, Alice felt strong for reporting, yet weak and patronized because others knew what happened to her. She also felt awkward on campus when the officers would acknowledge her.

From a structural perspective, Alice’s experience of reporting was heavily influenced by what occurred when Making the Report. When she arrived at the police station that night, Alice informed the officer that she needed to report a sexual assault. She answered the questions she could during the interview and gave a written statement as well. When asked if she needed to take a break, she told the officers she wanted to continue. During the interview, the officers documented her statement and reminded her consistently that she was not to blame for what happened. They reviewed her statements for accuracy and then offered counseling and to move her to another room. They then had her speak to the lieutenant, who also reiterated the assault was not her fault and then called the building director to speak with her, as well. The condition of the interview space was concerning for Alice, yet she received support during her interview.

Jasmine

Jasmine was the last participant interviewed. The analysis of her interview transcript revealed twelve meaning units grouped into four themes. Table 4.6 lists the themes supported by meaning units. The first three themes (Making the Decision to Report, Internal Experience of the Reporting Process, and Following the Report) give insight to the textural description of Jasmine’s experience, whereas the remaining theme (Making the Report) contributes to the structural description.
Table 4.6

*Themes and Meaning Units for Jasmine*

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**Textural Description for Jasmine**

**Making the decision to report.** The first theme, Making the Decision to report, speaks to the factors that contributed to Jasmine’s decision to report her sexual assault to law enforcement officials. Theme one consists of three meaning units: (a) Delays in Reporting, (b) Encouragement from Others, and (c) Reasons to Report.

Jasmine addressed the Delays in Reporting and explained that initially she did not want to report to law enforcement because she did not want to discuss the sexual assault. In response to her friend’s urges she stated, “I was like, well, no, I don’t want to talk about it, so I’m not going to do that.” Jasmine gave multiple other reasons for waiting to report the sexual assault to law enforcement. She explained, “I was too busy [to report].” She described how she was concerned
about reporting, “I was kind of scared of… their reaction or I wasn’t really sure if I wanted to talk about it or not, you know. I was afraid they would ask me… a million and three thousand questions.” She explained she did not feel ready to report, “…like, sit down and talk about it. Because I had talked about it before with my friend [name], so I was like, you know, it’s in the air. So, it’s over with.”

Jasmine was met with Encouragement from Others, namely her friend and her mother. When asked how the decision was made to report the sexual assault to law enforcement, she described how she was approached by a friend: “Well, after I talked to my friend about it because she noticed I was acting weird for, like, a week after.” She disclosed to her friend what had occurred, and Jasmine said “She was like, well, I think this is something serious. I think we should go report it.” Jasmine continued to talk with her friend about what happened. She soon decided to tell her mother, and Jasmine described encouragement from her mom by explaining, “She was like, yeah, you definitely need to go and tell someone.” Jasmine’s friend and mother both continued to urge her to contact the police. She stated, “They were all pushy, nudging about going to report and stuff.” She was unsure if she would have reported had her friend and mother not pushed her to do so.

Jasmine identified her own Reasons to Report to law enforcement. Her friend was supposed to go with her to report to campus police, but the friend had to work that day. Jasmine made the decision to continue with her plan, and she recalled saying to herself, “I kept putting it off, so I was like, you know, I’m going to go do it.” She also thought of the encouragement from her friend and mother. Their frequent urging for Jasmine to report also served as reminders of the assault, and her thoughts did not decrease as she had hoped. She stated, “Then it didn’t go away, so I was like, well, maybe if I did this, then maybe it’ll go away.” In the follow-up interview,
Jasmine explained that initially she wasn’t sure if she wanted something to happen to the man who assaulted her. However, after consideration and going back-and-forth in her opinion, she eventually came to the conclusion that there should have been consequences to his actions.

**Internal experience of the reporting process.** Theme two, Internal Experience of the Reporting Process, addressed the thoughts and feelings Jasmine experienced while making her report to campus police. Theme two includes three meaning units: (a) Perceptions of Campus Police, (b) Views of Reporting Process, and (c) Responses to Reporting.

When discussing her Perceptions of Campus Police, Jasmine explained that “they just didn’t seem like they cared.” Jasmine was uncertain if the officer who was taking her statement was paying complete attention to her. She stated, “So it was like, oh, I mean, I guess she’s paying attention. She seemed to be paying attention, sort of.” She went on to explain that the officer was going “back and forth between... doing something on her phone... She seemed like she was mentally somewhere else.”

Jasmine discussed her Views of Reporting Process. She explained that the decision to report was not so emotional, but having to recount the events and discuss them was challenging. She explained, “It was a process. It was sort of emotional, but not really because I’m not that type of person.” She also described the length of the reporting process, and explained, “it was… not a really long process.” Jasmine described the reporting experience as “sketch” but did find some relief. When she was asked how it felt to disclose her experience in that space, she reported, “It really wasn’t… a comfortable environment.”

Jasmine discussed her Responses to Reporting. After leaving the campus police department, she did not go to her class that day. Instead, she decided to return to her residence and take a nap. She explained that although she often plans to take naps during the day, she
rarely gets the opportunity due to her schedule. She said, “I needed a nap that day. It was a long day.” When asked if the reporting contributed to the long day, she responded:

It was… mentally draining, so probably so. Like, I had a little headache afterwards. So I took me some medicine, drank me some water, and just knocked out, and then consequently, I didn’t even wake up for dinner, so I know I was sick because I have to take medicine to go to sleep. So, I was like, didn’t go to dinner; can’t take medicine. So I... really… slept through everything.

Jasmine explained that, although the process was draining, she felt better knowing it was documented. She stated, “I guess I felt kind of uneasy about it at first, but then after it was over I felt… better to know that it was, like, documented and that someone knew besides my friend and my mom.”

**Following the report.** Theme three, Following the Report, describes Jasmine’s experience following the report and includes three meaning units: (a) General Views of Campus Police, (b) Personal Impact of Reporting, and (c) Details Still Unknown.

Jasmine addressed her General Views of Campus Police. She stated, “I don’t really think they’re doing their job up in there. Like, honestly, I don’t think they do their job.” She continued to describe the police at her university and stated:

They’re just always lackadaisical like that. Like, about everything. So I really wouldn’t expect them to be… serious about this because they’re really… lazy people. I mean, they’re funny, and they’re nice, but they are really lazy people.

She continued to express her frustration with campus police behavior:

Yeah, I see them all the time, and they are always laughing, or joking, or playing. The only thing they really do is directions at the cross-walk. That’s pretty much it. Oh, and
they ride around campus in their campus police vehicles and that’s it... It’s something I’ve always noticed… since I first came to [university]. Oh, the only thing they bust down real hard on is drugs. They don’t like drugs.

Another point of concern for Jasmine was what would happen with the report she filed. She spoke about the officer who took her statement and stated, “She said they were going to file the information. (deep breath) Usually when people file information they just put it… somewhere in a file cabinet and nobody ever reads it again. Like, ever.” She spoke to her level of trust in the campus police and stated, “I just do not trust [university] PD anymore.”

Jasmine spoke about the Personal Impact of Reporting to campus police. When considering the impact that reporting has had on her life, she initially stated, “I haven’t changed the way I act or the things I do.” She went on to explain that she has changed in that she now urges others to make reports when they can. She gave the following statement:

If I… notice that something has gone wrong, I usually urge people to… say something about it and not be quiet about it, you know. Say something about it, and basically that might... be a difference. Like, I usually don’t want people to say anything. I’m not that type of person. I’m not a - I mean, I am outspoken, but I’m not a make a report type person. Like, not that stiff on it, but now definitely make a report to someone you think is going to do something about it.

She discussed how she was not devastated by the process and stated, “I mean, I was affected, but… I’m not one of those devastated, my life is going to end, type people. I know my life has to go on.”

At the time of the interview, there were Details Still Unknown to Jasmine. She was particularly bothered by the officer not asking for the perpetrator’s name and then initially
refusing to write it down once Jasmine addressed the concern. In her astonishment, she stated, “I was like, what are you thinking? I have no idea why she didn’t ask for his name. I was like, uh, uh, you don’t file a report and not ask for someone’s name.” Jasmine was also still uncertain as to what came of the report she filed. She stated, “Because to this day I have no idea what they did.” She continued, “What happened to it? I have no idea. Like, I haven’t heard about it. Like, nobody called me.” Jasmine reported that she had not heard from the campus police regarding the report since the day the report was filed.

**Structural Description for Jasmine**

**Making the report.** Theme four, Making the Report, addresses the structural details of Jasmine’s reporting process. Theme four consists of three meaning units: (a) Contribution to the Report, (b) Police Actions, and (c) Physical Space.

Jasmine described her Contribution to the Report made to campus police. She filed a report with her campus police department approximately three weeks after the sexual assault occurred. Jasmine reported that she was interviewed for 30 to 45 minutes. She stated: I was by myself. [Friend] was supposed to come with me, but she had to go to work that day.” She initially stated, “I had to sign a lot of papers, and that’s pretty much it.” Then she expanded on how she gave her statement to the officer and explained that she was given paper to write down her statement of what happened the night of the sexual assault. The officer read her statement back to her to confirm its accuracy and compared the statement to the verbal responses she gave the officer as she was interviewed.

