ABSTRACT

Sexual assault is a common experience. When survivors disclose their assaults they are more likely to tell their peers than formal support providers. Peers’ responses have been found to relate to survivors’ healing processes. Increased understanding regarding why peers respond as they do provides greater opportunities to influence their responses to survivors through outreach and support work. Previous research largely overlooks how the peer-survivor relationship might relate to responses to disclosures of sexual assault. This research includes both formal and informal supporters to increase the range of relationships available for examination. Two studies were conducted. The first study surveyed undergraduate students to investigate associations between different aspects of peer relationships and: a) emotional distress experienced after a disclosure, and b) social reactions provided to the survivor. The second study interviewed a subset of the peers involved in Study 1 as well as counsellors and support workers. Qualitative content analysis of interviews was used to increase understanding about the processes by which responses to disclosures of sexual assault are shaped by relationship characteristics. Findings suggest that relationship characteristics and type matter in disclosures of sexual assault.

This dissertation advances research about sexual assault disclosures in three important ways. First, it contributes to understanding about divergent social reactions to sexual assault disclosures by including a wide range of relationships at the time of disclosure, ranging from no prior relationship to close friendships. Second, it examines various supporters’ perspectives of how their thoughts and emotions might relate to their reactions to survivors. Little research has investigated a range of supporters’ views of
why they react in the ways they do. Third, this dissertation contributes to knowledge about how to improve support to survivors and the people to whom they disclose. Without better understanding of how supporters’ experiences relate to their responses, working with peers and formal supporters to help them respond in more helpful ways is difficult. Results are discussed in terms of their implications for prevention and intervention efforts and recommendations for systems of support.
PREFACE

This dissertation is original, unpublished, independent work by the author, Kristin Carol Kendrick. This research was approved by the University of British Columbia’s Behavioural Research Ethics Board under the title, ‘Processes by which responses to disclosures of violence are shaped by relationship context’. The Certificate Number is H12-01472.
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There are many people who supported me in completing this research. Sheila Marshall, my supervisor, provided me with mentorship, guidance, and knowledge. She also allowed me independence to explore issues of interest and importance to me. Sheila gave me the time and space I needed to complete this research in ways that fit for me. Thank you, Sheila, for providing me a sense of ownership over this journey. My committee members, Richard Sullivan, Grant Charles, and Elizabeth Saewyc, provided important insights and guidance that helped to shape this dissertation. For that, I am greatly appreciative. I would like to acknowledge the Social Science and Humanities Research Council for awarding me a Joseph-Bombardier Canada Graduate Scholarship, Doctoral Award, which allowed for me to complete the requirements for my Ph.D. There were many others who provided me with feedback along the way. I am grateful to each and every one of these people as they certainly contributed to shaping this project.
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DEDICATION

“Alas for those who do not sing but die with all their music in them” (Oliver Wendell Holmes, as cited by Terr, 1994, p. 137). This dissertation is dedicated to all people who are affected by sexual violence. It is hoped that this research can be one further step towards providing acknowledgement and validation of these experiences. This paper evidences that the people who disclosed their experiences of sexual assault were heard. We now all bear witness to that. Through continued witnessing, it is hoped that the shame, helplessness and secrecy experienced by so many survivors can continue to be addressed. The shame of sexual violence should not lie with those who were strong enough to survive these experiences, but by those who perpetrate violence. Each of us in society plays a role in maintaining the systems that support sexual violence and the silencing that accompanies it, and must therefore we must step up, step forward, and create change.
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

This initial social response [after a person experiences a traumatic event] will shape the way the victim comes to perceive the safety of the world and the benevolence or malevolence of others. If people in the social environment refuse to step in when a person’s own resources are exhausted, this may become as great a source of devastation as the original trauma itself and seed further helplessness, rage, and shame. (p. 37, van der Kolk, 2002)

1.1 PROBLEM SPECIFICATION

What happens when people tell their peers they have been sexually assaulted? What influences how those peers will respond? Do peers respond differently based on how close they feel to survivors or how long they have known the survivors? Can they, or should they, respond in ways that have been found helpful when used by counsellors, social workers, and support workers, or is there something different that happens in peer relationships? Much has been learned about the occurrence of sexual assault and its effects on those who survive this experience. Less has been learned about the perspectives of those who receive disclosures of sexual assault. When the perspectives of peers have been examined, rarely has their relationship with the survivor been considered in association with their responses.

Sexual assault is a common experience. In a national Canadian survey, 39% of adult women reported having had at least one sexual assault experience after the age of 16 (Statistics Canada, 1993). Overall in the United States (U.S.), statistics suggest that about one in four women and approximately one in 10 men report experiencing unwanted sexual contact at some point in their lives (Black et al., 2011). U.S. statistics also show that, for men, sexual assault experiences are more common in childhood: three to eight percent of men in adulthood and about one in six males in childhood have experienced sexual assault (Dube et al., 2005; Elliot, Mok & Briere, 2004; Finkelhor, Hotaling, Lewis
& Smith, 1990; Tjaden & Thoennes, 2006; U.S. Department of Justice, 2000). All people are at risk of experiencing a sexual assault, but certain populations are particularly vulnerable and warrant investigation. In adulthood, risk for rape is greatest during the late teens and early twenties (Perreault & Brennan, 2010; Tjaden & Thoennes, 2006). Comparisons are not methodologically possible between studies of college women and similarly aged women not attending college. Authors have, however, suggested that college women are placed at an increased risk for experiencing sexual assault (DeKeseredy, Schwartz, & Tait, 1993; Fisher, Cullen, & Turner, 2000; Krebs, Lindquist, Warner, Fisher, & Martin, 2007). Sexual assault on campuses has been an issue receiving much media attention in both Canada and the U.S. (e.g., CBC News, 2013, October 30; Dick, 2015). Many post-secondary institutions have been under investigation in the U.S. for a lack of policy and inadequate response to sexual assault on campus (Quigley, 2013). Processes for universities to develop a response to sexual assault have been presented (e.g., Lichty, Campbell, & Schuiteman, 2008) and a White House Task Force to Protect Students from Sexual Assault has been established in the U.S. (Obama, 2014). Research examining the sexual assault experiences of university students is of particular importance to improve support and ensure the efficacy of prevention programs both on and off of campus.

Investigations of sexual assault disclosures often overlook the perspectives of those who receive the disclosures. Research has shown that, at some point, most female survivors tell someone, and although less likely than for women, men also disclose their sexual assault experiences (Banyard, Plante, Ward, Cohn, Moorehead, & Walsh, 2005; Brennan & Taylor-Butts, 2008; Fisher, Daigle, Cullen, & Turner, 2003; Menard, 2005;
Stein & Nofziger, 2008; Ullman & Filipas, 2005; Widom, 1997). When survivors disclose their assaults they are most likely to tell their peers rather than formal support providers or family members (Ahrens, Cabral, & Abeling, 2009; Banyard, Moynihan, Walsh, Cohn, & Ward, 2010; Banyard et al., 2005; Brennan & Taylor-Butts, 2008; Dube et al., 2005; Elliot et al., 2004; Finkelhor et al., 1990; Fisher et al., 2003; Orchowski & Gidycz, 2012; Stein & Nofziger, 2008; Tjaden & Thoennes, 2006; Quigley, 2013; U.S. Department of Justice, 2000). Since social networks often expand during the transition to university, there are increased opportunities and contexts for disclosures when young adults enter university (Wang, 2007).

Peers are more likely to hear disclosures of sexual assault than individuals working in legal and social support systems. Therefore, it is important to understand the effect that disclosures have on peers. Peers may know the perpetrator. In cases of peer-to-peer sexual assaults in adolescence, perpetrators are most often friends of survivors (Stein & Nofziger, 2008). Peers are located in the social networks of survivors. They may be important supports for survivors and vice-versa. Peers may lose friends from their social network due to reactions to assault disclosures, and/or they may lose the survivor as a friend (Golding, Wilsnack, & Cooper, 2002; Sorenson, Joshi, & Sivitz, 2014). If their social network is influenced, peers, as well as survivors, may experience consequences to their physical health, emotional health, spiritual well-being, or experience interruptions in work or education (Jordan, Combs, & Smith, 2014; Quigley, 2013).

In addition to direct effects on the peer of hearing the disclosure, peers’ reactions to disclosures have been related to the well-being of the sexual assault survivor (Campbell, Dworkin, & Cabral, 2009; Filipas & Ullman, 2001; Littleton, 2010; Sylaska...
& Edwards, 2014). Increased understanding regarding why peers respond as they do provides greater opportunities to influence their responses through outreach and support work. As disclosures are most likely to occur to peers rather than formal support providers, working with peers can be an important way in which social workers can assist sexual assault survivors. For example, research has shown that informal supports are likely to influence whether survivors will engage in formal systems, such as criminal justice systems (Patterson & Campbell, 2010; Paul, Walsh, McCauley, Ruggiero, Resnick, & Kilpatrick, 2013).

Working with peers is an important way of helping survivors. However, previous research (e.g., Ahrens & Campbell, 2000; Banyard et al., 2010) assumes that when survivors of sexual assault disclose to peers they are disclosing to friends. The assumption of disclosures occurring in friendships is problematic as it may overlook variations in to whom people might disclose. Relationships form through interactions (Hinde & Stevenson-Hinde, 1987) and are characterized by the degree of emotional closeness and duration of the relationship. Peer relationships can be described as close friendships, casual friendships, and acquaintance relationships; people without relationships are considered strangers. Disclosures of sexual assault might occur in any of these types of peer relationships. Further, people who have close, long-lasting friendships with a survivor are likely to respond differently from people who may have just met the survivor or have a more distant, superficial relationship (i.e., an acquaintance). Therefore, including a range of relationships in the study of responses to hearing sexual assault disclosures is warranted. This dissertation extends prior research by including perspectives of peers who label their relationships differently as close friends, casual
friends, acquaintances or strangers. The present research also examines relationships based on characteristics of closeness and duration.

Peers might hear disclosures from strangers; however, formal support providers might be more likely than peers to receive disclosures upon their initial meeting with survivors. Survivors might purposefully seek out formal support providers with the intent of disclosing and accessing support for a sexual assault experience. This type of planned disclosure from a stranger is unlikely to occur for peers. To increase the likelihood of hearing about sexual assault disclosures from strangers, thus increasing the range of relationships examined, formal supporters and peers were included in this research.

Formal support providers work in a variety of contexts, such as legal, medical, support, and therapeutic contexts. Supporters have different objectives based on the contexts in which they provide service. For example, doctors aim to provide medical care and police aim to protect society, whereas counsellors and support workers provide emotional support without the necessary involvement of other social systems. All formal supporters, to some degree, provide verbal support to survivors. However, the provision of verbal support is the main aim of formal support providers such as counsellors, social workers, and support workers. This is an objective that is shared by peers supporting survivors of sexual assault. As counsellors, social workers, and support workers share a primary objective with peers to support survivors of sexual assault, these formal supporters are included in the present study.

Studies have not included perspectives from formal and informal support providers about their experiences of receiving disclosures of sexual assault in the same study. Research including peers and formal support providers together provides an
opportunity to understand the relevance of the relationship in responses to disclosures of sexual assault. Including peers’ and formal supporters’ perspectives together is also likely to extend the range of experience with sexual assault disclosures that supporters may have. Formal support providers whose roles are to specifically support survivors of sexual assault are particularly likely to hear many disclosures based on the nature of their role. Examining the perspectives of peers and formal supporters together allows for an investigation of how a range of experiences with sexual assault disclosures, an aspect of the disclosure context, might also relate to responses to disclosures of sexual assault. Other aspects of the context of the sexual assault disclosure, such as survivors’ characteristics and coping, assault characteristics, and where the disclosure occurred, have also been shown to relate to responses provided (Ahrens & Campbell, 2000; Ahrens, Stansell, & Jennings, 2010; Dunn, Vail-Smith, & Knight, 1999; Harter, Harter, Atkinson, & Reynolds, 2009; Hassija & Gray, 2012; Starzynski, Ullman, Filipas, & Townsend, 2005; Ullman, 2007, 1996a, 1996b; Ullman & Najdowski, 2011; Ullman, Starzynski, Long, Mason, & Long, 2008). This dissertation examines peers’ and formal support providers’ perspectives of how the context of the disclosure of sexual assault relates to responses supporters provide to survivors.

People in relationships of longer duration and higher levels of perceived closeness may respond differently to hearing disclosures of sexual assault than those in short, distant relationships. Symbolic interactionism provides a way of understanding how meaning is made of experiences through interactions with others (Mead, 1934, 1964). Attitudes and role-taking are concepts within the theory of symbolic interactionism (Lauer & Handel, 1977). These concepts provide an explanation for how the supporter-
survivor relationship may relate to the emotional reactions the supporter experiences. Attitudes include people’s emotions and people are thought to have similar attitudes, and thus emotions, as those of the people with whom they regularly interact. Role-taking suggests that people respond in interactions, in part, based on their perceptions of others’ emotions. People may take on the emotions of the other person with whom they are interacting. Accurate perceptions of emotions are more likely to occur when a person has more knowledge of the other person and can better attune to their emotions. Thus, if the survivor is distressed, a close friend might also experience emotional distress, but this might not occur within more distant relationships such as acquaintance relationships. Emotional distress experienced after hearing a disclosure is, therefore, likely to be higher for people who hear a disclosure from a close friend with whom they have had a lengthy relationship than for supporters who hear disclosures within short relationships or relationships that are not perceived as close. By including a range of relationships, this dissertation aims to explore the association between relationship characteristics and emotional distress. This exploration is important as people experiencing high levels of distress might respond differently to disclosures than those experiencing little distress.

This research aims to increase understanding about reactions to sexual assault disclosures in order to provide recommendations to peers and formal support providers about how to improve support for sexual assault survivors. Professionals working in the area of sexual assault currently recommend that peers should respond to sexual assaults in ways that have been found helpful when provided by formal supporters (e.g., Alma Mater Society of the University of British Columbia Sexual Assault Support Centre, n.d.; Concordia University Student Services Sexual Assault Resource Centre, n.d.; University
of Alberta Sexual Assault Centre, 2015; University of California Irvine, n.d.). No research has examined peers’ and formal support providers’ perspectives of their responses to sexual assault disclosures together. Further, as little research has examined responses across different types of peer relationships, the appropriateness of making these same suggestions to all peers remains unclear.

In summary, most research has focused on the survivors’ perspectives of the support they have received (Ahrens, 2006; Ahrens et al., 2009; Hassija & Gray, 2012; Orchowski & Gidycz, 2012; Orchowski, United, & Gidycz, 2013; Peter-Hagene & Ullman, 2014; Relyea & Ullman, 2015; Starzynski et al., 2005; Ullman, 1996b; 2010; Ullman et al., 2008; Ullman & Najdowski, 2011; Ullman & Peter-Hagene, 2014). Survivors are able to provide important information about what reactions they experienced as helpful when they disclosed their assaults. However, survivors’ perspectives alone provide little information about how to work with supporters to provide optimal reactions. This dissertation expands upon prior research by investigating a range of relationships to deepen understanding about responses to disclosures of sexual assault in hopes of improving support to survivors.
CHAPTER TWO: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 OVERVIEW

This dissertation explores responses to disclosures of sexual assault. Theories and models help inform understanding of what a disclosure might mean to the person who hears it. The meaning that people make within a disclosure interaction will influence the responses they provide. Symbolic interactionism is the overarching theory that guided this dissertation and informed the interpretation of findings. Symbolic interactionism posits that people make meaning of their experiences through social interactions (Cooley, 1902; Mead, 1934).

Under the umbrella of symbolic interactionism, there are models and theoretical propositions that are important to understand when examining disclosures of sexual assaults within relationships. An interactional model of relationships, proposed by Hinde (1976; Hinde & Stevenson-Hinde, 1987) suggests that interactions between people are key to forming and maintaining relationships. The content of interactions and the degree of complementarity shape the quality of the relationship. The interactional model of relationships is used, in this dissertation, to understand the role of relationships in responses to sexual assault disclosures.

The content of interactions between people is important in determining the quality of a relationship. Self-disclosure describes a specific type of content that might occur within interactions. Self-disclosure involves making oneself known in some way to another person (Jourard, 1971). When survivors choose to tell someone that they have been assaulted, they are likely to be engaging in self-disclosure.
In this chapter, a theoretical framework is presented to help guide the exploration of sexual assault disclosures within different relationships. Symbolic interactionism, the interactional model of relationships, and self-disclosure, are reviewed next. Together, these theories and models provide a lens through which disclosures to sexual assault might be understood.

2.2 SYMBOLIC INTERACTIONISM

In order to understand how people within varying types of relationships might respond to disclosures of sexual assault, it is first important to understand how knowledge is constructed and the nature of truth and reality. As the interest of this dissertation is responses to disclosures within relationships, a perspective about knowledge and truth that focuses on relationships is helpful to provide a foundation for this exploration. Symbolic interactionism is a theoretical perspective, or an overall orienting lens, that can be used to understand relationships (Cooley, 1902; Mead, 1934). Although there are many versions of symbolic interactionism (Katovich, Miller, & Stewart, 2003; Musolf, 2003; Robbins, Chatterjee, & Canda, 1998), there are some basic tenets of this theory that are relevant to understanding how knowledge is constructed within relationships, and these ideas are reviewed here.

Symbolic interactionism adheres to a social constructivist epistemological view. Social constructivism is a paradigm that contends that individuals attempt to understand the world, they develop multiple and varied subjective meanings of their experiences, and knowledge is co-created between people in situations (Creswell, 2009). This epistemological perspective is used to explain the ways in which the external world is internalized at an individual level to create personal meaning.
Mead’s (1934) philosophies of symbolic interactionism began with critiques that others who included social aspects of behaviour in their research and theories implied a pre-existence of a mind and a self prior to social interactions and processes. Additionally, Mead identified that even when aspects of the mind were related or attributed to social processes, a mechanism for this development was not identified. Mead posited that the mind is continually created and re-created through social processes and that language is the mechanism for the social construction of the mind and the self. Within symbolic interactionism language is considered a symbol. In fact, it is the most apparent and perhaps the most important symbol. Without language to conceptualize an idea, it is unlikely it will receive attention or be recalled. If certain aspects of an assault or a relationship did not have words or symbols to describe them, they would be unlikely to affect meanings and interpretations of experiences for individuals. Further, the language that is used to describe an experience such as a sexual assault is likely to affect the meaning of that event for the person to whom it is described.

Symbols are important in symbolic interactionism and are considered social objects used for communication (Charon, 1989). Significant symbols are possible, as are non-significant symbols. Significant symbols are those used by people with intention to represent something, such as how waving a hand can be used as a greeting. However, non-significant symbols are those that carry meaning that may be incongruent with the intent of the actor using them. For example, someone hearing a disclosure may hug a survivor with intent to show love and support; however, a survivor of sexual assault may interpret physical touch as threatening or disempowering. This highlights the importance
of not just understanding meaning of disclosure experiences to survivors, but also to those hearing disclosures.

All things, including situations, objects, relationships, and experiences, are actively categorized into meanings that are created by the individual. The perceptions of the individual are influenced by prior interactions with objects, relationships, and situations. Further, Mead (1964) proposed that experiences that remind a person of another experience will likely influence the person to act similarly to the way they did previously. These previous experiences influence not only the meanings people hold, but also the stimuli to which people attend in future situations. Throughout the decision-making process in which people choose what to attend to and interpret, individuals remain aware and are active participants (Blumer, 1969). Blumer described an individual’s engagement in the process of meaning-making through interactions as “indications”. The things to which individuals attend influence how they interpret their experiences. For example, in a disclosure situation, among many other things, an individual might pay attention to particular statements while ignoring others. Additionally, the prior interactions a person had with the survivor/discloser or other survivors are likely to influence what things are considered important to attend to in the current situation.

In addition to the creation of individual meanings, people also make interpretations about the meanings of other people. These interpretations are based upon others’ actions, and are ongoing and necessary in facilitating relationships and social interactions (Blumer, 1969). With regards to the topic of this dissertation, the person hearing a disclosure will likely create meaning within the context of the disclosure
interaction based upon the actions of the survivor during the disclosure, and the
survivors’ reports, if any, about actions during the assault. These reported or witnessed
actions will be given meaning based on what the past actions of the survivor have been,
according to the perceptions of the person hearing the disclosure.

Charon (1989) discusses the importance of significant others to symbolic
interactionism. Significant others are thought to be important in meaning-making because
they are important to people, as are their perspectives about social objects and of the self.
Things that are important to people are likely to receive greater attention, and therefore
are more likely to be included in personal meanings. This theory seems to suggest then,
that perspectives of significant others are more likely to be similar than perspectives of
non-significant others. At least, it is suggested that more attention will be given to
significant others’ perspectives when determining the meaning of an event.

In using tenets from symbolic interactionism, a disclosure cannot be understood
as an objective event, but rather, an interaction that is understood by the person hearing
the disclosure based on their experiences. While research has reported a fair amount
about the meaning survivors take from disclosure experiences, we know far less about the
meanings of these experiences to those who hear the disclosures. As they bring different
experiences with them compared to the survivors, it is likely they will attribute different
meaning to these experiences. Further, as this theory suggests that the interactions within
the relationship are likely to influence the meaning of the situation, information about the
relationship is important in understanding interpretations of disclosure experiences.

A disclosure is likely to hold different meanings for individuals when they first
hear it and as they continue to have additional interactions with survivors across time.
While individuals’ interpretations of their experiences may change across time, each of these interpretations is valid. In terms of ontology, or the nature of reality, the idea of an objective truth is rejected by symbolic interactionist thought, and it is argued that people apply personal values and meanings to external phenomena based on experience (Robbins et al., 1998). It is thought that reality does not exist apart from meanings that are imposed upon the world by people (Robbins et al., 1998). This perspective asserts that the world and human experience can be known best through subjective experiences.

Within the scope of symbolic interactionism, this dissertation aims to seek the subjective meanings of disclosures of sexual assault. Symbolic interactionism posits that people have the capacity for intentional, meaningful activity, and this dissertation will attempt to understand peoples’ meanings of their chosen actions in response to hearing a disclosure.

Concepts of attitude, roles, and role-taking are also important to consider in symbolic interactionism. These concepts provide a rationale for how relationships between survivors and the people to whom they disclose influence experienced emotions, thoughts, and reactions to disclosures. From a symbolic interactionist perspective, role refers to behaviour, and roles can only be understood in relation to other roles (Lauer & Handel, 1977). Thus, the behaviour of the person hearing the disclosure can only be understood in relation to the behaviour of the survivor who is making the disclosure. There are social expectations attached to the role of counsellor, friend or peer, for instance. The individual-role relationship may influence behaviour in that some individuals may be more committed to the role than others, or may interpret the role differently. For instance, a peer who is committed to the relationship, as would be expected in a close relationship, would likely respond differently to a disclosure of sexual
assault than a person with low commitment to the role, such as a stranger or acquaintance. Finally, friends may respond differently to a disclosure than strangers as they are more likely to experience role conflict in that a participant’s role as the survivor’s friend could be in conflict with her/his role as friend of the perpetrator.

People in close relationships may respond differently to disclosures of sexual assault than people in more distant relationships. Symbolic interactionism posits that this might occur, in part, through attitudes and role-taking. Attitudes include emotions, thoughts, and behaviours, and describe typical patterns among these aspects of individuals that arise from social interactions (Lauer & Handel, 1977). In symbolic interactionism, role-taking, or perspective-taking is an activity of imagining the cognitions and emotions of the other person and thus their expected behaviour (Lauer & Handel, 1977).

Extrapolating from symbolic interactionism, emotions and cognitions influence the interactions that take place and facilitate meaning-making as people tend to have interactions with others whose beliefs and emotions are similar to their own. It is therefore likely that survivors will engage in disclosure interactions with people who share similar emotions and thoughts. Emotions and cognitions also fluctuate on an ongoing basis as a result of social interactions. Thus, the emotions and thoughts of the person who hears the disclosure are likely to be more similar to the survivor’s if these people engage in ongoing interactions with each other, as would occur in close relationships or relationships of longer duration. People who hear disclosures from their close friends who are distressed after being sexual assaulted are thus likely to also experience emotional distress in relation to hearing the disclosure.
Perspective-taking helps people to construct their behaviour with reference to the other person. Thus, it is likely that the survivor had some expectation of response that was perceived as favourable in order for her/him to choose to disclose in the first place. In turn, the supporter would choose to respond, in part, based on how that person imagined the emotions and cognitions of the survivor. Further, some individuals have a greater ability to engage in perspective-taking than others. It is likely that perspective-taking might be more attuned when more interactions have occurred within a relationship, suggesting that those in close relationships might more closely match their thoughts and feelings to those of the survivor. Thus, if the survivor is distressed, a close friend might also experience distress. This would not necessarily be the case in the context of other relationships.

Symbolic interactionism provides a framework for understanding how meaning of experience is made in social interactions. In order for a disclosure of sexual assault to occur, one person must be in interaction with another. Attitudes, roles, and role-taking, as conceptualized in symbolic interactionism, suggest that people in close as compared to distant relationships are more likely to attune their emotions to those of the survivors within the disclosure interaction. People who hear disclosures from survivors with whom they share a close relationship are therefore more likely to experience emotional distress in response to hearing a disclosure than those who are not close to the survivor. A model suggesting that relationships are based on interactions is reviewed next.

2.3 INTERACTIONAL MODEL OF RELATIONSHIPS

It is important to conceptualize how dyadic relationships develop in order to understand how a relationship might influence how a person responds to a disclosure of
sexual assault. The interactional model of relationships (Hinde & Stevenson-Hinde, 1987) proposes that relationships develop based on five principles:

(a) Relationships develop through interactions.
(b) Both people involved in the interaction contribute and thus both contribute to the relationship.
(c) Each relationship is a distinctive accumulation of dyadic interactions.
(d) Each relationship is based on past interactions.
(e) Close relationships have both a representation based on past experiences and a representation based on a concept of the future. (Lollis, 2009, p. 36)

This dissertation focuses on one interaction in which a disclosure of sexual assault occurs. However, this disclosure interaction occurs within a greater context of past interactions between the survivors and people to whom they disclose, as well as expectations about future interactions that might occur within this dyad. Each individual interaction changes how the past is perceived and the concept of the future.

The interactional model of relationships is in line with symbolic interactionism in that both suggest that ongoing interactions influence how meaning is made of experiences (Hinde & Stevenson-Hinde, 1987; Mead, 1934). People who have just met when a disclosure occurs do not have prior interactions with each other that inform expectations within the disclosure interaction. These prior interactions and future expectations differentiate close relationships from relationships people may have with strangers or acquaintances. Lollis (2009) suggests that the longer the relationship the less influence any one interaction is likely to have on the relationship. Therefore, the type of a relationship a person has with a survivor of sexual assault is likely to influence how that person responds to a disclosure.

Complementarity is an aspect of interactions that contributes to the quality of relationships (Hinde, 1976). In a complementary interaction, the behaviours of each
person are different but go together. For example, a survivor might seek support from a person who will hear her/his disclosure and provide support. This is in contrast to a reciprocal interaction in which the behaviours of two individuals are similar. In a reciprocal interaction, a person might disclose a sexual assault, and the other person might make a disclosure of their own. Each person in the interaction might then provide support to the other person. Some relationships primarily involve reciprocal interactions, some primarily complementary, and others may not display such as discernible pattern of interactions on this dimension of relationships. People in close relationships are more likely to follow a pattern of reciprocity and complementarity than those in distant relationships. In a relationship that includes a pattern based on this quality of complementarity, this pattern will likely relate to reactions one person has to another’s disclosure of sexual assault. In an interaction between strangers, a pattern of interactions will not have developed. Thus, strangers’ responses to disclosures of sexual assault cannot be based on past interactions or future expectations. These reactions must therefore be based on factors other than expectations within the relationship.

The interactional model of relationships defines a relationship and provides a way of understanding how relationship qualities might relate to responses to disclosures of sexual assault. Further, the type of relationship a person has with a survivor is likely to influence whether a disclosure of sexual assault is made, and if it is, what information is shared during that interaction. Self-disclosure theory is reviewed next.

2.4 **SELF-DISCLOSURE**

In this dissertation, the model of self-disclosure is used to inform the study of disclosures of sexual assault. However, it is unclear if the disclosures of sexual assault
investigated in this dissertation involved self-disclosure or routine disclosure (Tilton-Weaver, Marshall, & Darling, 2013). Routine disclosure relates to the disclosure, voluntary or non-voluntary, of pragmatic information that could possibly be accessible without a direct disclosure (e.g., from a third party or through the public realm) (Tilton-Weaver et al., 2013). Self-disclosure, on the other hand, involves the voluntary sharing of private information (Pearce & Sharp, 1973), and provides opportunities for expression, intimacy and boundary negotiation (Altman & Taylor, 1973).

The seminal work on the phenomenon of self-disclosure was conducted by Sidney Jourard (Berg & Derlega, 1987). Jourard (1971, p. 19) defined self-disclosure as “the act of making yourself manifest, showing yourself so others can perceive you”. It is conceptualized as thoughts, feelings, and experiences that are voluntarily stated about oneself to another (Antaki, Barnes, & Leudar, 2005). Self-disclosure can be thought of as an interactional process, and this conceptualization fits with symbolic interactionism. Self-disclosures are not only made, but the receipt of self-disclosures is about perception and how one understands what another is communicating.

People will allow themselves to be known to others whom they believe are well-intentioned and trustworthy (Jourard, 1971). Altman and Taylor (1973) expanded on the importance of self-disclosure in the development of interpersonal relationships. Self-disclosure is necessary in order for relationships to form and be maintained (Altman & Taylor, 1973). In new relationships, people are likely to discuss impersonal information. Once relationships become more intimate and knowledge about and trust in another person is built, more personal information is disclosed (Altman & Taylor, 1973). Self-disclosure may also be used as a means of setting boundaries in relationships (Petronio,
People may choose to self-disclose in order to increase closeness in the relationship, or to not disclose as a way of maintaining distance. Self-disclosure is, therefore, more likely to occur in close relationships.

Jourard (1971) discussed that self-disclosure is a reciprocal process between people wherein emotional involvement with others leads to self-disclosure and self-disclosure builds emotional involvement: “If I love someone not only do I strive to know him; I also display my love by letting him know me. At the same time, by doing so, I permit him to love me” (Jourard, 1971, p. 5). Self-disclosure is often reciprocated in that if one person shares personal information, this will likely be met with the other disclosing a similar amount of personal information (Sharabany, 2009). Reciprocity might occur over time as opposed to one specific interaction (Altman & Taylor, 1973). As such, self-disclosure related to a sexual assault is more likely to occur in a relationship of longer duration in which people in a close relationship have shared personal information over time.

Greene, Derlega, and Mathews (2006) propose a model of self-disclosure in a specific interaction, which includes a variety of factors which influence disclosures, including relationship-linked reasons for self-disclosing. These authors discuss possible benefits and drawbacks to self-disclosure. The benefits of self-disclosure are dependent upon the reactions that are provided by the person who receives the disclosure. Risk is often, although not always, perceived in disclosures and Fisher (1986) proposed that people choose to disclose in a way that minimizes risk. One way in which risk can be minimized is by choosing a person that is expected to be supportive. This suggests that
people who self-disclose in close friendships might be more likely to receive supportive reactions to their disclosures.

2.5 SUMMARY

Symbolic interactionism provides a perspective for understanding how people may make meaning of their experiences. This meaning is made through interactions. The interactional model of relationships suggests that relationships are created and maintained through interactions across time. Close relationships include many interactions within which self-disclosure may occur. Research on self-disclosure indicates that self-disclosure is more likely to occur in close than distant relationships. People in close relationships are therefore more likely than those in distant relationships (e.g., acquaintances) to hear a disclosure of sexual assault and the responses to the disclosure will relate to experiences and expectations within the relationship. Symbolic interactionism also posits that people who have ongoing interactions, which are likely true in close relationships, are more likely to have similar emotions and to engage with the emotions experienced by the other person in the interaction. People in more distant relationships may have fewer interactions and less shared understanding than people in close relationships. People who hear disclosures in more distant relationships might then have emotional experiences quite different from those of the survivors. This theoretical framework guided by symbolic interactionism, along with propositions from the interactional model of relationships and self-disclosure, suggests that the relationship a person has with the person to whom s/he discloses is important in understanding responses to disclosures of sexual assault.
CHAPTER THREE: LITERATURE REVIEW

3.1 SOCIAL REACTIONS

This dissertation examines reactions to disclosures of sexual assault. In order to gain knowledge about how people respond to hearing disclosures of sexual assault understanding what is meant by ‘response’ is imperative. ‘Responses’ to hearing disclosures, in this dissertation, refers both to internal personal reactions, such as emotions and thoughts, and external behavioural reactions provided to the survivor. A definition for behavioural social reactions is described by Ullman (2010). The term ‘social reactions’, refers specifically to both positive and negative responses to a disclosure or learned knowledge about an incident or event (Ullman, 2010). Social reactions include both what people do and say in response to a disclosure and the absence of a response. Reactions can be to the disclosure itself, to the survivors’ reactions to the assault, or to the coping strategies used by the survivor (Ullman, 2010). Reactions are distinct from the concept of social support. ‘Social support’ has been defined as “an exchange of resources between two individuals perceived by the provider or the recipient to be intended to enhance the well-being of the recipient” (Shumaker & Brownell, 1984, p. 11). Social support can refer to an ongoing positive exchange between people whereas social reactions reference a specific event and can be positive or negative. Disclosures can be made in different relationships and disclosure contexts, and many factors can influence the reactions people have to disclosures of sexual assault.

3.2 RELATIONSHIP CHARACTERISTICS AND DISCLOSURE RESPONSES

Survivors are more likely to disclose a sexual assault to their peers than to formal support providers (Banyard et al., 2005; Stein & Nofziger, 2008). Peers, in comparison to
formal sources of support, are most likely to provide supportive reactions upon hearing a disclosure of sexual assault (Ullman, 1996a, 1999, 2010; Ullman & Filipas, 2001). Additionally, survivors have been found to perceive reactions from friends as being more helpful than reactions from other people (Ahrens et al., 2009). The reactions provided to survivors from peers are more important to the survivors’ healing processes than reactions provided within other types of relationships (Borja, Callahan, & Long, 2006; Filipas & Ullman, 2001; Ullman, 1996b).

Peers responses to disclosures are the primary focus of this dissertation. Peers might hear disclosures from strangers. However, due to the expectations people may have of formal support providers’ roles, people might purposefully seek out formal supporters with the intent of disclosing a sexual assault. It is therefore likely that formal supporters will hear more disclosures from strangers than will peers. Like peers, counsellors, social workers, and support workers offer verbal support to survivors. Including perspectives of counsellors, social workers, and support workers increases the likelihood of including the perspectives of people who hear disclosures of sexual assault from strangers. As a result, a greater range of relationship types will be available for examination. Research examining survivors’ perspectives of the support they receive from their peers and formal support providers are reviewed next.

3.2.1 Sexual Assault Disclosures: Survivors’ Perspectives

Most of the information available about peers’ reactions to sexual assault disclosures comes from the perspectives of the survivors who make the disclosures. This provides one perspective on the disclosure experience, and research investigating this perspective is presented in this section. Two of these studies qualitatively analyzed semi-
structured interviews with survivors (Ahrens, 2006; Ahrens et al., 2009). The remaining studies used community-based surveys analyzed quantitatively, with only one examining responses longitudinally over a one-year period (Ullman & Najdowski, 2011).

