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# Disclosing for Closure: Negotiating Boundaries for Self-Expansion After Violence

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# DISCLOSING FOR CLOSURE: NEGOTIATING BOUNDARIES FOR SELF-EXPANSION AFTER VIOLENCE

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This thesis is approved as a creditable and independent investigation by a candidate for the master's degree and is acceptable for meeting the thesis requirements for this degree. Acceptance of this does not imply that the conclusions reached by the candidate are necessarily the conclusions of the major department.

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This thesis is dedicated to the other half of my soul

Kai C. Morrison

Thank you for getting me this far.

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# ABSTRACT

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The #MeToo movement has brought the narratives of survivors of sexual assault center stage. As we begin to understand the intricacies of these narratives, we must remember them in their first iteration, their initial disclosure. This study aims to understand the motivations behind the first disclosure of sexual violence. Through looking at these motivations through the lens of self-expansion theory, we can better support survivors of sexual violence in this initial process. Self-discrepancy theory was also used to understand survivors' sense of self, and the motivations of how survivors seek refuge in their receiver. Thus, privacy management lends itself to understanding how survivors negotiate boundaries post violence. Through 4 semi-structured interviews through a womanist lens, themes surrounding expectations around the 'perfect victim' narrative and mirroring disclosure were found. These disclosure practices included the likeness and inclusion of the other, the paralysis of the ought self, and how privacy boundaries are negotiated and managed.

# CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

In 2015, a heinous crime was committed. While media outlets were interested in the perpetrator, defined as a promising young scholar and athlete, seldom were they concerned about the victim. Emily Doe decided to keep her identity anonymous throughout the trial. It wasn't until her testimony that people became interested in her identity. Audiences were floored by Emily Doe's ability to be so honest and sincere in her testimony about a crime not even news outlets were able to utter. Conversations around Emily Doe were more focused about the violence enacted onto her body rather than the victim herself. After seeing the outpouring of support, Emily Doe eventually decided to come forward with her identity. Chanel Miller, a 24-year-old Asian American woman, has since proven that for some, coming forward and telling one's story is an option. Many survivors do not see coming forward as an option. The fear of miscommunication, pity, shame, and worst of all, not being believed is at the forefront of many survivors' minds. These possible negative outcomes further complicate when, how, and who survivors first come to after experiencing violence. Many do not come forward for years after because of the fear of the initial conversation.

Conversations in Chanel Miller's case, and others similar, often focus on the reasoning of the violence enacted. Often media coverage, and conversations surrounding sexual violence, center on the reasonings why the perpetrator committed the act. However, the MeToo movement, a survivor focused movement looking to show survivors that they are not alone through the sharing of their own stories of sexual violence, has shifted the focus (MeToo, 2022). The MeToo movement has shown us since its first inception in 2006 that sexual violence is widespread. Chanel Miller

explains that she too needed to tell her story from her own vantage point and that she couldn't leave her story untold and unfinished. While Miller's memoir *Know My Name* does discuss the violence experienced by Miller, it also tells the story of what happens after. The story that comes after violence is seldom told. Miller's memoir has proven to be so successful because it truly is the first of its kind, being named the "guiding light of the #MeToo movement" (Weiner, 2019, para. 1).

The autobiography has garnered numerous prestigious awards. From the National Book Critics Circle Award for Autobiography in 2020 and the Pulitzer Prize for General Nonfiction in 2021, Miller's words have had a profound impact on her readers. Readers were astounded by her honesty and modern take on the nuances of victimhood and sexual violence in the 21st century.

Miller mentions how the process of writing was an act of healing in itself. In 2015 she mentions during her speech for a Sac State for Sexual Assault Awareness Month event "In court, I think there's this expectation to prove that I was good in order to be worthy of care, and when I was writing, I was like 'I'm really not interested in proving that I'm good.'" This illuminates the burden survivors carry to simply be believed. The idea of being a perfect rape victim plagued Miller throughout her hearing and onward in her advocacy. The process helped her learn more about herself and process her perception of self. The perfect rape victim is an idea that refers to media ideas of what a victim of sexual violence looks like and the parameters to be deemed to have an "honest rape" (Strobl, 2004). Miller (2021) mentions in the beginning drafts of her manuscript, she omitted her friends and family from her story. Not because she didn't find their role important—actually quite the opposite. She wanted to protect her social support system