After the verbal and written statements were compared, Jasmine asked the officer, “What are you going to do about it?” Jasmine noticed that the officer did not ask for the perpetrator’s name. She questioned the officer again, asking “you don’t want his name on paper?” She then
instructed the officer that she needed to take down the name. Jasmine gave the officer what she knew to be the perpetrator’s name, which the officer documented at that point. Jasmine did not follow-up with campus police regarding the incident after leaving that day.

Jasmine discussed the Police Actions and described her initial interaction with campus police when she arrived at the station. She explained, “It was an officer, like, at the front desk, like, when you go in. They ask you what you’re there for, and so I told him I was there to report an assault. He was like, okay, and he took me back to the back.” She described the interviewing officer and explained, “I talked to a lady, and she made the report.” Jasmine stated that the officer did not ask her a lot of questions and did not ask for the perpetrator’s name until Jasmine made a comment regarding the lapse. Jasmine said, “She was like, um, unless you want to take… legal action… we’re just to have it on record, or something like that.” Jasmine reported that the officer explained that she would see it in the report and indicated that it was not necessary for her to document the name.

She explained that the officer who interviewed her did not appear to give her undivided attention during the interview. She described the officer looking at her phone and said, “Yeah, she was, like, back and forth between, like, I don’t know, doing something on her phone.” She also thought the officer’s lack of focus may have been due to hearing officers in the hall outside of the interview room. She described the situation, “it was noise, like, people were outside talking and laughing, officers. So, it wasn’t really comfortable, but the door was closed, but you could still hear people outside laughing, talking.” After the interview was completed, the officer informed Jasmine that the information would be filed.
Jasmine described the Physical Space of the office where she filed the report as “like a box…. It was really empty” She was reminded of a scammer’s office more so than a police department and described the setting:

So, it was like the, it was behind the glass, so when I went in the first part, it was like you couldn’t see - You can’t really see who you’re talking to because it’s… tinted glass window with… a little circle on it, to… ask you. So, that’s weird, and then… the waiting room has a couple chairs in there. That’s pretty bare. They have a couple posters in there. You know, like, you know how you go to place where there’s like a scam going on?... It’s like a scammer’s office.

**Textural-Structural Description for Jasmine**

Jasmine’s experience reporting was not positive. From a textural perspective, she discussed Making the Decision to Report and initially delayed reporting her sexual assault to law enforcement for reasons that included being too busy and feeling scared of how the police would respond. However, with the encouragement from her friend and mother, along with her own personal reasons to report, such as wanting the reminders to go away, Jasmine made the decision to report to campus police after a few weeks. Her Internal Experience of the Reporting Process included her negative perception of the campus police officers and her views of and responses to the reporting process. She assumed that the officers didn’t care and were disinterested in her report based on their actions. Reporting was brief, yet somewhat emotional for Jasmine, even though she is not the type to express emotion. When leaving the police department, she realized how drained she felt and went to her apartment to take a nap. She did not make it to class and did not wake up until hours later. Following the Report, Jasmine’s overall negative views of campus police were confirmed. The impact of reporting was mild as she explained little about her life has
changed other than encouraging others to report crimes to law enforcement. Jasmine felt better knowing that the incident had been documented, although she never learned what happened to her report because she never heard from the officers again.

Structurally, when Making the Report, Jasmine went by herself to the police station. She gave her statements, both verbal and written, to the officer, who often looked at her phone while she was talking. The officer did not ask for the perpetrator’s name, therefore Jasmine requested that the officer document the name. The physical space seemed empty and felt like an office where scams occur rather than an interview space at a police department. Officers were outside the door making noise, talking and laughing, while she reported the sexual assault.

**Composite Textural-Structural Description for All Participants**

Utilizing the Modification of the Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen Method of Analysis of Phenomenological Data, a composite textural-structural description of all participants’ experiences was created. The individual textural-structural descriptions of each participant were integrated into a composite description of the experience, representing the group as a whole (Moustakas, 1994). For each of the six participants, I provided the individual textural and structural descriptions based on the transcribed interviews, which offered the “what” and the “how” found in the experiences of each participant. Following the textural and structural descriptions, I have provided the composite textural-structural description of each participant to highlight the essence of their experiences. It became apparent that shared themes existed among all of the participants. Table 4.7 shows the identified themes across the group of participants as a whole.

Five of the six participants in this study went through the progression of Making the Decision to Report. For all five, this included a delay in reporting and finding their own personal
reasons to report. The delays in reporting were due to conflicting feelings about the sexual assault, concern for how others would interpret the incidents, and the need to move on and return to the typical routine. Personal reasons to report to law enforcement included concern for the safety of others, reducing their own fears, and to improve the accuracy of statistics regarding sexual assault. Four of the five participants who made the decision to report spoke about the influence of receiving encouragement from others. The fifth participant, Sonia Jane, never actually made the decision to report to law enforcement Prior to Reporting. Instead, she was seeking medical assistance for her injuries when she went to her campus police, who then made

Table 4.7

*Composite Textural-Structural Themes Across Participants*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes (Textural)</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Jeané</th>
<th>Cassandra</th>
<th>Amanda</th>
<th>Sonia Jane</th>
<th>Alice</th>
<th>Jasmine</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Making the Decision to Report</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prior to Reporting</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internal Experience of the Reporting Process</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Following the Report</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Themes (Structural)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Initiating the Reporting Process</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Obstacles to Reporting</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Making the Report</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
the decision for her to take her statement. She also discussed her delay in reporting which was consistent with the reasons of other participants.

The Internal Experience of the Reporting Process was consistent among all six participants as each described what the experience was like for them of discussing the details of the assault in the presence of officers. All participants discussed their perceptions of the officers as influential in their overall experience and their emotional and physical responses to reporting. Five of the six participants addressed their view of their reporting experiences as a whole. Jeané and Cassandra discussed having to defend themselves and their actions to the officers, and Alice explained that her views of herself, having to remember the sexual assault, and coping with reporting were influential to her internal experience of reporting.

All six participants described their experiences that occurred Following the Report; what actually occurs can vary. Four of the six participants discussed the personal impact of reporting, which was greater for some than for others. Jeané and Alice both experienced the adjudication process after making reports to their campus police, and during counseling Jeané learned how investigation protocol was not followed. Three of the participants provided their overall views of factors associated with reporting, such as the reporting process itself and police officers in general. Amanda and Jasmine both spoke about never hearing from campus police again, therefore never learning what happened to the reports they filed and leaving details unknown to them.

Making the Report to law enforcement typically consists of two factors at minimum: the contribution to the report, and police action. Each participant, when describing her contribution to the report, explained giving verbal and written statements and answering the officers’ questions. Two participants described trying to provide evidence of the assault to the officers, as
well. All participants described the actions of the police officers involved in the reporting process. The officers’ actions ranged from supportive to dismissive to accusatory. Physical space was also highlighted for most participants as they described the setting of the interview spaces. Amanda’s mother’s involvement in initiating the reporting process and their relationship with the officers involved were factors that influenced how Amanda experienced the reporting process. Sonia Jane experienced obstacles to reporting, including physical injury, knowledge of resources, and memory loss, which negatively influenced her reporting experience as it progressed over a two week period. She also worked with a sketch artist and received assistance from other personnel while making the report; this added a different dynamic to her reporting experience.

**Summary of Validation Strategies**

To verify my research findings, I employed multiple validation strategies (Creswell, 2007). The first strategy utilized was the collection of documentation related to participants who reported the crime of sexual assault to law enforcement officials. No participants were able to provide documentation. Some of the participants thought they might be able to share documents they received from the hospital or the police departments, but they were unable to locate these documents prior to the follow-up interview. I collected documents such as pamphlets and handouts from the campus police departments and counseling centers at the three campuses used in the study. Generally, the documentation was informative in defining sexual assault, listing possible responses to sexual assault, and explaining how to protect oneself and avoid being assaulted. However, no information pertaining to reporting to law enforcement was found that addressed what occurs once a survivor initiates the report with police. In addition, the recommendation to contact police was found in only three documents that were made available at only two of the universities. On no document was there information regarding the reporting
process, such as officer protocol or expectations for survivors, thus no data from the documentation were found that could be linked to participants’ themes.

The second strategy, member checking, was utilized at two different times: after the transcripts were complete, and after the analyses were complete. The participants were emailed copies of the transcripts for review prior to the follow-up interview, and none of the six had anything to add or correct. After the analysis was completed for each of the six interviews, the participant descriptions and the textural, structural, and textural-structural descriptions were sent to each participant for feedback. Two of the participants responded to the emails and both agreed with the descriptions and themes. They were given the opportunity to meet again to discuss the analysis; neither requested a meeting.

The third validation strategy employed was the use of an external auditor. As I continued to reduce my data into relevant themes, I shared my identified meaning units and themes with my external auditor. As the identified themes continued to evolve, she continued to offer feedback and suggestions regarding the identification of relevant themes. My external auditor was supportive of the final themes.