Friends are generally perceived by survivors to react positively to disclosures of sexual assault by engaging in such behaviours as listening and providing emotional and tangible support (Ahrens, 2006; Ahrens et al., 2009; Hassija & Gray, 2012; Orchowski & Gidycz, 2012; Orchowski et al., 2013; Peter-Hagene & Ullman, 2014; Relyea & Ullman, 2015; Starzynski et al., 2005; Ullman, 1996b; 2010; Ullman et al., 2008; Ullman & Najdowski, 2011; Ullman & Peter-Hagene, 2014). However, negative responses have also been reported in these same studies, including reactions such as blaming, minimizing/denying the response to the trauma, distancing/ending the friendship, controlling, distracting, and egocentric responses. How survivors perceive the reactions they receive is important (Relyea & Ullman, 2015).

Similar reactions by peers may be understood differently by survivors based on the meaning they attach to the response. Reactions from others have been interpreted as either positive or negative based on the survivors’ perceptions of the supporters’ motivations for the reactions rather than just the reactions themselves (Ahrens et al., 2009). Reactions were reported to be helpful by survivors when they were seen as communicating an investment in the survivors, to be motivated by the survivors’ needs rather than the supporters’ own needs, and to have an understanding of the significance of the assault and capabilities of the survivor (Ahrens et al., 2009). It is important to understand how reactions are perceived as survivors’ perceptions of the reactions can influence the survivors’ healing processes (Ahrens, Campbell, Ternier-Thames, Wasco &
Reactions survivors receive from others after a sexual assault can be healing or harmful. Some social reactions can help aid in the recovery of the survivor after a sexual assault (Orchowski et al., 2013; Ullman, 1996c, 1999, 2014; Ullman & Peter-Hagene, 2014). Although some responses may have no influence on recovery, negative social reactions have consistently been shown to have detrimental effects on the coping and adjustment of survivors after a disclosure (Ahrens, 2006; Hassija & Gray, 2012; Orchowski et al., 2013; Ullman, 1996c, 2014; Ullman & Filipas, 2001; Ullman & Najdowski, 2011; Ullman & Peter-Hagene, 2014). An exception to this was found in a survey of undergraduate students by Orchowski and colleagues (2013), who reported survivors’ perceptions of being treated differently by all sources of social support were positively correlated with self-esteem. This again supports that the perceptions of responses provided are more important than the reactions alone. Further, not all negative reactions are the same in respect to their influence on the survivors’ functioning. Negative reactions that relate to survivors perceiving decreased control have been associated with increases in survivors’ symptoms of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD; Peter-Hagene & Ullman, 2014; Ullman & Peter-Hagene, 2014). Survivors also reported that having increased control over their recovery process was related to greater satisfaction with their formal support provider (Starzynski, 2011). Reducing negative reactions to disclosures and how these reactions relate to perceptions of control can help survivors heal. Given that survivors are most likely to disclose to peers, reducing negative reactions from peers is of primary importance.
In summary, research evidence supports that peers generally provide positive reactions to survivors and that survivors typically find peers’ responses helpful. Perceived intentions underlying supporters’ reactions are important to the survivor. Although some reactions can be healing and some can be harmful, negative reactions are almost always detrimental to the survivors’ coping and functioning. Negative reactions have been found to be particularly harmful when they influence the level of control the survivor perceives.

It is important to understand survivors’ experiences of the reactions they receive after a sexual assault. It is clear that some responses can cause survivors increased difficulties, so there is reason to want to decrease these reactions. However, the studies summarized in this section did not examine perspectives of supporters. Peers’ perceptions of their support have been found to differ from the perspectives of survivors (Davis & Brickman, 1996). It is therefore important to ask peers about their own perceptions of their reactions after hearing of a disclosure of sexual assault in order to really understand the experiences of being involved with sexual assault disclosures. Further, without understanding what influences peers to provide the responses they do, intervening to change their responses is difficult. In order to increase understanding about the reasons people hearing disclosures respond in the ways that they do, these individuals must be asked directly. In the next section, a review is presented of research examining peers’ own perspectives of their reactions to disclosures of sexual assault.

### 3.2.2 Sexual Assault Disclosures: Supporters’ Perspectives

Although studies have examined peers’ reactions to disclosures of sexual assault, very few have asked the peers themselves about their experiences of the disclosure. When asked, many peers report hearing about a person’s experience of sexual assault. A study
of 2000 college students in the U.S. found that more than 40% reported having received a disclosure of sexual assault (Paul et al., 2013). Counsellors, social workers, and support workers also hear disclosures of sexual assault. Peers’ perspectives of hearing disclosures of sexual assault, along with the perspectives of formal support providers, are reviewed in the next section.

3.2.2.1 Social Reactions to Survivors

Survivors’ overall positive perceptions of the reactions of peers in response to their disclosures have been supported in survey research that has examined the friends’ perceptions of the disclosures. Peers have reported primarily positive, supportive reactions to survivors (Ahrens & Campbell, 2000; Banyard et al., 2010; Dunn et al., 1999). Friends in these studies also reported negative reactions. Some reactions have been reported in the literature as positive but may have been experienced as negative by survivors. Paul and colleagues (2013) surveyed college students and reported that two-thirds of their sample encouraged survivors to report to police. These authors described this encouragement to report as a positive reaction. However, it is unclear how this encouragement took place or how it was experienced by survivors. Peers might have encouraged survivors to report their sexual assaults to the police with the intention of protecting and supporting the survivor. If survivors did not want to report to the police they might have felt pressured to do so by their peers recommending this option. These survivors could have felt they lost control of their healing process, and experienced this reaction as negative. Peers’ personal experiences shape their beliefs of what kinds of reactions, such as recommending the survivor report to police, are supportive or harmful.
Personal experiences of supporters might also relate to how likely they are to provide certain kinds of reactions to survivors.

A previous experience of sexual assault has been shown to relate to the social reactions friends provide to survivors. Research has shown that friends who have experienced a past sexual assault provide fewer negative reactions to survivors than friends who have not been sexually assaulted (Ahrens & Campbell, 2000). This could potentially be because their own experiences might inform them of what is helpful for survivors of sexual assault. Relationship characteristics have also been shown to relate to reactions peers provide to survivors.

Only one study has directly examined relationship characteristics in people who have heard a disclosure of sexual assault from their peers. Ahrens and Campbell (2000) surveyed undergraduate students who heard disclosures from friends. Friends in longer relationships (i.e., longer than five years) with survivors reported more positive and less negative reactions to survivors than did those in newer friendships (Ahrens & Campbell, 2000). This demonstrates that relationship characteristics are important to the reactions that people provide to survivors. However, Ahrens and Campbell (2000) recruited a non-probability sample for their study by advertising for friends of rape survivors. By advertising for friends, it seems these authors obtained a sample that was comprised largely of close friends. The friendships in their study were on average eight years in duration, and over three quarters of the friends described their relationship with the survivor as that of “good friends”. These friendships were described as somewhat close and important and the vast majority (81%) saw each other on a weekly basis. The study by Ahrens and Campbell (2000) provides information about the importance of
relationship characteristics in disclosure experiences. However, a wide range of peer relationships was not captured in the study.

The findings that people in longer relationships provided more positive responses, and that friends who have also experienced a sexual assault provide more positive responses are in line with symbolic interactionism. It seems that increased experience with the survivor through ongoing interactions might allow peers in longer relationships to display more empathy and greater understanding of appropriate and helpful reactions. Understanding the emotional experiences of friends who hear disclosures might further understanding of how supporters respond to hearing disclosures of sexual assault. The personal responses of peers who hear disclosures, both in terms of emotions and cognitions, are reviewed in the next section.

3.2.2.2 Personal Responses to Hearing Disclosures

Learning about the emotional and cognitive responses peers have to hearing disclosures of sexual assault provides insight into reactions they might provide to survivors. This insight can suggest ways these peers might be supported to change some of their social reactions to survivors. Surveys of college students show that friends report difficult feelings, positive feelings, and changes to worldview in response to hearing a disclosure of sexual assault (Ahrens & Campbell, 2000; Banyard et al., 2010; Dunn et al., 1999). Similar findings were reported in a U.S. study using a qualitative analysis of interviews (Branch & Richards, 2013).

Both positive and challenging emotions have been reported by peers related to hearing disclosures of sexual assaults. Difficult feelings that were reported included: being angry, upset, concerned, afraid, surprised, shocked, in disbelief, uncomfortable, and
burdened (Ahrens & Campbell, 2000; Banyard et al., 2010; Branch & Richards, 2013; Dunn et al., 1999). Similar to what has been found with peers, trauma clinicians and advocates have been found to experience anger and fear (Wasco & Campbell, 2002). Additionally, formal support providers working with trauma survivors have also been found to experience secondary traumatic stress (Catanese, 2010; Pearlman & Mac Ian, 1995). Positive feelings tended to be related to the friends’ helping efforts (Ahrens & Campbell, 2000; Banyard et al., 2010). Peers have reported generally feeling positive about the support they provided after disclosures of sexual assault (Ahrens & Campbell, 2000; Banyard et al., 2010; Dunn et al., 1999). However, Banyard and colleagues (2010) found the same proportion of students felt upset as those who felt positive about helping their friend.

In addition to emotional responses to hearing disclosures of sexual assault, peers have also reported cognitive responses. Peers reported changes in their worldviews about safety and security (Banyard et al., 2010; Branch & Richards, 2013). Friends have also have reported uncertainty about how to help (Ahrens & Campbell, 2000; Banyard et al., 2010; Dunn et al., 1999). Advocates and clinicians have also reported cognitive changes related to hearing disclosures of sexual assault. These formal support providers have reported positive personal transformation related to the expression of appreciation from survivors, feeling effective, witnessing the possibility of healing and recovery, and seeing strength and resilience (Ullman, 2010).

Many challenging, but also some positive, thoughts and feelings were experienced by people who heard disclosures of sexual assaults from their friends. This diversity in responses might be explained by gender differences in how friends perceive the help they
are able to provide. Banyard and colleagues (2010), in a cross-sectional survey of college students, found that women responded more positively than men to a disclosure, felt less discomfort and confusion, and felt more effective with regards to their responses. How friends perceive their help is important. Ahrens and Campbell (2000) also surveyed college students and found that positive, neutral, and negative experiences of helping by the friend related to positive, negligible, and negative responses, respectively, to the survivor. The studies reviewed in this section of this dissertation provide preliminary evidence that women seem to manage disclosures better than do men, who might require more support when they do hear disclosures. Further, the findings in this section indicate that the peers’ experiences of their help relate to how they react to survivors.

As with gender and supporters’ experiences of helpfulness, sexual assault experiences might also help explain some differences in friends’ reactions to disclosures. Paul and colleagues (2013) found that people who heard a disclosure were more likely to have previously experienced sexual assault and have a history of PTSD, depression, and substance abuse than people who had not received a disclosure of sexual assault. Friends with their own histories of sexual assault in comparison to friends without such histories have been found to experience more distress after hearing a disclosure (Banyard et al., 2010).

3.2.3 Summary

Research has examined peers’ perspectives of hearing disclosures of sexual assault but the methodologies of these studies have treated all peers the same. This has left a gap in our understanding of how relationships might affect responses to disclosures of sexual assault. The majority of the studies of peers’ perspectives specifically
advertised they were looking for friends to participate in their studies (Ahrens & Campbell, 2000; Banyard et al., 2010; Branch & Richards, 2013). When relationship characteristics of the samples were provided, the resulting samples were described as having characteristics of close friendships (Ahrens & Campbell, 2000; Branch & Richards, 2013). The studies that recruited more broadly did not distinguish people who heard disclosures by relationship type (Dunn et al., 1999; Paul et al., 2013). Only one study conducted an analysis of relationship characteristics as they relate to responses, and did show that relationship made a difference (Ahrens & Campbell, 2000). This occurred even within a sample that was described as mainly consisting of long friendships that were perceived as close.

Further research about different types of relationships, ranging from strangers to close friendships, as they relate to responses to sexual assault disclosures is necessary to more fully understanding different reactions peers provide to survivors. This information is important in developing effective ways to work with peers in order to provide the most helpful social reactions to survivors. A novel research contribution of this study is examining how a variety of different relationship characteristics relate to personal responses and social reactions provided to disclosures across different types of relationships.

A wide range of relationships is captured in this dissertation by including both peers and formal support providers. Peers who hear disclosures are most likely to have at least some relationship with a survivor prior to hearing a disclosure. Formal support providers, such as counsellors, social workers, or support workers, might hear disclosures upon first meeting. People might choose to access their services specifically to gain
support for their experiences of sexual assault. This is particularly likely at sexual assault and trauma centers where the experience of a trauma is a requirement to access service. The primary focus of this dissertation is on how peers with various types of relationships with survivors, different relationship lengths, and different perceptions of closeness to survivors respond to disclosures of sexual assault. Formal support providers are also included in this dissertation to increase the likelihood that relationships of various durations and levels of closeness will be included. Contextual factors, also shown to relate to sexual assault disclosures, are reviewed in the next section.

3.3 CONTEXTUAL FACTORS AND DISCLOSURE RESPONSES

In addition to relationship characteristics, reactions people provide to sexual assault survivors have been found to be affected by many characteristics. These characteristics include: acceptance of traditional gender roles; beliefs about the world; knowledge about sexual assault; characteristics of the survivor; characteristics of the assault; and how the survivor coped and behaved before, during and after the traumatic experience (Ahrens et al., 2010; Ahrens & Campbell, 2000; Dunn et al., 1999; Harter et al., 2009; Hassija & Gray, 2012; Starzynski et al., 2005; Ullman, 2010, 2007, 1996a, 1996b; Ullman & Najdowski, 2011; Ullman et al., 2008). These factors describe the context in which the sexual assault and the disclosure occur. Gender and supporters’ relationships with the perpetrators have also been related to reactions of peers who hear disclosures and are reviewed in more detail in this section (Ullman, 2010).

Gender has been related to who is told about sexual assault experiences (Hanson et al., 2003; Mathews, Derlega & Morrow, 2006; Menard, 2005; Orchowski & Gidycz, 2012; Tang, Freyd, & Wang, 2007; Ullman, 2010; Widom, 1997). Gender differences
have also been found in how people respond to disclosures of sexual assault (Banyard et al., 2010). Clearly, disclosures of sexual assault are heard across genders and participation in the current study was open to all genders.

Another factor that might relate to how peers respond to a disclosure of sexual assault is their relationship to the perpetrator. A U.S. national probability study reported that peers were most frequently the perpetrators of the sexual assaults experienced by adolescents (Stein & Nofziger, 2008). As peer relationships occur in social networks, there is potential for peers to have a personal relationship with both the survivor and the perpetrator. This might complicate the reactions that peers might have to hearing about a sexual assault. Peers with relationships with perpetrators may be more likely to deny or minimize the abuse. Alternatively, peers who know the perpetrators may experience more secondary trauma as they may feel personally threatened and risk personal loss of relationships and support.

Many things can influence the likelihood of a person disclosing her/his sexual assault experience at any given time. In order to gain a deep understanding of reactions to sexual assault disclosures, the context of the disclosure must be examined. Previous studies have examined the association between contextual aspects of disclosures and responses to disclosures. This is the first research to examine the perspectives, together, of both informal and formal support providers about the context of the assault and disclosure as they relate to the reactions they provide to survivors.

3.4 SUMMARY

Survivors have generally been asked about their perceptions of the reactions they received when they disclosed a sexual assault. Relationship has rarely been considered in
examinations of disclosure reactions. The one study that examined peers' perspectives along with relationship characteristics found that the relationship was important (Ahrens & Campbell, 2000). Formal supporters might be more likely than peers to hear disclosures of sexual assault from survivors with whom they have had no prior relationship. The inclusion of formal supporters in a study along with peers allows for the possibility of reactions within a wider range of relationships to be examined. Although recommendations suggest peers should respond as formal supporters do (e.g., Alma Mater Society of the University of British Columbia Sexual Assault Support Centre, n.d.; Concordia University Student Services Sexual Assault Resource Centre, n.d.; University of Alberta Sexual Assault Centre, 2015; University of California Irvine, n.d.), some differences have been found between reactions of these supporters (Ullman & Filipas, 2001). More research is needed to further understand how relationship characteristics are associated with emotional responses and social reactions to disclosures of sexual assault.

This dissertation includes two studies that both aim to fill this gap in knowledge. The specific research questions and objectives for each study are listed next.

### 3.5 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

#### 3.5.1 Study 1

In response to hearing disclosures of sexual assault:

1. Do people who report different types of relationships with sexual assault survivors (i.e., strangers/acquaintances, casual friends, close friends) report providing different social reactions to the survivors?
It was hypothesized that close friends would be more likely to experience higher levels of both negative and positive reactions to disclosures of sexual assault than strangers/acquaintances and casual friends.

2. Do people who report different types of relationships with sexual assault survivors (i.e., strangers/acquaintances, casual friends, close friends) report experiencing different levels of emotional distress?
   It was anticipated that close friends would experience higher levels of distress as a result of the disclosure than strangers/acquaintances or casual friends.

3. Does the level of closeness reported by peers to survivors predict the number of positive and negative reactions they report providing to the survivors?
   It was hypothesized that higher levels of perceived closeness to the survivor would predict higher levels of negative and positive reactions to disclosures of sexual assault.

4. Is the level of closeness reported by peers to survivors associated with their reported emotional distress?
   It was hypothesized that higher levels of perceived closeness would be related to higher levels of distress reported as a result of the disclosure.

5. Does the length of the participant-survivor relationship predict the number of positive and negative reactions peers report providing to the survivors?
   It was thought that relationship length would predict social reactions.
   Peers in longer relationships were expected to show higher levels of
negative and positive reactions to disclosures of sexual assault than those in shorter relationships.

6. Does the length of the participant-survivor relationship relate to the emotional distress reported by participants?

Relationship length was hypothesized to predict emotional distress. It was anticipated that relationship length would be positively correlated with levels of emotional distress.

3.5.2 Study 2

Expanding on Study 1, to further examine processes by which relationships shaped responses to sexual assault disclosures, the following objectives were proposed for Study 2:

1. To explore how people hearing sexual assault disclosures describe their relationship with survivors and their responses to disclosures;

2. To understand how people hearing sexual assault disclosures describe the context of disclosures along with their responses to disclosures;

3. To explore and understand how people are personally affected by hearing disclosures of sexual assault;

4. To understand how people who receive disclosures of sexual assaults might be better supported.
CHAPTER FOUR: METHOD

4.1 STUDY 1

4.1.1 Design and Data Collection

This study used a cross-sectional survey design with a request to re-contact participants in the future. Data collection took place via an online survey using Remark Web Survey Version 5 Professional Edition (2014). Participants who completed the online survey were entered into a draw to win one of five iPods.

4.1.2 Sample

The sample was drawn from the general population of undergraduate students at post-secondary institutions in British Columbia (including the University of British Columbia’s (UBC) Vancouver campus, UBC’s Okanagan campus, Simon Fraser University (SFU), Kwantlen Polytechnic University, Douglas College, and the University of the Fraser Valley (UFV). Figures indicate that 47,732 undergraduate students were registered at UBC, between the Vancouver and Okanagan campuses, in the 2013/2014 academic year (The University of British Columbia, n.d.b). In 2013, 54% of UBC students on the Vancouver campus were female and 46% were male (The University of British Columbia, n.d.a). Reports from 2013 indicate that 79.82% of undergraduate students with registered birth dates were between the ages of 18 and 24 years of age (The University of British Columbia, n.d.a). Statistics from Simon Fraser University were comparable (Simon Fraser University, n.d.). Statistics from other post-secondary institutions also showed the greatest proportion of students were under 24 years of age and were female. However, these schools showed a smaller proportion of students falling into the 18-24 year age range and a greater proportion of female students. This might be
understood considering that some of these were statistics reflective of all students rather than undergraduates alone, and many statistics were older (Douglas College, n.d.; Kwantlen Polytechnic University, n.d.; University of the Fraser Valley, n.d.).

Convenience and snowball sampling procedures were used to recruit participants using a third-party method as well as a passive self-selection process. Invitations were distributed via departmental email listservs (see Appendix A). Additionally, recruiting posters were placed around campuses, including locations such as the Student Union Buildings. Eligible participants included undergraduate students who had heard a disclosure of sexual assault since beginning post-secondary education from someone who was assaulted when they were between 19 and 24 years of age. In total, 791 students accessed and completed portions of the online survey. Of these, 216 reported hearing a disclosure that met the inclusion criteria for the study and went on to complete the survey. Just over one quarter (27.3%) of the 791 respondents reported hearing a disclosure.

4.1.3 Measures

4.1.3.1 Demographic, Background, and Relationship Characteristics

Please see Appendix B for a copy of the questionnaire that was used in this study to assess demographic and background characteristics, including type, length, and closeness of the participant-survivor relationship. This questionnaire was developed for the purposes of this study and the questions were based on prior studies and theoretical propositions. Demographic information, including the respondents’ reported ages, genders, and educational attainments were collected using this questionnaire.
After answering demographic questions, a screening question was asked. Definitions of sexual assault and consent were presented. Then, respondents were asked: “since you started post-secondary education has somebody told you, either in person or over the phone, that she/he had been sexually assaulted?” It was identified that the sexual assault must have occurred when the survivor was between 19 and 24 years of age.

Respondents who reported not meeting inclusion criteria were screened out of the rest of the survey. Participants who answered yes went on to complete the rest of the survey.

Participants who continued with the survey were then asked the number of disclosures they had heard from someone who was assaulted when they were between 19 and 24 years old. The genders of the survivors were recorded for up to ten of these disclosures. The respondents were then asked to focus on the most recent disclosure that met inclusion criteria in order to answer more detailed questions. Once focused on the most recent disclosure participants experienced, additional questions addressed characteristics of the assault, context of disclosures, and the nature of the relationship between the participant, survivor, and the perpetrator.

Questions were asked to gain information about qualities of the relationship between the participants and the survivors of sexual assault, including the type, level of closeness and length of the relationship. The type of the relationship was assessed by how participants categorized their relationship with the survivor. Participants were asked to choose which category best described their relationship to the survivor at the time of the disclosure: stranger; acquaintance; casual friend; close friend; romantic partner; co-worker; family member; formal/professional relationship; other.
Closeness was another relationship quality assessed in the present study. Level of closeness to survivors as perceived by participants was rated on a five point Likert-type scale. Possible responses ranged from 1 (not at all close) to 5 (extremely close).

Another participant-survivor relationship characteristic assessed in the present study was the length of the relationship. Participants were asked to indicate how long they knew the survivor prior to the disclosure. Responses were indicated by participants choosing one of eight categories, ranging from less than 24 hours to more than 10 years.

4.1.3.2 Personal Response to Hearing a Sexual Assault Disclosure

The Emotional Distress Scale of the Impact on Friends measure (Ahrens & Campbell, 2000) was used to assess the participants’ perceived distress in response to hearing a sexual assault disclosure. This measure was developed based on literature on victimization perspective theory, significant others’ reactions, and recovery (Ahrens & Campbell, 2000). The scale was used in reference to hearing the most recent verbal disclosure, either face-to-face or over the telephone, of sexual assault since beginning post-secondary education from a person who was between the ages of 19 and 24 years at the time of the assault. The Emotional Distress Scale consists of 24 items, and corrected item-total correlations ranged from .33 to .66. Each item is rated on a five point Likert-type scale, with possible responses ranging from 1 (do not agree at all) to 5 (agree very much) (Cronbach’s alpha = .90). Please see Appendix C for a copy of this measure. Scale scores were determined by calculating the mean of the 24 item responses.

4.1.3.3 Social Reactions to the Survivor

In order to assess the social reactions that the person hearing the disclosure provided to the survivor of this most recent disclosure, Ullman’s (2000) Social Reactions
Questionnaire was used. This scale was originally developed for survivors to report on their perceptions of the disclosure. Ullman developed the measure using theoretical bases from literatures on social support and social reactions to victims (Ullman, 2010). This measure assesses concepts demonstrated as important in the social support literature, including instrumental support, emotional support, and information support, and the victimization literature (Ullman, 2010). Ullman then conducted validation studies of the measure in community, college student, and mental health client populations and made modifications based on results of a factor analysis and open-ended responses from survivors (Ullman, 2000; 2010). According to factor analysis, five subscales for negative reactions were identified (taking control, victim blame, treating differently, distraction, and egocentric responses) along with two subscales for positive reactions (emotional support, and tangible aid). Good convergent validity of this measure was suggested by positive correlations of positive social reactions and self-esteem (.19), support over the past month (.42), helpfulness of support providers (.43), frequency of social contact (.28), number of confidents (.13), and satisfaction with support (.42) (Ullman, 2000). Negative social reactions were negatively correlated with self-esteem (-.20) and positively correlated with PTSD symptom severity (.42) (Ullman, 2000). Concurrent validity was assessed between the Social Reactions Questionnaire and open-ended responses from sexual assault survivors with correlations of .30 and .21 for overall positive and overall negative reactions, respectively.

Adaptations to the questionnaire were made for the purposes of this study to assess the supporters’ perceptions of their own responses. Please see Appendix D for a
copy of this questionnaire. The italicized portions of this measure in the appendix represent the adaptations from the original scale.

This scale consists of 48 items, and each item on this scale is rated on a 5-point Likert-type scale to capture the frequency of each reaction they provided, from never to always. This scale contains seven subscales. Scores on each subscale are created by averaging responses on each item included. Therefore, subscale scores have a possible range of 0 to 4. Composite scores for overall positive reactions were created by averaging responses to items included in the emotional support/belief and tangible aid subscales. Additionally, composite scores for overall negative reactions were created by averaging responses to items on the remaining five subscales. Composite scores also have a possible range of 0 to 4. Reported test-retest reliability ranges from .64 to .80 (Ullman, 2000).

Internal consistencies in the current study range from were .89 for positive reactions and .90 for negative reactions.

4.1.3.4 Missing Data

Missing data on individual items ranged from zero to six cases per item. An analysis revealed that data were most likely missing at random (Little’s MCAR test: $X^2=3009.86, df=2932; p=.16$). Missing data for full scale scores using means of all items for each dependent variable ranged from 8.0% to 12.2%. Thus, data for individual items were imputed using the expectation-maximization technique in SPSS version 22.0, and subscale scores were calculated from the completed data.

4.1.4 Data Analysis

The Statistical Program for the Social Sciences, version 22.0 (IBM Corp., 2013) was used to complete data analyses. Descriptive statistics were run to provide further
information about participants and the disclosures. Welch’s tests and a one-way ANOVA, respectively, were conducted to answer the first and second research questions: (1) Do those reporting different relationships with the survivor report different levels of positive and negative reactions to survivors after hearing disclosures?; and (2) Do participants reporting different relationships with the survivor report experiencing different levels of emotional distress after hearing disclosures? Multiple regression analyses were completed to answer research questions three through six: (3) Do participants’ perceived levels of closeness to survivors predict levels of negative and positive reactions to survivors?; (4) Are participants’ perceived levels of closeness to survivors associated with their reported levels of emotional distress after hearing disclosures?; (5) Do the reported lengths of relationships with survivors relate to different reported levels of positive and negative reactions to survivors?; and (6) Does participant-reported length of relationships with survivors predict levels of emotional distress after hearing disclosures reported by participants?

4.1.5 Ethical Considerations

The first page presented to respondents who accessed the online survey was the consent form (see Appendix E). The consent form stated that consent to participate was indicated by participants moving to the next page and continuing with the survey. Identifying information was not collected on the online survey. At the completion of the survey, participants were re-directed to a separate webpage. On this separate page, participants were provided the opportunity to report contact information should they have wanted to be entered in a draw for 1 of 5 iPods to acknowledge their participation. Participants also had the opportunity to provide contact information if they wanted to be
re-contacted and offered the opportunity to participate in an interview related to the same topic area. Finally, the participants were directed to a website with information about resources that support survivors of sexual assault and could offer support to the participants. Contact information for the researchers was also provided and participants were instructed they could contact researchers to request referrals for support.

Participants were asked about hearing disclosures of sexual assaults that occurred when survivors were between the ages of 19 and 24. Survivors were not included if they were assaulted when they were under 19 years of age. In British Columbia, sexual assaults that are experienced by children under the age of 19 must, by law, be reported to authorities. Excluding children under 19 years allowed for this research to be conducted without a duty to report sexual assaults. This allowed for survivors to make their own decisions in regards to reporting options.

4.2 STUDY 2

4.2.1 Design and Data Collection

An interactive research approach (Maxwell, 2013) was the qualitative design used in the present study in order to elicit a comprehensive summary of responses to hearing disclosures of sexual assault. In this study, as responses of the participants were of interest, a survey with participants was conducted using face-to-face interviews to capture their subjective interpretations of the situation. Individual interviews using a semi-structured research guide were undertaken with students and formal support providers who reported having heard a disclosure about a sexual assault from a person who was assaulted by a peer when s/he was between 19 and 24 years of age. These interviews retrospectively investigated participants’ processes of: a) personal internal
responses to hearing the disclosures; b) their reactions towards the survivors of violence; c) their relationships with the survivors; and d) the social/physical contexts surrounding the disclosures. The interviews also inquired about participants’ perspectives on improving support to people who hear disclosures.

4.2.2 Samples

The sample for Study 2 was recruited from two populations. These two sets of participants (undergraduate students hearing disclosure from peers and formal support providers hearing disclosures in the context of their formal role) are discussed separately at times to increase understanding of how relationships shape disclosures. Descriptions of each sample are provided next.

4.2.2.1 Sample a

Of the participants from Study 1 who indicated that they would be willing to be re-contacted, a subset of people were approached and asked to engage in in-depth interviews about their experiences. All of these participants were undergraduate students who discussed disclosures they received from peers. Responses to the online survey were anonymous. After participants completed the online survey they were re-directed to a separate website where participants who were interested in participating in the interview entered their contact information. The contact information entered on this website was not connected to the participants’ responses to the online survey questions. Participants who indicated a willingness to participate were re-contacted. Purposive sampling of online survey participants for the interview was not possible. Participants’ contact information was not connected to their survey data and response rates were low when consenting participants were re-contacted. As such, the first 16 participants who met
study criteria and consented to participate were interviewed. The relevant criteria for
inclusion in this study were: participant’s age at the time of receiving the disclosure
(between 17 and 24 years of age), the length of time that has passed since the disclosure
(no more than three years), the type of relationship they shared with the survivor (i.e., a peer relationship), and characteristics of the survivor (i.e., a survivor who was assaulted between 19 and 24 years of age at the time of the assault).

4.2.2.2 Sample b

Support workers and counsellors were also interviewed for this study. Convenience and snowball sampling procedures were used to recruit participants using a third-party method as well as a passive self-selection process. Invitations were distributed via organizational email listservs for a variety of counselling and support organizations around the Lower Mainland of British Columbia, as well as through UBC student listservs (see Appendix F). Participants were selected for inclusion in this study based on:
the age of the person who disclosed to them (19 to 24 years at the time of disclosure), the length of time that has passed since the disclosure (no more than three years), and the type of formal support relationship they shared with the survivor (i.e., support worker, counsellor).

4.2.2.3 Sample Size for Study 2

There are many considerations in determining appropriate sample sizes for qualitative research. Baker and Edwards (2012) asked 14 prominent qualitative methodologists and five early career researchers to respond to the question, ‘how many qualitative interviews is enough?’ Findings suggested that the answer to this question depends on the research questions, practical issues such as time and degree, and
The present study is primarily concerned with identifying commonalities of experiences that can be used to suggest implications for the greater community and for the purposes of a Ph.D. dissertation. A symbolic interactionist theoretical lens was used.

As commonality was of primary importance, the goal should be to achieve saturation (Baker & Edwards, 2012). Saturation would mean no new data would emerge in a category and descriptions of each category would have been created (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). However, the idea of saturation is difficult for endeavors requiring sample size estimation prior to undertaking the study, and assumes that sampling, data collection, and data analysis are a combined process, which is not always possible (Baker & Edwards, 2012). As such, numerical guidance is also provided, with answers ranging from 12 to 60 (Baker & Edwards, 2012). Further, symbolic interactionist thought would suggest that data analysis, and therefore the idea of theoretical saturation, are based on the interpretations of the data rather than characteristics inherent to the actual data. Therefore, theoretical saturation may not be achievable. As such, general guidelines of sample size often come from previous similar studies (e.g., Ahrens, 2006; Neville & Pugh, 1997; Ullman & Townsend, 2007; Washington, 2001).

Based on these considerations, an overall sample size of 32 was used in this dissertation. Interviews were completed with 16 students (sample a) to gather peers’ perspectives on disclosures, and 16 formal support providers (sample b). Together, these people comprised the sample for Study 2.
4.2.3 Measures

4.2.3.1 Demographic and Background Characteristics

Demographic and background characteristics were collected for this study. The information was collected after the interview, allowing the interview process to move from open-ended questions to specific close-ended questions. Please see Appendices B and G for copies of the demographic and background questions for student and formal support providers, respectively. In general, the same background information was collected for both samples. Additional questions were added for sample a regarding information relevant for students and for sample b in order to ascertain the nature and role of the formal support providers’ relationships with clients.

4.2.3.2 Interview

The in-person semi-structured interview was designed to answer the following research question: “What are the processes by which responses to disclosures of sexual assault are shaped by relationships?” The interview covered a range of topics with the objectives of further understanding: the relationships between the survivors and the people hearing the disclosure; the supporters’ perceptions of sexual assault characteristics and the contexts of the disclosures; the supporters’ experiences of the disclosures and the personal effects of the disclosures. It was hoped that further understanding would be gained about how these aspects of the disclosure were experienced in relation to reactions provided to survivors. Questions also addressed perspectives about what would help participants and other supporters cope with disclosures and respond to survivors after disclosures. Please see Appendices H and I for copies of the Interview Guides used with students and formal support providers, respectively.
The interviews started with broad, open-ended questions. Interviews then gradually moved towards more specific questions only when necessary when this information was not provided spontaneously. Participants were asked to answer questions with regard to the most recent disclosure of sexual assault they heard that fit study criteria.

The interview was designed to start by introducing the topic and providing a definition of sexual assault for the purposes of this study. While preliminary questions were provided in the Interview Guide, this was adapted throughout the research process based on feedback from participants and researchers. The one major change made was that, at the end of the interview, a list of current suggestions for how to support a survivor was provided to the participant in order to get more specific feedback.

The participants chose the location for the interviews, based upon comfort, availability, and privacy. Interviews occurred at the formal support provider’s work place, the interviewer’s work place, or an interview room in the School of Social Work at the University of British Columbia. The interview room in the School of Social Work was sound-proofed. All rooms had either no windows or windows were covered to prohibit visual access to the rooms. Interviews started with a thorough process of reviewing and signing consent forms. Recordings were started once the content of the interview began with the interviewer reading the primer from the interview guide. From the time recordings began, interviews ranged in duration from about 18 minutes to 2 hours and 11 minutes, averaging approximately 1 hour. Field notes and memos were recorded after each interview. Participants were provided with a $25 honorarium for their participation.
4.2.4 Data Analysis

In order to situate myself within this research, I describe my analysis by first providing some information about what I brought to the research process. My clinical experiences working with survivors of sexual violence guided my interest in and conceptualization of this research as well as my interactions with the people I interviewed. My observations of survivors and their supporters from my practice within formal systems and hearing disclosures of violence in the context of my personal life informed my involvement in this research. My identities as a white female and a university student, and my experiences with social work practice, cannot be separated from my role as researcher. I brought this collection of experiences to my research inquiry and the interviews were jointly constructed through my perceptions and those of the people I interviewed. My evaluations and interpretations of this research were made through the lens of my own experiences, and it is hoped that this information will aid readers in more fully understanding the research presented here.