from the prying eyes and questions because “she was learning how to trust to world again” (Miller, 2021). Sharing one's narrative can make one's own place in the world a bit clearer. This study aims to better understand disclosure practices of those who have experienced sexual violence. Survivorship is seen by many people as a definable identity with a community attached. Being a survivor changes the world and how one interacts within it. Disclosure is one of the first chances to tell one's own story of survival. Understanding the disclosure practices and privacy boundaries created by survivors, we can create more meaningful post-traumatic communicative situations for survivors. Being a survivor comes with its own set of challenges; survivors shouldn’t have to focus on their ally's comfortability.

**Background of the Problem**

One in 3 women and 1 in 4 men will be sexually assaulted in 2022 (RAINN, 2021). Sexual violence is a pervasive problem that has embedded itself within our culture. Though a large portion of the population have and, unfortunately, will experience sexual violence, it is still hard to find places to speak on these issues openly and honestly. Feminist scholarship posits the important nature of public discourse when talking about rape and rape adjacent crimes (Callahan, 2011). Casual sexism and hegemony have become a fixture in internet culture through rape jokes and the oversexualization of women and has made talking about violence casual. The violence has become normalized in our everyday culture, especially online. Social media sites, according to Carrie A. Rentschler (2011), the internet and its spaces have created a generation of “aggregators of online misogyny.” Online misogynists aim is to “maintain the patriarchal order and perpetuate sexist norms, which enforce and normalize male control and push women out

of online spaces" (Dehingia, Lundgren & Raj, 2021, p.1). Feminist scholars have been working to create spaces better equipped to counteract this hegemony for the sake of education and advocacy, to support, and participate in the work to end rape culture. Sills et al. (2011) found online networking spaces, specifically online forums, to be a place to find solace and relatability with others who have experienced violence. Internet culture has a huge part in our popular culture and how we see the world. Sills et al.'s research has affirmed that the internet can be full of feminist advocacy, but it also can be home to the counter. Though important, we need to look further beyond advocacy to how we can build communities that better facilitate disclosure and healing for survivors. The ability in these spaces to find peer-to-peer support is all too important. The relatability with others is all too often overlooked. This study will be using a womanist lens to frame and understand how narratives can aide in world building beyond misogyny that placates the internet and infests survivor safe spaces.

**Hegemonic Masculinity in Narrative**

Hegemonic masculinity is embedded into every crevice of the world as we know it (Mulinari & de los Reyes, 2020). Hegemonic masculinity is best described as "the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees the dominant position of men and the subordination of women" (Connell, 1995, p. 77). Hegemony has lent men believability under the scope that they are the watchful eyes overseeing women. bell hooks (2004) noted that hegemonic masculinity removes men's ability to show their emotional side. This not only prevents empathy, it evokes violence against those that are seen as weaker, or vulnerable. Since the masculine voice has a louder, majority voice, their ideas about

violence are also allowed to be the loudest. Thus, men are those who often have a voice over what is believable, and what isn't.

**The 'Perfect Victim' Paradigm**

As previously mentioned, hegemonic voices dictate what is believable, and what is not. Often times survivors of sexual violence feel the need to fit within the 'perfect victim' paradigm in order to be believed. Survivors must report the crime perfectly without any memory lapse, or delay in reporting the crime. They must dress appropriately, nothing too revealing, that would have encouraged violence. They must have an ideal past, that is removed from any adulteress behavior (North, 2018). Without following these tenets, survivors leave themselves up to being called liars or unreliable sources of their own violence.

The perceived unbelievability of women is even embedded in the laws that are supposed to protect citizens. Rape shield laws were enacted in the 1970's and 80's to keep defense attorneys from using survivors past sexual history as evidence of "adulterous past behavior" (Cavallaro, 2019). The idea of perfect victimhood furthers the idea of needing a perfect narrative. By furthering our understanding of how survivors put up privacy boundaries for those they choose to disclose to, we can create more meaningful disclosure practices that do not include a perfect recollection of violence.

