

Latinas' Reasons for and Patterns of Sexual Assault Disclosure

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Abstract

This phenomenological qualitative study describes Latinas' reasons for and patterns of sexual assault disclosure. Thirteen Latina research participants' voices contribute to the literature on sexual assault disclosure through their reasons for disclosing, not disclosing, or for delaying their disclosure in addition to who they chose to disclose this information to. The reasons for disclosing include external support, protection of self and others, and situational disclosures, which occurred without intention or given permission. Reasons for not disclosing or delaying sexual assault disclosure include themes of fear of facing consequences, negative reactions from others or retaliation by a family member. Furthermore, the mother-daughter relationship proved to be a critical ingredient in the decision to disclose or to delay disclosure. Although the literature review identified some research in the area of sexual assault with Latinas, research to date has been scant concerning the Latina mother-daughter relationship with regards to the dynamics that exist between mother and daughter(s) concerning taboo and/or sensitive topics not addressed in the home such as sex. The results of this study point to the need for further research on how well Latinas feel their mothers have prepared them to protect and advocate for themselves concerning sexual assaults.

Keywords

Hispanic, Latina, *Tejana*, Sexual Assault, Sex, Reasons For, For Not, For Delaying Disclosure

1. Introduction

The Latino population is at 18.5% of the total population in the United States (United States Census Bureau, 2019). It was at 50.7 million in 2010, but in 2019, it increased to 60.6 million (Noe-Bustamante, Lopez, & Krogstad, 2020). The La-

tino population is the second largest ethnic group in the United States (US); only the white non-Hispanic population is larger (Noe-Bustamante et al., 2020). Latinas are an extremely diverse population with different levels of acculturation, immigration histories, and socioeconomic levels (Comas-Díaz & Greene, 1994).

With regard to violence, the literature reviewed indicates that research on or about Latinas has been conducted in the following areas: 1) intimate partner violence and/or interpersonal violence (Alvarez & Fedock, 2018; Finno-Velasquez & Ogbonnaya, 2017; Gonzalez, Benuto, & Casas, 2018; Ingram, 2007; Kim & Montano, 2017; Kim, Draucker, Bradway, Grisso, & Sommers, 2017; Rizo & Macy, 2011; Sabina, Cuevas, & Zadnik, 2015; Sorenson, 1996; West, Kantor, & Jasinski, 1998; Zadnik, Sabina, & Cuevas, 2014), 2) social reactions to victims/survivors' disclosures of sexual assault (Ahrens, 2006; Ahrens, Cabral, & Abeling, 2009; Orchowski, Untied, & Gidycz, 2013; Ullman, 2010), and 3) Mexican immigrants' and/or other Latinas' experiences of sexual violence (Ahrens, 2006; Kim et al., 2017; Morrissey, 1998; Ramos-Lira, Koss, & Russo, 1999; Romero, Wyatt, Loeb, Carmona, & Solis, 1999; Sorenson, 1996). Most recent research conducted on sexual assault disclosures has been on the recipients' experiences of being told about the sexual assaults, rather than the experiences of those who had been assaulted (Ahrens & Aldana, 2012; Branch & Richards, 2013; Kirkner, Lorenz, Ullman, & Mandala, 2018; Milliken, Paul, Sasson, Porter, & Hasulube, 2016).

In addition, the few studies on sexual assault disclosure indicate that Latinas have a higher rate of nondisclosure than other women who do not identify as Latinas (Romero et al., 1999). Cultural beliefs and taboo topics such as sex, rape, and abuse influence the reasons why Latinas do not disclose and/or delay their disclosure of sexual assault (Ahrens, Rios-Mandel, Isas, & del Carmen Lopez, 2010). Constructs guided by culture such as the importance of family or strong religious beliefs lead to barriers to disclosing sexual assaults. However, supported research in this area is limited. The little that exist indicate that Latinas are reluctant to disclose due to their traditional beliefs on marriage and the significance placed on virginity (Morrissey, 1998; Ramos-Lira et al., 1999). Other themes found that prevent Latinas from disclosing sexual assaults are the fear of shame (Ahrens et al., 2010; Ramos-Lira et al., 1999) and self-blame (Ramos-Lira et al., 1999).

Ahrens and her colleagues (2007) examined sexual assaulted survivors' reasons for disclosing to formal and/or informal parties in addition to exploring the effects of the disclosure. The researchers specifically asked about the first disclosure. Who was the first recipient and why did they choose that individual to be the first person to hear about their sexual assault? The researchers identified seven themes for reasons for disclosing. The most common reason for disclosing a sexual assault was during the process of actively seeking emotional support. Furthermore, seventy-five percent of the 102 participants disclosed their sexual assault to an informal support provider. Concerning the population surveyed, only six percent of the participants identified as Latinas. The others identified as

African American (51%), Caucasian (37%), and Asian American or multiracial (6%) (Ahrens, Campbell, Ternier-Thames, Wasco, & Sefl, 2007).

In another study on sexual assault disclosure, the researchers found that 80% of their participants disclosed their assault to at least one person prior to the study, 97.6% told informal support providers and 60.7% disclosed their assault to at least one formal support source such as a police officer (Starzynski, Ullman, Filipas, & Townsend, 2005). Of this study, only five percent of the participants represented Latinas. The vast majority of the participants identified as African American (46.2%) or Caucasian (37.1%) (Starzynski et al., 2005).

Ullman and Filipas (2001) found in their study of 323 adult sexual assault survivors that those who report their sexual assault to formal support sources such as a police officer or detective are women who were sexually assaulted by a stranger (Cuevas & Sabina, 2010; Ullman & Filipas, 2001). In addition, those who were physically injured during a sexual assault were more likely to disclose to a formal support source such as someone in the medical field, than those who did not receive a physical injury such as contusions, broken bone(s), and/or bruises (Cuevas & Sabina, 2010; Ullman & Filipas, 2001). Similar to the studies already mentioned, only six percent of the participants in this study identified as Latinos/as. Regardless to ethnicity, most sexual assault survivors are more likely to disclose to informal support sources (e.g. a friend or family member) than formal ones such as the police (Ahrens et al., 2009; Filipas & Ullman, 2001; Fisher et al., 2003; Smith, Letourneau, Saunders, Kilpatrick, Resnick, & Best, 2000; Starzynski et al., 2005) because they are more likely to receive emotional support from friends and family members than from formal support sources (Ahrens et al., 2007).

Rizo and Macy (2011) completed a systematic review of the literature on Latino partner violence survivors; however, they only reviewed studies examining intimate partner violence disclosures and not specifically about sexual assault disclosure. A systematic review of sexual assault experiences, reactions, and disclosures should be completed. Ahrens, Isas, and Viveros (2011) recommend using more qualitative, face-to-face strategies, and hands-on methods of collecting data and conducting research with Latinas sexual assault survivors to empower them to share their narratives than quantitative methods. Using face-to-face strategies, such as meeting with Latinas at churches, community events, or even at Latina sororities on universities and/or colleges' campuses may encourage Latinas to participate in research more than using impersonal approaches such as fliers (Ahrens et al., 2010; Ramos-Lira et al., 1999). In addition, Latinas are more likely to participate in research if someone they trust introduces them to it such as in snowball sampling.