Qualitative content analysis, informed by applied symbolic interactionism was used to guide analysis of the data (Sandelowski, 2000). Relevant research findings and theory were used to help design the interview guide and form initial categories of data. Conventional content analysis was used in this research to provide a detailed description of the process of responding to sexual assault disclosures (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Following Schreier (2012), this method of analysis involves six systematic steps to reduce data: building a coding frame with several main categories and subcategories, dividing transcripts into coding units, using double coding to assess the coding frame, evaluating the consistency and validity of the coding frame and making corresponding
revisions, coding all the material, and interpreting the findings. Data was managed using the ATLAS.ti 7 computer program (Atlas.ti Scientific Software Development GmbH, 2013).

First, main categories for coding the data were deductively determined from the extant literature which informed the research questions and the interview guide (e.g., relationships, context, thoughts and feelings, and improving support). I then read through each transcript and wrote a brief summary of what the participant had communicated. Next, I used these main categories to segment the transcript into coding units of: relationships, context, personal effect of hearing the disclosure (thoughts and emotions), and ways to improve support to the supporters. In order to accomplish this, I read the transcripts through a second time and divided them so that portions were designated to the appropriate category. I placed segments in the relationship category when the participants described how relationships (between themselves, survivors, perpetrators, or others) related to their responses to the disclosure. Segments were considered related to context when the participants reported how circumstances surrounding the disclosure were related to responses provided to the survivor. Although relationships are an aspect of the context of the disclosure, I coded relationships separately for this research. As such, when the responses to the disclosures were related to relationships, I segmented them as being related to relationship rather than context. Participants described how their thoughts and feelings, at the time of the disclosure, related to their responses to the survivor. When this occurred in transcripts, I considered these portions to be the personal effect of hearing the disclosure. Finally, when participants talked about what they believed was important for people to know and do in responding to disclosures, and what
they felt was missing or needed in training, these portions of the transcript were considered related to how to better support supporters.

Once the transcript was segmented, the coding frame (i.e., main categories and subcategories for coding) was built. Subcategories were inductively determined and were developed from the data. I then read the transcripts again by going through all segments in each category, one category at a time. When each segment was read, I created a brief description of, or code for, what the participant was saying or alluding to using a word or a phrase. Then, the categories were expanded and refined using strategies of subsumption, in which new categories were added for new concepts or data were coded into categories that had already been created, until no new categories were found. I re-read the segments to ensure that they fit with the code provided. Next, I created a coding frame. The coding frame included labels, category descriptions, examples and decision rules when necessary. I again re-read and coded the transcripts using the codes that were created.

I used double coding to assess the coding frame. I conducted the initial coding process. In order to ensure intersubjectivity, four transcripts were coded by me and another rater separately using the coding frame in order to ensure understanding was shared across these two people. Coding was reviewed and discussed together, and there was 90.1% agreement in coding between raters.

Next, the consistency and validity of the coding frame were evaluated and corresponding revisions were made. To ensure validity of the coding frame, I reviewed the frame to ensure unidimensionality of each category, mutual exclusivity, and exhaustiveness. Finally, all remaining relevant material was coded using the coding frame...
and the findings were interpreted. Once coding was completed, new summaries of each transcript were created based on the codes that were assigned. These summaries were compared with the initial summaries to ensure the two sets coincided with each other. The trustworthiness of the data was enhanced through field journaling, member checking, rich description, reflexivity and an audit trail (Krefting, 1991).

The theme interpretations were member checked (Rubin & Babbie, 2008), allowing for the person hearing the disclosure to provide information to determine congruence of interpretations, or provide alternative perspectives to include in analyses. Member checks were completed by sending summaries of each interview to the participants for feedback. Of the 32 participants, 27 provided contact information that was accurate at the time of requesting feedback. Of these 27 participants, 15 (54%) provided feedback on the summary of the interview provided to them. Twelve of these participants stated that the summary fit with their experience as it was, while two others provided some clarification of their experience and refinement of wording that was incorporated into the findings. One participant provided some more specific and detailed feedback that was also incorporated into the findings. As a researcher, I maintained a journal throughout the research process to improve and document my reflexive processes.

4.2.5 Ethical Considerations

This study was undertaken with careful attention to the ethical concerns which inevitably arise in research and in research relating to violent events in particular. Informed consent, confidentiality, and the respondents’ rights to privacy and anonymity were central in this research (see Appendix J for a copy of the consent form). Participants were informed of the research project and its potential consequences (i.e., benefits,
discomforts and risks) at the initial meeting. Participants were informed about the research objectives, the interview process, that they need not answer any questions with which they were not comfortable, and their right to withdraw from the interview and project at any time. Recorded interviews were transcribed. Notes, recordings, transcripts and coded data were assigned pseudonyms, delinking the participant from the written documents. Transcribers were asked not to reveal participant information and reviewed and signed agreements of confidentiality. In an effort to acknowledge the important contribution made by participants in terms of time, knowledge, and potential inconveniences, participants were provided with a $25 honorarium. It was not thought that the offer of a $25 honorarium would coerce participation, as it was limited to remuneration for time and not based on the level of risk of the research, and was not seen as disproportionate to their contributions (Ensign, 2003).

I am currently a practicing social worker in Vancouver, British Columbia as well as a student at the University of British Columbia. As such, it was possible I may have had relationships with some potential participants. In order to minimize the possibilities of dual relationships or inadvertent coercion for some who might have felt an obligation to participate, potential participants with whom I already had a relationship were excluded from the study.

The focus of the interviews was on hearing disclosures of sexual assault and reactions to these disclosures. The confidentiality of participants and of the survivors was of primary importance in this study. Experiences were discussed at the initiative of participants in line with their comfort levels. Additionally, information about therapeutic support was made available to all participants and referrals for support were available.
4.3 CONCLUSION

This dissertation consists of two studies. In the first study, undergraduate students were surveyed in attempts to determine if different aspects of relationship relate to the personal responses of receiving a disclosure and the social reactions provided to the survivor. The second study used an interview and qualitative content analysis informed by applied symbolic interactionism to increase understanding of the processes by which responses to disclosures of sexual assault are shaped by relationship context, and how people hearing disclosures might be better supported.
CHAPTER FIVE: RESULTS

5.1 OVERVIEW

This chapter contains four sections providing an overview, the results of the first study, the results of study two, and then a brief summary.

5.2 STUDY 1

5.2.1 Description of the Sample

5.2.1.1 Characteristics of the People Hearing the Disclosures

In total, 216 participants indicated they heard a disclosure that met the inclusion criteria for the study and completed the survey. Despite participants indicating they met inclusion criteria, some participants who went on to complete the study were outside some of the inclusion criteria in terms of their age (n=15), the nature of their relationship with the survivor (n=8), and/or the length of time that had passed since receiving the disclosure (n=5). Since I had inclusion criteria, ethical decisions had to be made about the management of this data. As participants gave their time and shared their information, I felt ethically obliged to use this data. Further, adding and subtracting their information was not found to significantly affect findings. As such, participants who completed the survey but identified they met some but not all inclusion criteria were included in analyses.

Four cases were removed as the participants were clearly not addressing the items in a serious manner, making the final sample size 212. A brief description of the sample was provided in the Methods Section (Chapter Four), and some additional information is provided in Table 1 below to further describe the participants in the study. Most commonly, participants were female, heterosexual, and Caucasian. Most participants
reported high school as their highest educational attainment and were in the process of undertaking post-secondary education. Students were most commonly attending the University of British Columbia at the Vancouver campus and the greatest proportions lived in their family home, with roommates, or in residence, reflecting a young adult sample transitioning towards further independence. Most commonly, students reported making an income of less than $15,000 per year, but, growing up, perceived their families to be about average or well-off in terms of comparing their family’s income status to those of their peers. Of note, more than one third of the sample reported having experienced a sexual assault with more than an additional tenth of the sample reporting that they were unsure if they had experienced a sexual assault or not.

Participants were asked how many disclosures they had heard that fit the criteria of the study (in person or over the phone disclosures from a person assaulted when they were between 19 and 24 years of age). Most commonly, participants heard one such disclosure (n=111; 56.6%), about one quarter of participants reported hearing two such disclosures (n=49; 25.0%), 12.2% (n=24) of participants reported three disclosures, and a few participants heard four disclosures or more (n=12; 6.1%). Participants were then asked to indicate the genders of the people who made up to the last 10 disclosures to them. Overall, the 212 participants reporting hearing 388 disclosures of sexual assault, mostly from female survivors (n=353; 91.0%).

Table 1. Demographic and Background Characteristics of Survey Participants

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<th>Participant Demographic/Background Characteristic</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
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<td><strong>Participant Age</strong></td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>-----------------------------------------------</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Participant Gender</strong></td>
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<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Sample (n=204)</td>
<td>3.31</td>
<td>1.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>School Attended</strong></td>
<td>n</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of British Columbia – Vancouver campus</td>
<td>129</td>
<td>62.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of British Columbia – Okanagan campus</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>4.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Simon Fraser University</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>11.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Douglas College</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>9.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of the Fraser Valley</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>4.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kwantlen University</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>6.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>208</td>
<td>100.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Living Situation</strong></td>
<td>n</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University Residence</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>17.54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family Home</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>40.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roommates</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>20.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partner</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>9.48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alone</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>8.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>211</td>
<td>100.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Personal Income</strong></td>
<td>n</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Under $15,000</td>
<td>176</td>
<td>83.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$15,000 to $29,999</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>12.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$30,000 to $59,999</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>210</td>
<td>100.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Participant Demographic/Background Characteristic

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Family Perceived Income Status</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Very Well Off</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Well Off</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>28.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>About Average</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>42.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat Below Average</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>18.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>7.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t Know</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>211</td>
<td>100.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Personal Sexual Assault Experience</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>41.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>44.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unsure</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>13.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>212</td>
<td>100.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5.2.1.2 Characteristics of Survivors

Survivors reflected characteristics largely similar to participants. Table 2 presents data on the reported characteristics of the sexual assault survivors. These survivors were between 19 and 24 years old at the time they were assaulted and made the last disclosure participants heard that fit inclusion criteria for the study. Survivors most commonly identified as female, heterosexual, and Caucasian.

Table 2. Demographic and Background Characteristics of Survivors from Surveys

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Survivor Demographic/Background Characteristic</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Survivor Gender</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>196</td>
<td>92.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>6.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>211</td>
<td>100.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Survivor Sexual Orientation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heterosexual</td>
<td>172</td>
<td>81.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bisexual</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>9.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gay or Lesbian</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>4.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>211</td>
<td>100.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Survivor Ethnicity/Race</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>57.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East Asian</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>16.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Asian</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>6.22</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5.2.1.3 Participant-Survivor Relationship

Table 3 presents preliminary analyses and summary descriptions of the relationship between the participant and the survivor. The majority of participants described the survivor as a close friend at the time of the disclosure. The proportion of relationships described as close friendships decreased since the disclosure. In Table 3, the category of close friends also includes participants who indicated their relationship was that of romantic partners (at disclosure: n=5; now: n=6), and acquaintances also included students describing their relationship as a formal/professional relationship (at disclosure: n=1; now: n=2). Most commonly, students perceived their relationship with the survivor to be close.

Table 3. Description of the Participant-Survivor Relationships from Surveys

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant-Survivor Relationship Characteristic</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Type of Relationship at Time of Disclosure</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Close Friend</td>
<td>133</td>
<td>63.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Casual Friend</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>21.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acquaintance or Stranger</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>7.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>7.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>210</td>
<td>100.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Participants’ Perceived Closeness to Survivor at Disclosure</strong></td>
<td>n</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extremely Close</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>30.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quite a Bit Close</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>37.32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderately Close</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>20.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Little Bit Close</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>10.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not at all Close</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>209</td>
<td>100.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Type of Relationship Now</strong></td>
<td>n</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Close Friend</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>57.42</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Participant-Survivor Relationship Characteristic

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Relationship Now</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Casual Friend</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>20.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acquaintance or Stranger</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>16.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>5.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>209</td>
<td>100.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Length of Participant-Survivor Relationship</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Less than 24 hours</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24 hours to 31 days</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32 days to 1 year</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>24.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Between 1 and 2 years</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>18.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Between 2 and 5 years</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>20.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Between 5 and 10 years</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>18.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greater than 10 years</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>10.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>212</td>
<td>100.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 5.2.1.4 Assault Characteristics

In the vast majority of descriptions of assaults there was one perpetrator who was identified as male who was an acquaintance of the survivor. However, about one fifth of the assaults were described as being perpetrated by a stranger to the survivor, consistent with previous research (Ullman, Filipas, Townsend & Starzynski, 2006). About one third of the participants did report some relationship with the perpetrator. Please see Table 4 for a more detailed description of assault characteristics.

### Table 4. Description of the Assaults Captured in Surveys

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assault Characteristic</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of Perpetrators</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>161</td>
<td>91.48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3.98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More Than 2</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4.54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>176</td>
<td>100.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender of Perpetrator(s)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>198</td>
<td>93.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other/Unknown</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>211</td>
<td>100.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Survivor’s Relationship to the Perpetrator(s)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stranger</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>20.76</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Assault Characteristic

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Survivor’s Relationship to the Perpetrator(s)</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Acquaintance</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>29.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friend</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>15.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marital/Dating</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>17.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>4.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>11.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>212</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant’s Relationship to the Perpetrator(s)</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stranger</td>
<td>114</td>
<td>54.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acquaintance</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>14.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friend</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>13.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>12.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>4.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>209</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Weapon Present During Assault</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>5.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>169</td>
<td>80.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>14.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>211</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Survivor Physically Injured</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>16.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>140</td>
<td>66.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>17.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>211</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Drug/Alcohol Use</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>By Survivor</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>6.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>By Perpetrator</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>7.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>By Both Survivor and Perpetrator</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>41.98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Substances Used</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>21.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>22.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>212</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5.2.1.5 Disclosure Characteristics

Table 5 presents data regarding the disclosure of the sexual assault to the participant.

Table 5. Description of the Disclosures Captured in Surveys

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Disclosure Characteristic</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of Disclosures Between Survivor and Participant</td>
<td>n</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>42.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>20.49</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Disclosure Characteristic

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of Disclosures Between Survivor and Participant</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>15.61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More Than 3</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>19.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>205</td>
<td>100.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time Between Assault and Disclosure</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Less than 24 hours</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>15.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 to 7 days</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>21.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 to 31 days</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>10.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32 days to 6 months</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>12.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Between 6 months and 1 year</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>9.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Between 1 and 2 years</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>12.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greater than 2 years</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>12.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>5.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>209</td>
<td>100.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time Elapsed Since the Disclosure</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0 to 7 days</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>7.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 to 31 days</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>9.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32 days to 6 months</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>23.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Between 6 months and 1 year</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>20.48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Between 1 and 2 years</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>22.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greater than 2 years</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>14.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>210</td>
<td>100.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Other Present During Disclosure</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>25.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>154</td>
<td>72.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>212</td>
<td>100.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### 5.2.1.6 Responses to Disclosures

Possible scores on emotional distress could range from 1 to 5 with higher scores being indicative of higher levels of distress. Participants reported varied levels of emotional distress, with the range in this study being from 1.17 to 4.54. Possible scores for both positive and negative responses could range from 0 (never used) to 4 (always used). Again, various levels of responses were reported for both subscales (Positive Responses: .11 to 3.80; Negative Responses: .00 to 2.92).
5.2.2 Comparative Analyses

5.2.2.1 Research Questions 1 and 2

Research questions 1 and 2 are: (1) Do peers in different types of relationships with the survivors provide different social reactions to survivors after hearing disclosures; and (2) Do peers in different types of relationships with the survivors experience different emotional responses to hearing disclosures? Mean scores of positive and negative reactions to hearing sexual assault disclosures were compared between different types of relationships (strangers/acquaintances, casual friends, and close friends). Similarly, mean levels of emotional distress after hearing disclosures were compared across types of relationships. Please see Table 6 for descriptive statistics by relationship type.

First, the data were examined to see if assumptions of ANOVA tests, including normality and homogeneity of variance, were met. Influence data points were examined by calculating Cook’s distance. As no Cook’s distance values were greater than 1.00 (range: .00 to .11) no cases were identified with undo influence. Further investigation of data included examining descriptive statistics, z-scores, histograms, and box-plots for each variable. The skew values (calculated by dividing skew by standard error) were -3.50 for positive reactions, 12.23 for negative reactions, and 1.61 for emotional distress. When examining homogeneity of variances, Levene’s tests demonstrated that the variances were homogeneous for emotional distress \(F(2, 195)=1.59, p=.21\) and negative reactions \(F(2, 195)=.67, p=.51\) but not for positive reactions \(F(2, 195)=3.90; p=.02\). ANOVA tests were conducted to determine if there were group differences for emotional distress. Due to violations of normality, Welch’s tests were conducted to determine if there were group differences for positive and negative reactions provided to the survivors.
Findings indicated no significant differences between groups in terms of their levels of emotional distress \( F(2, 195) = .63, p = .53 \) and the negative reactions \( F_{\text{asymp}}(2, 50.92) = .68, p = .51 \) they described providing to survivors. However, groups did significantly differ in the positive reactions they described providing to survivors \( F_{\text{asymp}}(2, 44.35) = 9.73, p < .001 \). An effect size calculation showed that the type of relationship with the survivor explained 10.4\% (\( \eta^2 = .104 \)) of the variance in the positive reactions they provided to survivors. Due to heterogeneity of variances, Games-Howell tests were used for post-hoc comparisons of group differences in positive reactions provided to the survivor. These probes revealed that close friends reported responding to survivors with significantly more positive reactions than casual friends. No significant differences in positive reactions to survivors were found between acquaintances and casual or close friends.

**Table 6. Survey Descriptive Statistics: Dependent Variables by Relationship Types**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dependent Variable</th>
<th>Close Friends</th>
<th>Casual Friends</th>
<th>Strangers/ Acquaintances</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>Mean</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive Reactions</td>
<td>2.50*</td>
<td>.64</td>
<td>2.00*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative Reactions</td>
<td>.52</td>
<td>.48</td>
<td>.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional Distress</td>
<td>2.57</td>
<td>.69</td>
<td>2.43</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Groups significantly differ (p < .05)

**5.2.2.2 Research Questions 3, 4, 5 and 6**

Multiple regression analyses were completed to answer research questions 3 through 6: do those with different perceived levels of closeness and those with different lengths of relationships with survivors provide different social reactions to survivors and/or experience different emotional responses after hearing disclosures?
First, the assumptions of linear regression modeling were examined. Normality, independence, homoscedasticity, low correlations between the predictors and residuals, multicollinearity, and linearity were tested on the present data. In order to examine the assumption of normality of linear regression modeling, the distributions of residuals were first examined graphically through histograms and P-P plots for each dependent variable (i.e., emotional distress, positive reactions, and negative reactions to the survivor). The residuals for emotional distress appeared to meet the assumption of normality and linear regression modeling was performed. Residuals for positive reactions to the survivor did appear to slightly deviate from normality, and negative reactions were determined to not be normally distributed. To gain further information, values for skew and kurtosis were examined. Skew values, when divided by the standard error, were: 1.61 for emotional distress, -3.50 for positive reactions, and 12.23 for negative reactions. Kurtosis values were: -.62 for emotional distress, -.17 for positive reactions, and 17.56 (when values were divided by the standard error). As the distribution was moderately skewed for positive reactions, linear regression modeling was completed but interpretations should be made with caution as this may attenuate correlations. The skew was large for negative reactions. Following the recommendation by MacCallum, Zhang, Preacher and Rucker (2002) against dichotomizing ordinal variables, the values for negative reactions were log transformed and then a linear regression was performed. Because there were possible zero values on scale scores for negative reactions, a new variable was calculated by adding a constant and then multiplying by base-10 logarithm. There was a significant improvement in the values (when divided by the standard error) for skew (6.65) and kurtosis (3.66) after the transformation. However, skew remained and results should still
be interpreted with caution. Other transformations, including dichotomizing, were attempted and revealed the same answer.

5.2.2.2.1 Linear Regressions

Descriptive statistics for each of the independent variables are displayed in Table 7. Overall, the sample endorsed low levels of emotional distress, reported feeling quite close to the survivors at the time of the disclosures, and reported knowing the survivor for over a year at the time of the disclosure. Positive correlations were found between relationship variables and levels of reported distress. This finding indicates that the closer the participants perceived their relationships to be with the survivors and the longer the relationships persisted, the more distress they reported experiencing after the disclosure. Further, the closer the participants perceived the relationship to be, and the longer the relationship they reported having with the survivor, the more positive reactions they reported providing to the survivor. No significant associations were found between perceived closeness to the survivor or relationship length and negative reactions provided.

Table 7. Summary Statistics and Intercorrelations for Survey Independent and Dependent Variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>n</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Emotional Distress</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>.20*</td>
<td>.26*</td>
<td>2.55</td>
<td>.70</td>
<td>212</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Positive Reactions</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>.47*</td>
<td>.25*</td>
<td>2.36</td>
<td>.75</td>
<td>212</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Negative Reactions</td>
<td>-.05</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>.49</td>
<td>.44</td>
<td>212</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Closeness</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.48*</td>
<td></td>
<td>2.83</td>
<td>1.03</td>
<td>212</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Relationship Length</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3.47</td>
<td>1.54</td>
<td>212</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p<.05

Next, ordinary least squares linear regression modeling was used to fit three models examining if aspects of relationships with the survivor (closeness and length of
relationship) predicted responses to receiving disclosures of sexual assault: emotional distress, positive reactions and negative reactions to the survivor. Both independent variables were entered in a single step. The models showed that relationship characteristics significantly predicted emotional distress after hearing the disclosure and reported positive reactions to the survivors (see Table 8). In total, 6.5% and 21.4% of the variance in emotional distress and positive reactions provided to survivors, respectively, was accounted for by the linear combination of the length and perceived closeness in the survivor-participant relationship. The relationship variables did not significantly predict the negative reactions provided to the survivors.

Table 8. Linear Regression Models

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>$R^2_{adj}$</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>beta</th>
<th>SE</th>
<th>T</th>
<th>95% C. I. Lower</th>
<th>95% C. I. Upper</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Emotional Distress</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Constant)</td>
<td>.065*</td>
<td>8.366</td>
<td>2, 209</td>
<td>2.024*</td>
<td>.146</td>
<td>13.883</td>
<td>1.737</td>
<td>2.312</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Closeness</td>
<td>.071</td>
<td>.104</td>
<td>.052</td>
<td>1.379</td>
<td>-.031</td>
<td>.173</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship Length</td>
<td>.095*</td>
<td>.207</td>
<td>.035</td>
<td>2.735</td>
<td>.026</td>
<td>.163</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Positive Reactions</strong></td>
<td>.214*</td>
<td>29.724</td>
<td>2, 209</td>
<td>1.367*</td>
<td>.143</td>
<td>9.572</td>
<td>1.086</td>
<td>1.649</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Constant)</td>
<td>.333*</td>
<td>.456</td>
<td>.051</td>
<td>6.582</td>
<td>.233</td>
<td>.433</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Closeness</td>
<td>.014</td>
<td>.028</td>
<td>.034</td>
<td>.410</td>
<td>-.053</td>
<td>.081</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship Length</td>
<td>.014</td>
<td>.048</td>
<td>.023</td>
<td>.608</td>
<td>-.007</td>
<td>.015</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Negative Reactions</strong></td>
<td>-.005</td>
<td>.444</td>
<td>2, 209</td>
<td>1.548*</td>
<td>.124</td>
<td>12.488</td>
<td>.106</td>
<td>.227</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Constant)</td>
<td>-.031</td>
<td>-.072</td>
<td>.034</td>
<td>-.923</td>
<td>-.023</td>
<td>.010</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Closeness</td>
<td>.014</td>
<td>.048</td>
<td>.023</td>
<td>.608</td>
<td>-.007</td>
<td>.015</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: *$p<.05$, CI=Confidence Interval

Upon further investigation of the models it was determined that relationship length was a significant predictor of emotional distress. When relationship length was
increased by one unit, emotional distress would likely be increased by .095 units. Perceived closeness in the relationship significantly predicted the reported positive reactions provided to survivors. When perceived closeness to survivors was increased by one unit, positive reactions to the disclosure likely would increase by .333 units. However, the weights for the variables in the models were small, and therefore the relationship variables did not strongly predict emotional distress or positive reactions to the survivor.

5.3 STUDY 2

Qualitative content analysis was undertaken in order to accomplish four objectives regarding responses to hearing disclosures of sexual assault: participants were asked how (1) relationships, (2) the context in which the disclosure occurred, and (3) their thoughts and feelings, during the disclosure, may have related to their responses to survivors, and (4) what might be helpful in supporting them or other people who may hear disclosures of sexual assault. A description of the sample is provided next, followed by the themes associated with each of the research questions.

5.3.1 Description of the Sample

The sample consists of 16 formal support providers, including counsellors (n=4) and support workers (n=12), and 16 undergraduate students who participated in the online survey and consented to be re-contacted with the opportunity to participate in an interview. Further information on interview participants is provided in Table 9 below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant Background Characteristic</th>
<th>Formal Supporters</th>
<th>Peers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participant Age</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Range (Formal: 25-44; Students: 18-23)</td>
<td>32.00</td>
<td>6.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant Background Characteristic</td>
<td>Formal Supporters</td>
<td>Peers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------</td>
<td>-------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Participant Gender</strong></td>
<td>n</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>87.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>12.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>16</td>
<td>100.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Participant Sexual Orientation</strong></td>
<td>n</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heterosexual</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>80.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bisexual</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gay or Lesbian</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Questioning</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>13.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>15</td>
<td>100.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Participant Ethnicity/Race</strong></td>
<td>n</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>62.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East Asian</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Asian</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>25.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle Eastern</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mixed Races</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>16</td>
<td>100.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Highest Educational Level</strong></td>
<td>n</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High School</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelors</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>26.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Masters</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>40.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PhD</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>26.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>15</td>
<td>100.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Years of Post-Secondary</strong></td>
<td>M</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Range 1-6 years</td>
<td>----</td>
<td>----</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Length in Current Position</strong></td>
<td>n</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than 1 year</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>25.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 to 3 years</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>25.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 to 5 years</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>18.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 to 10 years</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>18.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greater than 10 years</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>16</td>
<td>100.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Length Formal Support Positions</strong></td>
<td>n</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than 1 year</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 to 3 years</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 to 5 years</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>25.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 to 10 years</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>43.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greater than 10 years</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>18.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>16</td>
<td>100.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant Background Characteristic</td>
<td>Formal Supporters</td>
<td>Peers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------</td>
<td>-------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Living Situation</strong></td>
<td>n</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Residence</td>
<td>----</td>
<td>----</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family Home</td>
<td>----</td>
<td>----</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roommates</td>
<td>----</td>
<td>----</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alone</td>
<td>----</td>
<td>----</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>----</td>
<td>----</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>----</td>
<td>----</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Personal Income</strong></td>
<td>n</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Under $15,000</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>12.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$15,000 to $29,999</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>18.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$30,000 to $59,999</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>50.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$60,000 to $79,999</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$80,000 to $99,999</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>12.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>16</td>
<td>100.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Personal Sexual Assault Experience</strong></td>
<td>n</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>37.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>62.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unsure</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>16</td>
<td>100.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 10 provides information about the survivors who made the disclosures to the participants.

**Table 10. Demographic and Background Characteristics of Survivors from Interviews**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Survivor Background Characteristic</th>
<th>Formal Supporters</th>
<th>Peers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Survivor Gender</strong></td>
<td>n</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>93.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>16</td>
<td>100.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Survivor Sexual Orientation</strong></td>
<td>n</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heterosexual</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>75.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bisexual</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>12.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gay or Lesbian</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>12.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>16</td>
<td>100.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Survivor Ethnicity/Race</strong></td>
<td>n</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>75.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East Asian</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aboriginal</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>12.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6.25</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Descriptions of the participants’ relationships with the survivors are presented in Table 11.

Table 11. Description of the Participant-Survivor Relationships from Interviews

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant-Survivor Relationship Characteristic</th>
<th>Formal Supporters</th>
<th>Peers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Type of Relationship at Time of Disclosure</td>
<td>n %</td>
<td>n %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Close Friend</td>
<td>0 0.00</td>
<td>10 62.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Casual Friend</td>
<td>0 0.00</td>
<td>3 18.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acquaintance or Stranger</td>
<td>0 0.00</td>
<td>2 12.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>16 100.00</td>
<td>1 6.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>16 100.00</td>
<td>16 100.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participants’ Perceived Closeness to Survivor at Disclosure</td>
<td>n %</td>
<td>n %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extremely Close</td>
<td>0 0.00</td>
<td>3 18.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quite a Bit Close</td>
<td>5 31.25</td>
<td>7 43.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderately Close</td>
<td>5 31.25</td>
<td>2 12.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Little Bit Close</td>
<td>4 25.00</td>
<td>3 18.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not at all Close</td>
<td>2 12.50</td>
<td>1 6.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>16 100.00</td>
<td>16 100.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type of Relationship Now</td>
<td>n %</td>
<td>n %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Close Friend</td>
<td>0 0.00</td>
<td>9 56.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Casual Friend</td>
<td>0 0.00</td>
<td>1 6.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acquaintance or Stranger</td>
<td>3 18.75</td>
<td>5 31.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>13 81.25</td>
<td>1 6.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>16 100.00</td>
<td>16 100.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Length of Participant-Survivor Relationship</td>
<td>n %</td>
<td>n %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than 24 hours</td>
<td>6 37.50</td>
<td>0 0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24 hours to 31 days</td>
<td>3 18.75</td>
<td>0 0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32 days to 1 year</td>
<td>6 37.50</td>
<td>11 68.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Between 1 and 2 years</td>
<td>1 6.25</td>
<td>2 12.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Between 2 and 5 years</td>
<td>0 0.00</td>
<td>1 6.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Between 5 and 10 years</td>
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<td>Greater than 10 years</td>
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<td>2 12.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>16 100.00</td>
<td>16 100.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Information collected about the nature of assault is displayed in Table 12.
Table 12. Description of the Assaults Captured in Interviews

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assault Characteristic</th>
<th>Formal Supporters</th>
<th>Peers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>n</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Perpetrators</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>81.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>12.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More Than 2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>100.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender of Perpetrator(s)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>100.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
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<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>100.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Survivor’s Relationship to the</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perpetrator(s)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stranger</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>18.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acquaintance</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>25.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friend</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>12.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marital/Dating</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>25.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>12.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>100.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant’s Relationship to</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the Perpetrator(s)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stranger</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>81.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acquaintance</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friend</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>12.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>100.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weapon Present During Assault</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>75.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>18.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>100.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Survivor Physically Injured</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>50.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>31.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>18.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>100.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drug/Alcohol Use</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>By Survivor</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>12.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>By Perpetrator</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>By Both Survivor and Perpetrator</td>
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<td>25.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Substances Used</td>
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<td>18.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>43.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assault Characteristic</td>
<td>Formal Supporters</td>
<td>Peers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------</td>
<td>-------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drug/Alcohol Use</td>
<td>n</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>100.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Please see Table 13 for characteristics of the disclosures received from the interview participants.

**Table 13. Description of the Disclosures Captured in Interviews**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Disclosure Characteristic</th>
<th>Formal Supporters</th>
<th>Peers</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No. Disclosures Btwn Survivor &amp; Participant</td>
<td>n</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>n</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>37.50</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6.25</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>12.50</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More Than 3</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>43.75</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>100.00</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time Between Assault and Disclosure</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Less than 24 hours</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6.25</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>18.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 to 7 days</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6.25</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>18.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 to 31 days</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>31.25</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32 days to 6 months</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>18.75</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>25.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Between 6 months and 1 year</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Between 1 and 2 years</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6.25</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>12.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greater than 2 years</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>31.25</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>12.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>100.00</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>100.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time Elapsed Since the Disclosure</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0 to 7 days</td>
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<td>6.25</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 to 31 days</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6.25</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32 days to 6 months</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>25.00</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>12.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Between 6 months and 1 year</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>18.75</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>31.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Between 1 and 2 years</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>12.50</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>18.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greater than 2 years</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>31.25</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>31.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>100.00</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>100.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Others Present During Disclosure</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>18.75</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>43.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>81.25</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>56.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>100.00</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>100.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5.3.2 Analyses

The findings of the qualitative content analysis of transcripts are presented here. To help elucidate findings, quotes from participants are presented. Quotes that are from formal support providers and students who identified as peers of the supporters are provided participant numbers with F and P prefixes, respectively. Findings from formal supporters and informal supporters are combined unless otherwise stated.

5.3.2.1 Research Objective 1 – Relationships

Interview transcripts were analyzed using qualitative content analysis in order to explore how relationships between the survivor and the person hearing the disclosure related to perceived responses to disclosures of sexual assault. In examining how the participant-survivor relationship related to responses of participants to the disclosure, six main themes were identified: (1) the level of perceived closeness to and knowledge of the survivor; (2) the participants’ relationships with the perpetrators; (3) the presence of others at the time of the disclosure; (4) participant identification with the survivor; (5) the boundaries in the relationship; and (6) that the relationship did not relate to the response. Table 14 presents each code in the relationship category along with how many peers and formal supporters made statements that were classified in each code.

Table 14. Number of Interview Participants whose Statements were Classified in Each Relationship Code

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Relationship Codes</th>
<th>Formal Supporters</th>
<th>Peers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Closeness to &amp; Knowledge of Survivor</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participants’ Relationships with Perpetrators</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presence of Others at the time of the Disclosure</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant’s Identification with the Survivor</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boundaries in the Relationship</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship Did Not Relate to the Response</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5.3.2.1.1 Level of Closeness to and Knowledge of Survivor

Most people who took part in the interviews said they knew the survivors for under a year, with only six of the thirty-two participants indicating they knew the survivors longer than one year. Further, participants described different perceived levels of closeness to the survivors, with three participants feeling not at all close to the survivors, seven a little bit close, seven moderately close, twelve quite close, and three extremely close.

Participants talked about how their perceived closeness in their relationship to the survivor related to how they responded to the disclosure. Closeness was described by participants with reciprocity and expectations based on prior interactions in the relationship, investment in the relationships, and strong emotional reactions. Relationship expectations, investment, and emotional reactions were in some cases reported with confidence in responding and belief of the survivor and in other cases with controlling responses and blaming the survivor.

