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SEXUAL ASSAULT DISCLOSURE: THE ROLE OF SURVIVOR AND DISCLOSURE  
RECIPIENT RACE & ETHNICITY

by

NOLA BROWNE

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the Honors Undergraduate Thesis program in Psychology  
in the College of Sciences  
and in the Burnett Honors College  
at the University of Central Florida  
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Thesis Chair: Amie Newins

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## **ABSTRACT**

To date, most research on sexual assault disclosure has utilized samples composed predominately of White women (Fedina et al., 2018). As a result, there is a need for research that examines sexual assault disclosure within racially and ethnically diverse samples. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to examine whether survivors' race/ethnicity is related to whether they disclose their sexual assault to others of the same and different races and ethnicities. The study recruited undergraduate college students from the UCF Psychology Department Sona System to complete an online survey that assessed history of sexual assault and disclosure of sexual assault (for those who endorsed a history of sexual assault). For the current study, the sample was restricted to students who had experienced a sexual assault since the age of 14 ( $n = 139$ ). White participants were more likely to disclose to a friend of the same race than non-White participants,  $\chi^2(1, N = 139) = 11.80, p < .001$ , and more likely to disclose to a family member of the same race than non-White participants,  $\chi^2(1, N = 139) = 5.32, p = .021$ . Additionally, there are no statistically significant differences between Hispanic and non-Hispanic participants in disclosure likelihood for any type of disclosure recipient group. These findings suggest that research examining barriers of sexual assault disclosure in diverse racial and ethnic populations is needed.

## **DEDICATIONS**

To my beloved friends and family, your unwavering support has been my anchor throughout this academic journey. Dedicated to the resilient black women in psychology who have paved the way, this thesis stands as a tribute to your enduring impact on the field. With heartfelt gratitude, I extend this work as a token of appreciation for the strength and wisdom you have generously shared with me.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

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## INTRODUCTION

Sexual assault is defined as any nonconsensual sexual act, and it includes incidents in which an individual does not have capacity to consent (The United States Department of Justice, 2020). The three components of the definition of sexual assault are the unwanted sexual act itself (e.g., touching sexual body parts, attempted or completed penetration), the tactic that was used to perform the unwanted act (e.g., physical force, verbal coercion), and the communication of non- consent (Cook et al., 2011). While all acts of sexual assault involve communication of non- consent (or lack of communication of consent), the unwanted sexual act and perpetration tactic determine the specific type of sexual assault (i.e., unwanted sexual contact, attempted coercion, coercion, attempted rape, or rape; Koss et al., 2007).

Disclosure of sexual assault occurs when the survivor tells someone else about their sexual assault. Disclosure of sexual assault that elicits positive and accepting responses can lead to improved mental health for the survivor (Sabina & Ho, 2014). There are also medical, mental health, and legal resources that could be beneficial to a sexual assault survivor if they disclose their assault (Lindquist et al., 2016). Despite the benefits, there are barriers to disclose of sexual assault, such as fear of not being believed and receiving blame for the assault experience (Ullman et al., 2010). To date, most research regarding barriers to sexual assault disclosure has utilized samples composed predominately of heterosexual, White women (Fedina et al., 2018). As a result, there is a need for research that examines sexual assault disclosure within diverse samples.

## **Sexual Assault Prevalence**

In the United States, 463,634 people ages 12 and older experience sexual assault each year (RAINN, 2020). Particular groups are at an increased risk of experiencing sexual assault. Individuals who identify with a traditionally marginalized racial or ethnic group are at an increased risk of experiencing sexual assault (Fedina et al., 2018). Hispanic men in the United States were found to be at greater risk for sexual assault than White men, with a prevalence of 12.5% compared to 5.7% (Raj et. al, 2019). Gender non-conforming individuals, as well as those with non-heterosexual orientations, are at elevated risk of sexual assault (Mellins et al., 2017; Fedina et al., 2018). Collectively, existing research underscores that LGBTQ+ individuals not only face increased vulnerability to sexual violence but also endure heightened adverse consequences post-assault (Rothman et al., 2011; Sigurvinsdottir & Ulman, 2015). Individuals reporting mental and physical disabilities are notably vulnerable to sexual assault (Basile et al., 2016). Individuals who have previously experienced a sexual assault are also at a higher risk of revictimization (Conley et al., 2016; Fedina et al., 2018; Mellins et al., 2017). Furthermore, unacknowledged victims of sexual assault are individuals who perceive their experience as less severe, often interpreting it as a misunderstanding, seduction, or simply as a negative sexual encounter, which can lead to them not fully acknowledging themselves as sexual assault survivors. Research suggests that unacknowledged victims may face a higher risk of experiencing sexual revictimization compared to those who openly acknowledge their sexual assault (Littleton et al., 2009). Within a study investigating adult sexual assault, a notable interaction between race/ethnicity and perceived transgender identity, revealing that sexual assault severity escalated particularly among individuals of color as transgender visibility rose, which may suggest that

the simultaneous visibility of being transgender, and a person of color may amplify the severity risk of the assault (Staples & Fuller, 2021). These factors persist in more defined spheres, like sexual victimization on college campuses.