A few studies have been completed on barriers preventing sexual assault disclosure among Latinas (Rizo & Macy, 2011). Research indicates that more than half of the survivors of sexual assault disclose their assault to at least one person (Ahrens et al., 2007; Fisher et al., 2003; Starzynski et al., 2005). However, in most of these studies, Latinas have very little representation. There is a limited amount

of research conducted specifically on what leads Latinas to disclose, who they are most likely to disclose to, what delays them from disclosing, and/or what prevents them from disclosing their sexual assaults.

This study concerning reasons for disclosure or delay of disclosures was completed in recognition of such limitations. Interview data from 13 Latina sexual assault survivors were analyzed for themes to answer two research questions. Qualitatively, semi structured interviews were conducted to gather data to answer the following research questions: 1) What reasons do Latinas give for choosing to disclose, not to disclose, or to delay disclosure of their experiences of sexual assault? 2) Can patterns be detected regarding to whom Latinas disclose and under what circumstances?

2. Method

2.1. Recruitment Procedures

For this phenomenological qualitative study, poster announcements and informational flyers were used to recruit the first seven Latina sexual assault survivors interviewed in 2005. Six more Latinas were recruited in 2011 with snowball sampling. Most of the participants were clients from a local women's center for domestic and sexual violence or a center for psychotherapy services. All thirteen Latinas had survived at least one sexual assault prior to their interview. Both waves of interviews were conducted under research protocol approved by two west Michigan colleges. The sexual assault survivors were female, 18 years and older (Age Range = 18 to 40), English and/or Spanish speaking, and Hispanic/Latina (two of the Latinas identified as Mexican (Mexico-Mexican Native-born citizens with United States residency), nine identified as Mexican American, and the last two identified specifically as *Tejanas*, which signifies that they are Texas-born Mexican Americans. For their willingness to participate in this research, each participant was given a \$25 gift card as a token of appreciation. For further information on the recruitment procedures, see author's published dissertation (Villarreal, 2012), which informs the current study's methods.

2.2. Procedures

This researcher's semi-structured, created questionnaire was used in 2005 to collect qualitative data from the original group. The same questionnaire was used in 2011. However, the questionnaire was extended in the last group to include additional questions on feelings and consequences associated with the process of disclosure. This addition was based on an initial analysis of the data. The final interview protocol used 25 questions in addition to collecting participants' age, racial/ethnic identification and the number of sexual assaults experienced throughout their lifetime up until their interview.

The research participants were self-selected, and they made the first contact. Once interest was expressed and research participants' criteria was met, an interview was scheduled. At the beginning of the interview, participants reviewed

the consent form in English, Spanish, or in both languages, then signed it. Due to the intimate nature of the interviews, the research was particularly careful that the research participants knew that this study was voluntary, and they could withdraw from the study at any time. None of the participants withdrew from the study. Most of the interviews were completed within a couple of hours; however, there was one particular interview that took almost three hours. That research participant also alternated between speaking both English and Spanish. All interviews were conducted by this author researcher.

2.3. Analysis Procedures

Data analysis began as soon as each interview was completed with the researcher documenting detailed field notes. These field notes served as an additional source of collected data, triangulating results. They provided narratives of the verbal exchanges between the researcher and the participants. In addition, observations made about the participants' behavior during each of the interviews were included in the field notes.

This researcher transcribed all the audiotapes into verbatim written documents. Any data collected in Spanish were translated into English in parentheses. Spanish words, phrases, and/or sentences were italicized. The researcher used pseudonyms to protect the identity of each of the participants. Prior to data analysis, the researcher compared the audiotapes with the transcriptions for accuracy and readability. Prior to employing a phenomenological method to analyze the data, the researcher conducted a naïve reading of the transcribed data, while taking mental notes. Next, the researcher implemented a constant comparison phenomenological approach by reading the transcriptions, then re-reading them multiple times to identify frequently repeated themes, which emerged throughout the interviews. At the same time, the research took the field notes into consideration while reducing the data and categorizing the themes for similarities and differences. The constant comparison approach continued through several cycles between the multiple transcriptions. In addition, constant comparison technique was utilized between the literature and the emerging themes from the data, i.e. through constant comparison with the literature, the data were cross-examined for probable themes identified by others. Furthermore, the researcher tested the identified themes and patterns against disconfirming data (negative examples, rival explanations, and exceptions to the patterns) in the literature, which led to saturation of themes. **Table 1** provides the transcription conventions used in this study.

Table 1. Transcription conventions.

Spanish Words and Phrases	Italicized
English Translations	In Parentheses
Interviewees' Pauses	Ellipses

(Villarreal, 2012).

For the purpose of this study, sexual assault is defined by Michigan's Penal Codes on Sexual Conduct, which identifies four levels of severity. Criminal Sexual Conduct in the First Degree (CSC I) is the most severe type of sexual assault and it is seen as a felony. This type of assault includes force and any type of body orifices' penetration with a penis, finger, or object such as the end of a broom (Legislative Council, Act 328 of 1931, 750.520b). A Criminal Sexual Conduct in the Third Degree (CSC III) is considered the second most severe type of sexual assault, which is also a felony. This type of assault also involves penetration; however, the perpetrator often believes that they have received consent for sexual relations, but the victim does not have legal right to give consent. For example, a 28-year-old (perpetrator) becomes sexually active with a 14-year-old (victim/survivor) (Legislative Council, Act 328 of 1931, 750.520d). CSC II is the third most severe type of sexual assault, which is also seen as a felony. This type of sexual assault may involve molestation, cyber molestation, pornography, exploitation of children and sex trafficking (Legislative Council, Act 328 of 1931, 750.520c). Lastly, A CSC IV, which is the least severe type of sexual assault, is seen as a misdemeanor. This type of sexual assault may involve direct or indirect behavior such as exposure of private parts, urinating in public, adolescent male grabbing another adolescent's buttocks (Legislative Council, Act 328 of 1931, 750.520e).

3. Results

For each client, a vignette is used to introduce and summarize their experience(s) of sexual assault. In these vignettes, the researcher provides the participants' basic demographic information and their personal story as background information. As stated before, pseudonyms are used to protect the participants' identity; the researcher avoids using any personally identifiable descriptors. However, identity based on race/ethnicity is provided for each Latina participant. For example, two of the participants identify as *Tejana*, which is an identity only used by those who were born in Texas.

Most of the participants answered their questions in English even if it was not their native language. However, Adriana was one of the two participants that alternated back and forth in English and Spanish while answering the questions during her interview and Raquel clarified her English responses a few times in Spanish. This researcher began the vignettes with the first set of participants, who's interviews were conducted in 2005, then finishes with the second set conducted in 2011 (Villarreal, 2012).

3.1. Demographic Characteristics of Participants

The researcher examined the transcripts of thirteen Latina sexual assault survivors for the study. The women's ages at the time of the interview range from 18 to 40 ($M = 26.5$). Concerning identity, two of the women identified as Mexican (Latinas born in Mexico), two as *Tejanas* (Texas-born Mexican Americans) and

the other nine identified as either or both Hispanic and Mexican American.