Expectations in the relationship based on prior interactions with the survivor were also described by participants. Disclosure interactions were reported by participants to follow a communication pattern already established in their relationship with the survivor. This pattern in how the participant and survivor communicated included reciprocity. Reciprocity in the relationships was described and participants who said they felt close to the survivors talked about sharing about themselves, including possibly disclosing personal assaults. Participants described that knowledge of the survivor and experience in the relationship came with confidence in knowing how to respond and knowing what the survivor may have needed. Survivors were also described by
participants as able to read them better due to increased knowledge, as illustrated in the following narrative:

I mean obviously, obviously I cared about her enough to realize that I wanted to be a supporter for her. We always had a very open dialogue, like open book policy that if we wanted to know something, ask something, then like we always would. We have really good communication in our relationship, and that's something that's always been important to us. And so I think that that probably made disclosure easier for her. And made it easier for me to ask the right questions to get a good understanding of like, well what's going on and what she needed from me. (Participant P3)

Those hearing disclosures reported that having a close relationship with the survivor made things complex and there were many factors and conflicts to consider. Peers described expectations in the relationships along with reactions implying some blame towards the survivors. Participant P9 shared:

I trusted my friend and she won't do that, you know, 'cause every time when we go out together, when we go out we always promise each other we're going out together and then we're going home together. And then, that's what we talked about as well. But then, that night, she didn't, right? So it's like, you knew that we were going to be worried about you and you made your choice but then that happened. Like, you also have to blame yourself for it.

When participants talked about knowing about a person, they described feelings of intimacy in the relationship and that this made things feel personal. Participants reported being invested and engaged in the relationship, and this was described along with protective responses. One participant said:

There's more of a personal connection. So there's more of a protective, like, this is my friend. This is someone that I really care about. It's someone that you are more connected to. And I guess it depends on the relationship with the person. Like, right now I'm thinking about a really close friend that in thinking about that, but ...like it would be different, I think, like, if it was an acquaintance, versus a best friend, you know, and I think that it would be that would dictate how much I'm showing and how much I'm how much feeling I'm expressing around it. So I think it's different in that, that person knows me as well. (Participant F11)
Another participant talked about feeling close to the survivor along with being controlling and protective in interactions with the survivor and having difficulty remaining objective. This participant’s responses implied belief in the survivor’s disclosure:

I felt more, like, I mean, that we were pretty close and so I feel like I had more of an invested interest. Not only because she was my client but also because I, you know, I cared about her well-being and I wanted, you know, so that’s why I was more...I don’t know, more persistent in finding out information and then following through with her…. Even when she wouldn’t call me back I would still call her and I would still call her. Not trying to harass her but let her know that I was thinking about her basically. And then I made that APS report-Adult Protective Service. Based on concern that I had about the reaction of the parents. (Participant F10)

Strong emotions were mentioned when participants felt close to the survivor. Participants who described feeling close to the survivor also talked about responding with a great deal of expressed emotion and reported being genuine in their responses to the survivor, suggesting that their responses to the survivors were in line with their reactions, assumptions, and beliefs. Primarily difficult emotions were reported in these relationships, including feeling angry, upset, uncomfortable, disappointed, scared, and surprised. Somatic language was also used. Participants talked about feeling they were winded, kicked in the gut, or had their hearts crushed. The following excerpts help illustrate these responses:

Knowing so much about her and her history and how she reacts in situations, how she is with people, I think definitely helped me to understand more. And the fact that I care so much about her probably is why the anger came up initially. Just because any time somebody that I love, you know, gets hurt it’s, I don’t know, it’s hard to hear. I think, you know, if I didn’t know somebody very well and they were telling me this I think it would much easier to just keep more kind of stable emotions and just process it rather than get emotional about it. So like, yeah, knowing her, added a lot of emotion to the picture on my side. (Participant P15)
While most of these feelings were experienced as challenging, participants also talked about having increased positive emotions, as is demonstrated in the following quote:

She's someone that I haven't, I've known her for a few months and, always been very self-deprecating…. That's just her outlook, her attitude and so I guess it was really, it was a really great moment to see her start to develop self-respect a little bit. (Participant F3)

5.3.2.1.2 Identification with Survivor

The extent to which participants identified with the survivor was reported as being important to how they responded to the disclosure. Having similarities to the survivor, such as shared age, cultural background, and shared life experience was described as making rapport easy to develop and having less of a power differential in the relationship. Participants who identified with the survivor reported feeling vulnerable and feeling sadness, helplessness, and frustration. A participant who was older than the survivor reported feeling more protective of the survivor because of the age difference. One formal support provider who was older than her client described feeling like a big sister:

I think I realize why I felt very like big-sisterly and I tried to stay aware of that because of transference stuff but like partly because some of his struggles with his family really echoed mine. Like he's [of a minority racial group] and he wasn't out to his parents…. And he was going through this phase where I kind of went through at one point too feeling you know, to be queer like I've got to give up my culture and not realizing that you didn't have to do that…. But it's not as okay to like have these negative feelings, like feelings of disappointment or even like anger or like whatever, you know, and so I knew that I was having those feelings too. I realized, I'm like, oh my goodness I feel like his big sister. That was a big like kind of insight for me. I'm like I should not be feeling like his big sister right now. (Participant F12)

It was thought by supporters that, for survivors, identifying with the other person may make it harder to disclose. Males who heard disclosures talked about being conscious of the gender difference and thinking about the strength of the survivor to
disclose given this difference. One participant who described identifying with the survivor engaged in debriefing with the aim of maintaining accountability:

She's the type of client that if I just met her out one night I would be friends with her. We had a lot in common… like we dressed the same, like the same music. Just, in fact, as the details started coming out, I was at the same concert she was at the night she was assaulted. So there was maybe a lot of transference maybe in this session or in my time with her. And we only had about 14 sessions together. Usually people are limited to twelve but, I think her- and I went over just a couple sessions more than that…. I know I went into my supervision and I was like, okay, I need to monitor that I don't get, that I don't share too much of myself with clients I really like, and I said that to my boss. (Participant F11)

5.3.2.1.3 Boundaries in the Relationship

Boundaries in relationships were described along with responses to survivors. The description of relationship boundaries with responses occurred differently and more explicitly by formal supporters than by peers. Overall, boundaries in the relationship and levels of control in responses were described together. Further, participants who described thinking a lot about boundaries reported this along with the management of emotions. Having a clear role in the disclosure was also reported with boundaries by formal support providers. Finally physical boundaries during disclosures were discussed. These responses are discussed further next.

Boundaries were described with controlling responses when boundaries were strict and when they unclear. Formal supporters describing clear boundaries talked about leading as opposed to collaborating. Participants who described clear boundaries and thinking of their importance described providing minimal personal disclosures, as illustrated by this formal supporter’s comments:

The second time that she was here I'd shared my age with her and that's not something I'd ever do with anybody. I've shared very, very, very few details. But that even crossed my mind as being almost crossing the boundary that I shouldn't be crossing. It's interesting 'cause I, for me and my brain, it's a slippery slope. Like
I've shared how old I am, and then I'm going to share other pieces of info and then it's not good. (Participant F1)

For others who described the importance of having more flexible relationships, more ongoing relationships were discussed:

It was mainly that one conversation and then we had multiple conversations online after the weekend. We became Facebook friends and I think it was probably a week or two before we engaged online. I think I just sent her a message a couple of weeks later asking her how she was doing. (Participant F5)

Overall, participants reported fewer boundaries in personal relationships and friends talked about doing or saying things that were directive or controlling. Some formal support providers reported perceiving their role was too big and that this presented unclear boundaries. Participants describing unclear boundaries described these relationships as close and with a sense of protectiveness, more similar to how peers seemed to talk about their relationships. The formal role can get survivors to believe formal supporters know how to take care and formal supporters talked about urges to rescue and thoughts that they might know better:

I just remember having this feeling that's when I was like first realized, to even myself, maybe there's like too much blurring right here. Because right now I'm feeling like, his big sister giving him this, you know, lecture or something like that and that's not my role. And I think I even said that to him. Like I don't want to give you a lecture and I feel like I am, but I just really want like, the best for you. (Participant F12)

In these less defined formal roles it was stated that there were limited opportunities for supervision. One youth worker said that:

Another part of the problem too, at this agency, was that there wasn't enough, I guess, policy, procedure, protocol-type stuff around boundary things. Like we were kind of making up rules on the go, on the fly…. Our agency didn't give us cell phones but we soon discovered, like really early on, this is not going to work, if they didn't have our numbers and we didn't have theirs in terms of like a lot of the planning workshop stuff and when they needed support and stuff like that. I think [staff] felt very protective of this youth because there's just so many kind of
barriers for them…. I think our role became too big, like we were trying to be everything. We weren't a youth worker wouldn't even be like a really appropriate title. It was like therapist and, I don't know. It was everything. (Participant F12)

The management of emotions was discussed with boundaries. One participant reported feeling as though her/his responses were better in a formal rather than informal role due to the emotional control and objectivity s/he experiences in formal circumstances. For this participant, it seems less emotional control was perceived with more controlling responses:

Participant F3: I was thinking about the differences between hearing disclosures in my personal life and hearing them at work and I'm thinking back, 'cause I have, there's a couple in my personal life where the survivor is between 19 and 24 and I get, I don't control my emotions as much when I'm with my friends. I say, "We're going to the doctor now. I'll be at your house in 20 minutes." And, like, I have just a different context. I don't do it as well.

Interviewer: What do you think that's about that there's such a difference?

Participant F3: I think it's context and head space. Like when I'm here I'm on and my role is very clear, my expectations are very clear. I have a list of “this is how you do your job” and it never involves flipping out.

Boundaries were reported along with the participants’ roles and their responses were often discussed in terms of their roles. Less structure in peer relationships was described as allowing friends to step back when necessary, whereas one participant reported an inability to disengage as a professional as it was part of the job expectations. Formal support providers talked about having clear roles that involved providing education in response to the disclosure. Formal supporters said they talked with the survivors about boundaries, such as what they would do if they saw each other in public or limits of confidentiality and dual roles, while peers did not report this. Additionally, formal supporters talked about control in their responses by describing being limited in terms of what issues could be addressed within their role. Either their role informed their responses or they referred the survivor elsewhere, as illustrated by one participant:
My reaction was more like, okay, so now, how, what do we do about it other than what I can do now within our mission that is just vocational. Like how can I put that in the context of work so that I don't touch anything that they would think that like breaches my job description. (Participant F13)

Participants mentioned physical boundaries by describing touch in different ways. Conversations about benefits or drawbacks of touch were absent from interviews with friends, whereas touch was described as being used consciously and tentatively by formal supporters, as elucidated here:

I think that sometimes what's lacking in social services is that human connection. Like the ability to like touch someone on the shoulder and physically show them that you're there. In all of my positions there's a very strict no physical contact, what's the word, like rule, which I'm really happy with. But I think every once in a while you meet that person and if you know that what they actually need is a hug, or a pat on the shoulder and it's safe for both of us, um, and then you like, if there's cameras and you're aware that other people can witness, I think that's also really important that you're giving them a hug. And it's consensual and they just need that human connection. I think that would be important. (Participant F6)

5.3.2.1.4 Relationship with Perpetrator

Relationships of survivors and participants with perpetrators were communicated as important in responses participants had to disclosures. More peers talked about knowing the perpetrator than did formal support providers, although there was still one formal support provider who also had a relationship with the perpetrator. When the perpetrator was unknown to the survivor, one participant talked about fear as s/he felt the assault would be difficult to prevent. Participants who knew the perpetrator provided explanations for the assaultive behaviour and reported feeling sad for the perpetrator. Being angry and upset were mentioned particularly when the perpetrator was known to the survivor and also was older or in a position of authority. Perceptions about the perpetrator seemed to relate to belief of the sexual assault. As demonstrated below, one participant talked about being angry because s/he knew the perpetrator was ‘bad’, and
another talked about some uncertainty as s/he did not think the perpetrator was a horrible person.

Oh, I was just infuriated about him 'cause I know he is that kind of person but I didn't actually think he would actually do that and, I don't know, it's just very-infuriated that such kind of person exists. (Participant P6)

I don't think he's a malicious person. I think he's a bit careless and a bit self-centered and you know, maybe not the most considerate person in the world but yeah, he's not, you know, he's not malicious. From what he's done for her and with her and how they've gotten along in the time they had spent together, you know, I could tell that they had a good relationship at that point. I guess I was curious as to what situation or what had happened that finally had gotten him to go that extra step. Especially when he knew she was in a relationship. And maybe it was the boyfriend as well. What had, I don't know, what had tipped that. Not that it, like, not had tipped it, what had she done to make it happen but like, I don't know. I guess, again, just trying to understand the situation. (Participant P15)

When survivors knew the perpetrator, participants talked about feeling shock, empathy, worry, frustration, sadness, and one participant reported blaming the survivor for the assault because of this relationship. The survivor-perpetrator relationship was described as troubling as, in some instances, it seemed to make it difficult to define the event as assaultive. One participant explicitly stated s/he wouldn’t report to police if s/he knew the perpetrator as that would be complicated:

I mean, I personally would not report it…. It's kind of like reporting your friend to an authority. It's not something that I would do. So, instead of that I would have, I would just avoid the situation completely…. Well, I mean if it's a stranger, I wouldn't hesitate. (Participant P8)

5.3.2.1.5 Presence of Others

The presence of others at the time of the disclosure was mentioned as important for how participants responded. Peer participants talked about feeling able to step back as others were supporting, and having an ability to figure things out and debrief together:

If she had told me one-on-one, I would have, of course I would have said something. Of course I would have helped her through it because she was
confiding in me. But, at that moment, outside of the bar, while we were drunk, around a bunch of other drunk people, it didn't seem like the place for me…. And I'm really, I'm really glad that my other friend kind of shaped up and like, okay, so, ...our friend's in this kind of trauma right now and she needs to just kind of sober up and help her through this and I'm really happy that she did that and, but, for me, I just could not. I just couldn't do it. (Participant P13)

I did have a close friend with me as well [at the time of the disclosure], and so we sort of had a debrief after that and, yeah. like I think in other situations people don't necessarily have the ability to debrief. (Participant P4)

One formal support provider who reported others being present during the disclosure talked about wanting to protect the survivor from the others while also, later in the interview, considering that the others may have provided a sense of safety for the survivor:

My disclosure actually happened during one group…. So that's how she started disclosing and all clients are like, "Oh, what happened to you? So, that moment I stopped the conversation… because I did not want it to go anywhere where it shouldn't go and, for me, it was also I was scared, how to control it, if it didn't bring any traumatic experiences for her. (Participant F13)

5.3.2.1.6 Relationship Did Not Change Response

Participants reported that they would respond in the same manner in different relationships and that the nature of the relationship was not important in terms of their response to the survivor. When one formal supporter was asked how the relationship with the survivor related to responses, the response was:

Participant F15: I guess, on one hand, I felt this professional role where I respond clinically in a way that's useful to them. But I think, at the same time, I'm probably aware that I was probably also responding at a more visceral just human being level. Just as somebody else who can relate to the emotion of being violated and not having experienced it personally but imagining how awful that would be. I mean so I suppose I was sort of reacting on both levels: professionally and personally.

Interviewer: Okay. Do you think if it wasn't a professional context that you would have responded differently?

Participant F15: I'm not sure. I- probably not.
This same participant commented in member checks that although s/he would likely respond similarly in different relational contexts, the therapeutic relationship, as expressed through empathy, trust, security of attachment, would relate to responses to the disclosure. From this person’s perspective it seems that specific characteristics of the relationship are not important for the responses, but rather, qualities of individual relationships do relate to responses to disclosures.

5.3.2.2 Research Objective 2 – Context

Interview transcripts were analyzed in order to examine how people understood the relationship between the context, within which a disclosure of sexual assault occurred, and their perceived responses to the disclosure. Although relationships are an aspect of the context of the disclosure, relationships were coded separately for this research. Participants reported six different aspects of the context of the disclosure that related to their response: (1) participant characteristics; (2) experience with disclosure; (3) survivor characteristics; (4) survivors’ reactions; (5) assault characteristics; and (6) rape culture. Table 15 presents how many peers and formal supporters made statements that were classified in each context code.

Table 15. Number of Interview Participants whose Statements were Classified in Each Context Code

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Context Codes</th>
<th>Formal Supporters</th>
<th>Peers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participant Characteristics</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experience with Disclosure</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Survivor Characteristics</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Survivors’ Reactions</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assault Characteristics</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rape Culture</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5.3.2.2.1 Participant Characteristics

Participants talked about many characteristics of themselves that were related to how they responded to the disclosure. Their personal perspective and well-being were reported as relevant to their response:

In my own, sort of, well-being, when it's impacted, for sure. You know, if I have a particularly stressful, you know, or challenging period of life, that's going to affect how I react to things. We all have this, you know, finite level of resources to deal with life, including jobs and everything else and so if a great deal of our resources are being used in our personal life, that leaves less to deal with, you know, what we do in our professional life and so that definitely affects it. (Participant F16)

People reported their typical interaction with others, for instance, that they are generally thoughtful in interactions with others or that they do not generally handle emotional situations well, and this seemed to be reflected in the disclosures:

Participant P1: Well, I was shocked, that's why I didn't say anything and probably 'cause I didn't have any experiences like how to comfort others who, like I just didn't know what to say in that context.
Interviewer: OK. And you didn't have any experience in how to comfort others like, in general that's hard for you, or specifically because it was-
Participant P1: In general it's hard for me, and, and especially this ‘cause it was so extreme.

This participant later went on to say:
I was just being quiet too. I'm just not really a good person for it [a disclosure] to happen, you know, I didn't know how to react to something, I don't know.

One participant reported that the disclosure increased her/his awareness and thus her/his perspective about and understanding of sexual assault:

I've always tried to be aware of that, that anybody could be yeah a survivor, victim of sexual assault. But, you know, for her to tell me that and for us to be such casual, or you know, without knowing her really, really well, it made me think about, yeah just being more aware that anybody could have had that kind of experience. Like anybody that you interact with on a day-to-day basis.
(Participant P10)
5.3.2.2 Experience with Disclosure

Formal support providers reported that their responses were related to their theoretical orientation to counselling and supporting people. Formal supporters also mentioned that hearing many disclosures led them to change their responses to disclosures over time as a form of self-care. This change could possibly be related to secondary trauma, and participants stated that hearing many disclosures related to feeling disheartened, processing more cognitively, and being more detached. Formal supporters who heard many disclosures over time spoke about informing survivors they did not have to provide details, not discussing work with social supports, and taking a more “expert” rather than peer stance. Learning over time was described by formal support providers and it was communicated that, over time, they learned to express emotions less, manage them better, and tried harder to keep the focus on the survivor’s experience.

I think, well, there has been recognition that I know for myself that I just can't do this work and also take it home and let it affect me and then the lives of those around me. Because all I'm doing is talking about this work or talking about things that I've done or things that have happened. It didn't add to the life of how I can do this work so I know that when I first started hearing disclosures and learning about details of what were going on or what had happened to people that I did want to, I know I did want to know more details then. I know now I really don't 'cause I just can't go there and, but it would affect me a lot and I would be really like pulled down by it and really, really upset and then I'd take it home or I would take it to a friend's. I wouldn't talk in specifics about what had happened but I would allude to them that I heard this horrific thing and I can't function right now. I can't talk to you and I can't deal with you and so I, over time have noticed that I have to leave my work here and that I have to let clients know that I don't need to always know lots of details although sometimes it may be helpful for them to say those details. (Participant F1)

Although it was reported by formal supporters that they felt desensitized to disclosures after hearing many across time, one formal supporter who mentioned not feeling desensitized described her/his ongoing emotional experience:
Well, I think the fact that I saw her vulnerability and that I saw how difficult it was for her to say what she needed to say. I think, just my genuine compassion and care for her influenced everything that I said to her because this is, I mean, I've heard thousands of disclosures and each and every time you get brought back to the humanity of that person sitting in front of you that's saying that to you. You hear common themes very frequently. Sometimes you hear almost the exact same type of incident, but focusing on the uniqueness of the individual and that person being able to say what they needed to say I think a hundred percent influences everything that I said and have said in my contact with her. (Participant F4)

A different formal supporter, for whom this was the first disclosure, talked about a flexible relationship without strict boundaries:

It was kind of a jump of faith on both of our parts to engage in that conversation and I think we kind of both made that very clear at the very beginning. Like I disclosed to her that I am not trained in this but I feel that I have the knowledge and the sensitivity to engage in this kind of conversation you're seeking to have. (Participant 5)

This participant later said:

We had multiple conversations online after the weekend. We became Facebook friends, and I think it was probably a week or two before we engaged online. I think I just sent her a message a couple of weeks later asking her how she was doing.

Experience with disclosure was generally mentioned by formal support providers. When peers reported this in the context of their disclosures, they were generally describing how a lack of experience related to how they responded:

Ya, ‘cause I was, well, I was shocked that's why I didn't say anything and probably ‘cause I didn't have any experiences like, how to, like how to comfort others who, like I just didn't know what to say in that context, like. (Participant P1)

5.3.2.2.3 Survivor Characteristics

Some characteristics of the survivor, such as their age, gender, sexual orientation, mental health status, cultural background, and financial status were also reported as being related to responses provided to disclosures. Younger survivors evoked feelings of being
hopeful and more protective in participants. Urges to protect were also reported with regard to survivors struggling to figure out their sexual orientation. In this case, concerns about fewer resources and more stigmas were reported. One participant reported these same concerns and feeling less confident responding to disclosures from male survivors:

He was also really confused about like, ‘you know, I'm a guy, can I even be raped?’ and stuff like that so there's a lot of things going on for him. And I know I felt 'cause I hadn't actually dealt with I guess, that kind of rape either, like male on male. Like that was kind of different too. And I know for [the LGBTQ] community it's one of those things where you don't want to talk about it 'cause it doesn't happen, right? Like, you know, we don't want things to reflect badly on a community that's already so marginalized. So there's a lot of that silencing too so he wasn't sure who he could talk to…. He was a bit worried about that too, the stigma, and, you know, being a guy who was still trying to figure out, like, his sexual identity-hood and like, find another man. So yeah, it was kind of out of my, it was definitely out of my comfort zone too. (Participant F12)

Later, this same participant stated:

You want to protect people who are younger. You know, you don't want them to be exposed to difficult things. You feel like, you know, maybe they don't yet have the resources and they're not yet equipped. It's just like, you know, I mean, the younger- you hear stories of like really young kids, like, experiencing, you know, the difficult things. I don't know. You just feel like your heart goes out to them more or mostly because of-not something that happened or resources, but to be able to deal with it.

Participants reported that survivors felt there was no room to discuss sexual assault in their cultures. One participant reported being surprised hearing of the sexual assault as the participant and survivor came from a conservative culture that discourages premarital sexual contact:

I wouldn't be as surprised just because, I mean, I have to know the background of the person first. Because, well, I know that this, like, close friend has the same culture as I do. And we come from this very conservative culture and she goes to church and I think that's why I'm surprised because otherwise I would not be as surprised. (Participant P8)
One participant reported being more understanding of the survivor because s/he had a passive personality. Another participant talked about referring the survivor to a private therapist for ongoing support as this was financially possible for the survivor. Mental health issues, and particularly intellectual disabilities, were reported as affecting the survivor’s coping, vulnerability, and participants’ responses to survivors. Participants described conflict between believing in the capabilities of those with mental health issues and also being unsure about their abilities and engaging in more controlling responses, as illustrated in the following excerpt:

It's so conflicting though because I asked [for details of what happened] because I wanted to make sure that she and I had the same interpretation of what sexual assault was and things like that and I didn't want to undermine her, you know, her capability, her cognitive capability of understanding that. But when I say it out loud, I'm thinking I did undermine her, like we talked about earlier. So yeah, I think that because of the fact that she had a developmental disability. (Participant F10)

5.3.2.2.4 Survivors’ Reactions

The reactions of the survivor to the assault and the disclosure were reported as being relevant to participants’ responses. Specifically, the survivors’ emotions, thoughts, and behaviours were important in how the supporters responded. When survivors engaged in adaptive coping or very common responses such as self-blame, participants provided positive responses, such as normalizing reactions and focusing on strengths.

I affirmed some of her positive self-talk. Like, she would say, “you know, I think this.” She would say something like, “this is what self-esteem feels like, I haven't felt this in years.” You know, like, you just kind of affirm it, like, “you have so much to be proud of. You're so-look how much you've come through.” That kind of thing. (Participant F3)

When the survivor was struggling in her/his coping, participants reported negative responses such as questioning the survivor about the assault or about her/his behaviour:
I can see that she's really sad. Like, her face was more like...blank than anything else. But then, when she talked, I felt like she's sad about it. Like, she didn't show any like aggressive anger or anything. She rather had this calm way of talking. You know, like, her face was calm. She was more like regretting what happened. You know, the way she told me about it. Sort of like, I'm sorry that this happened but like I'm going to tell you what happened. And then so we did that. And then she just basically told it as if it happened ages ago. You know what I mean? So I was like, are you sure? (Participant P9)

Both positive and negative responses were described by participants when survivors were reported to be emotional. In terms of positive responses, participants provided physical and emotional support and encouraged connections to resources. I think when she became emotional, like when she sort of, 'cause she started crying at one point, and I remember often leaning into her, so, sitting so that my elbows were on my knees so that I was kind of closer to her. And I remember, she took so much blame. Like she had so much guilt and shame around it that I know I said to her a lot that this wasn't her fault. And I think I said, "I'm sorry that this happened to you. You didn't deserve this". I tried to stay quiet so that she would be able to say what she needed to say but then also to convey that I could be here with you during this. Yes, this is horrible. This happened to you. Yes, some people may be- this is too much for your husband, but I can sit here and hold this for you right now. I'm not going to walk out because this is too much. And I remember trying to be really quiet, just trying to be there with her and even making statements when she started to really become escalated, like, “you're safe now”. (Participant F11)

Participants reported feeling angry, upset and helpless about survivors’ emotions and reported finding it difficult to witness the survivors’ struggles. Some negative responses included questioning, minimizing, or silencing the survivor. Participant P5: She was, ah, when she stopped crying she was just like really angry, like extremely angry. She was cursing a lot. Interviewer: How did you respond to that? Participant P5: About being really angry I was just doing the same, just trying to calm her down when she was really angry and really just telling her that it was okay and just forget about it. Like, I think I was telling her she's rightful in being angry because ah- I don't remember what exactly I told her but I just I was just trying to calm her down.
All of these reactions seemed to be provided with positive intentions. When the survivor did not express obvious emotions or behaved in an unexpected manner, participants reported some empathy but also talked about responding minimally and with disbelief or uncertainty. This is demonstrated by one participant’s remarks:

I was wondering how much she remembers or like I wonder ‘is she telling me the whole story?’ or if she's being honest with herself ’cause her story almost changed throughout the year. I think she was trying to mentally justify, like I said.

This participant went on to say:

The third interaction after like, the original one, was her saying, ‘Oh, I don't think, I don't even know what actually happened that night’. So it was like, there was like, there was a really gradual change.

And this supporter also stated:

I felt bad but, like, honestly, I think I almost like, used her justification to make me feel better. And so like, I kind of was like, oh, maybe it didn't happen and like, so I almost decided like-relief. (Participant P16)

Participants described interpreting the survivors’ actions and reacting based on their interpretations. For instance, one participant reported not seeking out the survivor to check in or follow-up as the participant thought the survivor just wanted a witness.

5.3.2.2.5 Assault Characteristics

The participants talked about different assault characteristics being related to their disclosure responses. These characteristics include the level of violence, others’ reactions, the location of the assault, the perpetrator’s comments and characteristics, being present during the assault, and the assault being considered a loss of virginity. Participants reported more support, sympathy and caring, as well as more worry, fear and anger when violence and injury were reported. One participant talked about the level of violence relating to an avoidance of that topic and not being sure what to do:
Telling me about the amount of blood there was, and the amount of pain and physical damage that she had for months afterwards. I found like, I had that gut-you know when you hear something awful and you get that "punch in your gut kind of feeling." I had that when she told me. It was just like I can't imagine that sort of violation, and that kind of physical manifestation of the violation that had happened to you and your body, and like your core, your insides, that really....like that's what I think about when I think about the assault…. I really didn't know what to say. I felt winded. I think about other things I could talk about, and be like "No, it's OK." Like, I told her it's OK that you didn't go to services right away. I know that that's hard to process, and we talked about normalizing it with sex a lot, and like that I felt like I actually did OK with that… but like I had nothing to say about that physical pain that she had. (Participant P2)

In violent assaults, participants reported more questions and concern about safety and one participant stated they would have taken more control if the violence was greater:

Participant P7: She said it was like a little bit groping, like they were making out. Like I don't think of it as sexual assault but when I think about it now, after everything, I'm like, oh it is. But, when you think sexual assault you think someone is getting like raped and beaten and murdered, like in a sense, not….

Interviewer: Do you think that if it was more of a violent attack that you would have responded differently?
Participant P7: Ya, for sure. I would have called the police or something if I saw something or she told me, I'm like, "Let's go to the hospital now."

In one case, the participant stated that she would have responded differently based on the nature of the assault:

Participant P14: I think, well, the fact that he actually raped her, and not, like, tried to kiss her or something. I probably would have responded completely differently if it had been or he had done something else.
Interviewer: What do you think would have been the difference in your response?
Participant P14: Big deal or not a big deal.

Participants reported that assault characteristics did not relate to their response when none were provided.

Others’ reactions were important to supporters’ responses. In one case other supporters engaged in a fight with the perpetrator after the disclosure and this took the focus off the survivor, put her at more risk and led to more fear from the participant.
Participants reported feeling horrified, troubled, angry and sad when others had unsupportive reactions to the survivor, such as in the following example:

It really impacted her relationship with her partner in a really negative way, in that there was talk of leave-like divorce, like just a lot of unhappiness there. And just feeling really-and the anger as well at her partner because, you know, it was really important for her to feel supported. And then, so I gave her some information for support and I said, ‘I don't know how you, if you want to give this to him or what you want to do.’ So she had this plan. She put it in an envelope and she was going out of town and I think she was out of town for like a week and she-before she left she said, ‘I have an envelope on the table and it would mean a lot to me if you read this’. And she- when she got back the envelope hadn't been opened. So I was really mad about that as well. Even though I know I was only getting one side of the story and even though we talked about how helpless her partner probably feels and how-and all of that. Like, he'd gone through and he would give her really blaming messages like, ‘Oh, you're never going again.’ …. And so I get really mad about those things. (Participant F11)

The location of the assault related to responses. One participant wanted to combat sexual assault myths by ensuring the survivor knew s/he didn’t blame the survivor as the assault occurred at a party. Another participant reported being scared and cautious after a drug-facilitated assault at a bar. Finally, when assaults occurred in different countries there was little focus on reporting and descriptions focused on lack of resources and frustration around that.

I think if I'm dealing with it in Canada it's probably a lot different though than dealing with it abroad when it's, like, not in your country, and you’re not a citizen…. I thought the most important thing was like, 'cause I know you can get rape kits in America or like, they can do like, swabs on you and stuff and so I didn't know if you could do that in [another country] or not but I was like, hey, well, you should go to get tested and like, see. And we, I think we briefly discussed like trying to report it 'cause she had his number. But she didn't do anything about it. Like, I think 'cause we both felt, well, I think she felt this way and I felt this way but it was never something that we acknowledged but it was like, you're in [another country]. Like what are they going to do? You should feel like you can report it anywhere in the world but like, we really didn't feel that way at all. (Participant P16)
One participant stated that s/he would not have said anything about the assault if the perpetrator was good looking, and another reported feeling anger because there were two perpetrators and the assault sounded planned:

I was really angry about that these two guys did this to one person. Like that—to
one female. And the fact that I don't know if it was planned. She wasn't sure if it
was planned. But she was in the bathroom or something and, or—I can't remember
but all of a sudden this other guy shows up. She had no idea. Yeah, and so that
made me really angry that that happened to her. (Participant F11)

5.3.2.2.6 Rape Culture

Rape culture can be defined as a way of life in which there is an assumption that
sexual violence is an inevitable fact of life, and beliefs, values and practices perpetuate
the existence of sexual violence (Buchwald, Fletcher, & Roth, 2005). Participants who
thought about rape culture reported difficult feelings including being angry, frustrated,
and sad, and reported that their beliefs about needing to change rape culture informed
their responses. Rape culture was often specifically discussed with the survivor:

I don't remember but I wouldn't be surprised if I might have overtly conveyed
some of that anger and saying stuff like, you know, it's unfair or something.
'Cause I've always felt some…I don't know if I would have called it anger though.
I would have said frustration. I say that a lot…. That this type of violence even
happened, it's something that really frustrated me. I wouldn't even be surprised if I
did actually say that. (Participant F12)

In other cases, participants aligned with rape culture and endorsed victim-blaming
and communicated this blaming to the survivor, as demonstrated by the participant in this
excerpt:

Participant P7: I didn't think it was a big deal at that time I was like, well, you
know, we've been drinking, we're dressed pretty…we're not wearing a lot of
clothes, we're in a club. Like that's pretty much what you do in that atmosphere.
Like you're dancing and so like even if you're just standing there, you're touching
shoulders with people right, so it's not completely out of the question…. I feel like
that's kind of what you get 'cause it's like so a concentration of people in a small
area and we're dancing and it's going to happen. But if someone crosses your line, or whatever, you need to like push them away.

Interviewer: Okay, and did you feel like if the same thing would have happened in a different context that you would have felt differently about it?

Participant P7: Ya, like, for example, if I was in a library or at Starbucks and I was in line or something and like someone like touched my ass or something I would look at them, and I would like publicly say something like, "What are you doing?" ….But then again I'm a very, as I said, outgoing, aggressive person and so I would do something like that. I would draw all the attention to him make him feel embarrassed.

Interviewer: Okay…how do you think that the thoughts that you had during the disclosure related to how you reacted to your friend?

Participant P7: Well, I thought in the club like everything was more commonplace, like to get like groped or touched or whatever. I don't know but for some reason she had it very uncomfortable and so and I was like, but you're in a club. And, you know, she's trying to like, I don't want to say like play the victim, but she's like, oh I shouldn't have done it blah, blah, blah. Or like maybe she-I don't want to say to play the victim, but the type of word I'm looking for is she's asking for it. Do you know what I mean? Like, she looks at you and says, I was asking for it. And I was like, no it's kind of everyone. You know, when you’re there you're kind of there for a certain thing, and I didn't think it was that serious.

5.3.2.3 Research Objective 3 – Personal Effect of Hearing a Disclosure

Interview transcripts were analyzed in order to explore and understand how people are personally affected by hearing disclosures of sexual assault. Participants described how their thoughts and feelings at the time of the disclosure related to their responses to the survivor. Table 16 presents each code for the personal effects (i.e., thoughts and feelings) of hearing a disclosure of sexual assault. This table indicates how many peers and formal supporters made statements that were classified in each personal effect code.

Table 16. Number of Interview Participants whose Statements were Classified in Each Personal Effect Code

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Codes for Personal Effect of Hearing a Disclosure</th>
<th>Formal Supporters</th>
<th>Peers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Thoughts About Safety</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thoughts About Victim-blaming</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Codes for Personal Effect of Hearing a Disclosure</td>
<td>Formal Supporters</td>
<td>Peers</td>
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<tr>
<td>-------------------------------------------------</td>
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<td>------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thoughts About Letting the Survivor Lead</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thoughts About the Survivors’ Needs</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Triggered Thoughts of Personal Sexual Assault</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anger/Frustration/Upset/Fear Not At Survivor</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anger/Frustration Directed Towards the Survivor</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shocked/Overwhelmed/Detached/Confused</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Empathy</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive Emotions</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5.3.2.3.1 Thoughts

Thoughts that participants described as being important to their responses included: (1) thinking about safety; (2) thoughts about victim-blaming; (3) thoughts about letting the survivor lead; (4) thoughts about the survivor’s needs; and (5) triggered thoughts of personal sexual assault experience.