### **Sexual Assault on College Campuses**

One in five women is sexually assaulted while enrolled in a 4-year college (Cantor et al., 2015; Krebs et al., 2016). In a study looking at sexual assault among college students, the most common perpetration tactic used on women was incapacitation, followed by physical force (Mellins et al., 2017). Verbal coercion was also found to play a role in many instances of sexual assault (Mellins et al., 2017). In a systematic review of studies published between 2000 and 2015, unwanted sexual contact and sexual coercion were the most common forms of sexual victimization among college students (Fedina et al., 2018). Within an investigation of college students of all genders, 22% of students reported experiencing a sexual assault since starting college (Mellins et al., 2017). Women are more likely than men to experience sexual assault (Conley et al., 2016; Mellins et al., 2017). Hispanic students with learning disabilities are confronted with a 22% higher likelihood of experiencing sexual victimization compared to their White counterparts with learning disabilities (Daigle et al., 2023). The high rates of sexual assault among college students highlights the importance of research on this topic area.

### **Sexual Assault Disclosure**

Two-thirds to three-quarters of adult sexual assault survivors disclose their sexual assault experience (Ahrens, Stansell, Jennings et al., 2010). However, for most survivors, there is a delay in the time period between the time period the assault took place and when

they choose to disclose (Ahrens, Stansell, Jennings et al., 2010). Factors associated with longer disclosure timelines include if the survivors' sexual assault experience involved penetration, if the survivor was subjected to threats, and if the survivor had been acquainted with the assailant (Bicanic et al., 2015). Based on previous research related to sexual assault disclosure, survivors who wait longer to disclose are less likely to seek medical assistance and to report the assault to law enforcement than survivors who disclose soon after the assault (Ahrens, Stansell, Jennings et al., 2010; Ullman, 1996). There are further intricacies of sexual assault disclosure patterns to the recipients of such disclosures, which reveals the diverse channels survivors employ to share their experiences.

In the sexual assault literature, disclosure recipients are often classified into two groups: formal disclosure recipients, which include law enforcement, institutional officials, medical providers, and mental health providers; and informal disclosure recipients, which include friends and family. Formal disclosure recipients provide access to healthcare, counseling, and support services for sexual assault survivors, and they also include agencies that can investigate and pursue sanctions or legal action against perpetrators (Lindquist et al., 2016). Informal disclosure to family and friends can provide access to social support and decrease feelings of isolation for survivors (Sabina & Ho, 2014). While there are benefits to both forms of disclosure, more women disclose sexual victimization experiences to an informal support than a formal support (Mennicke et al., 2019; Orchowski & Gidycz, 2012). Additionally, research has shown that female sexual assault survivors are more likely to disclose to a female peer than a family member (Orchowski & Gidycz, 2012). It was found that 69% of women who were physically forced into sexual contact and 56% of women who experienced an incapacitated

sexual assault disclosed the assault to someone close to them (Lindquist et al., 2016).

When individuals consider disclosing their sexual assault, they can experience multiple barriers. In one study, some of the main reasons survivors who did not disclose their experiences were that they did not believe the experience was a serious enough matter to report, they were uncertain whether the act was intended, and they did not want others to find out about their sexual assault experience (Lindquist et al., 2016). Emotional barriers to disclosure include shame, embarrassment, and fear that formal reporting institutions perpetuate rape myths that will elicit negative responses or lack of access to resources (Sabrina & Ho, 2014). Rape myths are beliefs about rape that are generally untrue but are widely accepted by society, often as an avenue to deny and account for the actions of perpetrators (Edwards et al., 2011). Disclosure recipients who endorse rape myths tend to respond to sexual assault disclosures more negatively and to provide fewer emotionally supportive responses (Grandgenett et al., 2020). Another study found that fear of the police, concerns about confidentiality, and beliefs that the survivors can handle the situation themselves serve as barriers to formal disclosure (Thompson & Zinzow, 2011).

Furthermore, some individuals indicate they did not tell their healthcare provider about their sexual assault history because their provider never asked (Berry & Rutledge, 2016). Survivors with high levels of substance use, posttraumatic stress symptoms, and depressive symptoms were less likely to have disclosed than survivors with low scores on these variables (Berry & Rutledge, 2016), which is concerning because these individuals are more likely to need the resources that can be provided following disclosure. When an individual discloses, they can receive a range of different reactions ranging from supportive to non-supportive (Ullman, 1996), which may impact the likelihood of additional disclosures. In

sum, there are a variety of barriers (e.g., social responses, rape myths, emotional factors) that could potentially impact the likelihood of disclosure for sexual assault survivors. However, most of these studies (e.g., Berry & Rutledge, 2016; Thompson & Zinzow, 2011; Ullman, 1996) were conducted using samples of women who primarily identified as White, so more research on differing racial and ethnic groups is needed.

### **Sexual Assault Disclosure by Race/Ethnicity**

People of color (POC) may face additional barriers to sexual assault disclosure due to the impact of previous experiences (e.g., discriminatory experiences) and cultural factors (Ahrens, Rios-Mandel, Isas et al., 2010; Tillman et al., 2010). In a study that examined a group of racially and ethnically diverse women who had experienced assault, responses and support received from informal disclosure recipients impacted survivors' likelihood of reporting the assault to law enforcement (DePrince et al., 2019). Specifically, informal responses of tangible aid and treating the survivor differently were associated with higher likelihood of reporting to law enforcement; while informal responses of distraction were negatively associated with reporting likelihood and informal responses of emotional support were not associated with reporting likelihood (DePrince et al., 2019). Additionally, Black women report hesitancy to disclose sexual assault perpetrated by Black men to the police because their community emphasizes racial loyalty over reporting intraracial sexual assault (Slatton & Richard, 2020). Furthermore, racial stereotypes of Black women being promiscuous may decrease their likelihood of disclosure due to concerns about being believed or being blamed for the sexual assault (Bryant-Davis, 2009). The enduring Jezebel stereotype, rooted in historical contexts of slavery, continues to perpetuate the hyper sexualization of Black women in modern society. Furthermore, a contemporary