In **Table 2**, cumulative findings of the descriptors are presented for the thirteen Latina participants in the study. Eleven (85%) of the participants' first sexual assault occurred when they were children by the age of twelve and after they were at least five years old. All the participants (100%) were assaulted at least once prior to their 18th birthday. In addition to experienced childhood sexual assaults, only three (23%) participants (Araceli, Dominga, and Raquel) were assaulted as adults.

Table 2. Demographics and selected characteristics of participants and sexual assault incidents.

Demographics	Existing Data From 2005 (<i>N</i> = 7)		Data Collected in 2011 (<i>N</i> = 6)		Total (<i>N</i> = 13)	
	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%
Age at the Time of the First Assault						
Early Childhood (1 - 5 y/o)	0	0	1	17	1	8
Childhood (6 - 12 y/o)	6	86	4	67	10	77
Adolescent (13 - 17 y/o)	1	14	1	17	2	15
Adult (17+)	0	0	0	0	0	0
Assaulted as an Adult						
Yes	2	29	1	17	3	23
No	5	71	5	83	10	77
Person to Whom First Disclosed						
Professional	1	14	1	17	2	15
Survey	0	0	1	17	1	8
Friend	2	29	1	17	3	23
Family Member	3	43	2	33	5	38
Significant Other (Boyfriend)	1	14	1	17	2	15
Severity of Most Severe Assault						
Mild Severity (CSC IV)	0	0	1	17	1	8
Moderate Severity (CSC II)	1	14	3	50	4	31
Average Severity (CSC III)	0	0	0	0	0	0
Most Severe (CSC I-Penetration)	6	86	2	33	8	61
Perpetrator of First Assault						
Stranger	0	0	1	17	1	8
Date or Acquaintance	1	14	2	33	3	23
Family Member	6	86	3	50	9	69
Significant Other (Boyfriend)	0	0	0	0	0	0
Time of Disclosure for First Assault						
<24 hrs. after the Assault	1	14	1	17	2	15
1 Day - <1 Month	0	0	0	0	0	0
1 Month < 1 Year	1	14	0	0	1	8
1 Year < 5 Years	2	29	1	17	3	23
6 Years < 10 Year	0	0	2	33	2	15
>10 Years after the Assault	3	43	2	33	5	39
Number of Assaults						
1 Assault	4	57	1	17	5	38
2 Assaults	2	29	1	17	3	23
3 or More Assaults	1	14	4	67	5	38

(Villarreal, 2012).

3.2. Vignettes of Participants' Sexual Assaults

Araceli

Araceli was a 32-year old, college educated, married female, and mother of two, who identified as *Tejana*. She experienced two different incidents of sexual assault. First, when she was seven years old, her grandfather molested (CSC II) her. Then, when she was 18 years old, as a freshman in college, she was raped (CSC I) by two acquaintances.

Araceli was shamed into silence upon disclosing her second incident to a police officer. She did not disclose her acquaintance rape (CSC I) again until she met with a clinician for psychotherapy for the first time at the age of 32. Concerning the assault, Araceli was out with a couple female freshmen classmates at a male upper classmate's apartment and before she realized it, she was left alone with two male upper classmen. They both raped her. Araceli ran from the apartment as soon as she had the opportunity to escape. She then contacted the police from a near-by gas station. She later decided not to press any charges because she was afraid of her parents finding out about the sexual assault; she was convinced by the investigating police officer that everyone would find out unless she decided not to pursue charges. She explained the reasons for her discomfort and for not following through with pressing charges in the following way:

He (the detective) told me that that if I wanted to do that (press charges), that I can do that, but he said "if you tell, you're dead" (it appeared that Araceli felt as if she would die if anyone, her parents, would find out about the rape); more like ... "If you charge them, everyone's gonna know, it's gonna be in the paper, and it's gonna be, this is," he said "this is gonna be something that pretty much everyone will know. Your parents will find out." Then, I just decided "no."

Sandra

Sandra was an 18-year-old, single female, who identified as Mexican. While living in Texas with her mother, Sandra was raped (CSC I) by her maternal step-grandfather at the age of 10. Her first sexual assault disclosure occurred during a confrontation. Her brother asked her what was leading her to date older men. This is when she cried out in fear and yelled that her Grandpa raped her. It appears that Sandra was only assaulted once, but she never told anyone until she was 14. Here is what she said about that disclosure:

Well I moved up here (from Texas) when I was 14, and my sister-in-law had me go out with older men, and, I umm ... my brother found out and he asked me what was leading me to do this, and that's when I told him ... that night, that Grandpa had raped me.

Dominga

Dominga was a 31-year-old, college educated, single never married with no children, who identified as *Tejana*. Dominga disclosed two sexual assaults. The first was a molestation (CSC II) at the age of 11. Her father was the perpetrator.

Dominga did not provide any specifics about this incident, simply that it happened. As a 19-year-old, Dominga lost her virginity to an acquaintance rape (CSC I) at the hands of a fraternity member at a small west Michigan Christian college. The first incident was not disclosed for several years. She disclosed the second incident first. Dominga was 26 years old when she finally decided to seek counseling for the traumatic events she experienced. This is when she disclosed the first incident. Subsequently, she disclosed the first and second incident to her mother and brother at a later time.

Concerning the disclosure for the second incident, Dominga disclosed the second incident soon after the assault. The perpetrator and Dominga were at a party celebrating his 21st birthday. After the party, several individuals, including Dominga and her perpetrator, went back to the perpetrator's apartment. Due to her intoxicated state, she had no realization of the gravity of the situation when she found herself upstairs in his bedroom, which was where the rape occurred. Here is her description of what occurred in the perpetrator's bedroom:

I was at a party, drunk, and it was his (the perpetrator's) 21st birthday. We went back to his apartment, where he lived with three other fraternity brothers. Other sorority sisters of mine went with us... And then, people started leaving slowly, and before I knew it, I was up in his bedroom, but his brother and another sorority girl were in the room next to us... All I remember is passing out, in and out, in and out, and just remembering people laughing, things happening, clothes coming off, and I kept saying: "stop, stop ..." And then I'd pass out, wake up to something else, and I remember his other two roommates laughing, and crawling in and out of the room. I was yelling and crying and screaming and he wouldn't stop. I don't know how I got home. I remember the next day, I told him; I called him. I called him and said: "Could I be pregnant? Am I pregnant?" And, he didn't know what to say. And I remember him saying, "Were you a virgin?" and I said, "Yeah," but I never told him that he raped me. I never said it was a rape. I was just worried about being pregnant.

Feliciana

Feliciana was an 18-year-old, single female, who identified as Mexican American. At the age of 13, Feliciana was raped (CSC I) by an acquaintance in her own bedroom while her parents were home. She only knew the perpetrator for about two weeks. She disclosed as soon as the incident was over. The perpetrator was arrested, prosecuted, and was still incarcerated serving his sentence in prison when Feliciana was interviewed. Most of Feliciana's responses during the interview were short. Furthermore, Feliciana regretted her disclosure; her experience testifying in court was retraumatizing.

Gabriela

Gabriela was an 18-year-old, single female, who identified as Mexican American. Her disclosure occurred a few months after a male relative raped (CSC I) her more than once within a couple of months. No other specific details were

disclosed, simply that she was 10 years old when this relative raped her. Gabriela found great emotional support from the cousin who had previously disclosed similar abuses to her, creating a safe environment in which Gabriela could also disclose.