5.3.2.3.1.1 Thoughts of Safety Related to More Involvement with Survivor

Participants talked about thinking about the survivor’s safety, wanting to be protective, and safety in their relationship with the survivor. When participants talked about these thoughts they also talked about becoming a stronger advocate, connecting the survivor to resources, particularly legal resources, completing assessments and safety planning, asking questions, having ongoing discussions, taking control of the disclosure, and encouraging the survivor to follow her/his instincts.

I think I pushed her to try to get…I kind of had a gut feeling of what could happen if she takes her kids to-she was going to let her kids go visit him in [a different place], two of them, and I was just, ‘The guy's not going to give them back.’ You know when you can see it coming because of what he's done in the past. So I was just, I think I overemphasized educating her around like, legal aid and getting interim custody. (Participant F8)
5.3.2.3.1.2 Thoughts about Victim-blaming

Some participants reported having thoughts that the assault was not the survivor’s fault whereas others thought the survivor shared some blame. Participants’ responses seemed to vary relating to these different thoughts. Participants who did not report victim-blaming thoughts talked about discussing rape culture with the survivor and tried to counter the victim’s own sense of blame by saying it was not her/his fault and discussing constructive versus destructive guilt. Responses in which participants discussed rape culture with the survivors could have been coded either as Rape Culture or as Thoughts about Victim-blaming. If the participant was reflecting on the greater culture, the rape culture category was chosen. If the response was because they were thinking about who was responsible for this particular assault this victim-blaming code was applied. Participants who thought about victim-blaming communicated messages to the survivor that the assault was not their fault, as demonstrated by this participant:

Participant P3: Well she was doing the like "It's my fault I let this happen" and stuff. I definitely told her like "No, it's not your fault." And our first conversation mostly centred around that because for a long time she did believe that. Because her ex was so manipulative she did believe that she had let it get to that point. That it was her own fault for letting things get so out of hand in their friendship. Yeah, so our first conversation mostly centred around me trying to justify that it wasn't her fault. You know, but it became kind of circular, and I didn't really know what else to say. So, I mean that's unfortunate that I didn't really know what else to say.

Interviewer: So you said that it's not your fault. Do you remember anything else that you did say?

Participant P3: Yeah, I'm just trying to like explain why I thought it wasn't her fault, because she was very convinced that it was. And so I just like was explaining like my understanding of their relationship and like how no one ever invites to be assaulted, invites someone to assault them. Like, sexual assault is never your fault, and I was like explaining that, how that was why I thought it wasn't her fault. And I said like "I'm sorry that this happened, obviously I wish this hadn't happened, but you’re strong enough that I think you can work through it, and it will be OK."
Participants who reported thoughts that the survivor shared blame communicated conflicting messages, asked clarifying questions, and minimized/dismissed the survivors’ experiences. For example, one participant said:

I think I also probably asked for a lot of clarification just because she was drunk and she was aware of his feelings and she was the one who got into the bed with him. So I think I probably, I seem to remember, you know, just confirming with her like, that it wasn't something that she actually wanted…. I would have asked what did she say. You know, when she said she didn't want...did she tell him? Did she, you know, push him away? You know, did he say anything? Have they talked since? Like, how'd she feel about it? But probably in terms of clarification, yeah, I think I probably just would have been, I guess, asking what kind of signals she was giving him that she didn't, you know, like, how she was telling him no. I think that is what I would have asked her. (Participant P15)

5.3.2.3.1.3 Thoughts about Letting the Survivor Lead

When participants described thinking consciously about following the survivor they talked about focusing on strengths, the future, and positives. These participants were concerned about doing what the survivor asked, asking what the survivor wanted, and being careful about body language. Although formal support providers reported that, with lots of experience with disclosures, they adopted a behaviour of telling survivors they do not need to provide details, one participant who let the survivor lead ended up hearing many details of the assault:

She had never been able to talk about it in a way where she could get the details out and for her really she needed to tell me how he did it. That was very important to her that somebody should hear the graphic nature of what happened to her. To her, that felt like a validating experience. So when she disclosed that, she said, "I've waited so many years to be able to say exactly what happened."

This participant went on to say:

When she did disclose all the graphic details, she didn't see any look on my face of disgust, horror, or anything like that. What she saw was a caring, kind, friendly face who was not judgmental and who really cared about her well-being and who was able to go from the graphic disclosure and talking about some options for her too. She was afraid. She said, she actually, this is interesting too, she said she
came close to disclosing this to a worker down here somewhere, an agency worker. And as soon as she was just about to say it, and she said, "You know even though the person didn't know what I was going to say, the look on my face must have looked like I was about to lay something really heavy on this person and immediately, that person's body language was, she backed off. She said, "I hadn't even said what I was going to say but she must have seen my face and immediately her reaction was to back away from me." Where she said, “when I disclosed to you, you actually came forward." (Participant F4)

Participants who thought about letting the survivor lead were also concerned with validating and trusting the survivor’s choices, as demonstrated by this quote:

She has every ability to make her own decisions about disclosing pregnancy and things like that to her family and so she said she didn't want me to talk to them about that so that, you know, that was something I had to respect. (Participant F10)

Participants reassured the survivor about confidentiality and control in the process, connected her/him to resources, provided education, and wanted the survivor to know how thankful, privileged and honoured they felt. Further, in terms of following the survivors’ leads, the participants talked about the importance of identifying the issues the survivor wanted to address, and listening to and supporting the survivors’ requests.

But she wanted to call the guy ’cause she had his number. She wanted to call him and like, meet with him and basically tell him how, I guess, how it had hurt her. And she actually did end up doing that about a month later and I went with her to do that. (Participant P14)

Participants with thoughts about letting the survivor lead reported saying they were sorry, the assault should not have happened, and that it was not the survivor’s fault, and others communicated not providing education or saying it was not her/his fault as it did not seem appropriate, as shown in the following quote:

And so she's listing all these really negative affirmations that she'd been telling herself that made her believe that she deserved it. And basically she'd been jumped from behind like from somebody that she'd seen and raped, not long ago, a few months ago. And so I centered very much around hearing her feedback about her level of self-awareness and her worth as a human being. 'Cause that's,
you know, that's where she's at. That was where she's at and I felt was the most like it wouldn't have done—I don't think it would have done any good if—it would have severed the relationship and it would have totally wrecked the moment if, at that time, I'd been like, "So have you been tested? And launched into the --it was never your fault and like if I'd gone into that all the stuff that I've been trained to do as a like, first responder, like, hearing things for the first time. It wouldn't have a positive outcome I think. Just letting her process on her own, at her own speed, at her own-kind of as she was. (Participant F3)

One participant talked explicitly about taking the lead. This person reported thinking the survivor should report to police and then asked if s/he wanted to report and expressed she had some responsibility for the safety of others.

5.3.2.3.1.4 Thought about the Survivor’s Needs

Participants described thinking about the survivor’s needs and these thoughts guided their responses. Although letting the survivor lead may include thinking about the survivor’s needs, these were coded as separate categories. When participants described doing something purely because it was allowing the survivor to do what they were doing or supporting their requests regardless of what the participant felt might have been useful, thoughts about following the survivor’s lead was the code used. When the participant focused on their own perspective of what the survivor might need, this was the code that was used.

Participants reported that they connected to their personal emotions and genuinely and intentionally expressed them, as they believed this would benefit the survivor. These participants also desired to support as best as possible, by doing things such as keeping focus on the survivor, and purposely not pressing for details. One person indicated the importance of attuning to the survivor as a whole person and her/his responses in order to provide support that fit for the survivor:
I could be wrong but I try not to think of myself as reacting all over the place depending on different things that people tell me, but I probably do. We probably all do, but I try to sort of, you know, offer it at a different level so to speak so that, you offer, you're responding to the whole person. Always trying to think about how it fits in understanding who the person is. And what they need, what they need from me working within that relationship and experience at any given time. So, in other words, sorry, I'm still putting it together. So what I know about her and what her experiences are: so she has parents who are sort of critical and rigid and not the most approachable. So, you know, when she's telling me about having been assaulted, having this terrible experience, and really she felt there was no one available to her. So a lot of what I feel that I'm doing is just sort of putting together all these pieces of who she is and, more like, this is sort of like another episode in a long series of gradual traumas that she's experienced in the context of her attachments and relationships and development for her that was particularly awful. This was a lot about stuff that she's been dealing with, all stuff that you take into account. (Participant F15)

In order to respond to the survivors’ needs participants described compartmentalizing their own emotions to model grounding, containment and remaining present to witness the survivor.

I was trying to ground. So when I was thinking I was trying to be very conscious of how I was sitting and the expressions on my face. And then giving deep breathing. I often people do deep breathing as well and I'll do it with them. But I'm also pushing my feet into the ground just making sure that I was really grounded around that. And trying not to talk a lot. So I sometimes—it feels like I could be chasing someone. I was trying to be very conscious of not trying to throw out tons of different things for her. But just kind of feeling. And I think most of that franticness was kind of like before each session. Like, "Oh, what can I do today during the session that might be helpful or that she may be able to take home and practice?" (Participant F11)

Participants who reported thinking about the survivors’ needs provided education and told the survivor it was not her/his fault while others felt these responses would be distancing so did not provide them.

So first I was just listening to her, not really like saying anything. But I started to think, you know, how to respond to her and, you know, like for me, I really, really wanted to say, ‘It's not your fault’, you know, like stop, stop, stop, no. But, you know, when you're blaming yourself that kind of words don't really—and I knew that so I was trying to find a way to synchronize my feelings with her at first and then try to open up all the words to think about the incident. (Participant P6)
Well, I was thinking a little bit more about the, you know, struggle. She came to understand that this may be something that she had provoked or somehow encouraged and I felt that it's probably very important for me to take some kind of stand regarding that. And that it may be hard for her expressing it to me and that's why I was so polite, and testing out whether that's an appropriate way to think about it or not. So I felt, at the time, it was probably pretty important for me, given the idea, that I didn't really feel that it was appropriate way to think about it. (Participant F15)

One difficulty with this category was that participants’ perceptions of what the survivors needed might have been in line with the survivors’ ideas or might not have been. When someone who heard a disclosure thought about what the survivor needed, power differentials could have resulted with the possible consequence of the hearers imposing their ideas on the survivors. As one participant stated:

I think we do a lot of things that we're not trying to be harmful but we can be. Like with the, "I'm not blaming you but, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah." And sometimes I just get really, depending on how the conversation's going, but I just want to be like, "I don't care what you think. This is what I know from talking to people and so saying things like "but blah, blah, blah," they feel blamed whether you're trying to blame them or not. And so that's what I think. (Participant F11)

Some participants reported differences in their responses when compared to a list of things that are often suggested to supporters:

I wanted to figure out who it was and like, I wanted her to like, help her solve what happened. But like, I think that seemed like it could be what she wanted and I think that was like my logical personality coming out and how I dealt with it. I think it was like really personal. Oh yeah. "Try not to press for more details." I definitely did that and that's probably not good. I probably think it sounds like I tried to press for more details but I didn't. I didn't like, ask like, I wasn't like, oh, like, what was the colour of his hair? Like it wasn't like that but I think it was like, she wanted to share the information and like, I got the impression she wanted to come up with like an explanation as well so I was trying to help her. (Participant P16)
5.3.2.3.1.5 Triggered Thoughts of Personal Sexual Assault

Participants talked about how hearing the disclosure triggered thoughts of a sexual assault they had experienced or another assault they had heard during disclosure from a different person. One participant noted the importance of this in how we respond to disclosures:

The tough part is the people who are being disclosed to may have experiences that are unresolved for them. Maybe they-we shouldn't assume that everyone who's being disclosed to, has a friend or family member who has had an absence of this kind of experience themselves or some other kind of traumatic experience. So that may be what's sort of shutting them down from being, you know, an optimal responder, more than, say, lack of knowledge or education. It might be that they can't go there for themselves. (Participant F15)

The personal experience of sexual assault was described in relation to both positive and negative responses to the disclosure. In terms of positive responses, participants talked about their personal assault allowing them to relate to the survivors’ experiences, have knowledge about victim-blaming that informed responses, find it easier to listen, and disclose their own experience with the purpose of connecting sexual assault to a societal problem. This shared experience led to a shared worldview and high levels of support. In speaking of her own experience of sexual assault, one supporter commented:

I think it made me relate to the kind of confusion you feel afterwards, and you don't know how to define it. And the hesitation you feel to go to someone and say "this happened to me." Because it's such a dramatic statement, and it's so… like, you're so worried about it being not quite true. You don't want to make that huge claim to that kind of hurt without being absolutely sure. And at the same time, you never think that sort of thing could possibly happen to, like your friends, much less yourself. And so I feel like, in that way, I really, really related to her. And like that confusion and the difficulty processing it, and just being like unsure and scared. And also the need to normalize it, like she told me she was having, she had a lot of sex afterwards, to normalize what had happened to her. And, I totally related to that too, and how that can confuse you in regards to sex and what you, what's normal in sex and what's healthy in sex and what you should, how you
should be in regards to sex. At the same time, I didn't relate to the violence and the anonymity of the person who did it to her. And the disorientation she had in the moment, or like the amount of hurt after, like physical damage that she sustained afterwards, that didn't happen to me. And, so that made me feel like equating my experience with hers was truly trivializing her experience. And, I didn't want to do that, I didn't want to connect the two. (Participant P2)

However, negative responses were also described as relating to personal assaults, including feeling overwhelmed and withdrawing, and comparing the experiences of assault.

I was just kind of watching and I was silent. I wish I was not. I wanted to support her. I wanted to be as emotionally helpful as the other friend but I was not…. I could have done more. I know I could have done more because I've been through the same thing. But, I don't know, I just, I didn't want to go that emotional distance, just because it might, it sounds very, very selfish. I didn't want it to trigger other things of mine. (Participant P13)

Personal assault experiences were also described as being reinforcing for the survivor’s maladaptive coping and cognitive distortions. One participant explicitly stated that s/he wanted the survivor to do what s/he did for personal comfort and validation. It seems that where a supporter is in their recovery process may be important in understanding how this can relate to their responses to disclosures, as demonstrated by the following comments:

I think there was definitely an element of like-I wanted her to deal with it the same way that I was dealing with it because it was still so fresh for me. Now I would deal with it completely differently but, at the time, it was like this, I don't know, I just wanted someone to be doing the same thing as me. It was, that's what I mean by it being somewhat selfish. It was like, I don't think I was really in a very good place to be helping someone else, you know. And so a lot of the kind of things that I sort of, [was] kind of wanting her to do were not coming from as genuine a place as they would if I was not so upset myself I think. (Participant P14)
Participants reported processing their own experiences through the disclosures by doing such things as asking questions to increase their own understanding and sharing the disclosures with others to help them feel validated:

I never told her about like some of the things but like my best friend was really, really judgmental of what happened to me and she was kind of like, you have to look at the consequences of what you did. She's totally changed her stance now but I think part of me wanted to prove to her that I was holding myself responsible and that I knew that it was my fault. Like, it was really weird, but I just really like, I didn't want to lose her as a friend, and so I had told her about what [happened] to my friend, which I shouldn't have done. And then I had said, because my friend continued to go out and party and do all these things after this had happened. And she was still having like, really bad anxiety and then she would come to my house in the morning bawling just because she just felt weird or something. Not that anything more had happened. But at that point, I was kind of like, well, you should just stop going out for a while. But I didn't say that, but I was just like, why are you still going out? Like, why are you still doing all this? And so I would talk to my friend about that and she was like, ‘Oh, what is she thinking?’ And I guess it was kind of this weird cathartic thing for me to be relating to my friend. I guess it was like this weird thing where it was almost like I was trying to make up for what had happened. Like, for letting her down. I felt like I had let her down. And so I was using my friend's experience to almost be like, well, look what she's doing wrong. I'm not doing that. You know, like, it's this weird catharsis, which now, like, looking back. I'm like that was weird. But I mean, at the time I was so, like, I don't know. I was just like messed up for like a long time and just like, weird. (Participant P14)

Participants who felt triggered by the disclosure reported seeking supervision and debriefing:

The one thing that I feel when I'm hearing disclosures, part of my debriefing, is usually comparing my own experiences with sexual violence to what I've heard. And it's obviously really inappropriate to do that with a client. It would be like, “Well, when that happened to me, this is what...". Obviously, I don't go there, but that is an important part of debriefing for me…. I think it's a negative triggering experience. Like, I guess I wish that somebody, that I had somebody to disclose to. I think is what is probably going on. Whereas, yeah, it took me months and months to be able to find someone to tell so I could see the value so strongly in the disclosure regardless of the outcome. That I guess it just reminds me of how sad I was when I didn't have someone to tell. (Participant F3)
5.3.2.3.2 Emotions

Emotions experienced by participants that they perceived as being related to how they responded to the survivors included: (1) feelings of anger or frustration directed towards the survivor; (2) feelings of anger, frustration, upset, or fear related to things other than the survivor; (3) feelings of being shocked, overwhelmed, uncertain, detached, or confused; (4) empathy; and (5) positive emotions.

5.3.2.3.2.1 Feelings of Anger or Frustration Directed Towards the Survivor

When feelings of anger or frustrated were experienced in relation to the survivor, participants reported that they behaved more carefully after the disclosure, and they described communicating the endorsement of sexual assault myths and victim-blaming.

This is illustrated by a supporter in the following quote:

It made me maybe a little, I think, irritable of kind of like ‘Oh, it's just, whatever, it's not a big deal’, kind of thing. And maybe in hindsight I probably shouldn't have done that but I kind of blew it off that night when she told me. I kind of blew it off. Even though I was kind of upset with her and I was, like you know, ‘it’s the wrong time and place’. Like I really didn't want to discuss it further…. Even now, the more I think about it, I probably should have done something differently 'cause I kind of blew it off really fast. I was like, ‘Oh, you know, it's not a big deal. And, you know, it's both your fault and I know it's not like you're the first person for it to happen to and you won't be the last.’ Like I kind of blew it off really quickly and so she just kind of like dropped it. (Participant P7)

Others reported having conflicting thoughts about survivors engaging in risky behaviour while acknowledging that the perpetrator was accountable for the assault. One person talked about trying not to communicate blame and trying not to judge, but that this may not have been successful:

I thought I'd been careful not to show that and really like, I don't know, you know, I was trying not to judge. It's very hard but, you know, you're human. I feel like there was a little part of me that went like, you know, it's not your fault. This is a horrible thing that happened to you and you know, you're definitely the victim here. But I really wish you would be safer and be more careful because, in terms
of like, you know, how society works right now. You know, you need to do a lot of educating of, like, you know, men out there to not, you know, rape. Until society changes how do we keep safe and we need to keep safe. So, I'm sure, yeah, I think there was a little piece of me that was really kind of maybe just a little frustrated too because I was just, it was, I think it was just because it was on top of my knowledge of his using and things like that. And even though we like totally like take a harm reduction approach to substance use and things like that and we never say, "Stop doing it.".... But, yeah, I'm sure there was, yeah, a little bit of disappointment and frustration of like that situation. Like of, you know, how like, yeah, 'cause it was connected to, at that point, a really low point that he was going through. (Participant F12)

One participant stated that the intensity of emotions experienced related to her/his personal well-being at the time of the disclosure.

5.3.2.3.2.2 Anger, Frustration, Upset, Fear Not Directed At Survivor

Participants who reported experiencing anger, frustration, upset, and fear not directed at the survivor talked about how they related to having a connection with the survivor, urges to rescue and control the survivor, and communicating these emotions to the survivor. Supporters talked about trying to manage their emotions and how they were communicated, and that they wanted to show caring but not overwhelm or distract from the survivor:

I probably expressed anger around ‘you guys didn't have the right to do this’. And likely, I'm usually pretty cautious around what I say because sometimes the person, the survivor, likes the person who hurt them or whatnot so I try not to make a lot of (inaudible) around the offenders and of course I don't want to put my own interpretation. That's usually, but when she would say something like, ‘These guys are fucking assholes’, I would say yeah and I would agree with her. Um, just trying to validate her anger and also and I was really angry so I think it provided me the space to be a little upset and to express that without pushing my thoughts and feelings onto her. (Participant F11)

Urges to rescue and control for participants were communicated in a variety of ways. Participants increased their involvement and controlled the interaction by directing the survivor about what to do and expressing they had difficulty stepping back.
Participants reporting a desire to rescue described responding in ways that shifted the focus away from the survivor. Participants described controlling the interactions by providing education to create distance. The focus of the disclosure was directed away from the survivor by asking questions that were often about the perpetrator, and by threatening the perpetrator or expressing anger at others. The urge to rescue is described by the following participant:

Maybe because I was-had like a heightened sort of emotion or anger at that time. And I was just like, that part of my brain was like, you have to ask her every single question that you can because this, you know, like, seal this information, like I said before. And then, you know, so my thoughts about like her capabilities was kind of out the window at that point and I don't know. (Participant F10)

Participants reported that when they felt emotional, the expression of these emotions may have detracted from listening. These responses often served to take the focus off the survivor, as noted by this supporter:

Yeah, I think that anger kind of, for me, it put more focus on the person who assaulted her than on her. I don't think that it did sort of to the extent that it was actually detrimental to my ability to support her. But that definitely, I noticed that I was so angry at the person who assaulted her, and so, so wishing that I could, like make them see what they'd done. Make her see what she had done and like make her understand the severity, and make her feel remorse for what she'd done. And I got a little bit caught up in that, and I feel like that might have taken away from my ability to really understand what my partner was going through…. Oh, she did actually, during the first time that we talked, she did actually outright ask me, if I was angry at [the perpetrator]. And like, she's like well, what would you do if you saw her, what would you do? And it's like "well, I'd punch her in the face." Which, I probably shouldn't have said, it probably wasn't the most helpful thing, but I mean, she did outright ask me what I would do if I saw her. (Participant P3)

In addition to moving focus away from the survivor, when anger towards the perpetrator was experienced, participants said they provided education about consent and victim-blaming, options, empathy, listening, and checking in.
5.3.2.3.2.3 Shocked, Overwhelmed, Uncertain, Detached or Confused

Participants who talked about being shocked, overwhelmed, uncertain, detached or confused expressed that they became withdrawn in their interactions with the survivors, listened, expressed feeling sorry and checking in with the survivor, had some disbelief, and talked about not knowing how to respond. Participants reported asking questions to try to understand or convince themselves of what happened. This is shown in the conversation with this participant:

'Cause we were all shocked for just at least like, two, three seconds. We were like, ‘oh my God. This happened to you.’ And then we just needed a little bit of back story because if someone says, ‘I was raped.’ How? Like you-like my immediate response is, how did this happen? So...I'm not too sure. I guess I just needed to know the back story. Like, when I process information I just need the surrounding background in order for me to process it completely. I mean, I can't speak to the other two friends, how their processing works but they also were very curious as to ....when? how? I don't exactly remember like what exactly we said on top of each other but I know that all three of us said something like, what? Like, how did this happen? And then after that initial I withdrew. (Participant P13)

Participants who felt uncertain said that they remained silent, modeled coping skills, became transparent, provided resources and information, engaged in supervision, and agreed with the survivor. One supporter said:

And then like I just didn't know how to react to it. And I was kind of worried for her even though we're not like super close friends or anything. And then I just stayed with her for like a while after she told me. And she didn't tell me a lot of the information during that day. She just told me like she got raped. Anything-and I didn't dare to ask any more questions, like, further on to like provoke her emotions even more or something. So I just stayed with her.... I didn't know how to react to it, ‘cause, like, I've never experienced it before. And it's kind of like, awkward. And then I just didn't know how to react and I didn't know what would be [an] appropriate way or what I should say to her to make her feel better or something. And I just told her, like, you know, there's always counselling services that are-I think that's stupid for me to say that right now. (Participant P1)

Finally, one supporter reported reminding her/himself that s/he was doing the best s/he could:
I remember, you're kind of running a mile a minute. Like there's always that moment when, like, is this happening? Like she is actually telling me what I think she's telling me and oh, okay. And then you kind of think back to like to those worksheets they have somewhere stuck in your office about sexual disclosure, can't remember anything, and kind of just go with it. And try-like, you're so afraid to fuck something up or like upset them or ever have the story cut off before they're ready to stop it. And so I think about all those things and understand that we're doing the best we can. (Participant F3)

5.3.2.3.4 Empathy

Participants who talked about empathic reactions described how this understanding led to supportive reactions including offering support and disclosing personal experiences of sexual assault. Supportive reactions that were reported included basic helping skills such as active listening, normalizing feelings, and allowing silences, as illustrated by this participant:

I had been empathetic and that I was, again, focussed on what she was saying and having made eye contact and listening and paying attention and really acknowledging their experience. (Participant F1)

Supportive reactions specifically related to sexual assault included placing blame with the perpetrator and offering resources. One formal support provider suggested that empathy should really be emphasized in her/his responses as empathy informed thoughts about what the survivor needed from the disclosure and the interaction. This participant also said:

I suppose I felt for her. Like I felt how awful it must have been to be holding on to this for so long and to feel that she couldn't tell anyone about it. She could have no support with this whatsoever. But, to me, that's suggesting there must be some deeply conflicted feelings within herself about it. Something else or a more general lack of support…. So, you know, sort of, I was taken with how much she was struggling with it. I don't think I felt sort of anything personally. It was more like I was trying to turn it in a way that she could sort of make use of me and tell me about it. So I could be calm and um, respond in a way that I felt would be helpful to her. (Participant F15)
In describing how feelings of empathy may have related to responses provided to the survivor, a supporter said:

I think just positively probably. I mean, the reason she came to me was obviously because she wanted to talk about it so I think if I'm going to be supportive I need to hear what she's saying. And I really need to listen and that's what she wanted, so I think that was probably very, very, you know, the best thing you can be. Because even if you can't do anything else for somebody, you can listen to them. And, again, talking about things I just think are helpful, no matter what the situation is. And I think also coming from a more positive place or a more caring place, my advice would be more rational and be more concerned with her rather than anybody else. 'Cause if I'm trying to support, I'm only, you know, being supportive of her in that situation. (Participant P15)

5.3.2.3.2.5 Positive Emotions

Participants talked about experiencing positive emotions when they heard the disclosure. Increased awareness of sexual assault and of their own interests was reported. Participants talked about feeling glad the survivor was talking about the experience. They reported peace, hope and gratitude for the healing that had already occurred and for the potential for continued recovery. Supporters reported expressing positive emotions in addition to expressing more difficult emotions to the survivor. One supporter described:

I tried to express, yeah that I felt upset, I felt that was you know unfair and wrong and I felt, yeah...I didn't want her to think I felt like I was pitying her...but I admired her for you know, being able to talk about it now. She seemed really strong and that was kind of what I was trying to express. But I also wanted her to know that I felt sad about what had happened to her. (Participant P10)

5.3.2.4 Research Objective 4 – How to Better Support Supporters

Interview transcripts were analyzed in order to understand how formal support providers might better support people who receive disclosures of sexual assaults from peers. Participants reported what they believed they did know about responding to sexual assault disclosures and where they received their knowledge and training. Reports were also provided about what participants felt was missing from learning and training.
Further, participants described what they felt was important information to provide to people who may be supporters of sexual assault survivors. Some participants reported not having any knowledge or training on how to respond to sexual assault disclosures. For those that reported having received information or training, this information was reportedly mostly from personal experience, purposely sought out, or provided on the job. One participant specifically mentioned that experience was more important than information. For those who had formal academic training, this included counselling certificates, Bachelor’s degrees, Master’s degrees, and Ph.D.s. Participants reported that they relied on general counselling skills to inform their responses to the sexual assault disclosure. All the above information highlights that participants frequently needed to seek out training in these areas as opposed to having them integrated in general curricula. Further, it seemed that interest in these areas led to participants seeking out knowledge. This suggests that people without a specific interest in sexual assault may receive little or no information about sexual assault. Participants did specifically mention that information is available on sexual assault but needs to be sought out, as shown in the following participant’s statement:

As far as I'm concerned, unless you look for it, I don't think that there's anything that's really available to the public on. It’s kind of like something that you would just be exposed to and just, therefore, know. There's nothing like that. Like, the only reason that I know what I know now is from purposely trying to find it. (Participant P14)

Participants specifically stated they felt that their training was in line with their practice. However, it seems more complicated than this. Although participants likely did respond in ways that lined up with their training, in many ways training specific to
responding to sexual assault disclosures was minimal. It seems that, in addition to following this training, many additional responses also occurred.

Through different types of training, participants reported learning skills, gaining knowledge, and understanding theoretical perspectives. Participants reported having basic helping skills such as empathy, active listening, and communication skills. Participants also mentioned gaining knowledge in mental health, available resources and systems. Knowledge specifically related to sexual assault was reported by participants including: definitions, statistics, legalities, and impacts on survivors. Participants also reported having understanding of various theoretical perspectives and practice approaches, including anti-oppressive practice and feminist approaches.

Participants talked about what things they believed were important for people to know to do in responding to disclosures, and what they felt was missing or needed in training. Four main categories were identified as important aspects of support in response to sexual assault disclosures: (1) debriefing and/or clinical supervision; (2) specific things to say or do; (3) knowledge and awareness of resources; and (4) increased education at all stages of schooling. Table 17 presents each code for how supporters can be better supported along with how many peers and formal supporters made statements that were classified in each code.

Table 17. Number of Interview Participants whose Statements were Classified in Each Support Improvement Code

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Codes for How to Better Support Supporters</th>
<th>Formal Supporters</th>
<th>Peers</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Debriefing and/or Clinical Supervision</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specific Things to Say or Do</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge and Awareness of Resources</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increased Education at All Stages of Schooling</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>12</td>
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</table>
5.3.2.4.1 Debriefing and/or Clinical Supervision

Both formal support providers and peers noted that the opportunity to debrief and discuss disclosures was not always possible and was an important need, particularly as every disclosure is different. Debriefing was described as helpful and important in order to review responsibilities, fill in gaps in practice, provide reassurance, and foster confidence. Formal supporters noted that some of the debriefing and supervision they had was helpful in managing disclosures:

Ya, I mean they also did emphasize in our training that, you know, it's also not healthy as a worker to suppress those emotional reactions that you need to have. And that's why sometimes we have sort of the buddy system and so somebody is fine to sort of be your debriefing person. So you debrief with each other and it's a way to not carry that home with you and to not also then be vicariously traumatized by just sort of being asked to shut down your emotions and to just keep that inside. So always making sure that there is someone available to debrief. And I'd had an amazing experience with that because there's always been someone available to me when I've had a particularly difficult disclosure or I'm really sad or I'm really upset to be able to actually talk to someone, whether they're my co-worker or whether a superior. But like actually being able to have that and not have to sort of fumble around to try and find external support. It's all being dealt with internally. (Participant F7)

Other formal supporters shared that managers sometimes do not have clinical training or that the supervision they received was not perceived as adequate or useful:

Participant F12: But we didn't really have great supervision, almost always like, we didn't have supervision. So that was tough. 'Cause definitely what we do, there's a clinical aspect to it and we could have really used some clinical supervision. But we were often left really to just do the best we can. And the role we're in too. Now that I've had different roles...and I've had so much supervision... so I knew how that felt and how helpful that could be and how actually, not just helpful, how needed it is. It really felt like that was a big, empty gap in my work as a youth worker. 'Cause, on top of that, without supervision, like, there's no proper supervision and the nature of the work we did was just such blurred lines. Like, it wasn't like, you know, I'm going to a chair, you're going to a chair, you're a client, I've got this specific role. It was like we're out together in the community, we're having, you know, we're meeting for coffee, we're texting. Like, I've done crisis like kind of management whatever stuff over text and over Facebook messaging. There was so much blurring, like after hours and off-time.
It was I think that really contributed too, to my blurring about the boundaries and stuff.

Interviewer: And so, when you think that it would have been helpful to have more support and better supervision, what, in that, would have been helpful? What did you wish that you had that you didn't in that supervision?

Participant F12: One thing—I think it takes really specific skills to provide supervision and to know how to like, skill-fully debrief and ask the right questions. It would have been nice to have someone who had more of that social worky counselling training too. ‘Cause we were the youth workers so, presumably, we had that background. But nobody else in our agency did. Not our ED or program manager or anything. Like, they had different training, right? They're running budgets and they wrote grants and, you know, they signed your pay cheque. I don't know. You know, they did other stuff, right? They were like, program planners. So there was no one with that type of clinical skill that could debrief with us, and could offer support or other resources or do any skills training or anything like that. Because, truthfully I didn't actually have formal training in youth work. I had some counselling background and I had volunteered and some work experience with youth but nothing this intense.

It was suggested that there be supervision that is somewhat removed from daily practice to increase comfort and safety but is still available onsite. For example,

Participant F2 commented:

I think I feel really supported by (my manager). I think that, you know, we both debrief to each other and that's really helpful for giving me that validation there and then. And just to have that checking and to debrief, I think that is really valuable. I think that sometimes having a clinical supervisor too, taking me through my thoughts. I'm still learning in terms of my role here, what's a part of my probation. I'm doing my thing and I'm still a bit conscious about that right now. But I'm thinking, in general, I think it's really good to have someone that is external from the work that you do as well, who has experience in the field to be able to debrief to as well.

Participants mentioned the importance of organizational support for self-care in the form of breaks and time for reflection and checking in. Although formal support providers identified a need for improved support, it was noted that this can be just as important but more difficult for peers than for professionals. One participant described increased difficulties around debriefing and confidentiality related to having a social support system that was shared with the survivor:
Well I guess one way that it did affect my relationship with someone else is that the way we actually met, me and my partner, was because I was at high school with her younger sister [who] was one of my best friends. Knowing that my best friend's sister was going through this thing that she didn't know, like my friend didn't know, definitely was weird. And, you know, there were times that I wanted to say like "this is what's going on, and I don't know how to handle it, and like, can you help". (Participant P3)

Participants suggested that debriefing while maintaining confidentiality can be accomplished by accessing professionals or debriefing with people who are separate from the survivor and without using identifying details. When possible, it was recommended that this still be discussed with the survivor before engaging in debriefing. One participant described conflict around benefits and drawbacks of debriefing with someone:

Participant P14: And I think that's when these two intertwine. So like, try to maintain confidentiality. And then, forgetting to take care of yourself. I think one of the biggest things that people do, just from my own experience from people around me that I've seen from reacting to me, is it is really hard to deal with someone telling you that they were assaulted. And I think the number one thing that people do to try to make themselves feel better is to tell someone else about that person's assault, to share the burden.

Interviewer: Right. What do you think about that?
Participant P14: I think it's really important to keep it confidential but, at the same time, it's so hard. Like, there needs to be more resources I guess to people who are dealing with being told of someone else's sexual assault. Especially when it's someone that you love because humans are just-I mean I think it's just kind of a nature of the beast. Like, you just want to tell somebody because you feel overburdened.