amalgamation of the Jezebel stereotype with the Sapphire stereotype, which portrays Black women as emasculating and loud, is prevalent in American society (Collier et. al, 2017; Townsend et al., 2010). These preconceived stigmas influence societal perceptions of Black women, which can affect their interactions with various formal entities and peers. Individuals of Asian descent may not disclose their sexual assault because of fear of shaming themselves or their family (Campbell, 2001). Barriers to disclosure for Latina women may include complex interplays of cultural norms, familial dynamics, and societal expectations. Based on focus groups with Latina women, the following themes were identified as influencing the labeling and disclosure of sexual assault and intimate partner violence in the Latina community: availability of community resources to support survivors, beliefs about familism, fear of violence, respect for authority, norms related to not talking about sex and violence, and traditional marital beliefs. The tendency to protect the family impacts individuals from collectivistic cultures, as it can lead to hesitancy to confide in friends and family due to feelings of shame and a desire to avoid burdening their social circles (Fontes, 2007; Kim et al., 2006). Other sociocultural barriers to disclosure that vary by race and ethnicity include language barriers, lack of access to community-based support, fear of discriminatory treatment in formal agencies, and socially established victim-blaming (Bryant-Davis, 2009).

In mental health treatment, patients typically indicate they would prefer to see a therapist of the same race and ethnicity (Cabral & Smith, 2011). While a racial and ethnic match between a patient and therapist is not the sole determinant of the therapeutic relationship, the patient's perception of the therapist's race and ethnicity may impact the patient's beliefs about the therapist's ability to understand them, which can influence the

patient's level of comfort disclosing information to the therapist (Chu et al., 2016). Additionally, language barriers can impact how much a person can or will tell someone (Chu et al., 2016). Patients who have an ethnic and linguistic match with their therapist attend more sessions and are less likely to drop out of therapy prior to completion (Karlsson, 2005). These findings may be relevant to sexual assault disclosure, particularly to formal support providers, as similar factors may influence to whom an individual is willing to disclose their sexual assault. Based on the research on mental health treatment, the race/ethnicity of the potential disclosure recipient may influence the likelihood of disclosure, particularly for POC.

As it relates to informal relationships, in a study evaluating patterns among cross-racial friendships, it was found that women are likely to have fewer cross-racial friendships, while men and those with a higher education have a likelihood of having friendships with individuals of different racial groups (Plummer et al., 2016). The findings also suggest that individuals from Black and White racial backgrounds generally express a reduced likelihood of forming cross-racial friendships (Plummer et al., 2016). Further studies suggest that both African- and Euro-American women may encounter challenges in establishing and sustaining cross-racial friendships compared to their male counterparts (Samter et al., 1997).

### **Present Study**

The purpose of this study is to examine how survivors' race/ethnicity is related to whether they disclose their sexual assault to others of the same and different races and ethnicities. Given that patients prefer therapists who match their race/ethnicity (Chu et al., 2016), it was hypothesized that survivors from historically marginalized races/ethnicities



would be more likely to disclose to formal disclosure recipients who match their race/ethnicity than White survivors. Analyses examining likelihood of disclosure to informal disclosure recipients of the same and different races were exploratory.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **Participants**

This study recruited 407 undergraduate college students from the University of Central Florida Psychology Department Sona System, a study recruitment platform. The inclusion criteria for the overall study were that participants were at least 18 years old to ensure all participants could consent to participate in research; additionally, participants who indicated they experienced a sexual assault since the age of 14 were included in the analyses for this study. Sexual assault experiences since the age of 14 were used to identify survivors of sexual assault because many sexual assault experiences during this timeframe are adolescent and adulthood sexual assaults that are distinct from childhood sexual abuse (Koss et al., 2007). There were 139 college students that were included in this study, based off the above inclusion criteria.

### **Measures**

#### *Demographics*

This study collected the following demographic information from the participants: age, current gender identity, whether their gender identity matches their sex assigned at birth, race/ethnicity, and sexual orientation and is presented in Table 1. (See Appendix A).

#### *Sexual Assault History*

Sexual assault history since the age of 14 was assessed using a modified version of the Sexual Experiences Survey – Short Form Victimization (SES-SFV; Koss et al., 2007). The SES- SFV includes questions assessing seven different forms of unwanted sexual contact (i.e., unwanted sexual touching and attempted and completed unwanted oral, vaginal, and

anal sex), each of which could have been forced upon a person via five different perpetration tactics (See Appendix B). The SES-SFV has been shown to produce reliable and valid information about sexual victimization among collegiate women (Johnson et al., 2017). However, the SES-SFV has been shown to have a questionable reliability and an adequate validity when used with collegiate men (Anderson et. al, 2018).

The SES-SFV was modified in two ways for the current study. First, in order to make sure the questionnaire was applicable to individuals of all genders, questions about being forced to penetrate someone else were added, consistent with suggested modifications by Littleton and colleagues (2020). Second, the response options were modified to be dichotomous (i.e., yes/no), rather than the number of times an experience occurred, since the measure was be used to identify individuals who have experienced a sexual assault and the number of sexual assaults experienced was not necessary (See Appendix B). Individuals who endorsed any item on the modified SES-SFV were included in the study as a survivor of sexual assault.