Adriana

Adriana was a 34-year-old mother of 2-year-old triplets, who identified as Mexican. She had United States' residency. When she was 10 years old, she was raped (CSC I) by an uncle in Mexico.

Gloria

Gloria was 36 years old, college educated, married, mother of two, who identified as Mexican American. She disclosed three different incidents of sexual assault. When she was about 5 or 6 years old, Gloria was molested (CSC II) for the first time by a male neighbor. This incident was disclosed on the same day that Gloria met with this researcher. Prior to the interview, she was at her Godmother's home reviewing her sexual assault history, which was when she disclosed the aforementioned incident. At the age of 6, Gloria was verbally assaulted with vulgar language (CSC IV) by an African American adult male. Gloria attempted to disclose this incident within minutes, but her mother would not listen or did not take her seriously, because they were at a neighbor's house party.

The final sexual assault disclosure included multiple incidents that occurred when Gloria was between the ages of 10 and 14 years old. She was raped and/or molested (CSC I & II) regularly by her mother's former boyfriend/husband over a period of several years. The previous incident, where her mother ignored her disclosure of her second sexual assault incident, silenced Gloria for about 30 years. She did not disclose these rapes until she was 40 years old during an evening of intoxication. She admitted this at a social gathering that included her sisters (older and younger) and their mother, that she was systematically raped and molested for several years. This disclosure occurred after her older sister disclosed that the same man, mother's former boyfriend/husband, raped her (CSC I).

Teresa

Teresa was a 34-year-old, mother of two. She identified as Mexican and Scottish American. At the age of 10, Teresa was molested (CSC II) by an older biological brother. Teresa did not disclose for about four years.

Raquel

Raquel was a 20-year-old, single female attending college. She had one child and she identified as Mexican American. She was raped (CSC I) by a housemate at the age of 12. Concerning her second perpetrator, Raquel's ex-boyfriend, father of her son, often pressured her into sexual relations after they broke up.

Verónica

Veronica was a 21-year-old, college educated, single female, who identified as Mexican American. She witnessed an indecent exposure incident (CSC IV) by a stranger when she was about 10 or 11 years old, while working as a school safety guard. Disclosure occurred within minutes and the perpetrator was arrested, pros-

ecuted, and convicted for his crime.

Magdalena

Magdalena was a 20-year-old, college-educated, single female, who identified as Mexican. She was one of the participants that disclosed her sexual assault history for the first time. Her perpetrator was an older male cousin. He molested (CSC II) her several times while she was a child between the ages of 6 or 7 years old.

Cynthia

Cynthia was a 22-year-old, college-education, single female, who identified as Mexican American. At the age of 13 or 14 years old, Cynthia was molested (CSC II) a couple of times by a step-uncle. These incidents were only disclosed to her fiancé, a college roommate, and to this researcher. Cynthia's aunt is no longer married to the perpetrator that violated Cynthia through molestations.

Leticia

The final participant, Leticia was a 40-year-old, divorced once, but married Latina. She was a mother of five and identified as Mexican American. Between the ages of 10 to 14 years, Leticia was molested (CSC II) multiple times and then raped (CSC I) when she was 14 years old by her first stepfather. The rape was reported to the local police department and her stepfather was arrested; however, Leticia refused to testify for the prosecution's side. She then repressed these memories for several years. As she does not even remember the court proceedings, her mother informed her that she walked out of court after stating, "I wasn't doing it." Here is what she said when she refused to testify against her stepfather in court:

I guess I went into the courtroom and I don't know, I froze, she said, and I walked out, said I wasn't doing it.

3.3. Phenomenological Analysis: Common Experiences and Central Themes

Previously, this researcher provided contextualized descriptions of each of the participant's sexual assault incidents that they survived and overcame through short vignettes. In this section, the researcher presents the common experiences, and central themes for two research questions.

In addition, selected participants' quote(s) are utilized to support and clarify the central themes found in the study. The two research questions used to guide the study were: 1) What reasons do Latinas give for choosing to disclose, not to disclose, or to delay disclosure of their experience of sexual assault? 2) Can patterns be detected regarding to whom Latinas disclose and under what circumstances?

3.4. What Reasons Do Latinas Give for Choosing to Disclose, Not to Disclose, or to Delay Disclosure of Their Experience of Sexual Assault?

For question one, the researcher separates the results into two categories. First,

Table 3 presents the findings on the reasons for not disclosing or delaying sexual assault disclosures. Then, **Table 4** offers the findings on the reasons identified by the participants as to why they disclosed their sexual assault(s). As illustrated, **Table 3** shows more reasons for delaying or for not making a disclosure than for choosing to disclose a sexual assault incident. For this purpose, reasons for delaying or for not disclosing are discussed first.

3.5. Reasons for Not Disclosing or Delaying Sexual Assault Disclosure

In this section, the researcher discusses the reasons given for not disclosing or

Table 3. Reasons for not disclosing or delaying sexual assault disclosure.

Themes	Existing Data From 2005 (<i>N</i> = 7)		Data Collected in 2011 (<i>N</i> = 6)		Total (<i>N</i> = 13)	
	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%
Fear of Consequences	6	86	5	83	11	85
Physical Harm	4	57	3	50	7	54
Family Involvement/Acknowledgment	1	14	4	67	5	38
School Expulsion	1	14	0	0	1	8
Home Wrecker	0	0	1	17	1	8
Fear of Negative Reactions	4	57	4	67	8	62
Would Not be Believed	3	43	2	33	5	38
Blaming Reactions	2	29	3	50	5	38
Uncertainty about Receipt of Information	2	29	0	0	2	15
Lack of Support	2	29	0	0	2	15
Ignored	0	0	1	17	1	8
Disownment	1	14	0	0	1	8
Mother-Daughter Relationship	4	57	3	50	7	54
Avoidance	2	29	4	67	6	46
Ignorance	1	14	4	67	5	38
Lack of Knowledge about Sexual Assault	1	14	3	50	4	31
Lack of Knowledge about How to Respond	1	14	2	33	3	23
Fear of Retaliation	3	43	1	17	4	31
Father	1	14	1	17	2	15
Brother	1	14	1	17	2	15
Mother	1	14	0	0	1	8
Self-Blame	3	43	1	17	4	31
Felling of Guilt	3	43	0	0	3	23
Feeling of Shame	0	0	1	17	1	8
Feeling of Humiliation	1	14	0	0	1	8
Stigmatization	3	43	0	0	3	23
Being Judged	3	43	0	0	3	23
“Bad Person/Dirty Person”	2	29	0	0	2	15
“Slut/Whore”	1	14	0	0	1	8
Protection of Others	0	0	1	17	1	8
Love for Perpetrator	0	0	1	17	1	8

(Villarreal, 2012).

Table 4. Reasons for sexual assault disclosure.