The fourth validation strategy I used was peer debriefing. I spoke with my peer debriefer regularly to address any questions, concerns, or conflicting feelings regarding my data collection and analysis processes. She was very encouraging and would speak freely when asking questions regarding my perspective. She and I both kept a journal pertaining to our peer debriefing conversations. Although the journal entries revealed no findings related to the identified themes, participation in the peer debriefing and journaling provided me with ongoing confirmation that my experience and personal biases were not influencing the data collection or analysis.
Findings by Research Question

Data were collected and analyzed to answer the first central research question, “What is the lived experience of college women who have been sexually assaulted as they go through the process of reporting the crime?” and the second central research question “What contributed to college women’s decision to report their sexual assault to law enforcement?” Both questions were answered with the assistance of the participants based on the data collected from the interviews. Within the composite textural-structural description, the findings suggest that the overall reporting experience is determined by three stages of the reporting process: Prior to Reporting, During the Reporting Process, and Following the Report.

Central Research Question #1: What is the lived experience of college women who have been sexually assaulted as they go through the process of reporting the crime?

Based on the analysis of the six transcripts, the participants’ lived experiences of reporting sexual assault to law enforcement was reflected in the composite description and two themes: Internal Experience of the Reporting Process, and Making the Report. These themes occurred in the events that took place During the Reporting Process.

Two of the participants, Amanda and Alice, were met with support and understanding from police officers. Although the process for both was uncomfortable due to having to discuss the intimate details of their assaults, they described the process in mostly positive terms. Alice had the most positive experience in reporting, as the officers were supportive throughout the process. They avoided asking questions in a judgmental fashion or expressing disbelief. Amanda knew the officer who interviewed her, and even though he began the interview with a joke at her expense, she still saw him as professional and prepared for the interview. Her view of the process was quite different when reporting to campus police, who spent minimal time with her even
though the perpetrator was a fellow student. Amanda may have left campus police feeling some relief that she did not have to tell her story again, but she also felt disgusted with the lack of care and attention she received.

The majority of the participants, Jeané, Cassandra, Sonia Jane, and Jasmine, all had overwhelmingly negative experiences that had much to do with how they were interviewed. Jeané described her experience as “terrible” as she explained how part of her interview took place in the presence of the perpetrator. She was interviewed by three male officers who questioned the legitimacy of her report because she did not have memory of what occurred. They also told her there was nothing they could do for her if she could not tell them she was raped. Cassandra was asked by the campus officer why she even went to the police and told that she should have just gone to her mother. When she was asked about the sexual assault and the subsequent harassment, she felt as if she was being blamed for what occurred. She described the police as misogynistic and accusatory and labeled the overall experience as “humiliating.”

Sonia Jane went to campus police for a ride to the hospital and was held there for approximately two hours; she was not allowed to leave until she had been interviewed by four different officers. She had to repeat her story multiple times without understanding why. After being taken to the hospital, she was interviewed again by an officer from the city police who was rude to her throughout the interview. The officer highlighted that she had been using substances and questioned why she could not remember certain facts. Sonia Jane felt as if the officer was blaming her for what happened and was not listening to her. Although the officer attempted communication with her over the following two weeks, Sonia Jane felt as if the process was going nowhere because the officer only asked if she remembered anything new.
Jasmine was also frustrated with the treatment she received from campus police. She explained that while being interviewed she could hear the other officers laughing and talking outside the door. The officer interviewing her looked at her phone frequently during the interview. The officer did not ask for the perpetrator’s name, which was concerning for Jasmine as she considered that an important detail. She had to request that the officer document the name after the officer informed her that the name was not needed.

A factor that also contributes to the findings was the lack of documentation that addresses the reporting process. Of the documentation collected from the universities, reporting to police was mentioned, but in none of the documents I obtained was the reporting process explained.

**Central Research Question #2: What contributed to college women’s decision to report their sexual assault to law enforcement?**

Based on the analysis of the transcripts, one theme, Making the Decision to Report, was found to address the factors contributed to the participants’ decisions to report to law enforcement. The details of this theme took place Prior to Reporting. Five of the six participants (Jeané, Cassandra, Amanda, Alice, and Jasmine) described factors that contributed to their decision to report their sexual assaults to law enforcement. Two factors were consistent across all five participants: Delays in Reporting, and finding their own personal Reasons to Report. All participants described the delays in reporting as an influential factor and each explained what contributed to the delay. Examples included that the delays were due to conflicting feelings about the sexual assault, concern for how others would interpret the incidents, and the need to move on and return to the typical routine. The participants described their personal reasons to report to law enforcement. Reasons given were concern for the safety of others, reducing their own fears, and to improve the accuracy of statistics pertaining to sexual assault. Four of the five
participants (Jeané, Amanda, Alice, and Jasmine) who made the decision to report described receiving encouragement from others, which they saw as highly influential in their ultimate decision.

Additional Findings

Findings were noted in what occurred following the report by all six participants, which contributed to their overall experience of the reporting process. The participants spoke about influential factors that occurred after they filed their reports with law enforcement officials. These factors included going through the adjudication process, never hearing from the police again, and learning new information after the fact. Jeané experienced all three of these factors. Going through the adjudication process was difficult for Jeané as she was questioned by a panel of university personnel and students and then never learned of the outcome. She realized approximately a month after reporting to the police that she would never hear from them again. She also learned from her counselor that protocol was not followed when she was at the hospital, which could have greatly affected the outcome of her case. Like Jeané, Amanda never heard from her campus police following her report, which was bothersome because the perpetrator was a student at the same university. Although Sonia Jane communicated with the officer intermittently for a couple weeks after her initial report, the ongoing process was difficult and then to never hear back was hard for her as well. Jasmine never heard from campus police again regarding her case. However, when she was told that the information would be put on file, she assumed that meant it would never be looked at again.

A number of the participants also shared how they were impacted by the report, which contributed to their experience following the report. The impact of the report varied among participants. Cassandra spoke about her general lack of trust in police officers following her
reporting process and stated that she does not even consider contacting them for assistance any more. Amanda’s life returned to normal fairly quickly, as the impact of reporting was minimal for her. She described it as “one more thing” she had to deal with at the time and her family rarely spoke of it following that day. Alice experienced a number of feelings following the report and as she went through the adjudication process. The impact of reporting was contradictory as she felt strong for doing so, yet weak and patronized at the same time. She explained feeling awkward seeing the police officers on campus when they would acknowledge her. Jasmine described that she was “not devastated” by the process; however, her generally negative view of the campus police was confirmed.

**Summary**

In chapter four, the data analysis strategy and findings of my study were presented. To begin, an introduction to the chapter and a summary of the data analysis procedures were offered. Tables of the identified themes and meaning units and the textural, structural, and textural-structural descriptions for each of the six participants were presented, as well as the composite textural-structural description of the group as a whole. A summarization of the validation strategies used was provided. A review of the research questions and a discussion of how the questions were answered, as well as a discussion of additional findings, were provided to end the chapter.
CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

In chapter five, a summary of the study is presented. The findings are discussed as they relate to the conceptual framework and previous research. Implications for counselor educators, college counselors, and campus and off-campus police are discussed, and recommendations are offered for future research. Limitations of the study are addressed. A personal reflection is provided to conclude the chapter.

Summary of the Study

In keeping with Moustakas’ guidelines for phenomenological research (1994), a summary of the study in its entirety must be presented. The purpose of the study was to explore the phenomenological experience of college women who reported the crime of sexual assault to law enforcement officials. In chapter one, a detailed introduction that began with a description of the road to conducting this study and my personal interest in the topic of reporting sexual assault was presented. Sexual victimization and its impact on college campuses were discussed to provide background for the study. Concepts such as self-blame and rape myth acceptance were presented so that the lack of reporting could be better understood. A feminist conceptual framework for the study was detailed and the significance of the study was explained as it relates to sexual victimization on college campuses. It was hoped that the results would contribute to our understanding of survivors as they make the decision to report the crime. Utilizing a feminist perspective, the main focus of this study was to determine the essence of the participants’ experiences in reporting sexual assault. An overview of the chosen methodology was provided, which contributed to the research questions: “What is the lived experience of college women who have been sexually assaulted as they go through the process of reporting the crime?” and
“What contributed to college women’s decision to report their sexual assault to law enforcement?” The potential limitations, delimitations, and assumptions associated with the study were discussed and a glossary of terms was presented.

In chapter two, a thorough review of the literature beginning with a feminist perspective on sexual assault was provided, which included in-depth discussion of rape myth acceptance, gender role socialization, power analysis, and rape reform. Sexual assault as a national issue, sexual victimization on college campuses, and the impact of sexual assault on the mental health of survivors were addressed. The literature related to the disclosure and reporting of sexual victimization by survivors was discussed, focusing on barriers and predictors of reporting sexual assault to law enforcement. The chapter concluded with a discussion of qualitative studies conducted with survivors of sexual assault.