### *Sexual Assault Disclosure*

Participants who indicated they experienced a sexual assault on the modified SES-SFV were asked follow-up questions about sexual assault disclosure. Participants were asked if they disclosed to a variety of informal (i.e., family and friends) and formal (e.g., law enforcement, university offices, healthcare providers) disclosure recipients. For each type of disclosure recipient that an individual disclosed to, they were asked to indicate the number of individuals of the same race and of a different race to whom they disclosed. Dichotomous variables (yes/no) indicating whether participants disclosed to each type of support (i.e., family, friends, law enforcement officers, mental health and medical

providers, Title IX Office or Office of Institutional Equity staff, and faculty or staff members) of both the same and different race/ethnicity were created (See Appendix C)

### **Procedure**

Study procedures were reviewed by the UCF Institutional Review Board prior to the initiation of data collection. Survey respondents were recruited through the UCF Psychology Department Sona system during the Fall 2023 semester. The study was described as a study about sexual experiences. Students in the Sona system who are at least 18 years old were eligible to sign up for the study on the Sona site. After signing up for the study, participants were provided with information about the study, including the study purpose, duration, risks, and benefits. Participants then were able to continue on to the study questionnaires if they agreed to participate in the study. The study survey was hosted on Qualtrics. Mental health and sexual assault resources were provided both at the beginning and end of the survey. Due to timeline restrictions for completing this thesis, data collection was conducted for one semester (Fall 2023).

### *Data Cleaning and Statistical Analyses*

Chi-square tests of independence were used to examine whether participants' race/ethnicity was associated with likelihood of disclosing to each type of disclosure recipient of both the same and different race/ethnicity.

To ensure an adequate sample size for conducting a Chi-square test of independence, certain variables had to be collapsed into dichotomous variables and certain variables had to be combined into a single dichotomous variable. Regarding race, participants were divided into two groups: White (participants who identified their race as White only) and non-White (participants who identified their race as any other racial group either independently or in

addition to White). Regarding ethnicity, participants were divided into two groups: Hispanic (participants who identified as Hispanic or Latino/a/x) and non-Hispanic (participants who did not identify as Hispanic or Latino/a/x). Due to low rates of disclosure to formal disclosure recipients, a single formal disclosure variable was created such that participants were coded as “yes” if they had disclosed to any formal disclosure recipient (i.e., law enforcement officers, mental health and medical providers, Title IX Office or Office of Institutional Equity staff, and faculty or staff members) and were coded as “no” if they did not disclose to any of these individuals.

## RESULTS

Demographic information for the analytic sample is provided in Table 1. Most participants were young adults and identified as White or Hispanic/Latino/a/x, cisgender, women, and straight or bisexual. The most frequently endorsed sexual assault experience was unwanted sexual contact.

### Disclosure Differences by Race

White participants are more likely to disclose to a friend of the same race than non-White participants,  $\chi^2(1, N = 139) = 11.80, p < .001$ , and more likely to disclose to a family member of the same race than non-White participants,  $\chi^2(1, N = 139) = 5.32, p = .021$ . There were no statistically significant differences between White and non-White participants in likelihood of disclosure to a friend of a different race,  $\chi^2(1, N = 139) = 2.53, p = .112$ , to a formal disclosure recipient of the same race,  $\chi^2(1, N = 139) = 0.02, p = .883$ , or to a formal disclosure recipient of a different race,  $\chi^2(1, N = 139) = 0.14, p = .711$ . Only four participants indicated they disclosed to a family member of a different race, so it was not possible to run a chi-square test of independence to examine differences in likelihood of disclosure by race. The number and percentage of participants who disclosed to each type of individual by participant race are included in Table 2.

### Disclosure Differences by Ethnicity

There were no statistically significant differences between Hispanic and non-Hispanic participants in likelihood of disclosure to any of the types of disclosure recipients examined (friend of the same ethnicity:  $\chi^2(1, N = 139) = 1.61, p = .205$ ; friend of a different ethnicity:  $\chi^2(1, N = 139) = 2.27, p = .132$ ; family member of the same ethnicity:  $\chi^2(1, N = 139) = 0.06, p = .809$ ; formal disclosure recipient of the same race:  $\chi^2(1, N = 139) = 2.28, p = .131$ ; formal disclosure

recipient of a different race:  $\chi^2(1, N = 139) = 0.81, p = .369$ ). As noted above, because only four participants indicated they disclosed to a family member of a different ethnicity, it was not possible to run a chi-square test of independence to examine differences in likelihood of disclosure by ethnicity. The number and percentage of participants who disclosed to each type of individual by participant ethnicity are included in Table 3.

In addition to these findings, specific data into race and ethnicity disclosure rates within our study sample, along with the recipients that each individual racial and ethnic group in this study disclosed to, are provided in Tables 4 and 5.

**Table 1***Demographic characteristics of the study sample (n = 139)*

<b>Variable</b>	<b><i>M</i></b>	<b><i>SD</i></b>
Age (in years)	20.99	3.52
	<b><i>n</i></b>	<b><i>%</i></b>
Race/Ethnicity <sup>1</sup>		
American Indian or Alaska Native	1	0.7
Asian	15	10.8
Black or African American	16	11.5
Hispanic or Latino/a/x	46	33.1
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	1	0.7
White	83	59.7
Gender Identity		
Genderqueer, gender-fluid, or non-binary	4	2.9
Man or male	18	12.9
Woman or female	117	84.2
Gender identity matches sex assigned at birth		
Yes	135	97.1
No	4	2.9
Sexual Orientation		
Asexual	3	2.2
Bisexual	29	20.9
Demisexual	1	0.7
Gay	2	1.4
Lesbian	1	0.7
Pansexual	3	2.2
Queer	4	2.9
Questioning	2	1.4
Straight	94	67.6
Disclosure (at least one recipient)		
Yes	112	80.6
No	27	19.4
Type of sexual assault experienced <sup>2</sup>		
Unwanted sexual contact	116	83.4
Attempted coercion	64	46.0
Coercion	43	30.9
Attempted rape	53	38.1
Rape	50	35.9

<sup>1</sup> Participants could select multiple options for race/ethnicity, so the percentages sum to greater than 100%.