Themes	Existing Data From 2005 (<i>N</i> = 7)		Data Collected in 2011 (<i>N</i> = 6)		Total (<i>N</i> = 13)	
	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%
Support	4	57	3	50	7	54
Emotional Support	3	43	1	17	4	31
Intimate Support	1	14	1	17	2	15
Preparation for Interview	0	0	1	17	1	8
Protection	4*	57	0	0	4*	30
Protecting Self	2	29	0	0	2	15
Preventing Pregnancy	1	14	0	0	1	8
Preventing Sexual Transmitted Disease	1	14	0	0	1	8
Protecting Others	1	14	0	0	1	8
Situational Disclosures	1	14	2	33	3	23
Behavior Confrontation	1	14	1	17	2	15
Disclosure by Another Person	0	0	1	17	1	8

*Concerning the protection theme, only four Latina participants that disclosed their sexual assault to protect themselves; however, one of the four were worried they could have been pregnant and also disclosed to prevent pregnancy (Villarreal, 2012).

delaying a sexual assault disclosure. The central themes are: 1) fear of consequences, 2) fear of negative reactions, 3) the depth of and significance between a mother-daughter relationship, 4) avoidance, 5) ignorance in lacking knowledge about sexual assault and/or on how to respond to a sexual assault, 6) fear of retaliation by a family member, 7) self-blame, 8) stigmatization, 9) protection of others, and 10) the love that exist for the perpetrator.

The most common reason for not disclosing or delaying disclosure of sexual assault is the fear of experiencing consequences. Through the data reduction phase, the researcher identified four types of consequences that the Latina participants feared the most. First, a little more than half of the participants (*N* = 7; 54%) feared that their perpetrator would attempt to physically harm them if they told anyone about what happened. In Teresa's case, her brother verbally threatened to harm her if she told anyone. In her mind, he had already attempted twice to kill her, which is why she took his threat seriously. Here is what she says about why she feared physical harm:

Yes, it was my brother that molested me. He told me that if I ever told anybody that he would kill me. And, he has actually tried to kill me twice... Yes, he had already tried to harm me twice, kill me twice and I thought he would follow through with that.

A consequence identified by five of the Latina participants (39%) was their fear of family involvement or family acknowledgement of their sexual assault. In Raquel's case, she was twelve years old and she was supposedly in a relationship with the adult Latino who lived with her family during a migrant season. He had driven up from Mexico to work in the fields. She did not know how to stop the

assault and was afraid to say anything because she feared disappointing her mother. Here, she explains how she kept quiet during the assault that took place in their family's basement in fear that her parents would wake.

Raquel: I told him to just stop. I was trying to force him, but he was way stronger than me, so I couldn't do anything. Like, I didn't ... don't know. I didn't want to, um, like, like say anything. I didn't want anybody to be woken up or anything. I guess, right now, if I think about it. I didn't want my mom to know ... I just didn't want my parents to know, um.

A year after this incident, Raquel was asked by a physician during a routine medical physical if she had ever had sex. Without considering the possible ramifications, Raquel responded with yes. Her physician then reported the incident and referred Raquel to a Children's Advocacy Center (CAC) for a sexual assault assessment. On the way home from the CAC, Raquel's mother questioned her behavior. "Why didn't you wait? Why didn't you tell anybody? *Que yo te dije que te esperaras.* (I told you to wait.)" Subsequently, Raquel was silenced and forced to choose not to address this issue with her again. She felt that there were certain taboo topics, such as sex, that a mother and daughter cannot openly address.

In Magdalena's case, she did not want her family to find out about multiple molestations because the perpetrator was a family member. She was afraid to cause problems within the family. Her father is the perpetrator's parental uncle. The very close personal relationship that Magdalena's father had with his brother and nephew kept Magdalena from informing any of her family members about the molestations. The following is her statement about her father and cousin's relationship that kept her silenced for years until she participated in this research. Again, her cousin was the perpetrator.

My dad really respects his dad (paternal uncle) and he (Magdalena's father) always just respected him (paternal uncle).

In all, eleven of the participants (85%), reported not disclosing or delaying their disclosure of sexual assault due to fearing consequences. In addition, eight participants (62%) feared negative reactions, which is the second theme identified through the data reduction phase. The researcher identified six types of negative reactions that the Latina participants feared (Table 3); however, the two most common inhibiting reactions were the fear of not being believed and/or the fear that they would be blamed for the sexual assault. In Adriana's case, she only disclosed her childhood experience of sexual assault because her boyfriend of only a month was pressuring her into a sexual relationship, which she did not want. In addition, she was afraid that he would blame her for the assault, which he actually did after she disclosed. In other words, her fear should have been acknowledged. This is what she said about this fear:

Interviewer: Did you have concerns about disclosing? Were you worried about telling him? *¿Tenías problemas o miedo a decirle?* (Did

- you have problems or were you afraid to tell him?)
- Adriana: ¿A él? (To him?) Yeah. (She nods in agreement.)
- Interviewer: If so, what were they?
- Adriana: *Porque no quería que me desciera que yo tuve la culpa a que yo lo provoque.* (Because I didn't want him to tell me that it was my fault or that I provoked him.) So, *yo pensé que era mejor callado.* So, (I thought it was better to keep it quiet.)

The mother-daughter relationship played a critical role in the decision-making process to disclose, delay or not disclose a sexual assault. In other words, the existing dynamics between a mother and daughter affected a little more than half of the participants' ($N = 7$; 54%) disclosure of their first sexual assault. In Raquel's case, there was an unstated rule that she and sisters simply did not address taboo topics, such as drugs and sex, with their mother. Here is how Raquel understood this unspoken rule:

Even though after ... while I was pregnant. I really got close to my mom, but there's this part between daughter and mother; there's always this part that there's just things that we don't talk about at all. Like, we never have. Like, I have never seen my sisters and my mom talk about it. Like, my mom never talked to us about sex or drugs. She just told us not to do it. We found out about sex and drugs in school... Once, you do not have those conversations, you don't ... you ... like build that, that space between you ... do not cross that ... Like, to not go into that box or anything. Like, you can't just, say okay, "I'm going; we're going to talk about this."

In Magdalena's case, she and her mother simple did not have the type of relationship where a daughter could go to their mother to discuss personal issues or sensitive topics. This is what Magdalena said about how she cannot depend on her mother and rather keeps private matters to herself.

Um, just like, my mom and I have never had, like, a good relationship. It's always just been like ... She has always been like really strict. I feel like she hasn't opened up to me and like allowed me to tell her ... Like my things ... It just like, things that a mother and daughter ... Like I never felt like I could, in a sense, trust her. A few years ago, I would tell her something, she would tell my dad. I just felt like I couldn't trust her with my stuff. Being something like that, she would definitely tell my dad. So, I just kept it to myself and not told anyone.

Concerning some of the other themes for not disclosing or delaying their disclosure, avoidance is where the participants chose not to acknowledge and/or consciously or unconsciously blocked the sexual assault they experienced. Ignorance, is when the participants did not realize that they were sexually assaulted, may have been confused by what they experienced, or they simply did not know how to respond to the assault. And, fear of retaliation is when the participants' feared that a family member (mother, father, or brother) would reta-

liate on their behalf.

3.6. Reasons for Sexual Assault Disclosure

In this section, the researcher identifies the three main themes for disclosing an incident of sexual assault, which include external support, protection, and situational disclosures. Concerning support, through the data reduction, external support was divided into three categories: emotional, intimate, and preparation for interview. In Gabriela's case, she disclosed once she received emotional support from a female cousin. These are her words:

Interviewer: What led you to disclose?