Chapter three presented the methodology, beginning with the rationale for choosing a phenomenological design to better understand the experiences of college women in reporting sexual assault to law enforcement officials. The research questions were reviewed and how the participants for this study were obtained was explained. The six participants (Jeané, Cassandra, Amanda, Sonia Jane, Alice, and Jasmine) were introduced through their participant profiles. The procedures were discussed, including receiving approval from the University of New Orleans Institutional Review Board, informed consent, concern for confidentiality and the well-being of the participants, and the recruitment and use of gatekeepers from multiple universities. My role as researcher was discussed and personal biases were disclosed in an attempt to bracket personal experiences. Data collection methods were discussed, as was the utilization of an abbreviated version of the Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen method of analysis. Finally, validation strategies were described.
In chapter four, the results were presented. Data analysis procedures were summarized. An individual analysis for each participant was presented, depicting their textural, structural, and textural-structural descriptions based on the derived meaning units and themes found in unique narratives. The composite textural-structural description for all participants was provided, which illustrated the essence of the experience of reporting sexual assault to law enforcement for the group of participants as a whole. Validation strategies that were utilized were summarized, and findings were discussed as they answered the research questions. The chapter concluded with a discussion of additional findings as they relate to the phenomenon.

**Relationship to Previous Research**

In this section, findings from the study are positioned in relation to the literature. The literature that was reviewed addressed these topics: feminist perspective on sexual assault, rape myth acceptance, gender role socialization, power analysis, sexual victimization on college campuses, disclosure of victimization of sexual assault, and reporting.

**Feminist Perspective on Sexual Assault**

Feminist ideology asserts that violence against women, including rape and other forms of sexual assault, occurs within the social context of society, and this context must be understood to effectively grasp a survivor’s experience (Worell & Remer, 2003). Gender roles are socially constructed and violent acts are often ascribed to men and victimization to women (Brownmiller, 1975; Gillem et al., 2000). For decades, male violence toward women, specifically sexual assault, has been viewed as an observable demonstration of gender inequality (Koss et al., 1994). For some time the United States has been perceived as a rape culture because rape is often misdefined and condoned; social constructs allow men to perpetrate against women while women are often blamed for the assaults they experience; and services are often insufficient for
the needs of survivors in long-term recovery (Brownmiller, 1975; Buchwald et al., 2005; Sanday, 1981a; Worell & Remer, 2003).

The present study was conducted through the lens of a feminist conceptual framework and the findings were supportive of concepts within feminist literature. Sexual victimization and the resulting trauma experienced by survivors are greatly affected by societal beliefs regarding rape and other forms of sexual assault, gender-based socialization, and the imbalance of the distribution of power between women and men (Koss et al., 1994; Sanday, 1981a; Worell & Remer, 2003). These concepts will be discussed as they relate to the findings of this study.

**Rape Myth Acceptance.** Rape myths originally were defined as “prejudicial, stereotyped, or false beliefs about rape, rape victims, and rapists” (Burt, 1980, p. 217). The term was later redefined by Lonsway and Fitzgerald as “attitudes and beliefs that are generally false but are widely and persistently held, and that serve to deny and justify male sexual aggression against women” (1994, p. 134). Considerable research conducted over the years has supported the prevalence of rape myths and has suggested four general types of myths: (a) blame the victim, (b) express disbelief in claims of rape, (c) exonerate the perpetrator, and (d) claim that only certain types of women are raped (Bohner, 1998; Briere et al., 1985; Burt, 1980, 1991; Costin, 1985; Eyssel & Bohner, 2011; Gerger et al., 2007; Lonsway & Fitzgerald, 1994; Payne et al., 1999).

These general types of rape myths were prevalent in the participants’ narratives in this study, in the actions of the police officers and others, and in the internalized beliefs of the participants. Acceptance of rape myths was evidenced predominantly in the themes of Prior to Reporting and During the Reporting Process. One participant, Amanda, spoke about how she initially thought the sexual assault was her fault and how she had to fight against blaming
herself. Alice, although she knew she was not to blame for the assault, had to continue reminding herself of that fact as the intrusive thoughts crept in repeatedly. Three participants spoke about the messages they received from officers when they were working with the police. In Jeané’s case, an officer reminded her several times that she should have called the police sooner so something could have been done with her case. The officers also explicitly expressed their disbelief in her claim, and they exonerated the perpetrator as they asked her questions regarding the assault with him present, informing her that he said nothing happened. The campus police officer who interviewed Cassandra not only reprimanded her for not coming to the police sooner; he also informed her that she should not wear short skirts and should be home early to avoid being sexually assaulted. Sonia Jane explained that she believed she was also being blamed by the city police officer for her alcohol and marijuana use prior to her assault.

**Gender Role Socialization.** Feminist scholars have noted that learning begins in the home and, as we develop, begins to take place outside the home through extended family, school, and greater community (Evans et al., 2011). Early socialization contributes to not only to one’s gender identity, but also to personal expectations for self and expectations for others based on assigned gender. Weis and Borges (1977) suggested that dating practices in the United States are influenced by gender role socialization, which contributes to rape proclivity. When considering gender role socialization, certain behaviors generally become associated with one gender or the other as they are often viewed in the binary of male and female. An example of gendered expectations occurred when Cassandra was interviewed by the campus police officer and she was informed of how she should dress and behave. The officer also explained to her how he treats his son, which was different than he would imagine treating a daughter if he had one.
**Power Analysis.** Power plays an influential role in the lives of individuals who have power and those who do not. Men characteristically have more power than women, which is found in multiple forms such as economic, financial, physical, and political power (Worell & Remer, 2003). Ascribed power is defined as power that cannot be taken away and is given to a person based on social factors like gender, race, age, and/or class (Rozee, 2000). Women may have power in certain roles; however, a woman’s power does not match that ascribed to the male gender in the same roles. Similarly, most White men have more power than most ethnic minority men, but ethnic minority men still have more ascribed power than ethnic minority women in most cases (Worell & Remer, 2003). This societal power structure can contribute to sexual victimization in various ways. For example, men can use the power of their role to pressure women into sexual acts or use physical power to overcome women through sexual aggression. If the man holds economic power over a woman, she will likely have fewer options for reporting sexual assault. In addition, it is more likely that women will not be believed and possibly even blamed for their assaults due to the fact that women have less value than men in the social hierarchy (Koss et al., 1994).

The role of power was evident in the reports of the participants, as they described their positions as having little to no power when Making the Decision to Report and Making the Report. Cassandra described a sense of powerlessness in relation to the perpetrator due to his father’s prominent position as a psychiatrist, which contributed to her Delays in Reporting. The perpetrator utilized his father’s position, enhancing his own power over Cassandra as a means to keep her from reporting the physical and sexual assaults as he continued to harass her for the months following. When Jeané made her report to the city police, the Police Actions discouraged her, as she believed they were trying to dissuade her from filing a report and they acted as if she
was wasting their time. The officers’ decision to continue the interview with the perpetrator present increased her discomfort and further placed her in a position of reduced power.

Three of the participants attempted to overcome the power differential by defending themselves and their actions to the police officers who interviewed them, as was noted in the meaning unit Defending Herself to the Officers. Jeané made a statement that confronted the officer’s perspective that nothing had happened to her if she could not remember, as he reprimanded her for not reporting the assault sooner. Cassandra attempted to overcome powerlessness when she explained to the officer her decision to tell her mother when she felt ready and the need to retain her phone number versus changing it to avoid harassment. Jasmine also attempted to regain power as she insisted that the officer take the name of the perpetrator even after the officer told her it was not necessary.

Each participant mentioned the gender of the officers to whom they reported. Jeané spoke about the discomfort she felt when reporting to the three male city police officers. Cassandra was first interviewed by a male campus police officer, and she noted the misogyny within his dialogue. She later spoke with a female officer from the city police, who she believed had more empathy for her yet was still unable to help her. Amanda was first interviewed by a male officer from the sheriff’s office who was a colleague of her mother. After his opening joke, the officer showed respect and care as Amanda shared her accounts. Sonia Jane was interviewed by female and male officers on campus, and she did not distinguish if the officers’ genders had an effect on her experience. The officer from the city police who interviewed her and maintained contact for a two week period was female, and Sonia Jane experienced a great deal of discomfort and frustration with her. Alice spoke with an officer and the Lieutenant on campus, both of whom were female, and received much support and understanding from the two. Jasmine was also
interviewed by a female campus police officer who she had to assume was paying attention to her accounts. For the group of women as a whole, there were positive and negative experiences with officers of both genders. However, there seemed to be more positive interactions with female officers and more negative interactions with male officers reported by the participants. This suggests that the gender of the officers may have played a role in the reporting experiences of the survivors.

A factor that must be considered is that five of the six women who participated in the study identified with a race or ethnicity other than Caucasian. As discussed previously, the intersectionality of gender and race/ethnicity may have played a role in the distribution of power throughout the reporting process. However, only a few participants mentioned the race of the interviewing officers specifically, therefore there was not enough data to address the intersection of race/ethnicity and gender in this study.

**Sexual Victimization on College Campuses**

Fisher et al. (2000) established the National College Women Sexual Victimization (NCWSV) study, which was the first study to use behaviorally specific questions to screen participants; follow-up interviews were scheduled for those who met the required criteria. Respondents of the NCWSV study were asked whether or not they viewed their sexual experiences as rape. Based on the incidents that were categorized as completed rape by the researchers, 48.8% of the women surveyed stated they did not view the incident as rape, 46.5% stated they did, and 4.7% stated they did not know. The researchers recognized that this finding could lead to speculation that an appropriate means of measuring the incidence of rape had not been found. However, they also highlighted the fact many reasons may exist to explain why women may not consider their sexual experiences as rape, such as a lack of understanding of the
legal definition of rape, hesitancy to label someone they know as a rapist, or feelings of embarrassment and self-blame (Fisher et al., 2000).