<sup>2</sup> Some participants experienced more than one type of sexual assault, so the percentages sum to great than 100%.



**Table 2***Disclosure by Race*

<b>Disclosure Recipient</b>	<b>Non-White <i>n</i> = 75</b>		<b>White <i>n</i> = 64</b>	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Friend of the same race				
Yes	25	33.3	40	62.5
No	50	66.7	24	37.5
Friend of a different race				
Yes	38	50.7	41	64.1
No	37	49.3	23	35.9
Family member of the same race				
Yes	13	17.3	22	34.4
No	62	82.7	42	65.6
Family member of a different race				
Yes	2	2.7	2	3.1
No	73	97.3	62	96.9
Formal disclosure recipient of the same race				
Yes	16	21.3	13	20.3
No	59	78.7	51	79.7
Formal disclosure recipient of a different race				
Yes	11	14.7	8	12.5
No	64	85.3	56	87.5

**Table 3***Disclosure by Ethnicity*

<b>Disclosure Recipient</b>	<b>Non-Hispanic <i>n</i> = 93</b>		<b>Hispanic <i>n</i> = 46</b>	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Friend of the same ethnicity				
Yes	47	50.5	18	39.1
No	46	49.5	28	60.9
Friend of a different ethnicity				
Yes	57	61.3	22	47.8
No	36	38.7	24	52.2
Family member of the same ethnicity				
Yes	24	25.8	11	23.9
No	69	74.2	35	76.1
Family member of a different ethnicity				
Yes	3	3.2	1	2.2
No	90	96.8	45	97.8
Formal disclosure recipient of the same ethnicity				
Yes	16	17.2	13	28.3
No	77	82.8	33	71.7
Formal disclosure recipient of a different ethnicity				
Yes	11	11.8	8	17.4
No	82	88.2	38	82.6

**Table 4***Participant Race/Ethnicity by Disclosure to At Least One Individual*

Race/Ethnicity	<i>n</i>	%
American Indian or Alaska Native ( <i>n</i> = 1)		
Yes	1	100.0
No	0	0.0
Asian ( <i>n</i> = 15)		
Yes	11	73.3
No	4	26.7
Black or African American ( <i>n</i> = 16)		
Yes	8	50.0
No	8	50.0
Hispanic or Latino/a/x ( <i>n</i> = 46)		
Yes	36	78.3
No	10	21.7
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander ( <i>n</i> = 1)		
Yes	1	100.0
No	0	0.0
White ( <i>n</i> = 83)		
Yes	74	89.2
No	9	10.8

**Table 5***Participant Race/Ethnicity by Disclosure to Various Individuals*

Race/Ethnicity	Same Race/Ethnicity		Different Race/Ethnicity	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
<b>American Indian or Alaska Native (<i>n</i> = 1)</b>				
Friend	0	0.0	1	100.0
Family	0	0.0	0	0.0
Formal Disclosure Recipient	0	0.0	0	0.0
<b>Asian (<i>n</i> = 15)</b>				
Friend	4	2.6	9	60.0
Family	2	13.3	1	6.7
Formal Disclosure Recipient	2	13.3	1	6.7
<b>Black or African American (<i>n</i> = 16)</b>				
Friend	3	18.8	5	31.3
Family	1	6.3	0	0.0
Formal Disclosure Recipient	2	12.5	1	6.3
<b>Hispanic or Latino/a/x (<i>n</i> = 46)</b>				
Friend	18	39.1	22	47.8
Family	11	23.9	1	2.2
Formal Disclosure Recipient	13	28.3	8	17.4
<b>Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander (<i>n</i> = 1)</b>				
Friend	0	0.0	1	100.0
Family	0	0.0	0	0.0
Formal Disclosure Recipient	0	0.0	1	100.0
<b>White (<i>n</i> = 83)</b>				
Friend	48	57.8	56	67.5
Family	25	30.1	4	4.8
Formal Disclosure Recipient	17	20.5	11	13.3

## DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to examine whether survivors' race/ethnicity was associated with likelihood of disclosing their sexual assault to individuals of the same and different races/ethnicities. White participants were significantly more likely than non-White participants to disclose to a friend of the same race and a family member of the same race. There were no statistically significant differences between White and non-White participants in the likelihood of disclosing to a friend of a different race, a formal disclosure recipient of the same race, or a formal disclosure recipient of a different race, and there were no statistically significant differences between Hispanic and non-Hispanic participants in disclosure likelihood for any type of disclosure recipient.

The findings regarding race align with those of Jacques-Tiura et al. (2010), indicating that White survivors are more inclined to disclose to at least one person and marginally more likely to disclose to informal recipients compared to Black or African American survivors, with no significant differences in disclosure to formal recipients. This trend parallels broader research indicating that societal stigmas influence perceptions of sexual assault differently for African American women, potentially leading to underreporting (Bent-Goodley, 2007; Wyatt, 1992). Tillman et al. (2010) highlight additional obstacles to disclosure among African American women, such as societal stereotypes and cultural pressures. Similarly, individuals adhering strongly to Asian values may be hesitant to disclose very close victim-perpetrator relationship abuse due to perceived risks and the desire to maintain social harmony (Foynes et al., 2014). In light of this, this study's finding that White survivors were more inclined to disclose their experiences, particularly to at least one person and marginally more likely to disclose to an

informal recipient compared to non-White survivors, underscores potential disparities in help-seeking behaviors influenced by cultural upbringing and societal perceptions of sexual assault.