Gabriela: Having my cousin there to help me, and for her to tell me that I had to say something, and that it wasn't my fault.

Protection was another reason for sexual assault disclosures. There were four Latina participants (30%) who chose to disclose for protection of self and/or others. In Teresa's case, she disclosed a former molestation to protect herself from the perpetrator who was returning home. She was afraid that he would return home to molest her again. Here are her thoughts on why she felt she needed to disclose:

Brother is heading home for stepfather's funeral from the Marines. I was so afraid. I just didn't want him there. That I, I had to do something to stop him so he wouldn't be there. I didn't want something to happen again. I didn't want him to try to harm me again.

In this incident, Teresa's disclosure served to protect her. As first, her family, especially her mother, did not believe her disclosure, but then, during a phone conversation with their mother, Teresa's brother confirmed her story and admitted his transgression. He chose to entirely stay away from her and their family home.

One Latina participant disclosed to protect herself and prevent pregnancy, which led to quick disclosure. Dominga feared that the Christian college she was attending would expel her as a student if she resulted pregnant from an acquaintance rape. Her disclosure was influenced by fears. Here, Dominga shares her fear of pregnancy:

I was just so scared, so afraid that I was pregnant. I didn't want to be pregnant; I knew that if I was pregnant, I would be kicked out of school, and my mom wouldn't support me.

Feliciana disclosed because she did not want the perpetrator to assault someone else. This is her short quote, which is to the point:

I didn't want him to do it [rape] to somebody else.

The next section addresses the patterns shown regarding to whom Latinas sexual assault survivors reported their assault and in what time frames these disclosures occurred.

3.7. Can Patterns Be Detected Regarding to Whom Latinas' Disclose?

Table 5 presents the recipients of the Latina participants' disclosure and **Table 6** and **Table 7** address the patterns of disclosure based on time frame. After the data reduction phase, the researcher identified four recipient categories, which include family members, friends, professionals, and the interviewer, which is this researcher.

Out of these participants, only two (15%) made formal disclosures such as to enforcement officials. In seven cases (54%), the participants/survivors made their

Table 5. Patterns of recipient of first disclosure.

Themes	Existing Data From 2005 (<i>N</i> = 7)		Data Collected in 2011 (<i>N</i> = 6)		Total (<i>N</i> = 13)	
	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%
Family Member including Significant Other	4	57	3	50	7	54
Friends	2	29	1	17	3	23
Professionals	1	14	1	17	2	15
Interviewer	0	0	1	17	1	8
Gender of Recipient						
Female	3	43	5	83	8	61
Male	4	57	1	17	5	39

(Villarreal, 2012).

Table 6. Patterns of disclosure of the first perpetrator based on time frame.

Themes	Family Member (including sign. other)		Acquaintance		Stranger		Total (<i>N</i> = 13)	
	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%
Immediate (within 24 hours)	0	0	1	8	1	8	2	15
Soon (1 day - 1 month)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Later (1 month - several years)	10	77	1	8	0	0	11	85

(Villarreal, 2012).

Table 7. Patterns of disclosure of the perpetrators based on time frame.

Themes	Family Member (including sign. other)		Acquaintance		Stranger		Total of Assaults by all 13 Participants (<i>N</i> = 18)*	
	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%
Immediate (within 24 hours)	0	0	3	17	2	11	5	28
Soon (1 day - 1 month)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Later (1 month - several years)	12	67	1	6	0	0	13	72

*Percentage is based on a total of 18 assault incidents among the 13 participants (Villarreal, 2012).

first disclosure to a family member including a significant other and in another three cases (23%), the participants disclosed first to a friend. In only one (8%) case, Magdalena, had not disclosed any of the molestation she experienced as a child to anyone until she met with this researcher to participate in her interview. Furthermore, Raquel disclosed her first perpetrator's acts unintentionally to her family physician; however, she had not disclosed her second set of sexual assaults until she participated in her interview. Concerning gender, the Latina participants disclosed more often to a female ($N = 8$; 61%) than to a male ($N = 5$; 39%).

Concerning the perpetrators of the first sexual assault(s), only one participant (8%) did not know their perpetrator. Ten (77%) of the thirteen participants identified their first perpetrator as a family member. Seventy-seven percent ($N = 10$) of the participants took over a year to disclose their first sexual assault incident, whereas two of the other three participants disclosed within 24 hours. Regarding the total number of sexual assaults discussed during the interviews, more than half of the participants ($N = 8$; 62%) experienced more than one sexual assault, some by multiple perpetrators at different stages of their life. Only five (39%) participants experienced only one sexual assault incident.

Concerning time frame range, most of the participants ($N = 11$; 85%) delayed their disclosure by as little as a few months to up to as much as thirty years. Only two participants (15%) disclosed their incident right away and one of those participants experienced the least severe sexual assault (CSC IV), while their perpetrator was a stranger. In addition, five participants (38%) took 14 years or more to disclose their first sexual assault and only one of those five took more than 30 years to disclose. The average time waited for disclosure to occur was 16.5 years. As seen in **Table 6**, ten of the participants (77%) were first assaulted by a family member. **Table 7** shows the analyzes of all the assaults experienced by all 13 Latina participants; the total equals to 18 sexual assault incidents. From the five participants (28%) that disclosed immediately, two (11%) were assaulted by strangers and three (17%) were assaulted by an acquaintance.

4. Discussion and Interpretation of Results

The purpose of this paper is to add to the literature on research conducted with Latinas on their experience of disclosing one or more sexual assault incidents. The study focuses on Latinas' perspectives on what led them to disclose or delay their disclosure. It provides in-depth information about why these Latina survivors disclosed, to whom and under what circumstances. Similar to Ahrens and her colleagues (2007), this researcher analyzed narratives of sexual assault disclosure. However, in this study, the participants all identified as Latinas, whereas a minority of Ahrens and colleagues' participants were Latina (6%). The rest of their participants were African American (51%), White (37%), multiracial (5%), and Asian American (1%). At the same time, six percent of 102 female rape survivors would equal to about six Latina participants in Ahrens' et al. (2007) study,

whereas 13 Latina sexual assault survivors participated in this study.

4.1. Demographic Characteristics of Participants

In this study, most of the Latinas ($N = 11$; 85%) were sexually assaulted for the first time before becoming adolescents; however, they were all ($N = 13$; 100%) assaulted by the age of 18. These findings support Tjaden & Thoennes' (2006) study of 8000 women in the United States. They found that many American women are raped before they are adults –21.6 percent were raped before the age of 12 and 32.4 percent were sexually assaulted between the ages of 12 to 17 (Tjaden & Thoennes, 2006). This author's results are also consistent with findings reported by Romero et al. (1999) suggesting that childhood sexual assault among Latinas is higher than reported. Tjaden & Thoennes (2006) suggest that the risk of becoming a sexually assaulted female child or adolescent has increased over the past century. In addition to the demographics of selected characteristics, the researcher identifies a number of themes based on actual narratives given by thirteen Latina sexual assault survivors. It is important to mention that Latinas are significantly less likely to disclose a criminal sexual conduct in the first degree (CSC I) than non-Latina women (Tjaden & Thoennes, 2006). Furthermore, it is imperative that these findings are recognized since the Latino population is the second largest and fastest growing ethnic group in the United States.