Most of the women who participated in this study were quickly able to define the nature of their sexual assaults. The three participants who stated that they had been raped (Cassandra, Sonia Jane, and Alice) all knew immediately how to define their experiences. Amanda and Jasmine, who experienced other forms of sexual assault, knew that they had not been raped. The fact that Amanda knew she had not been raped added to her Delays in Reporting as she interpreted that to mean that the assault was not something to be reported. Jeané was the only participant who was uncertain how to define her experience as she could not remember the details of the assault, which also contributed to her Delays in Reporting.

Binge drinking and casual sexual encounters have become more common in recent years and are often seen as typical college student behavior (Littleton, Tabernik, et al., 2009; McCauley et al., 2010). In a review of field studies on the link between alcohol and sexual assault in adult women, Ullman (2003) found that in half of the incidents of rape that occurred, alcohol had been consumed by the victim, the perpetrator, or both. In a later study, Ullman and Najdowski (2010) found that women who had been drinking prior to their assault were more likely to receive negative reactions from others and to experience self-blame and depressive symptoms.

Three of the six participants in the study had consumed alcohol prior to the assaults. The results of this study were supportive of Ullman and Najdowski’s (2010) findings, as two of those three participants, Jeané and Sonia Jane, experienced negative reactions from the officers as they were interviewed due to their consumption of alcohol. Jeané was rendered speechless as one of the officers informed her there were many times he was drunk and could not remember how his
clothes came off. Sonia Jane explained that the city police officer who interviewed her at the hospital asked her questions regarding her alcohol and substance use prior to the assault and that she felt the questions were delivered in an accusatory manner. Alice did not report a negative reaction from the interviewing officers regarding her consumption of alcohol. These findings were highlighted by the textural theme Internal Experience of the Reporting Process and the structural theme Making the Report, which when synthesized are what occurred During the Reporting Process.

**Disclosure**

Ullman (2011) defined disclosure as informing others of one’s traumatic experiences through written or spoken word. Several studies have shown that while the majority of survivors do not report to law enforcement (Black et al., 2011; Fisher et al., 2003; Kilpatrick et al., 1992; Sable et al., 2006; Tjaden & Thoennes, 2006), most do at least reach out in an informal manner to gain support and assistance (Ahrens et al., 2007; Fisher et al., 2003; Ullman, 1996a). In one study, findings suggested that the majority of the college women surveyed indicated that they disclosed to a female friend, many disclosed to a family member, and none reported to police (Orchowski & Gidycz, 2012). These findings were consistent with other studies that have indicated that female survivors tend to reach out to friends and family or other people in their lives instead of formal support services (Ahrens et al., 2007; Rickwood et al., 2005; Ullman, 1996a). All six of the participants disclosed their sexual assaults to someone prior to going to the police. Consistent with the existing literature, all six disclosed to a female friend or friends, a family member or members, or both. Jeané disclosed to her family, namely her parents and aunt, fairly soon due to her injury. Amanda also disclosed to a parent, her mother, immediately following the assault. Cassandra, Sonia Jane, and Alice all disclosed to at least one female friend
prior to reporting. Jasmine disclosed to her friend and her mother, who both encouraged her to report.

**Barriers to Reporting Sexual Assault**

Many reasons exist to explain why sexual victimization goes unreported to law enforcement officials, including intrapsychic reasons such as self-blame, shame, guilt, embarrassment/humiliation, fear of reprisal, and denial (Bachman, 1993, 1998; Binder, 1981; Felson & Paré, 2005; Peretti & Cozzens, 1983; Sable et al., 2006; Stewart et al., 1996; Weiss, 2010; Wiehe & Richards, 1995). A frequently cited reason for not reporting is the fear of being blamed by others (Binder, 1981; Felson & Paré, 2005; Gunn & Minch, 1988; Kilpatrick et al., 1992; Sable et al., 2006; Tomlinson, 2000), particularly when the survivors were engaged in drinking and/or drug use prior to the assault (Stewart et al., 1996; Wiehe & Richards, 1995). Other reasons given for not reporting were related to environmental factors such as the survivor having had a prior relationship with the assailant and women holding negative views of the criminal justice system (Bachman, 1993, 1998; Binder, 1981; Felson & Paré, 2005; Fisher et al., 2000; Jones et al., 2009; Kilpatrick et al., 1992; Sable et al., 2006; Stewart et al., 1996).

To participate in this study, participants had to meet the criteria of having reported to law enforcement officials. Nevertheless, all six participants gave reasons why they considered not reporting and described Delays in Reporting the sexual assaults, which were found in the theme Making the Decision to Report. Jeané was hesitant to consider what happened to her as a sexual assault because she could not remember anything that happened and she was concerned that she might be blamed, which contributed to her delay in reporting. She was also focused on getting treatment for her badly broken ankle and left the state to return home for surgery and subsequent recovery. Cassandra explained that although she defined the assault as rape when it was
happening, she had difficulty for some time following the assault in accepting that it could have happened to her. She also delayed reporting because she feared having to go to court without evidence of the assault to support her case. Amanda reported the day following her assault. She spoke about her hesitancy to report because she knew that she had not been raped and was unclear if the incident was even something to consider reporting.

Alice reported one month to the day after the sexual assault and gave multiple reasons for her delays in reporting. She explained that initially she did not want to charge the perpetrator, partially due to her concern that the university might take his side, not believe her, and dismiss her account that she had in fact been raped. Jasmine reported almost three weeks after the assault and also gave multiple reasons for waiting to report. She explained that she did not want to talk about the assault and was too busy to go report the crime. She also acknowledged that she was afraid of how the officers might react to her story. She had already disclosed to her friend and mother, which she at first believed was enough. Sonia Jane did not intend to report to law enforcement; therefore, her narrative was not included in the theme Making the Decision to Report. However, she did describe her Delays in Reporting, which occurred Prior to Reporting. Sonia Jane did report as she was seeking assistance from campus police to provide transportation to the hospital for medical treatment. She delayed reporting for less than 24 hours, and during that time she attempted to return to her daily routine by going to work the morning following the assault.

**Predictors of Reporting Sexual Assault**

Williams (1984) suggested that, in order to report to law enforcement, women must first self-identify as victims of sexual assault and believe that they will be viewed as a victim by family, friends, and particularly the police. Women are more likely to consider themselves
victims and then report to law enforcement if physical violence was used in the assault, and if the incident resulted in injury, pregnancy, contraction of a sexually transmitted disease, and/or a visit to the hospital (Bachman, 1998; Baker & Peterson, 1977; Du Mont et al., 2003; Oros et al., 1980; Williams, 1984). Clay-Warner and McMahon-Howard (2009) found that the likelihood of reporting increased if the rape occurred in public or if the perpetrator entered the residence of the victim unlawfully. They also found that the probability of reporting increased by three times if a weapon was used during the assault. Furthermore, they found that victims were more likely to report if the perpetrator was a stranger as opposed to an intimate partner.

Since the 1980s, numerous studies have shown that sexual assaults matching the “classic rape” scenario are more likely to be reported than those that do not (Clay-Warner & McMahon-Howard, 2009; Chen & Ullman, 2010; Williams, 1984; Wolitzky-Taylor et al., 2011). Research conducted with college women has shown consistent results which indicate that the probability of victims reporting are related to the following factors: the nature of the crime, the victim-offender relationship, whether or not an injury occurred, the presence of a weapon, location of the incident, and association with alcohol and/or drugs (Thompson et al., 2007). Fisher et al (2003) found that college women who were raped by a stranger (as opposed to intimates or acquaintances), sustained an injury from the assault, were faced with a weapon, and experienced the assault on-campus were more likely to report to law enforcement officials. The findings of this study were supportive of the previous research in that portions of the participants’ narratives aligned with certain factors present in the “classic rape” scenario which contributed to their decision to report. However, although previous research indicated that sexual assaults were more likely to be reported if they matched the “classic rape” scenario, the research did not suggest that these are the only reasons that women might report sexual assault. The results of the current
study suggest that other factors that provide reasons to report, which are discussed in the following paragraph, may be identified by survivors. Also, it should be noted that the participant whose sexual assault most closely resembled the “classic rape” scenario, Sonia Jane, did not intend to report to law enforcement.