Interviewer: So you feel like a solution to that would be having more resources that people could access (Participant: Yeah) so that they could process that in a more confidential space.

This same participant went on to describe some possible concerns about debriefing even in a confidential space:

Participant P14: Yeah. Because I'm worried, also if we do-even if you don't tell anybody else, if you're not getting any help for yourself on how to deal with it, I think you end up talking to that person who was assaulted way more than they might need. And bringing up things to them which could lead to- especially because it's so important to not make that person feel guilty about it, but sometimes you might inadvertently do that just by asking these why questions.
Even if you don't think it's their fault. But it's like, you need to be able to talk to someone about those things. But talking to the survivor is not the person to talk to, you know?

Interviewer: Right. So...do you thing that there would be alternatives?
Participant P14: Like I said, this is where it gets so situational because like, I want to say I feel like if it's someone that you really do trust—and not just like the kind of trust where like, I trust them but then, like, tell someone else. I don't know. I guess it really comes down to a problem of there's just not enough dialogue for this kind of thing just in our society at all. And so it all just remains so, I don't know. It's like, who do you talk to? And then, how is that person going to react and how's that going to affect how you react to the person the next time when you see them? Like, if you talk to like, a teacher or like a parent, they might tell you like, oh, well, what were they thinking? And na, na, na. You never know what their reaction is going to be so it just gets so complicated.

One overall message from participants seemed to be that while confidentiality is important, self-care is equally as important in providing good support.

5.3.2.4.2 Specific Things to Say or Do

Participants reported that it would be helpful for people to know specific things to say or do in response to disclosures of sexual assault. One participant, however, said that although there is often a perception that one should say or do certain things in response to a disclosure, it was unlikely to be the case. This participant commented that empathic responsiveness is more important than a specific intervention and one could verbally say little, yet convey much, through relational responsiveness. It was shared that participants felt they knew what not to do but not what might be helpful or what worked for others.

One person noted that it can be difficult to translate theory into helpful practice. Another shared that knowing what to do was not always a realistic solution:

It's like, I think that these are so great but I don't think that it's possible. You know what I mean? Like, if all of these things happened [referencing a list of things a person should do in response to a disclosure], that would be so weird. I agree with all of these and I think it would be great but I think, in an actual situation, I don't think that all these things would happen, even if you thought all of these things really strongly. (Participant P14)
Participants communicated that they wanted to have done something differently but that they did not know what that could be. Participants in the study listed a number of things they felt people should do in response to disclosures. This included meeting survivors where they are at and being person-centered leaving control with the survivor. However, a couple of participants shared that if there was a medical need or need for evidence, they did believe supporters should push for hospital care or reporting as the participant may not be in an emotional place to make the best decisions at the time. For example, one person stated:

I guess though like there's just certain people who like, if you're really close with them, and you know that like, they're that kind of person who's just like terrified of doctors and you know that like their reasons for not going is like…it's just like informed decision. Sometimes I feel like if someone needs like a little bit of just like a reality check…. And I mean it's probably not what they want to hear and, in that moment, it probably isn't the most supportive thing to do. But I feel like…someone's health is actually at risk and that kind of comes with the knowing. And sometimes, if it's someone that you know really well, I guess that's not forcing but being clear about, mostly just as far as just health goes…. Like if my friend had like the next day told me that she was going go sleep with someone else I would be like, you can't do that. You might have something. I wouldn't like go to her house and stop her from leaving but… (Participant P12)

Further, although participants reported feeling it would be important to tell the survivor the assault was not her/his fault, Participant F4 stated:

One thing that sticks out for me is that it's very common in literature to tell people that they didn't deserve it and I find that problematic. There are many survivors that don't believe that so sometimes, when it is said to them, it creates a negative reaction and it's almost like you feel like you have go into defense mode and say 'Well, of course I didn't deserve that. I already knew that. I knew that that's not my fault.' So I think it's a very fine line sometimes and that seems to be something that comes up quite a bit that it's one of the first things you say. You didn't deserve that. It's not your fault. You have to be careful with that. I think you have to wait and see ‘how's this person identifying?’ How they are feeling about the experience before you start pulling out the, "He had no right to do this to you da, da, da da, da da.” Yeah, I think it's in knowing how to respond, and having literature is hugely important, but I think people always have to be reminded that it's much more complex and that as well and that every single person needs to be
treated as a unique individual with their own history and experience. So all those things don't necessarily apply to every survivor.

This same participant also described touch in the context of a disclosure:

Participant F4: The other thing is the literature around touch. You know, quite often it says, yes you should be obviously aware of that. You shouldn't impose touch on another person. You need to go by your instinct, the way that their body language is, and what they're saying to you. But touch is, can be, very positive and very healing especially in a disclosure that's happening. There was a study done by the BC Sexual Assault Service around touch and most people that access their service said that they found touch very positive. Even in a situation where they were sexually assaulted within the last seven days 'cause that's who they access in their service. So I think we need to be careful in our literature around that as well. That, yes, you should be mindful of not touching someone when they've disclosed something like that to you. But at the same time there needs to be some effort and something made so that you can get an idea if that person is or is not comfortable with touch. But, in my experience, most survivors find it very comforting, if they have a rapport with you, to be touched.

Interviewer: And do you have any suggestions as to how someone might be able to… I know you said in your experience you sort of put touch out there and allowed her to kind of make the decision. Any other ideas or suggestions around that to kind of help gauge when that may be appropriate for somebody?

Participant F4: I think taking cues from the person in terms of, are they trying to get physically closer to you. Not necessarily moving their chair right up to you, but even, are they going from sitting back to leaning forward. That is always an indication that they want more closeness with you as well. As they say, if you think that the person wants a hug or would like you to hold their hand, or whatever it is, I always believe in asking their permission, if that's what they want. But I also think be careful in that too. Are you the one that needs the hug and the physical touch or is it what they want? It can be a fine line between that too.

Other participants reported that touch could be important, and one participant specifically said this was something that was seen to them as being less complicated in personal rather than in formal relationships.

Normalizing responses was something described as important by supporters. However, this was typically in reference to normalizing emotions and cognitions. Despite the fact that many interventions focus on the importance of somatic experiences in treating trauma (Courtois & Ford, 2009), only one participant directly mentioned
normalizing physical body issues experienced by sexual assault survivors. There were conflicting opinions about whether or not to define the experience as a trauma with some thinking this was important for healing and others sharing this could be a barrier for people, as demonstrated by the following quotes:

Also, like, we're kind of taught a little bit too around…recognizing symptoms of like, trauma. Well, that was more my new training. Like recognizing symptoms around trauma and trying to normalize that too. 'Cause it's something that people think that they're going crazy and, you know, like, I keep seeing it happen or I can't sleep and so just trying to like, help people understand that that's a very normal reaction. Like, that's what trauma is. That's what PTSD is. It's like, normal reactions to, you know, whatever, extraordinary events. And to know it's not them. To kind of externalize it a little bit. I find that helps a lot of people to rethink things a little bit. It helps with like the self-blame and some of that stigma stuff. (Participant F12)

Participant P7: 'Cause I feel like sometimes when that happens things get blown out of proportion 'cause you're labelling it 'sexual assault'. When people hear that, like as I said, you think of something very crazy, very violent. Like just something ‘wow’ right? And…it becomes...really scary.
Interviewer: So you think that kind of labelling it for somebody if they didn't label it that way it could kind of be a more emotional thing?
Participant P7: Yeah, and then they might get, say, like, ‘Oh, I don't want to do that anymore’. Or I'd say, like you'd want someone just to say, "Oh, let's go talk to someone about it’.
Interviewer: Okay.
Participant P7: Not say, ‘Oh, let's go talk to your sexual assault experience to the counsellor’. You wouldn't want to phrase it that way. You'd say, ‘Oh, let's go talk to someone about it’.
Interviewer: Okay. So you want to kind of address the concerns but kind of....
Participant P7: Not use a label. I think the label is a little scary. Or it's so powerful.

One participant suggested that, either way, what might be important is to express that what happened was not alright. Participants mentioned the importance of believing the survivor while recognizing that people often disbelieve, as exemplified by Participant F12:

I wonder if it could kind of like—that training could be framed around like, if you don't believe. Maybe, as an internal exercise, you know, like, ask yourself why
you don't believe. And try to like unpack that. Like, is it your relationship with this person? Do you know something else about them? Or is it because you're uncomfortable? 'Cause I don't know if we can-it would be helpful to tell people to lie. It's like, even if they say, “I believe you”, and they don't believe you and if it's a friend then I feel like they may just know. You know what I mean?...You're saying the words but you don't actually mean it so I don't know if that's helpful. But I think what is helpful is to let them know how important it is. And how hard it is when people disclose. And how often it's the case they're not believed. And how powerful it is for them to be believed. And how it could help them in their own recovery and stuff. And to try to check in with yourself about why you don't believe. And if you don't believe, maybe not say you don't believe it but maybe, I don't know. It might be just best to not address it at all 'cause it's not going to be helpful to you or your friend.

To address this, the following suggestion was made:

Participant F16: I might change the wording to be “You may not know whether to believe your friend, but take them at their word, at this point, in order to support them the best way you know how. Which is really long and wordy but some (Interviewer: Yeah. That makes sense.) form of that…. Yeah. And then there could be something around-the issue isn't whether you believe your friend. The issue is how you can support them.

Interviewer: Right.

Participant F16: Regardless of your own belief, whether you believe, whether it's true or not is unfortunately, goodness knows, plenty of people disclose things that didn't actually happen…. The issue is that whether it actually did happen or not, they’re distressed and they need some support from somebody and so ....if you're their friend, the issue should be how do you support them.

One person shared that questions about details may help the survivor increase their awareness, but that every person is different and the manner in which questions are asked is important.

Participants mentioned the importance of attuning to the survivor in order to respond in a way that is most helpful for them. Related to that point, participants described the importance of self-awareness and for supporters to be critical about their reactions and responses, stating that people often do things with good intentions that can be harmful. One supporter stated:
Most people don't lie about this. Most people don't even know about it, right? So if (a survivor’s) telling you, it's a really big deal. And I think too, like, as you were saying, there's like all this stuff and I know that we've experienced it and like, in my past work experience, that people, or that, in high schools, they believe a lot of myths around sexual violence. "Well, yeah. If a girl's wearing short skirts, she's asking for it." Like, and they truly, truly believe that and have a really difficult time accepting that. So, like, where are you learning that message? Where did you—who taught you that? Because that's not the way you're born thinking. Where have you heard that before? (Participant F11)

Participants said it was important to recognize limits and what people are capable of providing in terms of support and to have a transparent conversation with the survivor about this. Participants described the sense that they were not doing enough and should be doing more. One formal supporter commented on this feeling:

I was creating this slide for professionals because they, I found a lot of—not backlash but there's a lot of like, on the support side, of what can you do to support but I need to do more. I need to do more. And I was like, "But, you're not counselling." And I'm like, "You just need to support them." So I was creating this slide on the differences between counselling and support and one of my colleagues that I worked with was amazing at like, analogies. Like, that was her thing. So I was talking to her about it and she was like, “Well, if you break your leg, you're not-or if your friend broke her leg, you're not going to put the cast on and fix, reset the bone and do all of that. That's the doctor's job. That's the specialist's job. As a friend, what your job to do is to support them. Which would be you drive them to the grocery store or you do their laundry. You do whatever. Like you're there to support them. You don't do the rehab for them. You don't do that stuff." And so I think that that's really important for people, is you don't have to do, you just have to be. And so, offering advice is considered to be doing. (Participant F11)

Participants shared the importance of connecting survivors with resources that are good and supportive and providing options rather than influencing decisions. One participant reflected that she wished she would have responded differently as she may have influenced the survivor’s decisions:

Participant F1: It's NOT so good.
Interviewer: So what do you think is not so good about it?
Participant F1: I think, well, it's presenting that police are inevitably going to be crappy and they're going to not be helpful and they're going to victim-blame,
which we do see. Like more often than not, we do see that does happen, but I think I would have perhaps wanted to bite my tongue. And if the question was asked of me, you know, what do you think about connecting with the police? Is that going to take a while? You know, I think I would check what I was going to say and say it in a way that wasn't going to deter them from making a possible choice. Not that I feel that I did, but that's a possibility.

Other responses that were reported as important were to consider safety, hold the offender accountable, and focus on resilience. Participants reported the importance of managing emotions, both for the supporter and by offering containment to the survivor, as the following participant described:

I think it was helpful for me to, you know, like, maintain my composure and so maybe that would be something to put on this like, you know, like, try to maintain your composure because if you're, you know, obviously escalated then it might cause escalation for the person that you're working with and that's doing the disclosing. (Participant F10)

Providing education for self and for the survivor was reported as important on a variety of topics, including confidentiality. Although education was considered important in a variety of contexts, participants specifically described cultural differences in understanding sexual violence and how this might relate to different educational needs, as demonstrated by this comment:

Even to, you know, like, learn…what is appropriate and what is not appropriate, what is sexual assault, what is not sexual assault…. Take for example, rape. [It] can happen in family and like, because it is different violence. Like in [my country of origin], we don't talk about these things. It's actually taboo anyway…. For example, jokes. Jokes that we are doing every day, can here be harassment or whatever, like [they] are very normal in my community. I can do something in work space or something can be done to me that I'm not even aware of, that this is sexual harassment because it's very normal in my community. (Participant F13)

5.3.2.4.3 Knowledge and Awareness of Resources

Participants talked about the importance of having knowledge and awareness of resources and other supports. One person mentioned the need to not just know about the
available resources but to actually have familiarity with how accessing the service might be experienced:

And I think, as a service provider, it's important to know which hospitals have sexual assault teams. Things with the police that, you know, they might take your clothes if you want to give a forensic kit. So if you're going to the hospital, maybe you don't have a lot of clothes, maybe it's your only winter jacket. Recognize, speaking as a service provider, letting them know if you're going to do this, which you kind of, you really don't have to, it's completely up to you, but they might take your clothes. Or, you know, they're going to tell you that it's best if you give them your evidence now, but you can actually store it for a year here and like, you can choose to give it to them because there's no limitation. Things like that I think are really important. (Participant F6)

A need for more available supports for supporters was reported and supporters talked about wanting more. One supporter mentioned having an awareness of services for survivors but not being aware that supporters could also access some of these services:

I had heard about like, what do you do when you're assaulted, what do you do, like who can you talk to when you've been assaulted by somebody. But I hadn't thought about talking to someone because I was supporting someone who had been assaulted. So, you know, I just did the web search and read a bunch of articles on "what are the best ways to support a survivor" and stuff like that. But I kind of wish that like I had known that those resources were out there, so that I hadn't of felt so like panicky at first when she told me, and I realized like, this is something that I have to deal with too. It did feel a little bit panicky because I didn't now how I was going to do that. (Participant P3)

Supporters reported accessibility to counsellors and police was an issue, with participants suggesting the use of supportive communities that people can be involved with before and after an assault:

I would probably go to a women's group before I would go to the police just because that way you have the help you need too. Like, if I had known the whole process I wouldn't have done it. There's not a lot of knowledge about the process of reporting and they're terrible with sympathy and not being sensitive to what's going on. So I think, if there was, if I was going to recommend someone, if something had happened, I would probably say... If they were thinking about reporting to the police, I would probably say, well, maybe like, go through a women's group. Like some kind of sexual assault support because they have better-they can kind of inform you more of what that process is going to be like
and also give you like you like immediate emotional support. And then you can
decide if you want to go ahead, and if you do that way you kind of have someone
backing you up to help you through the process, as opposed to just going at it
blindly, alone. But I think, definitely, that seeking support from some kind of
organization or group, like women's group, is probably a better way to go about it.
Just because I feel like, that way, you're kind of offered- there is a range of things
that you can be offered depending on what your needs are, kind of. But, at the
same time, even that can be really hard. (Participant P14)

It seems this could possibly be accomplished by creating more understanding and
compassion about sexual assault in general so that natural supports can be better equipped
to provide supportive reactions. Information about legal processes was noted to be a need,
as well as more discussion between supporters to share knowledge.

Yeah, I think that I was like, at the time of the disclosure, I wish I had known
more about the kinds of resources that are available. And I wish I had known
more about the law and like, what legally qualifies as sexual assault. Because
when she explained what happened to me, she was like, "Yeah, but it wasn't rape." And
I was like OK. And, well, but that doesn't matter, it's still threatening and it's
still violent, and it's still this. And she was like "No, it's not." But, I feel like if I
had had, if I had that training, I would have known better like how to explain to
her, your feelings are valid, this is what happened and like, it's normal that you're
feeling this way and stuff. (Participant P3)

5.3.2.4.4 Increased Education at All Levels of Schooling

Finally, participants reported a need for more education at all stages of schooling.

Although people talked about having helpful on the job training, participants also
reported not having any or very little education as part of the schooling and training that
was not specifically sought out.

Some of the more tangible very specific skills and the way to like conceptualize
sexualized violence and stuff has come from my very specific training. And like,
both my training and my practicum. But, so I've got most of the tangible kind of
skills is from that but then I did a counselling program. That was really, really
helpful. Because you don't get really, in our [academic] program, you know, we
don't get taught those skills, but that was really helpful. Like, I found that really,
really helpful, already having that before getting the specialized sexual assault
training... I did like a two-year like, a certificate program... So that was a really
good program actually. 'Cause it's taught by actual counsellors working in the
field right now and they're night courses so it feels really actually way more, in terms of clinical practice stuff, it's way more valuable than what I've done in a year. And you can put that in your paper…the importance of that. I find, there's not enough clinical training [in the academic program I participated in] at all. Well, there's none. (Participant F12)

It seems when education did occur, it was often just once, and participants suggested that this education needs to be ongoing across time, and a regular part of curricula. This education also was reported as focusing on sexual assault in general, as well as how to support a survivor. These points are illustrated by these participants:

Participant P10: Yeah well I was, like I said, I was pretty new. Like just recently in university so my high school didn't have any kind of education on that topic…. So yeah, probably just education could have done a better job preparing me and everybody for things like that.

Interview: And do you think, can you think of specific things that you think would have been important?

Participant P10: Well just every year we'd have the sex-ed talk. And, but for some reason, you know sexual assault, if it was mentioned was always just like a minor foot-note of that. And they're already coming to the school, and you know, sequestering the class, separating girls and the boys for different things, so I'm kind of like, they could talk to us.

This idea was supported by a formal supporter who described her thoughts about education:

Well, if we're going to talk about prevention, let's start talking to young kids about not being sexually intrusive. Or training men, and women as well, but, you know, when we look at, like, looking at the offender, they're really the only ones that can stop it. And so, if we're going to prevent we better start it there. But I really think we need to start with kids and making sure that kids are aware of what's okay and what's not okay and that they're being...that those lessons continue throughout their lives. So it's not like, "Hey, don't sexually assault." And then that's all they ever-they don't hear anything else. I think it needs to be really on-going conversations. 'Cause I think our society really does support sexually aggressive behaviour. (Participant F11)

This participant went on to talk about education across professions:

I think, yes, in terms of making it accessible for other people. I say that because I find it can be very social worky. And I think a lot of the work that's being done in the sexual trauma field is kind of like off in a corner. Like it's very like in its own
niche. We have our own language. We don't really have a lot of tolerance for people who oppose our views. So when a police officer comes in and says- or if I'm sitting in court and the defense lawyer says, "Well, why didn't you just leave?", I don't have a lot of patience with that. And so I don't, we don't have a lot of tolerance for other points of view, so I felt as if I was- take self-defence courses. I think that that can lead to blaming…. So we have this little niche. Sexual violence is a very main stream issue. But the way that we get our (inaudible) to share our messages are not being shared in a very main stream way. So we make it very social worky. We make it not very cool or accessible for people when it's happening to so many people out there but the messages aren't necessarily getting out to everyone. I think also what's missing is that these messages are not being shared with different groups of people-different professionals. I mean teachers should definitely know how to receive disclosures. I think the police need to be given these same messages and like I just think that these messages, doctors, just lots of different people. It's not being shared in a way that's accessible for people. And I think that part of the reason is because we're not allowing them to have a say in it. (Participant F11)

However, education across professions was not identified as the only issue.

Education within the support professions was also raised as an issue. Participants said that due to the statistics around sexual assault all formal support providers should expect and feel confident responding to disclosures regardless of their practice area:

So I think the training is absolutely necessary and even more so, specific training. If you're a service provider who's going to provide service to anyone, specifically women or trans folks, or anyone who faces sexual assault, which is 1 in 3, then training like this should be mandatory. (Participant F6)

Agency policies on disclosures and organizational philosophies were seen as helpful for guiding responses. One participant reported that training tends to be focused on anti-violence or clinical responses and this participant felt training needed to cover both these areas:

And I think it's a balance. Because I think it's like it can be either too clini-like you can go too clinical or too like anti–violence based, and I think it needs to be both. (Participant F8)

Suggested topics for education included the definition of sexual assault and consent, understanding of the law, encouraging disclosures, understanding empathy,
combating myths and victim-blaming, possible effects of sexual assault, how to facilitate healing, and rape culture. Gaps in training were noted for formal support providers. Participants indicated more training was needed about mental health and the agency of people with certain diagnoses to make personal choices. The importance of training in areas such as responding to historical disclosures, male survivors, child sexual abuse, addictions, violence and trauma specifically, and legal aspects of disclosures were also reported as important.

I don't have a lot of experience with people who actually press charges. So I don't feel confident suggesting that 'cause I can't tell the person, "Well, if we call the cops now this is what will happen." So I don't feel like I can present them with a well-informed choice. So, yeah that's, I mean that's a thing that I feel is lacking for me, to understand that court process. That's a big one. And there's a lot in there. If we call the police, do we lose control? Are they going to press charges or would you have the option of pressing charges? There's a whole lot of information wrapped in there that's pretty murky for me. (Participant F3)

Further, more training was seen as needed to assist with grounding, managing emotions and counter-transference. There were conflicting opinions expressed about educating about avoiding risky behaviours, with some thinking this is important and others stating that prevention messages are not helpful.

I guess for me, because I'm very bad at confrontation, it's just better to educate people, like what sort of opportunities can make others assault you, you know? Like don't get into those situations that open opportunities for others to assault you. (Participant P8)

Prevention messages are not good. And not like, prevention type messages, 'cause I think that those are very blaming. Things like, rape whistles…. And they keep like, for how long have we been telling people, especially women, you need to be responsible for preventing this from happening. But it's not stopping it so obviously we need to look at who's actually doing this. Not-ahh, it just makes me mad. (Participant F11)
5.4 SUMMARY

Two studies were undertaken in this research. The first study was an online survey of undergraduates who heard a disclosure of sexual assault from a peer. Participants with varying relationship characteristics were compared in terms of the emotional distress they reported experiencing, and the positive and negative reactions they reported providing to survivors. The relationship characteristics included differing types of relationships, perceived closeness within relationships, and varying duration of relationships with survivors. When comparing strangers/acquaintances, casual friends and close friends, no statistically significant differences in emotional distress and the negative reactions they described providing to survivors were found. Although no significant differences were found between acquaintances and casual or close friends in their positive reactions to survivors, close friends reported responding to survivors with significantly more positive reactions than did casual friends. The length of survivor-participant relationship and the participants’ perceived closeness to the survivor did not significantly predict negative reactions provided to survivors. Relationship length, however, was a significant predictor of emotional distress reported by the participant. Additionally, participants’ perceived closeness to survivors significantly predicted the positive reactions they reported providing to survivors.

The second study employed qualitative content analysis, informed by applied symbolic interactionism, to analyze interviews with both students and formal support providers about their experiences of hearing disclosures of sexual assault. The associations between relationships, context, and the participants’ personal responses to hearing the disclosure and their responses to the disclosure were examined. Participants
were also asked about their ideas of how to better support people who hear disclosures of violence.

In examining the relationship along with responses of participants to the disclosure, six themes were identified: (1) the level of perceived closeness to and knowledge of the survivor; (2) the participants’ relationships with the perpetrators; (3) the presence of others at the time of the disclosure; (4) participant identification with the survivors; (5) the boundaries in the relationship; and (6) that the relationship did not relate to the response. Analyses revealed that participants felt six contextual elements related to their response to the disclosures: (1) participant characteristics; (2) experience with disclosure; (3) survivor characteristics; (4) survivors’ reaction; (5) assault characteristics; and (6) rape culture. In terms of how participants reported being personally affected by the disclosure, five categories of thoughts that affected responses were identified, including thoughts about: safety; victim-blaming; letting the survivor lead; the survivor’s needs; and triggered thoughts of personal sexual assault experience. Further, participants reported emotional reactions to hearing the disclosure that related to how they responded: (1) anger, frustration, upset, or fear related to things other than the survivor; (2) anger or frustration directed towards the survivor; (3) feelings of being shocked, overwhelmed, uncertain, detached, or confused; (4) empathy; and (5) positive emotions. Finally, categories identified as important in supporting people who receive disclosures of sexual assault were: (1) debriefing and/or clinical supervision; (2) specific things to say or do; (3) knowledge and awareness of resources; and (4) increased education at all stages of schooling.
CHAPTER SIX: DISCUSSION

6.1 MAJOR CONTRIBUTIONS

The overall purpose of conducting the two studies in this dissertation was to further understanding of how relationships shape responses to disclosures of sexual assault. Study 1 examined associations between relationship characteristics, emotional distress, and social reactions provided to the survivors of sexual assault. Expanding on Study 1, Study 2 used interviews to investigate formal and informal supporters’ perceptions of relationship dynamics during disclosures, the context of disclosures, and ideas about how best to support the people hearing disclosures. There are several important contributions that emerged from these two studies. First, this dissertation was the first investigation of a range of relationship characteristics and their associations with supporters’ perceptions of their responses to sexual assault disclosures. Some people met the survivors at the time of the disclosures while others had known the survivors for several years. Findings demonstrate that the relationship matters. Second, a novel contribution of this dissertation was to explore how supporters in various relationships with survivors perceived their thoughts and emotions to be related to the reactions they provided to survivors. Some emotions and cognitions were consistently related to positive reactions, some were consistently related to negative reactions, and others were related to positive and negative reactions provided to survivors based on other factors. Third, this research contributes to the literature about how people who hear disclosures might better support survivors. Debriefing, having knowledge of resources, and education across ages and professions were identified by participants as important to the reactions provided to survivors. I discuss these contributions in greater detail below.
6.1.1 Relationship

This dissertation shows that survivor-supporter relationships make a difference in the social reactions sexual assault survivors receive after they disclose. This is important as prior research has shown that social reactions relate to the survivors’ healing processes (Ahrens, 2006; Hassija & Gray, 2012; Orchowski et al., 2013; Ullman, 2014, 1999, 1996c; Ullman & Filipas, 2001; Ullman & Najdowski, 2011; Ullman & Peter-Hagene, 2014). Both studies, consistent with prior research (Ahrens & Campbell, 2000), demonstrated that when supporters perceived a close relationship with survivors they provided positive reactions to survivors. However, in contrast with findings from Ahrens and Campbell (2000), results from Study 1 did not reveal a significant association between relationship length and reactions provided to survivors. This discrepancy might be because of aspects of the disclosure interactions that were examined. Ahrens and Campbell (2000) focused on positive changes in the survivor-supporter relationship (e.g., thinking more positively about the relationship), whereas the present study examined positive reactions provided to survivors (e.g., providing comfort). Relationship length was not associated with reactions to survivors in this study but was found to be important to supporters’ personal responses to disclosures.

Study 1 found that participants in longer relationships with survivors reported more emotional distress after hearing disclosures than those in shorter relationships. Study 2 expanded on Study 1. Overall, findings from Study 2 showed that when supporters described relationship qualities suggesting closeness and intimacy they felt confident in their reactions, engaged in reciprocal disclosure, expressed strong emotions, and engaged in controlling behaviours. Reciprocal disclosure in close relationships is
consistent with prior research (Ahrens & Campbell, 2000) and Jourard’s (1971) theory of self-disclosure. However, contrary to findings from Study 1 and prior research (Ahrens & Campbell, 2000), Study 2 found an association between negative reactions (i.e., controlling behaviours) and aspects of relationship quality. This difference might be related to how negative reactions were conceptualized across the studies. Ahrens and Campbell (2000) did not look at controlling behaviours in their analyses. Although Study 1 did ask about controlling behaviours, these behaviours were considered in addition to many other negative responses, such as blaming the survivor. The method of Study 2 permitted elaborated descriptions of disclosures. It might be that controlling reactions are related to relationship characteristics, but other negative reactions are not. Perhaps people become controlling in interactions with survivors when they are invested in the relationship, but other negative reactions such as blaming are more about beliefs about sexual violence and comfort with disclosures. Although indicators of close relationships were mostly related to positive reactions in this dissertation, relationship qualities were also associated with increased emotional distress and controlling behaviours.

Increases in emotional distress for some supporters could be related to controlling behaviours towards the survivors. Emotional distress was higher for supporters who were in longer relationships with survivors. Longer relationships would allow more opportunities for interactions than shorter relationships. It is possible that some supporters who had ongoing interactions with the survivor heard more details of the sexual assault over time. This repetition of details could be related to experiences of secondary traumatic stress (Figley, 1995; Hesse, 2002; McCann & Pearlman, 1990; Pearlman & Mac Ian, 1995; Pearlman & Saakvitne, 1995), in which, among other things,
these supporters could experience heightened physiological arousal (American Psychiatric Association [APA], 2013). Symptoms of arousal, such as feelings of anxiety and hypervigilance, could potentially lead to attempts to control the disclosure and the survivors’ behaviours. This could be because research has shown that increases in perceptions of control are related to decreases in distress (Frazier, Berman, & Steward, 2001). When a supporter experiences distress they may attempt to gain control in order to decrease their distress. The possible relationship between emotional distress and controlling behaviours could explain the occurrence of negative reactions to disclosures in close relationships. Further investigation is needed into this possibility, but prior research does support the association between negative experiences of disclosures, including emotional distress, and desires to act revenge on the perpetrators (Ahrens & Campbell, 2000). This dissertation also found that feelings of anger and upset were reported with urges to control. Controlling that comes from a place of emotional distress might not be perceived by survivors as detrimental. Prior research has shown that control related to concern for the survivor rather than thoughts the survivor is incapable can be perceived by survivors as helpful (Ahrens et al., 2009).

Overall, the findings in this dissertation support that the survivor-supporter relationship matters and might determine how responses to disclosures are experienced. The current research examined supporters’ perspectives. Prior research with survivors suggests that survivors, too, believe that characteristics of their relationships with supporters can change how responses are understood. Ahrens and colleagues (2009) reported that survivors perceived reactions to their disclosures more positively if they felt the person hearing the disclosure was invested in the survivor’s safety and healing.
Ahrens and colleagues (2009) also reported that most responses provided by friends were seen as positive, and that negative responses from friends were seen as less harmful than negative responses from other sources. Feelings of closeness and knowledge in the relationship might account for friends’ responses being perceived more positively than others’ responses. However, it is important to note that some participants felt they would respond the same regardless of their relationship with the survivor, and some reports about blaming survivors occurred across relationship characteristics. Even in close relationships a diversity of responses can occur. It was possible to capture this diversity of responses in the present study, adding to current understanding. Identifying these varying responses was possible as participants were able to share detailed information about how their varied relationships were perceived in relation to a variety of social reactions, both positive and negative.

6.1.2 Supporters’ Emotional and Cognitive Responses to Disclosures

Study 1 demonstrated that some people who hear disclosures of sexual assault from their peers experience emotional distress. Extending on Study 1, participants in Study 2 reported emotional and cognitive responses to hearing disclosures of sexual assault along with the social reactions they provided to survivors. The current study builds on prior research demonstrating that empathy is positive in disclosure interactions (Ahrens & Campbell, 2000). Empathy, positive emotions, such as peace, hopefulness, and gratitude, and thinking consciously about letting the survivors lead, were consistently reported in Study 2 along with positive social reactions to the survivors. Participants reporting these emotional and cognitive experiences described gaining increased awareness of sexual assault, communicating hope, trusting survivors’ choices, assuring
confidentiality and control, and reflecting strengths to survivors. Participants expressed positive emotions along with more challenging emotions such as sadness, which may have served to validate the survivors’ experiences. Prior research has shown the value for survivors of supporters acknowledging the significance of the assault (Ahrens et al., 2009). These findings suggest that facilitating the experiences in supporters of empathy, positive emotions and thoughts to let the survivor lead are likely to improve support to survivors. In addition to providing some insight into positive reactions supporters provide to disclosures, supporters’ personal responses were also related to negative reactions to survivors.

Consistent with past research (Branch & Richards, 2013), participants in Study 2 reported feeling shocked, overwhelmed, uncertain, detached, or confused. These feelings were mentioned with behaviours of withdrawing, disbelief, asking questions to convince themselves of what happened, being transparent, modeling coping, and engaging in supervision, consistent with prior research. These types of reactions have been perceived by survivors as hurtful in prior research (Ahrens et al., 2009). It would therefore be beneficial to find ways of addressing experiences of being shocked, overwhelmed, uncertain, detached, and confused with supporters in order to improve their reactions to survivors.

Some survivors’ experiences were not always related to particular types of reactions. Similar to prior research with both supporters (Ahrens & Campbell, 2000; Ahrens et al., 2009; Banyard et al., 2010; Branch & Richards, 2013; Dunn et al., 1999) and survivors (Ahrens et al., 2009), when personal experiences of sexual assault were described, participants in Study 2 mentioned both positive and negative reactions to
survivors. Positive responses to disclosures reported by participants who had historically been sexually assaulted focused on increased empathy and knowing what responses might be needed. Negative responses included reinforcing maladaptive coping, becoming overwhelmed and withdrawing, and asking questions with the intent of gaining insight into personal experiences. It might be that people who continue to struggle with their own past trauma might be more likely to provide negative reactions. Supporting people in their healing process after a sexual assault is important not only for the survivor, but for people they might support in the future.

Like previous sexual assault experiences, anger and frustration in Study 2 were also related to both positive and negative reactions to survivors. Prior research has reported that supporters experience anger and frustration at the survivors (Ahrens & Campbell, 2000; Banyard et al., 2010; Branch & Richards, 2013; Dunn et al., 1999) as well as anger, frustration and upset feelings not directed towards the survivors (Branch & Richards, 2013). This study expands on current knowledge by demonstrating that anger and frustration relate to different reactions to survivors depending on where these emotions are directed. When not directed at survivors, anger and frustration in Study 2 were reported along with connecting with the survivor, having urges to rescue and control, and moving the focus away from the survivor. When anger, frustration and upset were directed towards the survivors, participants stated they communicated sexual assault myths and victim-blaming and were more careful with their actions in their own lives after the disclosure. It is possible that adherence to rape myths leads to difficult feelings directed towards the survivor.
Anger and frustration may be helpful at times when these emotions are not directed at survivors. However, anger and frustration that were not directed at survivors also was related to some controlling behaviours. Prior research demonstrates that survivors perceived controlling reactions that were motivated by concern as helpful (Ahrens et al., 2009). This same study found that when survivors perceived controlling behaviours were because the supporter did not believe in the survivor capacities the control was seen as hurtful (Ahrens et al., 2009). Control might not always be a negative reaction. This counters previous recommendations that indicate it is better to not share opinions about accessing legal and medical support with survivors (e.g., Alma Mater Society of the University of British Columbia Sexual Assault Support Centre, n.d.; Concordia University Student Services Sexual Assault Resource Centre, n.d.; University of Alberta Sexual Assault Centre, 2015). Although it might be helpful to suggest accessing medical and legal support in a loving and concerned manner, research shows that a small proportion of rapes are reported to campus authorities and police (Fisher et al., 2003). If survivors are encouraged to access legal and health systems, it is important these systems are educated to respond in helpful ways. Positions could be created for social workers to liaise with, and provide training amongst, various systems that provide service to sexual assault survivors.