4.2. Reasons for Not Disclosing or Delaying Sexual Assault Disclosure

The researcher's qualitative data generated several themes that both support and expand on previous findings regarding the nature of sexual assaults and disclosure. Previous research has shown that survivors do not disclose sexual assault incidents when they believe that doing so would lead to negative consequences such as physical harm, which was the most common reason found in this study, or result in stigma/blame (Cuevas & Sabina, 2010), which are themes also found in this study. A little more than half of the Latina survivors in this study ($N = 7$; 54%) feared that their perpetrator would attempt to physically harm them if they told anyone. Concerning results found among Latina participants, Ramos-Lira et al. (1999) found that Latinas are least likely to disclose a sexual assault when the perpetrator is someone they know or have been dating than a stranger in fear that their family may respond negatively by not believing them or retaliating on their behalf. In addition, they found that Latina survivors will often blame themselves for the assaults especially when they are raised to place a high value on their virginity. Patterson and Campbell's (2010) findings are similar in that more than half of their participants delayed their disclosures in fear that they would not be believed. In this study, five (38%) Latina participants reported that they delayed or chose not to disclose their sexual assault because they feared that they would not be believed.

Another feared consequence identified by five (38%) of the Latina participants in this study was their fear of family involvement or family acknowledgement of

their sexual assault. In Magdalena's case, she never disclosed what a male cousin did to her for years until she met with this researcher for her interview because she feared negative reactions from her family and may have been afraid that her family would have ostracized her. She described her parents as being private and conservative. She did not wish to bring shame to them, which is one of the reasons that kept Magdalena from disclosing. This confirms earlier findings (Ahrens et al., 2010; Ramos-Lira et al., 1999) that Latinos have strong family orientation and a story of incest could ruin their reputation as a family. Furthermore, Magdalena was afraid of how her father and brother would react to the news of her assault; she was afraid that they would retaliate. Most importantly, she blamed herself. Culturally, Magdalena was in a further bind. She had been taught to obey her elders. Since her male cousin was a few years older than she was, she felt obliged to obey him—even in the midst of his sexual assaults. In Araceli's case, she chose not to press charges after contacting the police soon after she was raped by two college students while she was a freshman in college, because she feared her parents would find out about the assault. Araceli did the unexpected; the unexpected because it is not common for victims of acquaintance rape to disclose to the police. As stated before, Araceli stopped pursuing legal charges once the police officer convinced her that everyone, including her parents, would find out about the rape.

Rich qualitative data indicates a connection between the mother-daughter relationship that leads to a significant finding in this study, which is the third reason for delaying or choosing not to disclose a sexual assault. The dynamics that exist between mothers and daughters concerning taboo and/or sensitive topics not addressed in the homes such as sex affected a little more than half of the Latina sexual assault survivors' ($N = 7$; 54%) disclosure of their first sexual assault. The seven Latina survivors who reported that their relationship with their mother is what kept them from disclosing expressed concerns about how this unspoken rule, socially constructed value, created by culture and strong religious beliefs keeps them from being able to have open conversations with their mothers about a set of taboo topics such as sex, drugs, and/or relationships with males. This reluctance may reflect an underlying understanding that certain topics are not talked about within the Latina community. Adames and Campbell (2005) suggested that sexual aggression is a private matter among Latinas. And Romero et al. (1999) suggested that Latinas discussing sexual acts was a taboo within their communities. Low and Organista (2000) found that simply mentioning genitals or discussing sexual acts is considered inappropriate. Raquel, a participant in the current study, recognized this as a problem among her culture and suggests educating Latina mothers about what they should teach their daughters about certain taboo topics such as sex or drugs.

Another reason for not disclosing or delaying sexual assault disclosure was ignorance about sexual assaults. Taboo topics, such as drugs and sex, left at least five (38%) Latina participants are ignorant, not knowing or understanding that they were sexually assaulted. In addition, they lacked awareness of how to pro-

tect and advocate for themselves. Ignorance prevented a few of the participants from disclosing their incidents sooner. These participants felt that they lacked the information needed to disclose what they had experienced at the hands of someone they knew.

Ahrens et al. (2010) found that taboos on talking about sex, rape, and abuse limit the type and amount of knowledge Latinas have with regard to sexual assault. This in turn leaves them feeling uncertain about what constitutes sexual assault. These women may believe that only “rape” (what they would equate with penetration of the vagina with a penis) would be seen as a sexual assault, but that none of the other behaviors (e.g. molestation, child’s exploitation, indecent exposure or penetration of the anus or mouth with a penis, finger, or object such as a silicone dildo) would be seen as a sexual assault. With regard to statutory rape, Latina women younger than 18 may not realize that they are unable to consent legally to sexual activity, especially if the male is older than 17 years old. This was highlighted in this study with Raquel, who dated a man much older than herself when she was only 12 years old. This lack of knowledge can make it difficult for Latina sexual assault victims to seek assistance or to provide support to Latina sexual assault survivors (Ahrens et al., 2010). The culturally created code of silence in turn maintains the ignorance regarding sexual assault.

4.3. Reasons for Sexual Assault Disclosure

Each of Latina sexual assault survivors gave one or two reasons for disclosing a sexual assault. The reasons for disclosing were the perceived availability of support and protection, or situational circumstances. Situational disclosures occurred without intention (i.e. Leticia, Sandra, and Gloria were not planning on making their disclosures; the disclosures occurred through conversation and/or confrontation).

These results support and expand on what has already been found concerning the reasons for sexual assault disclosure. Filipas and Ullman (2001) found that emotional support availability was most beneficial in encouraging a sexual assault disclosure. In addition, sexual assault survivors are more likely to receive positive emotional support from informal sources such as friends, significant others, and family members than from formal sources, like the police or medical professionals in emergency departments (Ahrens et al., 2009; Ahrens et al., 2007). As can be seen in Table 4, seven participants (54%) disclosed because some level of support existed for them.

Two of the Latina sexual assault survivors (15%) reported that they disclosed their assault because they were afraid of pregnancy or of contracting sexually transmitted diseases or infections. These fears may be related to an associated fear of being ruined for marriage as with this culture, virginity is a highly sought-after trait for marriage. This author describes these fears in greater detail in her dissertation (Villarreal, 2012). In addition to worrying about an unwanted pregnancy, if someone becomes pregnant from sexual assault, she would be less

able keep the incident private or hidden from others than someone who does not get pregnant. Similarly, the physical evidence of a sexually transmitted infection (STI) might provide medical evidence of sexual activity and further diminish one's value as a "good, respectable *mujer* (girl/female/woman)". Disclosure in both cases may come because a woman seeks private preventive treatment due to fearing that there will be public exposure, either through pregnancy or medical records of an STI.