Wolitzky-Taylor and colleagues (2011) investigated the prevalence of reporting rape among a national sample of women. Along with the barriers to reporting, they examined the predictors of and concerns about reporting, and included questions for those who had reported regarding their experience of the reporting process. Of those surveyed who did report to law enforcement, the most common reason was to stop the perpetrator from harming someone else (38.2%). The results of this study support Wolitzky et al.’s (2011) findings in that two of the participants, Jeané and Alice, specifically addressed concern for others as a reason they decided to report. Other reasons given by respondents in the Wolitzky et al. study included: because it was a crime (13.8%), punish/catch offender (12.2%), get help/medical care (3.9%), and other (21.1%). The present study supports these findings, as participants described these same reasons for choosing to report or as contributing to the initiation of the reporting process (i.e., Sonia Jane seeking medical care). Cassandra explained that she never would have reported the assault if the perpetrator had left her alone as she requested. Out of fear for her safety, she sought help from campus police initially and then later went to the city police after continued harassment. Alice and Jasmine both mentioned seeing the perpetrator be punished as a factor that contributed to reporting. Jeané, Amanda, Alice, and Jasmine also gave other reasons for reporting. Jeané explained that she reported because she did not want to be afraid on her campus. Amanda considered her mother and reported for her as well as herself. Alice gave multiple reasons for reporting that included doing so for accuracy of statistics and for others to understand how
sexual assaults can vary in appearance. Jasmine reported that she finally decided to report so her mother and friend would stop asking her about doing so. Their persistent questioning served as a reminder of the assault, and she wanted that to stop.

Wolitzky-Taylor et al. (2011) also found that 47.2% of their respondents who reported consulted with someone else regarding the possibility of reporting prior to doing so. The majority of those who consulted (83.3%) indicated that the individual(s) with whom they consulted encouraged them to report to law enforcement. The results of the current study supported these findings. As mentioned previously, all six participants disclosed the sexual assault to someone else prior to reporting. Four of the six participants (i.e., Jeané, Amanda, Alice, and Jasmine) expressed that they received Encouragement from Others, and in Amanda’s case Encouragement from (her) Mother, to report the assaults they experienced to the police. These findings were revealed in the theme Making the Decision to Report.

Results from Wolitzky-Taylor et al.’s (2011) study also suggested that only approximately half of their respondents who reported were satisfied with how they were treated by police. They surmised that victims’ negative experiences with the reporting process could be “due in part to difficulties among law enforcement and other first responders in understanding the acute experience of the rape victims” (p. 823). The results of this study supported the potential accuracy of this surmised reason, as only two of the six participants (Amanda and Alice) indicated that their reporting experience was in some ways positive or positive rather than negative overall. The remaining four participants (Jeané, Cassandra, Sonia Jane, and Jasmine) used words such as terrible, humiliating, useless, and uncomfortable to describe their reporting experiences and cited specific actions of the police officers that contributed to their negative experiences. The events that transpired During the Reporting Process were found to be highly
influential in the participants’ experiences of the overall reporting process. This was particularly found in the themes Internal Experience of the Reporting Process and Making the Report.

**Implications for Counselor Educators**

The results of this study supported many of the findings from previous studies on reporting sexual assault to law enforcement. However, this qualitative study was different in that it gave voice to the experiences of college women who reported sexual assault to law enforcement officials, which provided insight into the shared experience of the phenomenon. These insights are valuable for counselor educators, particularly those who teach courses in trauma and recovery. The insights will also be useful to counselor educators who teach courses related to college counseling, as sexual assault on college campuses is a salient concern for college counselors. Counselor educators will be better equipped to convey an understanding of the reasons survivors choose to report and choose not to report, and of the experiences of those who have reported, to counseling students who will go on to work with college women who have been sexually assaulted. In conveying this pertinent information, counselor educators will play a more vital role in the improvement of services and treatment provided to clients. Furthermore, counselor educators could use this knowledge to better train officers, potentially through workshops and seminars, in appropriate interview techniques. They could form interdisciplinary teams across college campuses to better serve the needs of students who have been victimized.

**Implications for College Counselors**

No previous study has focused solely on the shared experiences of college women who have reported sexual assault to law enforcement officials. Learning what the women who participated in this study experienced while reporting and how they perceived and internalized the experience will benefit college counselors in multiple ways. Primarily, college counselors
who have an understanding of how the reporting process may progress for survivors can have a more informed perspective when working with female students who have reported or are considering reporting their assault experiences. Participants in this study discussed delays in reporting as well as their reasons for reporting to the police. Counselors, when working with students who have not reported and who are unsure if they want to report, can use the findings from this study to better understand why survivors may choose to delay reporting. They may play a more supportive role, as opposed to being overly encouraging for them to report.

Considering Sonia Jane’s experience, survivors who are not ready to report or do not want to report and are forced to do so could experience further feelings of powerlessness and revictimization, potentially contributing to further traumatization. For counselors working with those students who have reported, understanding that the reporting experience can vary from dehumanizing to helpful will allow counselors to be more assistive therapeutically. This assistance may include being able to validate survivors’ experiences in reporting, as well as help survivors process and make sense of what occurred as they attempt to integrate the assault and reporting process into their personal views of self.

**Implications for Campus and Off-Campus Police**

The results of this study suggest that the actions of police officers involved in the reporting process greatly affect the experience of the survivors who report sexual assault to law enforcement officials. Furthermore, the results suggest that there is a need for officers to understand how sexual assaults can and do occur, and that they will differ from the “classic rape” scenario (see Clay-Warner & McMahon-Howard, 2009; Chen & Ullman, 2010; Williams, 1984; Wolitzky-Taylor et al., 2011). This understanding, along with careful listening and supportive, nonjudgmental responses from officers is recommended. Results of this study suggest this might
allow for more positive outcomes for survivors. The results also indicate a need for officers to understand how their behaviors may be perceived by survivors even when they are not currently interviewing the survivors, such as when the survivors can hear officers joking and laughing outside the doors where they are waiting. Each participant in this study also mentioned being asked the same questions repeatedly when being interviewed by police officers. The repetitious questioning elicited feelings of confusion, anxiety, and frustration for the survivors, as most did not understand the purpose of being asked the same questions multiple times. This suggests that explaining the process to survivors, akin to demystifying the process in the feminist literature, may aid in the reduction of negative feelings and assist the survivors to feel included in the process.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

The women who participated in this study were from diverse racial/ethnic backgrounds; however, the diversity among the women was not a focus for this study. As previously discussed, ethnic minority women likely experience oppression quite differently than White women (Worell & Remer, 2003), so it could be expected that women of color might experience the reporting process differently than women who are White. Further research, both qualitative and quantitative, on the intersectionality of gender and race as it relates to the reporting experience of survivors would be beneficial. For example, a quantitative design could aid in the collection of baseline data to determine if there is a significant difference in the reporting experiences of women of color and women who are White. A qualitative design could build upon the results of such a study and explore the nature of any differences identified.

One participant, Alice, made several statements pertaining to her view of self prior to and during the reporting process. She had a very strong sense of self and was confident in the fact
that she was the victim and had done nothing wrong. As the police officers indicated to Alice that she was not to blame, she was able to agree with the officers self-assuredly. Alice’s view of self, along with the supportive actions of the police officers, seemed to play a role in her overall positive experience in reporting. In contrast to Alice’s experience, Jeané explained that During the Reporting Process and Following the Report in particular, she continued to feel violated and felt as if no one cared about her at her university. Feeling as if what happened to her did not matter to the officers or to the university was difficult for Jeané and likely had an impact on her view of self. Further research into survivors’ view of self related to the experience of reporting could be valuable.

Furthermore, this study focused solely on the reporting experiences of the survivors, which was inclusive of how the participants perceived the officers and officer actions. Studies conducted from the law enforcement perspective of working with survivors who report sexual assault would be valuable in providing a different view of the process. Additionally, this study focused on the experiences of female survivors as they reported to law enforcement. The experiences of male survivors of sexual assault is an area of growing need in the literature as more men come forward to report the abuse they experience and the unique stigma associated with male sexual victimization. A qualitative study with a design similar to that of this study could provide a male survivor’s perspective. Additionally, it is recommended that further qualitative research be conducted on the topic of sexual assault to allow the voices of survivors to be heard, not only through phenomenology, but also through other qualitative methods as well.
Limitations

One possible limitation to this study was the assumption that survivors who reported to law enforcement actually made the decision to do so. Considering the case of Sonia Jane, she never intended to report to the police. She went to her campus police only to obtain transportation to the hospital; she was held in her university’s police department and interviewed by multiple officers before they provided her with transportation. My assumption that survivors made the decision could have disrupted the study, particularly in answering my second research question: What contributed to college women’s decision to report their sexual assault to law enforcement? If more participants with experiences similar to Sonia Jane’s had been selected for the study, then the question may have not received enough support to be answered by the findings.

A second possible limitation that I anticipated was that participants may have been reluctant to disclose information due to the nature of the topic. There was little evidence to suggest that there was reluctance to disclose, given how verbal the participants were during the interviews and the willingness and desire they expressed to share their stories.

Another potential limitation to the study is the accuracy of the participants’ narratives. This is not to suggest that the participants were not truthful, as many do assume regarding the reports of survivors of sexual assault due to rape myth acceptance (Buddie & Miller, 2001). However, given the sensitive nature of the topic and the multiple emotions that the survivors reported they experienced as they progressed through the interview process, it is possible that the survivors’ perceptions could have been altered due to the conditions of the reporting experience. Nonetheless, given that this qualitative study was conducted with phenomenological design, the
focus of the study is on the participants’ experiences, which is inclusive of the participants’ perceptions regardless of how they may have been affected.