This dissertation makes a novel contribution by including perspectives from formal and informal support providers with a range of relationships to survivors. The supporters reported their perspectives on what related to their responses providing greater understanding about reasons for varied responses in this study and the extant literature.
Understanding reasons for different responses providing information about ways to work with supporters to change the reactions survivors receive.

### 6.1.3 How to Better Support Supporters

In Study 2, participants were asked how supporters might improve their reactions to disclosures of sexual assault and provide optimal support to survivors. Both informal and formal support providers described the importance of debriefing. Some participants reported having opportunities for useful debriefing and others did not. One participant reflected on the fact that debriefing will reconstruct the disclosure experience and thus change future responses to survivors. The more debriefing that occurs, the greater the potential is for moving away from the survivor’s experience and towards others’ perceptions of the assault. The possibility that debriefing could influence the support provided to survivors suggests that it may be important to debrief with someone who has knowledge and experience in the field of sexual assault. A person who understands how to best support survivors may be in a position to provide debriefing that could positively relate to future interactions with the survivor. Debriefing is important and should occur in a way that supports the supporter but also is done in the best interests of the survivor.

For any supporter, formal or informal, knowledge about sources of formal support is important. Indeed, these different sources are connected. Prior research using qualitative analysis of interviews with sexual assault survivors suggests that experiences with informal supports were related to engagement with formal supports (Fehler-Cabral & Campbell, 2013). The manner in which peers encourage service access is likely important. In the current study, participants talked about the importance of being more forceful in situations involving legal and medical concerns. However, prior research has
shown that it is not common for survivors to access police (Fisher et al., 2003). Participants in Study 2 talked about the importance of detailed knowledge and awareness of resources and increased accessibility to resources. Specifically, participants mentioned the importance of resources for supporters. Knowledge about legal issues and sexual assault in marginalized groups was reported as something lacking, as was improving connections between different support systems such as support workers, counsellors, and police officers. A focus on increasing connections between these different resources might help facilitate a supportive community in which overall support to survivors is improved.

Another way to create a supportive community is through educational efforts. Participants in Study 2 reported the importance of ongoing education about sexual assault and supporting survivors at all stages of schooling. This reinforces recommendations made by Ullman (2010) to train informal supporters at various ages how to respond to sexual assault disclosures. Education is a strategy for prevention. However, messages about how people can protect themselves from sexual assaults were discouraged by formal support providers in the current study. This type of prevention effort should be avoided. It places the responsibility for preventing sexual assaults on survivors rather than holding perpetrators accountable for their actions. Alternative prevention strategies were reported as helpful by participants in Study 2. Participants recommended discouraging assaultive behaviour by targeting potential assailters. This could be achieved by providing education to students in primary and secondary schools about sexually intrusive behaviours and beliefs.
In addition to educational efforts in primary and secondary schools, participants in Study 2 also recommended that education about sexual assault should occur across professions. Participants in the current study reported a lack of specific training about sexual assault during training for counsellors, social workers, and support workers. This paucity of training was reported despite the statistical likelihood of needing to support a survivor in the course of their roles. Ullman (2010) has suggested that education should take place with formal support providers, and should target victim-blaming in the legal culture. This would require the dissemination of information about sexual assault and how to support a survivor across disciplines. To accomplish this, education would need to occur during training and through continuing professional development.

In summary, important recommendations came out of this study about how to improve support that survivors are receiving from informal and formal support sources. A complexity was revealed in understanding responses to disclosures of sexual assault. To effect change in how people respond to disclosures of sexual assault the supporter-survivor relationship, the context in which the disclosure occurs, and how people emotionally and cognitively respond to disclosures must be taken into account. There are important implications of these findings that are discussed below.

6.2 STRENGTHS AND LIMITATIONS

In this research I was interested in how responses to disclosures of sexual assault differed in association with relationship characteristics. Little has been known to date about how people in different relationships respond and what might lead them to respond in different ways. Advertisements for Study 1 described the investigation as examining how students share experiences of violence in peer relationships. By recruiting students in
general rather than advertising specifically for friends of sexual assault survivors, it was possible to recruit a wider range of peer relationships than has been examined in prior research. Findings were consistent with prior research conducted in the U.S. showing that relationship matters in responses to sexual assault disclosures. This is the first Canadian study to examine relationship characteristics in association with responses to sexual assault disclosures. In Study 2, informal and formal support providers were included together in order to further extend the relationship characteristics within this research.

This is the first study to look at the perspectives of peers and counsellors, social workers and support workers together in relation to reactions provided to sexual assault survivors. This study expanded the range of relationship characteristics that have previously been included in examinations of the effect of the relationship on social reactions to survivors of sexual assault.

This study also investigated supporters’ perspectives of how their personal thoughts and emotions were affected by disclosures. Supporters then provided their perceptions of how their thoughts and emotions were related to the reactions they provided to sexual assault survivors. This study was able to explore the personal reactions to disclosures by including supporters themselves as the participants. By interviewing people who have heard disclosures, this research was able to provide insight into how their personal responses related to their social reactions.

This dissertation also contributes to information about how to better support survivors and the people to whom they disclose. Interviews were conducted with counsellors, social workers, and support workers, as well as peers. By gaining
understanding of these supporters’ perspectives, recommendations about how to best support survivors and those who hear disclosures can be made.

Although this dissertation advances knowledge in important ways, some challenges were experienced that may limit how the findings should be interpreted. In Study 1, ANOVA, Welch’s tests and linear regressions were used to enhance understanding of the differences between ‘hearers’ of disclosures. The Emotional Distress Scale of the Impact on Friends measure (Ahrens & Campbell, 2000) was used to assess the emotional reactions of peers after hearing disclosures of sexual assault. Further validity evidence of this measure is important for future research. The Social Reactions Questionnaire (Ullman, 2000) was used to assess positive and negative social reactions to survivors. This measure was developed for use with survivors to assess their perspectives, but was modified for this study to assess the supporters’ perspectives of reactions they provided. Validity evidence for this measure has been examined, but not in depth for the modified version used in this study. Negative social reactions to survivors was a highly skewed variable, and this must be considered when interpreting findings. Further, a power analysis suggested that a sample size of 305 would be required in order to detect a moderate effect size. For this study, 212 participants were included in analyses. Thus, it is necessary to be cognizant of the possible limitations of the sample size and the validity of the measures used and caution must be exercised in interpreting the findings. Advocating with university administrators about the importance of examining sexual assault experiences on campus might create a collaboration that could lead to more available opportunities for accessing students to participate. For instance, university administrators could allow access to a university-wide email listserv or could work with departments to
increase awareness about the study. These collaborations might lead to alternative recruiting methods, such as at orientations or within classrooms.

The sample in the present study was a convenience and snowball sample. Thus, the findings of the online survey cannot be deemed representative of the population of undergraduate students in British Columbia. Future research could include a representative sample of students by contacting a random sample of potential participants from a university roster. The findings from the interviews also might not be transferable across all people hearing disclosures of sexual assault. It might be that people with certain types of experiences relating to sexual assault and sexual assault disclosures self-select for this study while others do not. Demographic and background characteristics were gathered to help illustrate the participants who did self-select for participation. In this study, only a small proportion of participants and survivors were identified as male. The findings from this study may therefore not generalize to disclosures with males. Further, some participants in Study 1 did not meet full inclusion criteria in terms of their age (n=15), relationship with survivor (n=8), or time since the disclosure (n=5) but were included in the analyses due to having met other study criteria. Therefore, caution must be exercised in interpreting the findings.

Many survivors of sexual assault choose not to disclose their experiences and this is even more likely in groups experiencing additional oppression within our society. Ullman (2010) summarizes differences in disclosure between men and women, and members of different races, ethnicities, and cultures. There are reasons to believe other populations, such as immigrant and refugee populations, people identifying as gender queer, and members of the LGBTQ2S communities, would also differ in their
experiences of disclosure (see Ullman, 2010). For instance, Latinas in the U.S. have identified cultural taboos against discussing issues of rape, sex, and abuse (Ahrens, Rios-Mandel, Isas, & del Carmen Lopez, 2010). However, little research examines differences in disclosure reactions based on these characteristics even though some studies have shown high rates of sexual assault in these marginalized groups. Lesbian and bisexual girls as well as gay and bisexual boys, for example, have reported higher rates of sexual assault than heterosexual boys and girls (Saewyc et al., 2006). Males can also experience increased stigma around experiences of sexual assault (Ullman, 2010).

Men, members of the LGBTQ community, and other groups that experience increased stigma around sexual assault may be less likely to disclose sexual assault experiences; however, some disclosures made by survivors identifying with these communities were included in this dissertation. There was diversity in this dissertation in terms of culture, race, gender identity and sexual orientation. Participants in Study 2 did report how these identities related to their responses in the context of how they identified with the survivors or felt concern due to perceptions that survivors would experience increased stigma. Although a variety of experiences were captured in this dissertation, most participants and most survivors were heterosexual, Caucasian women. Responses to the sexual assault experiences of members who identify as male or gender queer might be quite different from responses to women who have been sexually assaulted. Research has demonstrated that men are less likely to disclose sexual assaults (Menard, 2005; Widom, 1997). Barriers to disclosure from men include personal factors such as emotional readiness and shame, relational factors such as fear of repercussions, and sociocultural factors such as acceptance of men to experience and discuss victimization (Sorsoli, Kia-
Keating, & Grossman, 2008). One study demonstrated that men seeking medical treatment for a sexual assault were more likely than women to identify as gay or bisexual, but were less likely than women to belong to a minority ethnic group (Kimerling, Rellini, Kelly, Judson, & Learman, 2002). These authors also reported that men may experience different types of assaults than women and reported men to be less likely to experience anal penetration, less likely to sustain injuries, and less likely to report to police. Further, men may be differently affected by sexual assault, which could relate to differences in disclosure experiences. Kimerling and colleagues (2002) reported male survivors to be more likely to experience psychiatric symptoms, to have a history of a psychiatric disorder, and to have a history of psychiatric hospitalization. Elliot and colleagues (2004), using a stratified random sample of the general U.S. population, also found that men who experienced sexual assault reported more symptoms than women who had experienced sexual assault. In their study, male survivors reported more anxious arousal, anger/irritability, defensive avoidance, dissociation, sexual concerns, dysfunctional sexual behaviour, impaired self-reference, and tension reduction behaviour in comparison to female survivors. Future research could purposively target underrepresented perspectives, such as the perspectives of men, those belonging to racial minority groups or the LGBTQ community, for instance. This would ensure these voices are included in examinations of sexual assault disclosures.

There may be differences between the disclosure experiences of those who volunteer to participate in research about sexual assault, versus those who do not; this difference will not be captured in this project. People who very strongly adhere to the belief that sexual assault is a victim’s fault or hold beliefs that people do different things
to invite unwanted sexual contact are unlikely to have participated in this study. However, findings showed that participants did endorse victim-blaming responses. This suggests that the current research did gather a variety of responses, including ones that may not be considered socially desirable.

Challenges were experienced in recruiting participants for Study 1. Some post-secondary institutions did express concerns about asking their students about sexual assault disclosures. One institution indicated that their students had particular vulnerabilities that could be intensified by participating in this research and refused to permit recruitment on the campus. A joint policy statement of Canada’s three federal research agencies guides the ethics of conducting research within institutions, such as universities, eligible to receive funding from these agencies (Canadian Institutes of Health Research [CIHR], Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada [NSERC], and Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada [SSHRC], 2010, December). This statement indicates that over-protectionist attitudes of Research Ethics Boards can be considered unjust treatment by excluding some individuals from research projects. Participating in this research may have had direct benefits, such as gaining new information, and indirect benefits, such as contributing to the advancement of knowledge that could lead to improvements for a group to which participants belong (CIHR, NSERC, SSHRC, 2010, December). Students attending the institution that did not grant access for recruiting were excluded from the possibility of receiving these benefits. It is unfortunate that the choice to participate was made for, rather than by, some potential participants. In future, advocacy and education efforts with these institutions
could facilitate a change in perspective that would allow for more equitable access to research for these all students.

Further, despite sending out many recruitment posters to many agencies, few responses were received and it took one year to recruit the participants for Study 2. Most of the participants who did take part in the interviews seemed to have specific investments in the topic of sexual assault. Many participants had ties to organizations and initiatives specifically involved with sexual assault. Also, larger proportions of the sample than expected (up to about 40%) indicated experiencing a sexual assault themselves. Although this figure was similar to the estimate provided by Statistics Canada (1993), Statistics Canada reported lifetime prevalence. The statistic in this study is, therefore, comparatively high given the relatively young age of the sample. These experiences might change how participants experienced disclosures. It is possible that those who were already engaged in the topic had more interest in participating in the research. Limitations in accessing participants, for this research, elucidate just how powerful silencing the topic of sexual assault can be. These limitations provide some insight into the challenges survivors may face in accessing support for sexual assault experiences. It is hoped that this research can contribute to a dialogue about sexual assault that could decrease future resistance to discuss this important topic.

It would have been desirable to include some disclosures from younger survivors to include a full range of survivors in late adolescence. However, there are legal and ethical reasons that led to a decision to limit disclosures to those of sexual assaults perpetrated against people who were between 19 and 24 years old at the time. In British Columbia, sexual assaults occurring to individuals under the age of 19 years are covered
by mandated reporting legislation. The agency of those assaulted in adulthood is
supported in that legislation allows for their choice regarding reporting these experiences.
Thus, resources and information could ethically be provided to participants to support
them and the survivors in their choices. However, there was no legal obligation to report
the violence discussed in this research. There was a particular interest in interviewing
post-secondary students in this research study. Sexual assault has been described as a
particular issue on college campuses (e.g., CBC News, 2013, October 30; DeKeseredy, et
al., 1993; Dick, 2015; Fisher et al., 2000; Krebs et al., 2007; Obama, 2014; Tjaden &
Thoennens, 2006). However, this population differs from people of similar ages who are
not attending a post-secondary institution in a number of ways, including their families’
income status and opportunities available to them (Christofides, Cirello, & Hoy, 2001;
Peterson, 2001). It would be interesting to complete similar research with other
populations of varying ages and occupations.

This study is limited by its retrospective nature. It is likely that the supporters’
experiences since hearing the disclosure affected their perceptions of the disclosure.
However, as this research is interested in understanding perspectives of the person
hearing the disclosure, the aim of the research has been achieved. A symbolic
interactionist perspective (Mead, 1934, 1964) suggests that, regardless of when the data is
collected, each person’s individual experiences before and after the disclosure will
influence their experiences of the disclosure itself. The main concern about the
retrospective nature of this study is that participants may not remember some of their
experiences as clearly as before, or even at all. This limitation is addressed by asking
participants to describe their most recent experience of receiving a disclosure and limiting disclosures to those that occurred within the past three years.

The findings from this research must be interpreted in consideration of the strengths and limitations listed above. Some important new contributions were made in this dissertation. These findings increase knowledge about sexual assault disclosures and how to best support survivors and the people to whom they disclose. There are some important implications of these findings, which are reviewed next.

6.3 PRACTICE AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

This dissertation advances knowledge about disclosures of sexual assault by examining the perspectives of a variety of different people who hear disclosures. Various social reactions to disclosures have been reported and little research has included the relationship between the survivor and the person they tell as an important consideration. Gray literature that is geared towards peers sometimes places expectations upon peer supporters that may not be reasonable, assuming a more emotionally controlled and objective response that may be more likely from formal supporters (University of California Irvine, n.d.). For example, a pamphlet about how to support a survivor that was distributed by the Sexual Assault Support Centre on the University of British Columbia’s campus contained such advice as listening, telling your friend it is not their fault, believing your friend, not judging their choices, maintaining confidentiality, not speaking to the perpetrator, and not pressing for details (Alma Mater Society of the University of British Columbia Sexual Assault Support Centre, n.d.). Similar suggestions have been by other resources (e.g., Concordia University Student Services Sexual Assault Resource Centre, n.d.; University of Alberta Sexual Assault Centre, 2015; University of California
Irvine, n.d.). These recommendations, while theoretically useful, do not seem to account for the reciprocal nature of peer relationships or situate peers in the social context of the survivor. If these recommendations are not feasible, communicating them can serve to increase guilt and shame for supporters and reduce their ability to support well. Research has shown peers do sometimes experience guilt about their responses, or may not respond according to these guidelines because of their own sense of blame and responsibility for the assault (Ahrens et al., 2009).

The present findings demonstrate that relationship matters and supporters respond differently based on many relationship qualities, including closeness, relationship length, knowledge of, and identification with, the survivor. Experience with disclosure was also found to be important in responses to survivors. Research has shown that responses from formal supporters may be more hurtful than responses from friends (Ahrens et al., 2009). The idea of simply providing peers with information suggesting they should respond as formal supporters do may be insufficient. Simply because responses have been effective in one context does not necessarily mean they are preferable in all relationships and circumstances. When social workers provide support to people hearing disclosures, understanding of their relationship with the survivor should first be gained.

This research has important implications for social workers’ practices with survivors’ peers and in doing general outreach in the community. Ullman (2010) has recommended that support be provided to the social support networks of survivors but has focused these suggestions on support to survivors’ relatives. Relatives are more likely than peers to be involved in survivors’ treatment. There is a small likelihood for survivors’ friends to receive support, but certainly a distant peer is unlikely to present to a
survivor’s counsellor or social worker for their own support. The current research suggests that peers, who often hear disclosures of sexual assault, could benefit from support and that there is a perceived gap in service for peer supporters. General outreach and education approaches provide opportunities to reach a wider range of people who may hear disclosures.

The research findings from Study 2 suggest that many participants wanted specific information on what to do and what not to do. However, participants described that helpful things to say would vary according to different circumstances. Rather than holding peers accountable to respond in specific ways, it might be important to provide general knowledge about victim-blaming and to help supporters understand the importance of being genuine and authentic with survivors. Findings that were regularly described along with positive reactions to survivors were: thoughts about letting the survivors lead; thinking about the survivors’ needs; empathy for the survivor; and positive emotions such as hopefulness being communicated along with challenging emotions such as sadness. Anger that was not directed at the survivor was reported with positive responses when this emotion was managed. Social workers’ practice efforts, both on individual and community levels, should focus on increasing these reactions in supporters. On the other hand, being shocked or overwhelmed, and expressing anger at the survivor, were also reported by supporters with victim-blaming attitudes and behaviours. The practice of social workers should continue to challenge the adherence of victim-blaming attitudes in North American societies such as the one in which this research was conducted.
Supporters with their own history of sexual assault may have an even larger need than supporters without such a history to consider how they might manage hearing disclosures of sexual assault. The importance of clearly communicating to supporters that a personal experience of assault can relate to reactions to a disclosure cannot be overstated. Sexual assault survivors may be best situated to provide empathic and healing responses to other survivors. However, survivors can also be triggered by their own experiences potentially causing distress for both themselves and the survivor. The language used when discussing the significance of a historical sexual assault with potential supporters is also important. Prior research has found that people who have experienced a sexual assault may not always label this experience as assaultive (Littleton, Axsom, Breitkopf, & Berenson, 2006). Social workers should create access to their services for peer supporters for purposes of debriefing. Peers’ experiences should then be carefully explored by describing rather than labeling sexual assault experiences. Debriefing can enhance self-reflection, which may be one of the most important aspects of supporting survivors of sexual assault.

Social workers could reduce barriers to service access for survivors and their supporters. If systems are increasingly accessed by survivors, social workers can also work to ensure survivors receive optimal support. Research has shown, for instance, that police involvement was viewed negatively when police blamed survivors or did not provide emotional support (Ahrens et al., 2009). The participants in this dissertation echoed Ullman’s (2010) calls for ongoing education across time, across disciplines, and across areas of practice. Current findings suggested a gap in knowledge and comfort in issues relating to the criminal justice system in Canada, and British Columbia in
particular. U.S. and Canadian statistics suggest that most survivors do not involve themselves in the criminal justice system (Brennan & Taylor-Butts, 2008; Fisher et al., 2000). As such, counsellors, support workers, and social workers supporting survivors are also unlikely to have much experience with this system. It seems that the relationship with the criminal justice system may be an area that needs specific attention in terms of training of counsellors, support workers, social workers, and criminal justice system employees.

Social workers, based on their training and expertise in working with systems and linking individuals to these systems, are well-positioned to address this gap. Social workers can advocate for structural connections between the criminal justice and social support systems. A challenge is that the goals of the criminal justice system do not always align with the goals of social support systems (Department of Justice, Government of Canada, 2015, January 7). Social workers can work with different systems to help identify shared goals. Increasing supporters’ knowledge of the criminal justice system and fostering collaboration between criminal justice and social support systems would better support survivors.

Many supporters in Study 2 reported responses of being uncertain, shocked, confused, overwhelmed and detached. These responses were communicated in the present research along with withdrawal from the disclosure, disbelief, and asking questions to help convince the supporter of what had happened. Ullman (2010) has characterized these feelings as negative reactions to a disclosure. It seems logical that these types of feelings would be related to a lack of familiarity with sexual assault issues and responses. By facilitating communication about sexual assault these responses might
become less common. Silencing around the topic of sexual violence seems to perpetuate the problem on many levels, both individual and community. With increased dialogue, attitudes can change. This is supported by research in social psychology (Aziz, Ghani, & Niazi, 2013; McCullough & Ostrom, 1974; Pornpitakpan, 2004). The way sexual assault allegations are managed needs to change and social workers can increase dialogue and awareness and advocate for changes in how systems handle disclosures of sexual assault.

Increasing dialogue about sexual assault and familiarity with this subject matter is important. One way to increase dialogue and education around sexual assault and consent is to include this in primary and secondary school curricula. Social workers are in a position to lead prevention efforts and advocate for policy changes (Bloom, 1995). Currently, education plans developed by the British Columbia government include recommendations to teach students about terminology for external sex organs, appropriate and inappropriate touching, and how to keep themselves safe and healthy (Ministry of Education, Province of British Columbia, 2005, 2006, 2007). There is no clear mandate for consent to be discussed. Definitions of sexual assault were first mentioned as knowledge indicators for grade 9 students. Clear direction by the government to include information about sexual intrusiveness and consent could ensure consistent and ongoing education on these topics. Further, a shift in language, away from preventing risk and towards personal responsibility for ensuring consent, could be an important step in changing the conversation about sexual assault and responses to victims.

The need for education extends beyond secondary schools. There has been a stated need for changes in regards to sexual violence on post-secondary campuses (Fisher
et al., 2000; Quigley, 2013). This dissertation suggests some approaches to working with supporters on an individual basis as well as providing outreach to a greater community. Knowledge from this study, as well as previous research, can be distributed via campus services such as sexual assault support centers, counselling centers, and equity centers. Many campuses have events, such as sexual assault awareness months, that provide opportunities for community awareness and engagement initiatives. Lichty and colleagues (2008) propose guidelines for developing a university response to sexual assault. The research from this dissertation could be used, along with other resources, to represent student voices and identify gaps in responses. In addition to the provision of services to survivors, the approach proposed by Lichty and colleagues (2008) suggests the importance of training for faculty and staff around responding to sexual assault disclosures. Social workers could create and manage hubs on campuses to deal with all aspects of sexual assault, including support, counselling, advocacy, policy, safety, disciplinary action, and education to students, faculty and staff. Social workers are uniquely positioned to facilitate these efforts given their training with respect to systems, advocacy, prevention and education, as well as skills for supporting individuals (Canadian Association of Social Workers [CASW], 2008). Services addressing different aspects of sexual assault are often dispersed across campuses, operated by different institutions, organizations, and departments in different areas of campus (e.g., The University of British Columbia, n.d.c; University of Calgary, n.d.). A centralized sexual assault resource would increase capacity to impact change on campuses and decrease communication and access barriers. In addition to policy and practice implications, this
dissertation has implications for research. Directions for future research are discussed next.

6.4 DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

This research makes an important contribution to current knowledge by including perspectives from a variety of different people who hear disclosures of sexual assault. Future research should replicate findings that relationship characteristics are important to reactions to disclosures (Schmidt, 2009). Schmidt (2009) argues there is a specific need for replication studies in the social sciences. Replication of the current findings could be explored in other populations. There are populations that haven’t been included in research investigating disclosures of sexual assault. For instance, people in work positions that are not overtly related to the provision of support also receive disclosures of sexual assault, including college professors (Branch, Hayes-Smith, & Richards, 2011). Disclosures might also occur to customer service representatives in a variety of locations, such as in retail stores, restaurants and bars, hair salons, and spas. Alternatively, these service providers could disclose to the people accessing their service. Research has also identified the occurrence of sexual assault disclosures on online forums (Moors & Webber, 2012). Relationship characteristics could be examined in a variety of contexts to pursue replications of the current findings.

The majority of participants in the study identified as female and talked about disclosures they received from female survivors of sexual assault. Future research could consider the gender of participants in how sexual assault disclosures are experienced. As men have been found less likely to disclose their assaults (Menard, 2005; Widom, 1997), less is known about the disclosure experiences of men. To gain insight into when and
how men disclose and how they perceive reactions they do receive, support can be improved for these survivors who are often overlooked. Research is needed specifically examining male experiences of sexual assault disclosure. Further, it would be interesting in future research to examine relationships between disclosure reactions and assault characteristics. Participants in this study identified that they would respond differently to assaults involving penetration in comparison to assaults involving unwanted sexual contact without penetration. Future research could examine reactions to disclosures across relationships while considering assault characteristics that were provided during the disclosure interaction.

Symbolic interactionism (Mead, 1934, 1964) posits that meaning is created in interactions, and thus looking at certain perspectives independently from others may risk losing contextual information that is important to understanding disclosures. Future research might benefit from investigations of survivors in conversation with supporters to learn more about how meaning is made together in a dyadic interaction.

This study found relationships between relationship characteristics and social reactions to disclosures of sexual assault. Future surveys with larger sample sizes could investigate how different variables, such as emotions and cognitions, might moderate the associations between relationship qualities and reactions to survivors. These studies could also account for how demographic characteristics relate to social reactions provided to survivors.

Further, an interesting direction for research could be to look at which reactions are likely to be provided together by the same supporter. Reactions do not occur in isolation. For instance, in the current study positive emotions, such as hopefulness, were
expressed to survivors along with some sad emotions. It would also be interesting to explore how different reactions are interpreted when examined together versus singular reports as in this dissertation. Although it is important to understand how responses to disclosures are formed, research has shown that different responses are interpreted differently across circumstances (Ahrens et al., 2009). It might be that certain responses are more helpful or more harmful when they occur together. There might be a difference between communicating sadness alone and communicating sadness with hopefulness, for example. Improving understanding of the complexity of responses and how they are interpreted by survivors might provide further clarity about how to best support survivors.

In order to provide further information on the complexity of reactions to sexual assault disclosures, in future, the individual subscales of the Social Reactions Questionnaire could be used. Information from these subscales could elucidate peers’ perspectives of the specific nature of the positive and negative reactions they perceive providing to survivors.

Information learned about social reactions to disclosures of sexual assault should be incorporated into prevention and intervention programs. This study contributed important information about what shapes supporters’ reactions to disclosures. These findings should be integrated into prevention and intervention programs and these programs should then be evaluated to determine the efficacy of these approaches. College sexual assault intervention programs have been found to be effective in changing attitudes and knowledge about rape, intent to rape, and incidence of sexual assault (Anderson & Whiston, 2005). A meta-analysis demonstrated that empathy for rape survivors and behaviours showing increased awareness about rape were not significantly
affected through these interventions (Anderson & Whiston, 2005). Longer interventions were found to be more effective, and program content was an important factor. This supports the utility of prevention programs throughout educational stages. The present study provides insight into how supporters respond to sexual assault disclosures. It would be interesting to focus prevention programs on factors found important to responses in this study. It would then be important to examine if prevention programs are effective in changing how disclosures are managed by peers.

6.5 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

This research used a survey and interviews with people who heard disclosures of sexual assault to further understand how people respond to disclosures. Findings suggest that the survivor-supporter relationship is important in understanding responses to disclosures as are the emotions and thoughts experienced by the supporter. Practice implications have been identified. With 39% of adult women in Canada having experienced a sexual assault (Statistics Canada, 1993), and U.S. statistics showing that three to eight percent of adult men and about one in six males in childhood have been sexually assaulted (Dube et al., 2005; Elliot et al., 2004; Finkelhor et al., 1990; Tjaden & Thoennes, 2006; U.S. Department of Justice, 2000), sexual assault is clearly a pervasive issue. Sexual assault can lead to significant personal and societal consequences, and it is important that survivors are well-supported (Courtois, & Ford, 2009; Ullman, 2010).

In order for survivors to receive optimal support, the people to whom they choose to disclose must be well equipped to provide them with positive, supportive reactions. It is the responsibility of systems within society to provide supporters, both formal and informal, with what they need to promote their own coping and the healing of survivors.
These systems include educational institutions and government organizations. Social workers are well-positioned to implement needed changes given their understanding of systems and policies, and their training to be advocates and supporters. If changes can be implemented, as a society, we can support survivors to thrive and can augment and propagate the important work that is being done to change attitudes in societies that allow sexual assaults to continue.
REFERENCES


from http://www.concordia.ca/content/dam/concordia/offices/sarc/docs/T15-21687-SSER-SARC-Survivors-Handout-1-v1%281%29.pdf


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APPENDIX A: SURVEY RECRUITING ADVERTISEMENT

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

Undergraduate Students Needed for an Online Survey

Research Project: Processes by which Responses to Disclosures of Violence are shaped by Relationship Context

We want to learn about peer relationships and how violent experiences are shared in these relationships. Our goal is to help improve services to students and those impacted by violence.

What’s Involved?

- Completing an online survey that is expected to take 30 minutes of your time.
- You will be entered in a draw to win 1 of 5 iPods.

Who is invited?

- Undergraduate students aged 17 to 24.

For more information, contact XXX

To participate, go to the following website:
https://www.surveyfeedback.ca/surveys/wsb.dll/s/1g1fde
APPENDIX B: STUDENT/PEER DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONS

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

Processes by which Responses to Disclosures of Violence are shaped by Relationship Context

Students’ Online Survey Questions: Demographic/Background Information

Please tell us about yourself.

What is your current age? ________________

What is your gender?  Male  Female  Other (please specify): ___________

What is your sexual orientation?

Heterosexual  Lesbian  Gay  Bisexual  Questioning

Other (please specify): _________________________________

Which school do you currently attend?

UBC – Vancouver campus  UBC-Okanagan campus  SFU  UFV

Douglas College  Kwantlen University  Langara College

Other (please specify):_____

For how many years have you been enrolled in college/university?

________________________

What is the highest level of education you’ve completed?

High School  Bachelor’s degree  Master’s degree  Ph.D.

What is your ethnic background?

(check all that apply)
Aboriginal     African     East Asian     Caucasian
Latin American     Middle Eastern     South Asian     Unknown

Other (please specify): ________________________________

What is your current primary living situation?

Residence/Student housing     In my family home
Off-campus housing with roommates
Off-campus housing with a romantic partner     Off-campus housing living alone
Other (please specify): ________________

What is your personal gross annual income?

under $15,000     $15,000 - $29,999     $30,000 - $59,999
$60,000 - $79,999     $80,000 - $99,999     $100,000 or over

Growing up, how would you describe your family’s financial situation?

Very well off     Well off     About average
Somewhat below average     Poor     Don’t know

**Sexual assault** includes any form of sexual contact without voluntary consent. This sexual contact can include kissing, fondling, vaginal intercourse, anal intercourse, and oral sex, as well as other acts, if they are done without voluntary consent. Having voluntary consent means that each person involved is a willing participant. Consent that is obtained through pressure, coercion, force, or threats of force is not voluntary consent.

Since you started post-secondary education has somebody told you, either in person or over the phone, that she/he had been sexually assaulted? The sexual assault must have occurred when the survivor was between 19 and 24 years of age?

Yes     No

*The previous question will be a screening question. If the participant answers no, they will be screened out of the study.*
How many people told you, either in person or over the phone, they had been sexually assaulted when they were between 19 and 24 years of age?

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Please indicate the gender of each person who told you s/he had been sexually assaulted when they were between 19 and 24 years of age, either in person or over the phone, up to the last 10 disclosures.

**Person 1.**  Male  Female  Other (please specify) _________________

**Person 2.**  Male  Female  Other (please specify) _________________

**Person 3.**  Male  Female  Other (please specify) _________________

**Person 4.**  Male  Female  Other (please specify) _________________

**Person 5.**  Male  Female  Other (please specify) _________________

**Person 6.**  Male  Female  Other (please specify) _________________

**Person 7.**  Male  Female  Other (please specify) _________________

**Person 8.**  Male  Female  Other (please specify) _________________

**Person 9.**  Male  Female  Other (please specify) _________________

**Person 10.**  Male  Female  Other (please specify) _________________

For the remaining questions, please focus on the most recent disclosure that you heard, either in person or over the phone, from a survivor:

**What is the gender of the survivor?**

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<td>Male</td>
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**What is the current age of the survivor?** _________________

**What was the age of the survivor at the time of the sexual assault?** _________________

**What is the sexual orientation of the survivor?**

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<td>Heterosexual</td>
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Unknown
What is the ethnic background of the survivor? (check all that apply)

Aboriginal  African  East Asian  Caucasian

Latin American  Middle Eastern  South Asian  Unknown

Other (please specify): __________________________________

On how many separate occasions did that person talk to you about the assault?

1  2  3  4  5  6  7  8  9  10  over 10

Unknown

How many perpetrators (people committing the assault) were involved?

1  2  3  4  5  6  7  8  9  10  over 10

What was the relationship between the perpetrator(s) of the assault and the person who was assaulted? (If more than 1 perpetrator, select all that apply).

Stranger  Acquaintance  Friendship  Marital  Dating  Unknown

Other

If you selected other, please specify:

____________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________

What was the relationship between you and the perpetrator(s) of the assault? (If more than 1 perpetrator, select all that apply).

Stranger  Acquaintance  Friendship  Marital  Dating  Unknown

Other

If you selected other, please specify:

____________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________
What is the gender of the perpetrator(s)? (If more than 1 perpetrator, select all that apply).

Male  Female  Other (please specify): ____________________  Unknown

Was there a weapon present during the assault?

Yes  No  Unknown

Was the survivor physically injured?

Yes  No  Unknown

Who had used alcohol/drugs at the time of the assault?

Survivor  Perpetrator(s)  Neither the survivor or perpetrator(s)

Both the survivor and the perpetrator(s)  Unknown

How much time had passed between when the assault occurred and when the survivor told you?

Less than 24 hours  1-7 days  8-31 days

32 days-<6 mths  >6 mths – <=1 yr  >1-<=2yrs

>2-<=5 yrs  >5-<=10 yrs  >10 yrs

Unknown

Please describe where you were when the disclosure occurred (e.g., at a party; at school):

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

Please describe what were you doing when the disclosure was made to you:

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________
Please describe what you believe prompted the person to tell you that they were sexually assaulted?