4.4. Nature of Assault and Patterns of First Disclosure

This author's findings are consistent with previous research on patterns of sexual assault disclosures. Studies on sexual assault disclosure suggest that at least two-thirds of sexual assault survivors disclose their assault to at least one person (Ahrens et al., 2007; Starzynski et al., 2007; Ullman & Filipas, 2001). A majority, 65% to 92%, of sexual assault survivors often disclose to friends and family members at some point after the assault (Smith et al., 2000). Mexican American women turned to family and friends more often than Puerto Rican and Mexican women; less acculturated Mexican women were more likely to consult clergy and generally used fewer sources than either Mexican American or Puerto Rican women (West et al., 1998). In this study, 10 out of 13 Latina participants/survivors (77%) made their first sexual assault disclosure to a family member, a significant other, or a friend. However, these participants were all of Mexican descent.

In addition, social supports such as family members and friends play an important role in assisting sexual assault victims become survivors through emotional support (Ahrens et al., 2009). The Latina participants of this study ($N = 7$; 54%) were more likely to disclose their sexual assault when they felt emotionally supported by a family member or friend, than when they did not feel supported. This signifies the gravity of importance in consideration of the cultural value of interdependence within Latino communities. Interdependence allows Latina survivors to have at least one family or community member that they may turn to when in need of emotional support. In contrast to family interdependence among Latino families, Smith et al. (2000) found in a national women's survey that childhood sexual assault survivors often made their initial disclosure to friends, instead of to mothers, other family members, and less frequently to professionals. In this study, the Latina participants were more likely to disclose to a family member, than friends, professionals, and/or this researcher. This finding is even true when the Latina participants chose to follow the unspoken rule, socially constructed moral, of not discussing taboo topics such as sex or rape with their mothers. In addition, this study supports Ingram's (2007) findings in that Latino victims make their first disclosures to a family member, friend or acquaintance, a health case worker, the police and lastly to the clergy.

Continuation on perpetrators, Starzynski et al. (2005) found that most sexual assault survivors (80%) knew their perpetrators (Fisher et al., 2003; Ramos-Lira et al., 1999). Similar to previous research, the majority of the women in this study ($N = 12$; 92%) knew their first perpetrators. As shown in Table 6, in ten inci-

dents (77%), the perpetrators were identified as family members and/or significant others. As shown in **Table 7**, a majority of the perpetrators (16 out of 18 perpetrators identified) were known by the participants. In these 18 incidents, only five (28%) incidents were disclosed within 24 hours. Two of these assaults were by strangers. The other three (Araceli, Dominga, and Feliciana) were assaulted by acquaintances they did not know well. These findings indicate that the lack of a significant relationship with the perpetrators led to quick disclosures. [Smith et al. \(2000\)](#) found that a relationship with the perpetrator was related to longer delays in disclosure, which was true for this study. The sexual assault survivors in this study were much more reluctant to reveal their assaults when the perpetrator was a family member or significant other such as a boyfriend. In this study, nine of the eleven that delayed their disclosure by at least a month to thirty years were assaulted by a family member or their significant other. Of these, five participants (38%) took 14 years or more to disclose their first sexual assault and only one of these five took more than 30 years to disclose (Mean for Disclosure = 16.5 years). In [Smith et al.'s \(2000\)](#) study, a little less than half of their participants did not disclose for over five years.

A final finding in this study is that two participants (15%), Raquel, who had not disclosed her second perpetrator, and Magdalena, who had not disclosed her first and only perpetrator, made their first disclosure to this researcher. They both delayed their disclosure until they decided to participate in this study and disclosed for the first time during their interview. The interviews may have given them the much-needed opportunity to safely disclose and take their first steps in transcending from their silent victimhood brought on by these assaults. In other words, the research interview was perhaps perceived as a safe place, situation, and/or reason to disclose their sexual assault incident(s). This finding supports previous research indicating that 25% of childhood rape survivors never disclosed their assaults until they participated in a research interview ([Smith et al., 2000](#)).

5. Limitations of the Current Study

Despite significant findings that contribute to the literature, a few limitations to this study need to be stated. First, this study was conducted on a small, self-selected, convenience sample ($N = 13$) from two agencies that provide psychotherapy. The results point to significant issues for Latinas; however, they should not be used as a true representation of the larger population of Latinas in the United States without further confirmation. In other words, the small representation of Latina sexual assault survivors curbs the generalizability of the findings. In addition, the qualitative findings were reported on only thirteen Latina participants, the numerical data should not be perceived as quantitative findings.

Second, the sensitivity of the topic may have been a limitation to who would be willing to be participants. Some potential participants may have chosen not to participate in this study due to their emotional state of mind and/or fear of

re-traumatization, consequences, and/or negative reactions from others. Third, only qualitative interview data were analyzed, which may have led to meanings that were specific to this participant group or to implications about the broader population that are unfounded with interpretation of the data collected from the interviews. Mix-methods or quantitative data might have produced different results. Thus, although participation was voluntary, the validity of the study may be limited by the bias inherent in the interview items as well as the recruitment and data collection methods used. Another limitation may have been the degree of error that occurs when individuals are recalling sexual assault incidents that may have not occurred recently, e.g. the Latina survivors' memories may have not been accurate.

Finally, this researcher does personally identify as *Tejana*. There could be a bias attributable to this fact from outside sources. It is the researcher's stance that Latinas in this culture have added ethnically enculturated significant challenges in this arena of sexual assault and disclosure as I have set out to demonstrate within the study.

6. Directions for Future Research

There is a gap in the academic literature; approximately only one percent of published research focuses on Latinos (Cuevas & Sabina, 2010) and less on Latinas who have been sexually assaulted. In working with Latinas, it is important to understand the similarities and differences that may exist between them and other female communities in the United States based on ethnicity and assimilation, while being open to each individual's unique narrative (Comas-Díaz & Greene, 1994).

This study contributes to Latinas' voices on sexual assault disclosure. It points to the need for further research on social services interventions to empower Latina sexual assault survivors. It also provides ample justification for future qualitative, quantitative, or mixed studies. The topic of sexual assault and culture among female victims/survivors has relevant implications for the psychotherapy, human services, and medical fields. Violence against women should be treated as a significant social, mental, and physical problem, and sexual assaults should be viewed as a transgression against children as well as adults (Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000). In working with Latinas, culturally sensitive training is essential in providing women of different ethnicities with adequate services.

The mother-daughter relationship proved to be a critical ingredient in the decision to disclose or to delay disclosure. This research points to the need for further research on determining if Latinas are taught to not address certain sensitive topics, which leads to ignorance in knowing how to protect and advocate for themselves concerning sexual assaults. Although the literature review identified some research in the area of sexual assault with Latinas, research to date has been scant concerning the Latina mother-daughter relationship with regards to the dynamics that exist between mother and daughter(s) concerning taboo and/or

sensitive topics not addressed in the home such as sex and sexual assaults.

Questions recommended for future research include: What is it that needs to be in place to encourage Latinas to feel safe about disclosing a sexual assault? Who should be educated about sexual assault, the children, or the mothers? How can we encourage Latina mothers to begin conversations with their daughters about sensitive/taboo topics such as sex and sexual assaults? In other words, researchers should examine the mother-daughter relationship as a barrier (or supporter) that exists in preventing (or enhancing) disclosures of sexual assault. Again, this study is demonstrating a need for further research in its entirely concerning a perceived, understood, and underserved group in this body of research.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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