Another limitation is the difficulty of ensuring pure bracketing as the researcher. Prior to the onset of data collection, I not only documented my biases in my study proposal, but I also met with my dissertation chair and discussed my biases and how they might impact my study. Throughout the data collection and analysis processes, I maintained contact with my peer debriefer who allowed me to process any emotions or thoughts I might have been having that could have hampered the study. I also maintained a researcher’s journal to document thoughts or feelings I experienced as they related to my study.

The final limitation is the lack of generalizability to the wider population, although this is not typically considered a limitation for qualitative research. When conducting a phenomenology, it is recommended that the number of participants remain relatively few but that data continue to be collected until the point of saturation is met (Creswell, 2007). With this in mind, conducting this study in different parts of the United States or increasing the sample size slightly might produce a greater understanding of the phenomenon of college women’s experiences reporting sexual assault to law enforcement officials. In addition, due to the subjective nature of the data analysis procedure, my interpretation of the participants’ narratives may differ from that another researcher, regardless of validation strategies.

**Personal Reflection**

As I sat and reflected on my journey through the dissertation process, I was flooded with thoughts and emotions. This final reflection did not represent just the end of what I imagined to be the largest research project I would ever take on; it represented a closing of an incredibly influential and invaluable period of my life. In the fall of 2011, in my very first research class, I
decided that I was going to study sexual assault among college women and reporting. Over the next two years I adjusted the focus and solidified my design, but I never strayed from the topic. In choosing this topic, I knew that I would never grow tired or lose my passion for the subject. What I did not know or expect to experience was that I would see the world very differently by the end of my journey.

Since proposing my design almost a year ago, I have been privileged to sit at the table, metaphorically and literally, with some of the most amazing people I have ever encountered. It can be easy to be overcome by frustration and disappointment in humanity when researching a topic as personally intrusive as sexual victimization. However, seeking gatekeepers for this study provided me with the opportunity to speak with several women (and a few men) who are bravely passionate about putting an end to abuse and injustice in all their forms, particularly the victimization of women and children. For their time and assistance with this study, however slight they may view it as being, I am greatly appreciative.

No part of my journey was quite as influential as my time spent with the participants: Jeané, Cassandra, Amanda, Sonia Jane, Alice, and Jasmine. Going into the interviews, I imagined that as a human being I could be affected by what I might hear, yet as a researcher, I was prepared to bracket my experience and maintain perspective. Their stories were profound. They shared their accounts with me and gave me insight into their experiences in ways I could not have fully imagined prior to data collection. I am so incredibly grateful to all of them for sharing those very personal pieces of their lives with me. What I learned from them was the experience of reporting sexual assault to law enforcement officials can vary from person to person. At best, it can be a manageable experience when the survivor is met with support and when protocol is followed. At its worst, reporting can be an emotionally exhaustive and
humiliating experience in which the survivor is left feeling blamed and invalidated. For these women to experience this type of treatment speaks volumes about the lack of progress of our society. We must do better.

Throughout the process, I stayed in contact with my committee chair and my peer debriefer in order to assess for any interference. I also continued journaling to document my thoughts and feelings to do my part to ensure the purest of bracketing. In reflecting on this portion of my process, I look back and feel confident and satisfied that I did this well, staying in the role of researcher instead of falling into that of another possible role such as counselor, investigator, or fellow woman. What I did not expect to feel came later.

For this study, I needed a minimum of six participants and intended to stop once the point of saturation had been met. I quickly realized I would need only six participants. However, between 20 and 30 people, mostly women but also men, contacted me to express interest in participating in the study. I did not expect the difficulty I would have in telling them that they could not participate in the study, that I would not hear their stories. After the data collection was complete, I walked the campuses looking for any remaining flyers I had posted. I found several, but not nearly the number I had posted. While collecting the flyers I noticed that countless tabs had been pulled. I wondered to myself, “How many had pulled a tab and called? How many pulled a tab and did not call? How many may have pulled a tab for someone else?” This was the part I did not expect. I did not expect to be impacted in such a way by the stories that I did not hear.

Of course I shared this with my peer debriefer, my chair, and my methodologist. After all, the project was not complete. I had to maintain my role as researcher and bracket my experience. Although I would set the thoughts to the side for a while, the idea remained that
there was still more to be done. And now, as this project comes to a close, I am painfully aware that there are still more voices to hear.
References


Appendix A
Recruitment Flyer

Seeking Participants
Research is now being conducted on
COLLEGE WOMEN’S EXPERIENCE OF REPORTING
SEXUAL ASSAULT

Are you a woman who experienced a sexual assault while
in college between 6 months and 5 years ago?

Did you report it to the police?

If so, we want to hear about your experience. You will receive a
$50 Visa Gift Card for your participation.

To learn more about this project, please call, text, or email:
Candace Park, MA, LPC, NCC
985.492.0220
cnpark@uno.edu

This research is conducted under the direction of Dr. Barbara Hartley, Department of Educational Leadership,
Counseling, and Development in the College of Education at the University of New Orleans, and has been
reviewed and approved by the UNO Institutional Review Board.
Appendix B
IRB Approval Letter

University Committee for the Protection of Human Subjects in Research
University of New Orleans

Campus Correspondence

Principal Investigator: Barbara Herlihy
Co-Investigator: Candace Park
Date: June 16, 2014
Protocol Title: “A Phenomenological Investigation of the Reporting Experience for Female Survivors of Sexual Assault on College Campuses”
IRB#: 02May14

The IRB has deemed that the research and procedures are compliant with the University of New Orleans and federal guidelines. The above referenced human subjects protocol has been reviewed and approved using expedited procedures (under 45 CFR 46.116(a) category (7)).

Approval is only valid for one year from the approval date. Any changes to the procedures or protocols must be reviewed and approved by the IRB prior to implementation. Use the IRB number listed on this letter in all future correspondence regarding this proposal.

If an adverse, unforeseen event occurs (e.g., physical, social, or emotional harm), you are required to inform the IRB as soon as possible after the event.

Best wishes on your project!

Sincerely,

[Signature]

Robert D. Laird, Ph.D., Chair
UNO Committee for the Protection of Human Subjects in Research
Appendix C
Oral Script for Recruiting Participants

My name is Candace Park and I am conducting research on the shared experiences of college women who reported the crime of sexual assault to law enforcement officials. I am a doctoral candidate in Counselor Education and Supervision at the University of New Orleans. The study that you are being asked to participate in involves my dissertation research.

The purpose of this study is to explore the lived experiences of college women who reported the crime of sexual assault to law enforcement officials. I hope to gain a better understanding of the reporting process for women and the meaning behind their lived experiences. I hope that the results of the study will help counselors to better understand the reporting experience for college women who are survivors of sexual assault to provide more effective services in meeting the needs of these women.

I am hoping to complete my dissertation research between the months of June 2014 and October 2014. Upon verbal agreement from you, we can set up the face-to-face interview at a time and location that is convenient for you.

When we meet for the initial interview, you will be asked to provide consent to participate in the study. You will then be asked to fill out a short questionnaire describing personal characteristics and the interview will follow. You will be asked to agree to be interviewed, possibly on two separate occasions to expand on your answers and to clarify information gathered and interpreted by the researcher. The research will require the following time commitment from you:

1) Estimated time to complete the short questionnaire – 1-2 minutes (administered on one occasion)
2) Estimated time to conduct the interview – approximately 60 minutes (may be conducted on two occasions as mentioned previously for clarification purposes).

Your total time commitment for this research study is estimated to be between 1 ½ and 2 hours. You will be audio recorded during each interview.

Before you can participate in this research study, you must first verbalize that you agree to participate in the study and to allow the use of your information in the study. This verbal acknowledgement of consent will be audio recorded to minimize identifying information. Prior to verbalizing your acknowledgement of consent, I will read it with you so you clearly understand the conditions of participation in this study. If you choose to participate, your information will be held confidential and you will be given the opportunity to provide your own pseudonym to protect your identity. You are encouraged to ask questions if any of the information is unclear. Do you have any questions or concerns at this time about the research study?

Thank you for your time and consideration.
Appendix D
Informed Consent to Participate

Please carefully read the following information prior to continuing onto the interview:

1. Candace N. Park, MA, LPC, NCC (931-629-6013; cnpark@uno.edu) a doctoral student in the Counselor Education and Supervision program, under the direct supervision of Dr. Barbara Herlihy (504-280-6662 or bherlihy@uno.edu), a faculty member at the University of New Orleans, is requesting your participation in a research study entitled, *A Phenomenological Investigation of the Reporting Experience for Female Survivors of Sexual Assault on College Campuses*. The purpose of this study is to investigate the experiences of college women who have faced a sexual assault and made the decision to report the crime to law enforcement officials. I want to better understand how you came to the decision to report the crime and the impact reporting has had on multiple aspects of your life. Your role in this research project will involve being interviewed face-to-face for approximately 60 minutes during which time you will be asked open-ended questions and audio recorded. A second interview may be required for clarification purposes. Once the study is complete, the recordings will be discarded. Your real name will not be revealed in the study. Anything you say can be used in the study.