The finding that there were no statistically significant differences between Hispanic and non-Hispanic participants in disclosure likelihood for any type of disclosure recipient suggests minimal differences in disclosure behaviors based on Hispanic ethnicity. However, previous research has highlighted opposing findings. For instance, Latinas were found to have a higher rate of non-disclosure of sexual assault compared to women of other ethnicities (Romero et al., 1999). Cultural beliefs and societal taboos surrounding topics like sex, rape, and abuse contribute to the reasons why Latinas may refrain from disclosing or delay their disclosure of sexual assault (Ahrens, Rios-Mandel, Isas et al., 2010). Additionally with Latina women, help-seeking behaviors are influenced by challenges such as accessibility issues, socioeconomic hardships, and language barriers, necessitating culturally sensitive interventions (Fedina et al., 2019). The discrepancy between the current study's findings and previous research regarding disclosure rates among ethnicity could potentially be attributed to the study's population being conducted at a Hispanic-Serving institution, which may introduce unique cultural and contextual factors influencing disclosure behaviors.

### **Limitations**

This study, while offering valuable insights into the relationship between survivors' race/ethnicity and their disclosure patterns, has several design limitations. First, because the number of participants identifying with racial and ethnic groups other than White or Hispanic was small, multiple groups had to be combined for the purpose of analysis, so it is possible there are specific group differences in disclosure that could not be examined. Of note, by combining

all participants who identified with a race other than White into a single group, unique differences by racial group may have been obscured, there are significant cultural differences among these groups that may impact disclosure. Additionally, comparing White and non-White participants may imply that White individuals are the group to which other groups should be compared. Furthermore, because the sample was composed exclusively of college students, many of whom are young adults, findings may not generalize to other age groups or to young adults not attending college. Recommendations for future research include designing studies to ensure adequate recruitment of specific racial/ethnic groups to allow for more nuanced analyses of racial/ethnic differences in disclosure of sexual assault, conducting studies with non-college-attending adults, implementing longitudinal studies to track evolving disclosure patterns, adopting an intersectional approach, and employing qualitative methods for a richer understanding of disclosure experiences.

### **Implications**

The lack of significant differences in disclosing to individuals of different races may indicate that survivors face similar barriers regardless of the race or ethnicity of the potential recipient. These barriers could include fear of judgment, cultural differences, or lack of trust. These findings may raise questions about the underlying reasons for racial and ethnic differences in disclosure patterns. Further research could explore factors such as cultural norms, societal attitudes, and experiences of discrimination that may influence survivors' decisions to disclose to individuals of the same or different racial backgrounds. Observing clinical implication, Berry and Rutledge's (2016) observation that individuals may not disclose their sexual assault history unless prompted by healthcare providers indicates that survivor dynamics in disclosure extend beyond personal relationships to interactions with formal recipients like healthcare providers.

The results of this study outline a potential openness to cross-racial disclosures, the disparity in disclosure likelihood to formal recipients of the same race underscores the need for proactive discussions by healthcare providers, ensuring equitable access to support for all survivors. Additionally, there can be an investigation related to how community access (i.e. recipients of similar backgrounds, accessible resources) can play a role on disclosure patterns among survivors, which could have played a role in this study because of the population being conducted at a Hispanic-Serving institution.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, this study provides insight on the relationship between survivors' race/ethnicity and their disclosure patterns of sexual assault. While White survivors were more inclined to disclose their experiences, particularly to individuals of the same race, Hispanic and non-Hispanic participants showed no significant differences in disclosure likelihood, suggesting minimal direct impact of ethnicity on disclosure behaviors. However, contrasting findings from previous research highlight the need for further exploration of cultural, societal, and contextual factors that may influence disclosure rates among diverse ethnic groups, especially considering the differences in communities that can impact disclosure rates. Moving forward, adopting an intersectional approach and conducting more nuanced analyses related to hinderances in non-disclosure patterns, alongside qualitative research, will be crucial for understanding and addressing disclosure rates of survivors from various racial and ethnic backgrounds.



## *APPENDIX A*

### **Demographic Questions**

1. Age (in years)
  - Under 18
  - 18
  - 19
  - 20
  - 21
  - 22
  - 23
  - 24
  - 25
  - 26
  - 27
  - 28
  - 29
  - 30+
  
2. What is your current gender identity?
  - Agender
  - Genderqueer, gender-fluid, or non-binary
  - Man
  - Woman
  - I identify another way. Please specify: \_\_\_\_\_
  
3. Does your current gender identity match your sex as assigned at birth?
  - Yes
  - No
  
4. What race/ethnicity best describes you? (Select all that apply)
  - American Indian or Alaska Native
  - Asian
  - Black or African American
  - Hispanic or Latino/a/x
  - Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
  - White
  
5. What term best describes your sexual orientation?
  - Asexual
  - Bisexual
  - Gay
  - Lesbian

- Pansexual
  - Queer
  - Questioning
  - Straight
  - I identify another way. Please specify:
-



## *APPENDIX B*

### **Modified Sexual Experiences Survey – Short Form Victimization (SES-SFV; Koss et al., 2007; Littleton et al., 2020)**