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

Were there others present when the disclosure occurred?

Yes   No   Unknown

If yes, please provide further detail about who was present:

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

At the time when the survivor first told you about the assault, what best described the nature of the relationship between you and the survivor?

Stranger   Acquaintance   Casual Friend
Close Friend   Romantic Partner   Co-worker
Family Member   Formal/Professional Relationship   Other

If you selected other, please specify:

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

Please indicate how close you felt you were to the survivor at the time of the disclosure:

Not at all   A little bit   Moderately   Quite a bit   Extremely

Now, what best describes the nature of the relationship between you and the survivor?

Stranger   Acquaintance   Casual Friend
Close Friend  Romantic Partner  Co-worker
Family Member  Formal/Professional Relationship
Other

**If you selected other, please specify:**

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

**How long had you known the person before they first told you about the assault?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time Period</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Less than 24 hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24 hours to 31 days</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32 days to &lt;=1 year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt;1 year to &lt;=2 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt;2 years to &lt;=5 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt;5 years to &lt;=10 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt;10 yrs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**How much time has passed since you were first told by the survivor about the assault?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time Period</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Less than 24 hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-7 days</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8-31 days</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32 days to &lt;=6 mths</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt;6 mths to &lt;=1 yr</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt;1 to &lt;=2 yrs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt;2 years to &lt;= 5 yrs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt;5 to &lt;=10 yrs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt;10 yrs</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Have you experienced a sexual assault in your lifetime?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unsure</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**APPENDIX C: IMPACT ON FRIENDS MEASURE**

**THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA**

Processes by which Responses to Disclosures of Violence are shaped by Relationship Context

Impact on Friends – Measure

For the next set of questions, please indicate how much you agree or disagree with the following statements about what it was like to try and help your friend/acquaintance when s/he told you about the assault.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1 DO NOT AGREE AT ALL</th>
<th>2 NEUTRAL</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5 AGREE VERY MUCH</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I was angry at her/him for letting this happen.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I felt that s/he brought the assault on her/himself.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I thought that s/he could have done more to protect her/himself.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I thought that it was unwise of her/him to put her/himself in that position.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I felt that I was able to understand what s/he was going through.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I could imagine being in her/his place.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I was able to empathize with her/his emotions.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I didn’t think that s/he was handling the situation in the right way.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I thought that it was taking too long for her/him to get over it.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I didn’t want to believe that the assault had occurred.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
I didn’t believe her/his story.  

I felt compassion for her/him.  

I felt sympathy for her/him.  

For the next question, please choose a response ranging from very poorly to very well.

How well do you think the victim was coping with the assault? (1=very poorly; 5 = very well)  

For the next question, please choose a response ranging from no effort to a lot of effort.

How much effort was the victim putting into coping with the assault? (1 = no effort; 5 = a lot of effort)  

For the next set of questions, please indicate how much you agree or disagree with the following statements about what it was like to try and help your friend/acquaintance.

1 2 3 4 5  
DO NOT AGREE AT ALL  NEUTRAL AGREE VERY MUCH

I didn’t know what to do to help her/him.  

I didn’t know enough about sexual assault to help her/him.  

I didn’t know how to act towards her/him.  

I felt uncomfortable talking to her/him about the assault.  

I was unsure about what s/he needed.  

I was unsure about what the laws were about sexual assault.  

I felt that my efforts to help didn’t help her/him.  

I was afraid that I was causing her/him more harm.  

I felt that I wasn’t supportive enough.  

I felt unable to give any more energy to helping her/him.
I felt burdened by her/his needs.  

I felt tired of dealing with what happened to her/him.  

The next set of statements are about how you may have felt after your friend/acquaintance told you about her/his experiences. For each of these statements, please indicate how much you agree or disagree with the statement.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DO NOT AGREE AT ALL</th>
<th>NEUTRAL</th>
<th>AGREE VERY MUCH</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I was angry at the assailant.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I was angry at society for the existence of sexual assault</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I was angry at myself for letting this happen to her/him.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I was angry at myself for not being able to prevent it.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I was afraid for the continued safety of the victim.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I was afraid for my own safety.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I was afraid to do things that never bothered me before.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I was afraid that I might also be assaulted.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I felt a loss of sense of security.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I no longer felt the world was a safe place.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I no longer felt the world was a fair place.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I had nightmares about the assault.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I couldn’t stop thinking about the assault.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I felt preoccupied with the details of the assault.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I was shocked by what had happened to the victim.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I felt numb after she/he told me about the assault.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I felt all alone in dealing with this.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
I was afraid of what others would think.

I wanted to get even with the attacker.

I wanted to physically beat up the attacker.

I felt upset dealing with her/his assault.

I felt disturbed dealing with her/his assault.

I felt alarmed dealing with her assault.

I felt grieved dealing with her assault.

I felt that I was doing a good job helping her/him.

I felt at ease dealing with her/his assault.

I felt relaxed dealing with her/his assault.

I felt comfortable dealing with her/his assault.

I felt needed.

I felt that s/he was thankful.

I felt appreciated.

The remaining statements are about your relationship with the survivor of sexual assault. For these items, please indicate how much you agree or disagree with each statement. Please choose N/A if a question does not apply to you.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>N/A</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>DO NOT AGREE AT ALL</td>
<td>NEUTRAL</td>
<td>AGREE VERY MUCH</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I still feel that we have the same things in common.

I still feel like I know and understand her/him.

I still consider her/him to be a friend.

I think that s/he still considers me to be a friend.

Our relationship grew closer through dealing with the assault.
I care more for her/him now. 1 2 3 4 5 N/A
I am happy with the relationship. 1 2 3 4 5 N/A
I felt that the victim had not trusted me enough to tell me sooner. 1 2 3 4 5 N/A
I felt that I had not really known her/him at all because of this secret. 1 2 3 4 5 N/A
I didn’t think about the relationship in the same way. 1 2 3 4 5 N/A
I felt that s/he was being self-centered. 1 2 3 4 5 N/A
I felt that s/he ignored me. 1 2 3 4 5 N/A
I felt neglected. 1 2 3 4 5 N/A
I was afraid of upsetting her/him. 1 2 3 4 5 N/A
Our relationship grew more distant through dealing with the assault. 1 2 3 4 5 N/A
I care less for her/him now. 1 2 3 4 5 N/A
I wanted her/him to stop talking about what happened during the assault. 1 2 3 4 5 N/A
I wanted her/him to try and forget about the assault. 1 2 3 4 5 N/A
I wanted to keep the assault a secret. 1 2 3 4 5 N/A
We still do the same things together. 1 2 3 4 5 N/A
I still treat her/him the same way. 1 2 3 4 5 N/A
I felt able to tell her/him about my own feelings. 1 2 3 4 5 N/A
S/He still came to me for support the way s/he had before. 1 2 3 4 5 N/A
I can still go to her/him for support the way I had before. 1 2 3 4 5 N/A
I started to avoid her/him. 1 2 3 4 5 N/A
I ended the relationship. 1 2 3 4 5 N/A
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>N/A</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>S/He ended the relationship with me.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I don’t want to be around her/him anymore.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I tried not to burden her/him with my feelings.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I was afraid to mention the assault until s/he brought it up.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am not myself around her/him anymore.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We don’t communicate as well as we used to.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We argue more than we used to.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel more responsible for her/his safety now.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel that need to take responsibility for her/his life.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I tried to get her/him to do what I thought was best.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I tried to relieve her/him from having to make practical decisions.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX D: SOCIAL REACTIONS QUESTIONNAIRE

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

Processes by which Responses to Disclosures of Violence are shaped by Relationship Context

SOCIAL REACTIONS QUESTIONNAIRE (SRQ)

HOW YOU RESPONDED...

The following is a list of behaviors that other people responding to a person with this experience often show. Please indicate how often you expressed each of the listed responses towards the sexual assault survivor by choosing the appropriate response.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>NEVER</th>
<th>RARELY</th>
<th>SOMETIMES</th>
<th>FREQUENTLY</th>
<th>ALWAYS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>never</td>
<td>rarely</td>
<td>sometimes</td>
<td>frequently</td>
<td>always</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>drew away from her/him</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>wanted to seek revenge on the perpetrator</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>told others about her/his experience without her/his permission</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>distracted her/him with other things</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>comforted her/him by telling her/him it would be all right or by holding her/him</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>told her/him you felt sorry for her/him</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>helped her/him get medical care</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>told her/him that s/he was not to blame</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
10. TREATED HER/HIM DIFFERENTLY IN SOME WAY THAN BEFORE S/HE TOLD YOU THAT MIGHT HAVE MADE HER/HIM UNCOMFORTABLE

11. TRIED TO TAKE CONTROL OF WHAT S/HE DID/DECISIONS S/HE MADE

12. FOCUSED ON YOUR OWN NEEDS AND NEGLECTED HERS/HIS

13. TOLD HER/HIM TO GO ON WITH HER/HIS LIFE

14. HELD HER/HIM OR TOLD HER/HIM THAT S/HE WAS LOVED

15. REASSURED HER/HIM THAT S/HE WAS A GOOD PERSON

16. ENCOURAGED HER/HIM TO SEEK COUNSELING

17. TOLD HER/HIM THAT S/HE WAS TO BLAME OR SHAMEFUL BECAUSE OF THIS EXPERIENCE

18. AVOIDED TALKING TO HER/HIM OR SPENDING TIME WITH HER/HIM

19. MADE DECISIONS OR DID THINGS FOR HER/HIM

20. SAID YOU FELT PERSONALLY WRONGED BY HER/HIS EXPERIENCE

21. TOLD HER/HIM TO STOP THINKING ABOUT IT

22. LISTENED TO HER/HIS FEELINGS

23. SAW HER/HIS SIDE OF THINGS AND DID NOT MAKE JUDGMENTS

24. HELPED HER/HIM GET INFORMATION OF ANY KIND ABOUT COPING WITH THE EXPERIENCE

25. TOLD HER/HIM THAT S/HE COULD HAVE DONE MORE TO PREVENT THIS EXPERIENCE FROM OCCURRING

26. ACTED AS IF S/HE WERE DAMAGED GOODS OR SOMEHOW DIFFERENT NOW

27. TREATED HER/HIM AS IF S/HE WAS A CHILD OR SOMEHOW INCOMPETENT
28. EXPRESSED SO MUCH ANGER AT THE PERPETRATOR THAT S/HE HAD TO CALM YOU DOWN

29. TOLD HER/HIM TO STOP TALKING ABOUT IT

30. SHOWED UNDERSTANDING OF HER/HIS EXPERIENCE

31. REFRAMED THE EXPERIENCE AS A CLEAR CASE OF VICTIMIZATION

32. TOOK HER/HIM TO THE POLICE

33. TOLD HER/HIM THAT S/HE WAS IRRESPONSIBLE OR NOT CAUTIOUS ENOUGH

34. MINIMIZED THE IMPORTANCE OR SERIOUSNESS OF HER/HIS EXPERIENCE

35. SAID YOU KNEW HOW S/HE FELT WHEN YOU REALLY DID NOT

36. HAVE BEEN SO UPSET THAT YOU NEEDED REASSURANCE FROM HER/HIM

37. TRIED TO DISCOURAGE HER/HIM FROM TALKING ABOUT THE EXPERIENCE

38. SHARED YOUR OWN EXPERIENCE WITH HER/HIM

39. WAS ABLE TO REALLY ACCEPT HER/HIS ACCOUNT OF HER/HIS EXPERIENCE

40. SPENT TIME WITH HER/HIM

41. TOLD HER/HIM THAT S/HE DID NOT DO ANYTHING WRONG

42. MADE A JOKE OR SARCASTIC COMMENT ABOUT THIS TYPE OF EXPERIENCE

43. MADE HER/HIM FEEL LIKE S/HE DIDN’T KNOW HOW TO TAKE CARE OF HER/HIMSELF

44. SAID YOU FEEL S/HE IS TAINTED BY THIS EXPERIENCE

45. ENCOURAGED HER/HIM TO KEEP THE EXPERIENCE A SECRET

46. SEEMED TO UNDERSTAND HOW S/HE WAS FEELING
47. BELIEVED \textit{HER/HIS ACCOUNT OF WHAT HAPPENED}

48. PROVIDED INFORMATION AND DISCUSSED OPTIONS
APPENDIX E: SURVEY CONSENT FORM

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

School of Social Work
2080 West Mall
Vancouver, B.C. Canada V6T 1Z2
Tel: (604) 822-2255 Fax: (604) 822-8656
www.swfs.ubc.ca

Thank you for taking the time to visit our survey!
Please read the consent form below before starting the survey, which begins on the next page.

Survey Consent Form

Processes by which Responses to Disclosures of Violence are shaped by Relationship Context

Principal Investigator: Sheila Marshall, Associate Professor,
UBC School of Social Work

Co-investigator: Kristin Kendrick, Ph.D. Student, Social Work, UBC

Purpose:
Sexual assault is a common experience, and when survivors disclose (i.e., tell people about), their assaults they are most likely to tell their friends. When sexual assault disclosures have been examined, research often overlooks information about the people hearing the disclosures. Hearing disclosures of sexual assault can be difficult for the person who hears the disclosure, and responses to disclosures have been related to the well-being of the sexual assault survivor.

We are asking you to help us improve knowledge in these areas by participating in an online survey if you have heard a verbal disclosure since starting post-secondary education, either in person or over the phone, of sexual assault. The sexual assault should have occurred when the sexual assault survivor was between the ages of 19 and 24 years.

The objective of the study will be to gain a more in-depth understanding of the experiences of hearing disclosures of sexual assault. In doing so it is hoped that an increased ability to work with friends through outreach and support work will be achieved. Further, increased understanding of why advocates and counsellors respond as they do provides opportunities to improve training and practice with survivors of sexual assault.
Study Procedures
This study consists of three questionnaires to be completed as an online survey: a demographic and background information inventory created for this study, a measure of emotional and psychological responses to hearing a disclosure, and one measure of the social reactions you provided to the sexual assault survivor. Together, these should take about 30 minutes to complete.

We are interested in learning:
- if the relationship between you and the sexual assault survivor relate to how you respond to the survivor after hearing the disclosure.
- if the association between your relationship with the survivor and your responses is explained or changed by your emotional experience of the disclosure.

Potential Risks:
It is possible that thinking about hearing others’ disclosures of sexual assaults may trigger emotions and bring up memories of past difficult experiences. Information about sexual assault disclosures will be provided to you. Researchers will also provide you with a list of resources that might be helpful should you want to obtain support.

Potential Benefits:
It is hoped that the study will be informative, positive and educational for the participants. You will be entered into a draw making you eligible to win one of five iPods to acknowledge your time and important contribution. You will be contributing to research that could potentially help other individuals and families who have had experiences similar to your own. You will have the opportunity to view a completed report of the study findings online at the conclusion of the study. Attempts will be made to disseminate findings from this study to agencies conducting work in the area of sexual violence and possibly at conferences and in peer-reviewed journals. You will also be provided with an online information sheet detailing common reactions to hearing sexual assault disclosures. This education might assist you in processing your past reactions and might help you manage any future disclosures you may hear.

Confidentiality:
Survey data will remain confidential. Data will be securely maintained and any documents containing identifying information will be destroyed five years after completion of the study. Electronic data will be identified only by participant number with no identifying information, and will remain available only to the research team. No individuals will be identified in any presentation or report coming out of this study.

This online survey is hosted by a secure website located in Canada and the survey is administered using software designed specifically for purposes of conducting academic research. The online survey is subject to Canadian laws, and the BC Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act (FIPPA) in particular. This survey or questionnaire does not ask for personal identifiers or any information that may be used to identify you. However, if you desire to enter the draw for one of five iPods, you can
choose to enter your contact information at the end of the survey. The contact information
will be collected from a separate website from the survey so that your data will not be
linked to your contact information. The websurvey company servers record incoming IP
addresses of the computer that you use to access the survey but no connection is made
between your data and your computer’s IP address. If you choose to participate in the
survey, you understand that your responses to the survey questions will be stored and
accessed in Canada.

**Contact for information about the study:**
If you have questions or desire further information with respect to the study, you may
contact the research team or Sheila Marshall.

**Contact for information about the rights of research subjects:**
If you have any concerns about your treatment or rights as a research subject, you may
contact the Research Subject Information Line in the UBC Office of Research Services at
(604) 822-8598.

**Consent:**
Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. You may refuse to participate or
withdraw from the study at any time. Your participation or non-participation will not in
any way jeopardize any benefits or entitlements and will not be shared with any service
provider.

Your completion of the survey will be taken as implied consent to participate in the
study, and indicate that you have received a copy of this consent form for your own
records.
Thank you again for your help.

**One more thing….an interview opportunity!**
We are interested in exploring some of the issues referred to here with a small number of
people through individual interviews. Your participation in this would be greatly
appreciated. If interested, please enter your contact information at the end of the survey
and provide your consent to be contacted. The contact information will be collected from
a separate website from the survey so that your data will not be linked to your contact
information. Alternatively, you can contact the research team or Sheila Marshall with a
message indicating you would like to be interviewed.
Support Providers Needed for a Research Interview

Research Project: Processes by which Responses to Disclosures of Violence are shaped by Relationship Context

We want to learn about how violent experiences are shared in relationships with formal support providers. Our goal is to help improve services to those impacted by violence.

What’s Involved?

- Participating in an in-person interview that is expected to take 90 minutes of your time.
- You will receive a $25 honorarium to acknowledge your time and important contribution.

Who is invited?

- Formal support providers (staff and volunteers) who have heard a disclosure of violence in the context of their work within the past three years from someone between the ages of 19 and 24, who was also in this age range at the time of their violent experience.

To participate, or for more information, contact XXX.
APPENDIX G: FORMAL SUPPORTER DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONS

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

Processes by which Responses to Disclosures of Violence are shaped by Relationship Context

Formal Supporters’ Survey Questions:
Demographic/Background Information

Please write or circle the most appropriate response:

SCREENING:

Sexual assault includes any form of sexual contact without voluntary consent. This sexual contact can include kissing, fondling, vaginal intercourse, anal intercourse, and oral sex, as well as other acts, if they are done without voluntary consent. Having voluntary consent means that each person involved is a willing participant. Consent that is obtained through pressure, coercion, force, or threats of force is not voluntary consent.

In the course of your role and in the past three years, has somebody told you, either in person or over the phone, that she/he had been sexually assaulted when they were between 19 and 24 years of age?

Yes    No

*The previous question will be a screening question. If the participant answers no, they will be screened out of the study.

Participant number: ______________

Please tell us about yourself.

What is your current age? ______________

What is your gender? Male    Female

Other (please specify): ________________________
What is your sexual orientation?

Heterosexual  Lesbian  Gay  Bisexual  Questioning

Other (please specify): ________________________________

What is the highest level of education you’ve completed?

Did not complete high school  High school  Bachelor’s degree

Master’s degree  Ph.D.

Other (please specify): ________________________________

What is your ethnic background? (circle all that apply)

Aboriginal  African  East Asian  Caucasian

Latin American  Middle Eastern  South Asian  Unknown

Other (please specify): ________________________________

What is your personal gross annual income?

under $15, 000  $15, 000 - $29, 999  $30, 000 - $59, 999

$60, 000 - $79, 999  $80, 000 - $99, 999  $100, 000 or over

For what type of organization do you currently work/volunteer?

Sexual Assault Support  Crisis Support

Violence Counselling  Counselling (non-violence specialized)

Other (please specify): ________________________________

How long have you been in your current position?

<=1 year  >1 year to <=3 years  >3 years to <=5 years

>5 years to <=10 years  >10 years

How long have you been involved in all of your formal support positions combined?
Please describe or list any training you have received for working with sexual assault survivors:

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

Assault characteristics:

How many people told you, either in person or over the phone, they had been sexually assaulted when they were between 19 and 24 years of age?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 over 10

Please indicate the gender of each person who told you s/he had been sexually assaulted when they were between 19 and 24 years of age, up to the last 10 in person or over the phone disclosures you heard?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Person</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Other (please specify)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Person 1.</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Other (please specify)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Person 2.</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Other (please specify)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Person 3.</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Other (please specify)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Person 4.</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Other (please specify)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Person 5.</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Other (please specify)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Person 6.</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Other (please specify)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Person 7.</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Other (please specify)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Person 8.</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Other (please specify)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Person 9.</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Other (please specify)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Person 10. Male Female Other (please specify) _________________

For the remaining questions, please focus on the most recent disclosure that you heard, either in person or over the phone, from a survivor:

What is the gender of the survivor?
Male Female Other (please specify): _________________

What is the sexual orientation of the survivor?
Heterosexual Lesbian Gay Bisexual
Questioning Unknown Other (please specify): _________________

What is the ethnic background of the survivor? (check all that apply)
Aboriginal African East Asian Caucasian
Latin American Middle Eastern South Asian Unknown
Other (please specify): _________________

On how many separate occasions did that person talk to you about the assault?
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 over 10
Unknown

How many perpetrators (people committing the assault) were involved?
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 over 10

What was the relationship between the perpetrator(s) of the assault and the person who was assaulted? (If more than 1 perpetrator, select all that apply).
Stranger Acquaintance Friendship Marital Dating Unknown
Other

If other, please provide details:
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
What was the relationship between you and the perpetrator(s) of the assault? (If more than 1 perpetrator, select all that apply).

Stranger    Acquaintance    Friendship    Marital    Dating    Unknown
Professional/Formal    Other

If other, please provide details:
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

What is the gender of the perpetrator(s)? (If more than 1 perpetrator, select all that apply).

Male    Female    Unknown    Other (please specify): ____________________

Was there a weapon present during the assault?

Yes    No    Unknown

Was the survivor physically injured?

Yes    No    Unknown

Who had used alcohol/drugs at the time of the assault?

Survivor    Perpetrator(s)    Neither the survivor or perpetrator(s)
Both the survivor and the perpetrator(s)    Unknown

Disclosure characteristics:
How much time had passed between when the assault occurred and when the survivor told you?

<24 hours    1-7 days    8-31 days
32 days to <=6 mths    >6 mths to <=1 yr    >1 year to <=2 yrs
>2 years to <=5 yrs    >5 years to <=10 yrs    >10 yrs
Unknown

Please describe where you were when the disclosure occurred (e.g., at a party; at school):

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Please describe what were you doing when the disclosure was made to you:

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

Please describe what you believe prompted the person to tell you that s/he was sexually assaulted:

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

Were there others present when the disclosure occurred?

Yes No Unknown

If yes, please provide further detail about who was present:

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

Nature of the relationship:

At the time when the survivor first told you about the assault, what best described the nature of the relationship between you and the survivor?

Stranger Acquaintance Casual Friend

Close Friend Romantic Partner Co-worker
Family Member  Formal/Professional Relationship  Other

If other, please provide details:

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

Please indicate how close you felt you were to the survivor at the time of the disclosure:

Not at all  A little bit  Moderately  Quite a bit  Extremely

Now, what best describes the nature of the relationship between you and the survivor?

Stranger  Acquaintance  Casual Friend
Close Friend  Romantic Partner  Co-worker
Family Member  Formal/Professional Relationship  Other

If other, please provide details:

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

How long had you known the person before they first told you about the assault?

Less than 24 hours  24 hours to 31 days  32 days to <=1 year
>1 year to <= 2 years  >2 years to <=5 years  >5 years to <=10 years
Greater than 10 years

How much time has passed since you were first told by the survivor about the assault?

Less than 24 hours  1 to 7 days  8 to 31 days
32 days to <=6 months  >6 months to <=1 year  >1 to <=2 years
>2 years to <=5 years  >5 years to <=10 years  Greater than 10 years

Have you experienced a sexual assault in your lifetime?
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Unsure</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

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APPENDIX H: STUDENT/PEER INTERVIEW GUIDE

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

School of Social Work
2080 West Mall
Vancouver, B.C. Canada V6T 1Z2
Tel: (604) 822-2255 Fax: (604) 822-8656
www.swfs.ubc.ca

Processes by which Responses to Disclosures of Violence are shaped by Relationship Context

Interview Guide/Prompt Questions
Student Interviews

These are preliminary questions that will be adapted throughout the research process. Adaptations will be based on feedback from participants, researchers, and collaborators, as well as through an ongoing process during data collection through preliminary analyses and constant comparison. Additionally, theoretical sampling will be used; therefore, initial participant observations and interviews will be used to inform which additional participants will be interviewed for this study.

Instructions to Interviewers
This interview guide is meant to assist with the interview process; however, it should be adapted according to the particular needs of the participants and your interactions with them. Please let the participants choose where to begin and follow them as they share their stories.

Screening/Primer: Thank you for your interest in participating in this research. As you know, I am interested in learning about how relationship and assault characteristics influence responses to hearing in person or telephone disclosures of sexual assault. For this study, sexual assault includes any form of sexual contact without voluntary consent. This sexual contact can include kissing, fondling, vaginal intercourse, anal intercourse, and oral sex, as well as other acts, if they are done without voluntary consent. Having voluntary consent means that each person involved is a willing participant. Consent that is obtained through pressure, coercion, force, or threats of force is not voluntary consent. I would like to learn more about this by speaking with people who have experienced hearing sexual assault disclosures from peers. Through completing the online survey, it’s clear that you have experienced hearing a sexual assault from someone between the ages of 19 and 24 since you started post-secondary education. I would like to talk with you about what your experiences have been in whatever ways you might feel comfortable sharing your stories.
Let the participants speak, follow their story, listen carefully, and interact with the participant in a way that seems to be comfortable and appropriate for both you and the interviewee. If, once it seems that the discussion is nearing an end, the following areas have not been addressed it might be helpful to ask the following questions:

**Broad Questions about Disclosure Responses**
1. “You mentioned that you’ve heard about a sexual assault since you started college or university from someone who was 19 to 24 years old. Can you please tell me about that?”
   - If they just talk about one experience: “Was this the only time you experienced something like this?”. If yes: “Can I get you to really think back to when that happened and tell me everything you can remember about it?”
   - If they talk about more than one experience: “You talked about a few different events there. I want to really understand your experiences. It seems that you heard _#_ different disclosures. Is that right? Which one was the most recent? Can I get you to just think back to that one experience and tell me everything that you remember about it?

2. How did you feel when they told you about their assault?
3. What did you think when they told you about their assault?
4. How did you react to the person who made the disclosure? What did you do? What did you say?

**Relationship between emotional responses and behavioural reactions**
1. How did your feelings relate to how you reacted to the survivor?
2. How did your thoughts relate to how you reacted to the survivor?

**Relationship**
1. Can you please tell me about your relationship with the person who disclosed to you?
2. How did your relationship change after they told you about the assault?
3. How did your relationships with others change after hearing the disclosure?
4. What aspects of your relationship with the survivor affected how you responded to the disclosure?

**Aspects of the Assault**
1. Were there things about the assault that were particularly important to how you responded to the disclosure?

**Training**
1. I want to switch gears now and ask you about general knowledge of sexual assault. What have you learned about how to respond to sexual assault disclosures?
2. You described that you were taught certain things about sexual assault, and you described in this case specific responses you had to the disclosure. Do you believe
your responses were the same or different from things you have learned? I’m wondering what your thoughts are about that.
3. To what extent do you believe your sexual assault knowledge was useful in this situation?
4. Did you seek out that knowledge on your own?

Potential Support Provision
1. What would have been helpful in supporting you after hearing the disclosure?
2. What may have been helpful for you regarding your reactions to the survivor?

General/Closing Questions
1. Is there anything you would like to speak with me about that hasn’t come up today?
2. Is there anything that you would like to ask me or anything you want me to clarify?
3. Is there any feedback you have about this interview process?
APPENDIX I: FORMAL SUPPORTER INTERVIEW GUIDE

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

School of Social Work
2080 West Mall
Vancouver, B.C. Canada V6T 1Z2
Tel: (604) 822-2255  Fax: (604) 822-8656
www.swfs.ubc.ca

Processes by which Responses to Disclosures of Violence are shaped by Relationship Context
Interview Guide/Prompt Questions
Formal Support Provider Interviews

These are preliminary questions that will be adapted throughout the research process. Adaptations will be based on feedback from participants, researchers, and collaborators, as well as through an ongoing process during data collection through preliminary analyses and constant comparison. Additionally, theoretical sampling will be used; therefore, initial participant observations and interviews will be used to inform which additional participants will be interviewed for this study.

Instructions to Interviewers
This interview guide is meant to assist with the interview process; however, it should be adapted according to the particular needs of the participants and your interactions with them. Please let the participants choose where to begin and follow them as they share their stories.

Screening/Primer: Thank you for your interest in participating in this research. As you know, I am interested in learning about how relationship and assault characteristics influence responses to hearing in person or telephone disclosures of sexual assault. For this study, sexual assault includes any form of sexual contact without voluntary consent. This sexual contact can include kissing, fondling, vaginal intercourse, anal intercourse, and oral sex, as well as other acts, if they are done without voluntary consent. Having voluntary consent means that each person involved is a willing participant. Consent that is obtained through pressure, coercion, force, or threats of force is not voluntary consent. I would like to learn more about this by speaking with people who have experienced hearing sexual assault disclosures in the course of their formal role. Based on our telephone conversation when we set up this appointment, it is clear that you have heard a disclosures of sexual assault in the context on your work over the past three years from someone who was assaulted when they were 19 to 14 years old. I would like to talk with you about what your experiences have been in whatever ways you might feel comfortable sharing your stories.
Let the participants speak, follow their story, listen carefully, and interact with the participant in a way that seems to be comfortable and appropriate for both you and the interviewee. If, once it seems that the discussion is nearing an end, the following areas have not been addressed it might be helpful to ask the following questions:

**Broad Questions about Disclosure Responses**

5. “You mentioned that you’ve heard about a sexual assault in the past three years from someone who was 19 to 24 years old. Can you please tell me about that?”
   If they just talk about one experience: “Was this the only time you experienced something like this?” If yes: “Can I get you to really think back to when that happened and tell me everything you can remember about it?”
   If they talk about more than one experience: “You talked about a few different events there. I want to really understand your experiences. It seems that you heard # different disclosures. Is that right? Which one was the most recent? Can I get you to just think back to that one experience and tell me everything that you remember about it?

6. How did you feel when they told you about their assault?
7. What did you think when they told you about their assault?
8. How did you react to the person who made the disclosure? What did you do? What did you say?

**Relationship between emotional responses and behavioural reactions**

3. How did your feelings relate to how you reacted to the survivor?
4. How did your thoughts relate to how you reacted to the survivor?

**Relationship**

5. Can you please tell me about your relationship with the person who disclosed to you?
6. How did your relationship change after they told you about the assault?
7. How did your relationships with others change after hearing the disclosure?
8. What aspects of your relationship with the survivor affected how you responded to the disclosure?

**Aspects of the Assault**

2. Were there things about the assault that were particularly important to how you responded to the disclosure?

**Training**

5. I want to switch gears now and ask you about any training you may have about sexual assault. What have you learned about how to respond to sexual assault disclosures?
6. You described that you were taught certain things about sexual assault, and you described in this case specific responses you had to the disclosure. Do you believe your responses were the same or different from things you have learned? I’m wondering what your thoughts are about that.
7. To what extent do you believe your sexual assault training was useful in this situation?
8. Did you seek out that training on your own? Was it a general part of your training?

**Potential Support Provision**
3. What would have been helpful in supporting you after hearing the disclosure?
4. What may have been helpful for you regarding your reactions to the survivor?

**General/Closing Questions**
4. Is there anything you would like to speak with me about that hasn’t come up today?
5. Is there anything that you would like to ask me or anything you want me to clarify?
6. Is there any feedback you have about this interview process?
Interview Consent Form

Processes by which Responses to Disclosures of Violence are shaped by Relationship Context

Principal Investigator: Sheila Marshall, Associate Professor
UBC School of Social Work
Co-investigator: Kristin Kendrick, Ph.D. Student, Social Work, UBC

Purpose:
Sexual assault is a common experience, and when survivors disclose (i.e., tell people about) their assaults they are most likely to tell their friends. When sexual assault disclosures have been examined, research often overlooks information about the people hearing the disclosures. Hearing disclosures of sexual assault can be difficult for the person who hears the disclosure, and responses to disclosures have been related to the well-being of the sexual assault survivor.

We are asking you to help us improve knowledge in these areas by participating in an interview if you have heard a verbal disclosure in the past three years, either in person or over the phone, of sexual assault. The sexual assault should have occurred when the sexual assault survivor was between the ages of 19 and 24 years.

The objective of the study is to gain a more in-depth understanding of the experiences of hearing disclosures of sexual assault. In doing so it is hoped that an increased ability to work with friends through outreach and support work will be achieved. Further, increased understanding of why advocates and counsellors respond as they do provides opportunities to improve training and practice with survivors of sexual assault.

Study Procedures
The interview will last approximately 90 minutes, and will be held a mutually convenient time and place. Qualitative analyses of interviews will occur as part of a research method in which individuals talk about a particular experience, and researcher(s) will record and analyse these interviews to gain information about the topic discussed.
We are interested in learning:
  o how the relationship between you and the sexual assault survivor influences your responses to the disclosure;
  o how the context of the disclosure (e.g., where and when it happens) influences your responses to the disclosure;
  o how people are personally impacted by hearing disclosures of sexual assault;
  o how formal support providers might better support people who receive disclosures of sexual assaults from peers.

**Potential Risks:**
It is possible that discussing hearing others’ disclosures of sexual assaults may trigger emotions and bring up memories of past difficult experiences. Information about sexual assault disclosures will be provided to you. Researchers will also provide you with a list of resources that might be helpful should you want to obtain support. Additionally, when needed or requested, researchers will provide appropriate referrals to community services either during or after the interviews.

**Potential Benefits:**
It is hoped that the study will be informative, positive and educational for the participants. You will receive $25 to acknowledge your time and important contribution. You will be contributing to research that could potentially help other individuals and families who have had experiences similar to your own. You will be offered a summary of the research findings after completion of the study, which can be mailed, emailed, or picked up at UBC. Attempts will be made to disseminate findings from this study to agencies conducting work in the area of sexual violence and possibly at conferences and in peer-reviewed journals. You will also be provided with a handout detailing common reactions to hearing sexual assault disclosures. This education might assist you in processing your past reactions and might help you manage any future disclosures you may hear.

**Confidentiality:**
Interview data will remain confidential. No individuals will be identified in any presentation or report coming out of this study. Notes, transcripts and tapes will be kept securely locked, and will be destroyed five years after the completion of the study.

**Contact for information about the study:**
If you have questions or desire further information with respect to the study, you may contact the research team or Sheila Marshall.

**Contact for information about the rights of research subjects:**
If you have any concerns about your treatment or rights as a research subject, you may contact the Research Subject Information Line in the UBC Office of Research Services at (604) 822-8598.

**Consent:**
Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. You may refuse to participate or withdraw from the study at any time. Your participation or non-participation will not in any way jeopardize any benefits or entitlements and will not be shared with any service provider.

Your signature below indicates that you consent to participate in this interview, and that you have received a copy of this consent form for your own records.

________________________________________________________________________
Participant signature  Date
________________________________________________________________________

Please tell us below how you would like to receive the report (e.g., mailing address, e-mail, or pick-up):

________________________________________________________________________