2. One risk associated with this study is that you will be asked to share personal information pertaining to your experience. You do not have to answer any question that you do not wish to answer. Due to the length of the interview (approximately 60 minutes), you may become tired or fatigued. Should that happen, you may take a break or choose to discontinue the interview. Due to the sensitive nature of this topic, you may experience emotional distress and wish to speak with a counselor after the interview. If you believe that you could benefit from additional services, the researcher will assist you in identifying services to fit your needs.

3. Although the benefits of participating in this study for you personally may be minimal, you will be contributing to the scholarly research about the reporting experiences of college women as survivors of sexual assault as it pertains to university personnel and the counseling profession.

4. You do not have to participate and are free to stop the interview at any time without consequence. Additionally, you are free to withdraw from this study at any point.

5. The results of this study will be used for my dissertation, publication, and conferences; however, your name and identity will not be revealed. You will be assigned a pseudonym of your choosing and it will be used in any reporting of your comments. The researcher will only know your name and any transcriptions of this interview will be kept in a locked file cabinet accessible only to the researcher.

6. Participants who agree to participate in the study will be included in a drawing for a $30 Visa gift card that will occur once interviews are complete. Your participation in this research study is voluntary and you may not be compensated. Refusal to participate will involve no penalty. You may withdraw from participation in this research study at any time.

7. If you have any questions about your rights as a participant in this research, or if you feel you have been placed at risk, please contact Dr. Ann O’Hanlon, Institutional Review Board, at the University of New Orleans at 504-280-3990.

Please indicate that you acknowledge having read this document and understand the conditions of participation in the research study by verbalizing your name and a statement of your consent to participate.
Appendix E
Personal Characteristics Questionnaire

Please complete this questionnaire by checking the appropriate answer that applies to you. The information you provide will remain confidential and not be disclosed to any person not involved in the research study.

________________________________________________________

Personal Characteristics

Pseudonym: ___________________________ Date of Birth: ______

Current Academic Status: Racial/Ethnicity:
_____ Freshman  _____ African American/Black
_____ Sophomore  _____ American Indian or Alaskan Native
_____ Junior  _____ Caucasian/White
_____ Senior  _____ Asian American/Asian
_____ Graduate/Professional Degree  _____ Hispanic/Latina
_____ Non-Student - Describe: _______  _____ Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
_____ Self-Identify: __________________  _____ Bi-racial/Multi-racial, Describe: ___

Relationship Status: Sexual Orientation:
_____ Single  _____ Heterosexual
_____ Serious Dating/Committed Relationship  _____ Lesbian
_____ Civil Union, Domestic Partnership, or Equivalent  _____ Bisexual
_____ Married  _____ Questioning
_____ Separated  _____ Self-Identify: __________
_____ Divorced
_____ Widowed

At the time of the assault:

How old were you?____

What was your academic status? ________________________________

What was your relationship status? ______________________________
Dear (Gatekeeper),

I am a graduate student under the leadership of Dr. Barbara Herlihy in the Department of Educational Leadership, Counseling, and Development in the College of Education at the University of New Orleans. I am conducting a qualitative dissertation study on the lived experiences of college women who reported the crime of sexual assault. I am requesting your help with this research because you have contact with women who meet the criteria necessary to participate in this study. As we previously discussed, in order to participate in this study, a participant must be a female who has experienced sexual assault between six months and five years ago while enrolled at a university and the decision was made to report this act to law enforcement officials. Participants who agree to participate in the study will be included in a drawing for a $30 Visa gift card that will occur once interviews are complete.

Your duty in this study is to act as a liaison between potential participants and myself as the lead researcher. Your role in this study is vital to obtaining participants and has the potential to assist in further understanding how survivors of sexual assault experience the reporting process. This study has been approved by the Institutional Review Board at the University of New Orleans [, as well as the gatekeeper’s university, if applicable]. The results of this study could be a direct benefit to you, as well as to professionals from other disciplines, in better understanding what reporting is like for survivors of sexual assault.

Your participation as a gatekeeper in this study is voluntary. If you choose not to participate or to withdraw from the study at any time, there will be no penalty. If you have any questions concerning the research study, please contact me at (931) 629-6013 or at cnpark@uno.edu. You may also contact my faculty advisor, Dr. Barbara Herlihy, at the University of New Orleans by email at bherlihy@uno.edu or by telephone at (504) 280-6662. Please contact Dr. Ann O’Hanlon by telephone at (504) 280-3990 for answers to questions about this research, participants’ rights as human subjects, and your concerns pertaining to research-related injury.

Thank you for your assistance in this study.

Sincerely,

Candace N. Park, MA, LPC, NCC
Doctoral Candidate
Counselor Education and Supervision
University of New Orleans
Appendix G
Participant Handout

Dear Potential Participant,

I am a graduate student under the leadership of Dr. Barbara Herlihy in the Department of Educational Leadership, Counseling, and Development in the College of Education at the University of New Orleans. I am conducting a qualitative dissertation study on the lived experiences of college women who reported the crime of sexual assault. I am currently in the recruiting process, and I am looking for participants who are willing to be interviewed on their experience with sexual assault and what it was like for them report the crime of sexual assault. To participate in this study, you must meet certain criteria. You must be a female who experienced a sexual assault between six months and five years ago while enrolled at a university and reported the crime to law enforcement officials.

Your participation in this study has the potential to assist in further understanding how survivors of sexual assault experienced the reporting process. My study has been approved by the Institutional Review Board at the University of New Orleans, as well as by [the participant’s university]. All information that you provide is confidential; there will be no way to identify you. The results of my study may be published but your name will not be known. Participants who agree to participate in the study will be included in a drawing for a $30 Visa gift card that will occur once interviews are complete. Although there may be no direct benefit to you, the possible benefit of your participation will contribute in assisting counselors, as well as professionals from other disciplines, in better understanding what reporting is like for survivors of sexual assault.

Your role in this research study will involve your participation in an initial interview and a follow-up interview, conducted by myself as the researcher, which will be audio recorded. All responses to the interviews will be transcribed verbatim, coded and analyzed and will be reviewed by a confidential peer reviewer. No identifying information will be included in the results, and there will be no risk of harm to participants due to breach of confidentiality. Your participation in this study is voluntary. If you choose not to participate or to withdraw from the study at any time, there will be no penalty.

If you have further questions and/or would like more information regarding this study, please feel free to contact me at cnpark@uno.edu or give me a call at (931) 629-6013. You can also contact my faculty advisor, Dr. Barbara Herlihy, at the University of New Orleans by email at bherlihy@uno.edu or by telephone at (504) 280-6662. Please contact Dr. Ann O’Hanlon by telephone at (504) 280-3990 for answers to questions about this research, your rights as a human subject, and your concerns regarding a research-related injury.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Candace N. Park, MA, LPC, NCC
Doctoral Candidate
Counselor Education and Supervision
University of New Orleans
Appendix H
Interview Protocol

1. Tell me about your overall experience in college.
2. When did the sexual assault occur?
3. Where did the assault occur?
4. Was this the first time you experienced a sexual assault?
   a. If not…
      i. Tell me about your previous assault.
   b. If so…
      i. Did you know the perpetrator?
      ii. Tell me about the nature of your relationship.
5. Describe the events leading up to the assault.
6. Describe the nature of the assault. (e.g., completed/attempted rape, groping/fondling, incapacitated rape, etc.)
7. When did you realize that the incident was a sexual assault?
8. Were there others in helping you reach this conclusion?
9. How was the decision made to report the sexual assault?
10. How was the report filed? (Did it occur at a hospital? Did you contact the police?)
11. How long after the sexual assault did you file a report?
12. With whom did you first make contact regarding the sexual assault?
13. What happened after the initial contact was made?
14. How would you describe your experience with the reporting process?
15. Were there specific events that contributed to this description?
16. If you could do it over again, would you file a report? Tell me about that.
17. Is there anything that you would choose to share with other survivors who are considering filing a report?
Appendix I
Confidentiality Statement

Persons assisting the researcher should complete this document.
Due to the sensitive nature of this study, the researcher also must sign this form.

A Phenomenological Investigation of the Reporting Experience for Female Survivors of Sexual Assault on College Campuses

CONFIDENTIALITY STATEMENT

As a peer/auditor working on the above research study at the University of New Orleans, I understand that I must maintain the confidentiality of all information concerning research participants. This information includes, but is not limited to, all identifying information and research data of participants and all information accruing from any direct or indirect contact I may have with said participants. In order to maintain confidentiality, I hereby agree to refrain from discussing or disclosing any information regarding research participants, including information described without identifying information, to any individual who is not part of the above research study and in need of the information for the expressed purposes on the research program.

_______________________   ________________________  ______________
Peer/Auditor Signature   Printed Name     Date

_______________________   ________________________  ______________
Researcher Signature    Printed Name     Date
VITA

Candace Nichole Park was born in Loretto, Tennessee. She obtained her Bachelor’s degree in Psychology from the University of New Orleans in 2006. She earned her Master’s degree in Counseling with a concentration in Marriage and Family Therapy from East Tennessee State University in 2008. Candace returned to the University of New Orleans in the fall of 2011 to pursue her doctoral studies in Counselor Education. Candace is a Licensed Professional Counselor in the state of Louisiana and a Nationally Certified Counselor.