The following questions concern sexual experiences. We know these are personal questions, so your information is completely confidential. We hope this helps you to feel comfortable answering each question honestly. Please indicate whether or not each experience has happened. If several experiences occurred on the same occasion—for example, if one night someone told you some lies and had sex with you when you were drunk, you would select both boxes a and c. **“The past 12 months” refers to the past year going back from today. “From age 14 until 1 year ago” refers to your life starting on your 14th birthday and stopping one year ago from today.**

- 1. Someone fondled, kissed, or rubbed up against the private areas of my body (lips, breast/chest, crotch, or butt) or removed some of my clothes without my consent (but did not attempt sexual penetration) by:**

	In the past 12 months?		From age 14 until 1 year ago?	
	Yes	No	Yes	No
a. Telling lies, threatening to end the relationship, threatening to spread rumors about me, making promises I knew were untrue, or continually verbally pressuring after I said I didn't want to.				
b. Showing displeasure, criticizing my sexuality or attractiveness, getting angry but not using physical force, after I said I didn't want to.				
c. Taking advantage of me when I was too drunk or out of it to stop what was happening.				
d. Threatening to physically harm me or someone close to me.				

e. Using force, for example holding me down with their body weight, pinning my arms, or having a weapon.				
--	--	--	--	--

**2. Someone had oral sex with me (placed their mouth in/on my genitals) or made me have oral sex with them (someone placed their genitals in/on my mouth) without my consent by:**

	In the past 12 months?		From age 14 until 1 year ago?	
	Yes	No	Yes	No
a. Telling lies, threatening to end the relationship, threatening to spread rumors about me, making promises I knew were untrue, or continually verbally pressuring me after I said I didn't want to.				
b. Showing displeasure, criticizing my sexuality or attractiveness, getting angry but not using physical force, after I said I didn't want to.				
c. Taking advantage of me when I was too drunk or out of it to stop what was happening.				
d. Threatening to physically harm me or someone close to me.				
e. Using force, for example holding me down with their body weight, pinning my arms, or having a weapon.				

**3. Someone inserted my penis into their vagina or made me insert fingers or objects into their vagina without my consent by:**

	In the past 12 months?		From age 14 until 1 year ago?	
	Yes	No	Yes	No

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

**4. A man put his penis into my vagina or someone inserted fingers or objects into my vagina without my consent by:**

	In the past 12 months?		From age 14 until 1 year ago?	
	Yes	No	Yes	No
a. Telling lies, threatening to end the relationship, threatening to spread rumors about me, making promises I knew were untrue, or continually verbally pressuring me after I said I didn't want to.				
b. Showing displeasure, criticizing my sexuality or attractiveness, getting angry but not using physical force, after I said I didn't want to.				

c. Taking advantage of me when I was too drunk or out of it to stop what was happening.				
d. Threatening to physically harm me or close to me.				
e. Using force, for example holding me down with their body weight, pinning my arms, or having a weapon.				

**5. Someone inserted my penis into their butt or made me insert fingers or objects into their butt without my consent by:**

	In the past 12 months?		From age 14 until 1 year ago?	
	Yes	No	Yes	No
a. Telling lies, threatening to end the relationship, threatening to spread rumors about me, making promises I knew were untrue, or continually verbally pressuring me after I said I didn't want to.				
b. Showing displeasure, criticizing my sexuality or attractiveness, getting angry but not using physical force, after I said I didn't want to.				
c. Taking advantage of me when I was too drunk or out of it to stop what was happening.				
d. Threatening to physically harm me or someone close to me.				
e. Using force, for example holding me down with their body weight, pinning my arms, or having a weapon.				

**6. Someone put their penis into my butt, or someone inserted fingers or objects without my consent by:**

	In the past 12 months?		From age 14 until 1 year ago?	
	Yes	No	Yes	No
a. Telling lies, threatening to end the relationship, threatening to spread rumors about me, making promises I knew were untrue, or continually verbally pressuring me after I said I didn't want to.				
b. Showing displeasure, criticizing my sexuality or attractiveness, getting angry but not using physical force, after I said I didn't want to.				
c. Taking advantage of me when I was too drunk or out of it to stop what was happening.				
d. Threatening to physically harm me or someone close to me.				
e. Using force, for example holding me down with their body weight, pinning my arms, or having a weapon.				

**7. Even though it did not happen, someone TRIED to have oral sex with me (placed their mouth in/on my genitals) or make me have oral sex with them (someone placed their genitals in/on my mouth) without my consent by:**

	In the past 12 months?		From age 14 until 1 year ago?	
	Yes	No	Yes	No



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

**8. Even though it did not happen, someone TRIED to insert my penis into their vagina or TRIED to make me insert fingers or objects into their vagina without my consent by:**

	In the past 12 months?		From age 14 until 1 year ago?	
	Yes	No	Yes	No
a. Telling lies, threatening to end the relationship, threatening to spread rumors about me, making promises I knew were untrue, or continually verbally pressuring after I said I didn't want to.				
b. Showing displeasure, criticizing my sexuality or attractiveness, getting angry but not using physical force, after I said I didn't want to.				

c. Taking advantage of me when I was too drunk or out of it to stop what was happening.				
d. Threatening to physically harm me or close to me.				
e. Using force, for example holding me down with their body weight, pinning my arms, or having a weapon.				

**9. Even though it did not happen, a man TRIED to put his penis into my vagina, or someone TRIED inserting fingers or objects into my vagina without my consent by:**

	In the past 12 months?		From age 14 until 1 year ago?	
	Yes	No	Yes	No
a. Telling lies, threatening to end the relationship, threatening to spread rumors about me, making promises I knew were untrue, or continually verbally pressuring me after I said I didn't want to.				
b. Showing displeasure, criticizing my sexuality or attractiveness, getting angry but not using physical force, after I said I didn't want to.				
c. Taking advantage of me when I was too drunk or out of it to stop what was happening.				
d. Threatening to physically harm me or someone close to me.				
e. Using force, for example holding me down with their body weight, pinning my arms, or having a weapon.				

**10. Even though it did not happen, someone TRIED to insert my penis into**

**their butt or TRIED made me insert fingers or objects into their butt without my consent by:**

	In the past 12 months?		From age 14 until 1 year ago?	
	Yes	No	Yes	No
a. Telling lies, threatening to end the relationship, threatening to spread rumors about me, making promises I knew were untrue, or continually verbally pressuring after I said I didn't want to.				
b. Showing displeasure, criticizing my sexuality or attractiveness, getting angry but not using physical force, after I said I didn't want to.				
c. Taking advantage of me when I was too drunk or out of it to stop what was happening.				
d. Threatening to physically harm me or someone close to me.				
e. Using force, for example holding me down with their body weight, pinning my arms, or having a weapon.				

**11. Even though it did not happen, a man TRIED put his penis into my butt or someone TRIED to insert fingers or objects in my butt without my consent by:**

	In the past 12 months?		From age 14 until 1 year ago?	
	Yes	No	Yes	No

<p>a. Telling lies, threatening to end the relationship, threatening to spread rumors about me, making promises I knew were untrue, or continually verbally pressuring me after I said I didn't want to.</p>				
<p>b. Showing displeasure, criticizing my sexuality or attractiveness, getting angry but not using physical force, after I said I didn't want to.</p>				
<p>c. Taking advantage of me when I was too drunk or out of it to stop what was happening.</p>				
<p>d. Threatening to physically harm me or someone close to me.</p>				
<p>e. Using force, for example holding me down with their body weight, pinning my arms, or having a weapon.</p>				



## APPENDIX C

### Sexual Assault Disclosure

[Note: These questions will only be displayed to participants who endorsed at least one item on the SES-SFV. Additionally, the follow-up questions (i.e., questions a and b for each number) will only be displayed if the participant responds “yes” to the initial question.]

On the previous page, you indicated you have had at least one of the sexual experiences described since age 14. Now, we'd like to ask you some questions about who you may have told about this/these experience(s).

1. Did you tell any of your friends about the sexual experience(s) you indicated on the previous page?
  - Yes
  - No
  
- a. How many of the friends who you told about the sexual experiences are of the **same race/ethnicity** as you?
  - 0
  - 1
  - 2
  - 3
  - 4
  - 5+
  
- b. How many of the friends who you told about the sexual experiences are of a **different race/ethnicity** than you?
  - 0
  - 1
  - 2
  - 3
  - 4
  - 5+
  
2. Did you tell any of your family members about the sexual experiences you indicated on the previous page?
  - Yes
  - No
  
- a. How many of your family members who you told about the sexual experiences are of the **same race/ethnicity** as you?
  - 0
  - 1
  - 2

- 3
- 4
- 5+

b. How many of your family members who you told about the sexual experiences are of a **different race/ethnicity** than you?

- 0
- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5+

3. Did you tell any law enforcement officers (e.g., police, Sheriff's department) about the sexual experiences you indicated on the previous page?

- Yes
- No

a. How many of the law enforcement officers who you told about the sexual experiences are of the **same race/ethnicity** as you?

- 0
- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5+

b. How many of the law enforcement who you told about the sexual experiences are of a **different race/ethnicity** than you?

- 0
- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5+

4. Did you tell any medical health care providers (e.g., doctors, nurses) about the sexual experiences you indicated on the previous page?

- Yes
- No

a. How many of the medical health care providers who you told about the sexual experiences are of the **same race/ethnicity** as you?

- 0

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5+

b. How many of the medical health care providers who you told about the sexual experiences are of a **different race/ethnicity** than you?

- 0
- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5+

5. Did you tell any mental health care providers (e.g., psychologist, therapist, social worker) about the sexual experiences you indicated on the previous page?

- Yes
- No

a. How many of the mental health care providers who you told about the sexual experiences are of the **same race/ethnicity** as you?

- 0
- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5+

b. How many of the mental health care providers who you told about the sexual experiences are of a **different race/ethnicity** than you?

- 0
- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5+

6. Did you tell any staff at the UCF Title IX Office or Office of Institutional Equity about the sexual experiences you indicated on the previous page?

- Yes
- No



- a. How many of the staff members at the UCF Title IX Office or Office of Institutional Equity who you told about the sexual experiences are of the **same race/ethnicity** as you?
- 0
  - 1
  - 2
  - 3
  - 4
  - 5+
- b. How many of the staff members at the UCF Title IX Office or Office of Institutional Equity who you told about the sexual experiences are of a **different race/ethnicity** as you?
- 0
  - 1
  - 2
  - 3
  - 4
  - 5+

7. Did you tell any UCF faculty or staff members about the sexual experiences you indicated on the previous page?

- Yes
  - No
- a. How many of the UCF faculty or staff members who you told about the sexual experiences are of the **same race/ethnicity** as you?
- 0
  - 1
  - 2
  - 3
  - 4
  - 5+
- b. How many of the UCF faculty or staff members who you told about the sexual experiences are of a **different race/ethnicity** than you?
- 0
  - 1
  - 2
  - 3
  - 4
  - 5+

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