**Privacy Management Theory**

Privacy management theory (PMT) explains how individuals manage private information through the construction of metaphorical boundaries (Petronio, 1991, 2000, 2002). PMT further explains that individuals are the rightful owners of their private information. However, when an individual discloses private information, they forfeit their

right to control who the receiver lets in on that information, and how their narrative is told. However, the sender does have the power to coordinate boundaries with co-owners after the initial disclosure (Petronio, 2002). Privacy rules can be generated by the sender, or they can be previously generated by societal definitions of gender, race, class or how we negotiate what is polite conversation. This study aims to uncover how privacy rules are made within the context of sexual violence.

Coming forward as a survivor is a particularly difficult conversation to have. Conversations around sexual violence are particularly difficult because of our cultural understanding of sex and deviant behavior. Sex is far removed from our casual vocabulary; conversations surround sexual violence are often intentional. This study will investigate the nuances of choosing the situations where this post-traumatic communicative event happens through the lens of PMT.

**Self-Expansion Model**

Self-expansion theory suggests that people are motivated to broaden the self (Aron & Aron, 1986; Aron & Aron, 1996; Aron, Aron, & Norman, 2001). The primary way of expanding one's notion of self is through close relationships, where others become included in the self-concept. Overarchingly, we are motivated to surround ourselves not with people who are like ourselves, but to surround ourselves with people we see qualities in that we would like to see in ourselves. The inclusion of the other into the sender furthers one's pursuit to see said qualities we wish to see in ourselves.

After experiencing violence, one might see a loss of their sense of self (Huemmer

McLaughlin & Blumell, 2018). This study aims to explore how survivors mediate this potential loss of self within the relationships they choose to maintain. Through looking at the tending of the relationships between sender and receiver, we look to discover how self-expansion is achieved. The healing process that comes after experiencing violence varies vastly and is hard to measure scientifically. However, this study will continue to look for themes of what motivates self-expansion, what this looks like for survivors, and how this aids in their healing progression.

**Self-Discrepancy Theory**

Self-Discrepancy proposes that people hold disagreeing internal representations of themselves that lead to different emotional states (Higgins, 1987). There are three basic modes of understanding your own, and other perspectives on you. People hold their own understanding of their actual self or what they are really like. However, who someone perceives themselves to be doesn't always add up to the actual public perspective of that person. A person also holds their ideal self, or who they would like to see themselves become. One's ought self includes who they think others would like them to be. Many individuals compare themselves to other people; this notion can metabolize into an ideal self-guide which manifests one's hopes and dreams, and into an ought self-guide which manifests into that person's obligations and responsibilities.

This study investigates the relationships between the survivor that discloses, and who they choose to disclose to, the sender and receiver. Having a better understanding on how survivors position themselves in the world through their actual self can help receivers better attend to the needs for the sender. Through looking at one's perception of their ideal self and how it is positioned not to a perceived self-guide we will be better

understanding as to where the receiver needs to position themselves next to the sender to maintain meaningful privacy boundaries. Understanding survivors' ought self in this study will also allow us to understand participants' healing journeys. The notion of a healing journey is personal, and individual, but through looking at individual cases we can see the further development of what one's ought self looks like put into actions, and the measures each participant put into reaching their personal definition of their ought self.

We simply do not know enough about post-trauma communicative responses after sexual violence. Self-expansion (Aron & Aron 1987) explains a model that helps with expanding one's understanding of self through the inclusion of others. The inclusion of other is usually a romantic other. However, social support comes in many forms. Often, survivors of sexual violence avoid romantic relationships. With the societal need to have a romantic partner for support (Porter, Chambless, 2017), who do you go to? Too often are platonic relationships downsized and limited in comparison to romantic partnership (Porter, Chambless, 2017). Survivors' disclosure of their traumatic past is a necessary research area for communication scholars. The disclosure boundaries that survivors put in place for their own self-protection are often latent and unintended unless pointed out.

# CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

Strong interpersonal relationships have the power to inspire, support, and create understanding. However, little consideration has been given to how the expansion of self can be used to bolster self-disclosure and encourage the curation of empathetic listeners, essentially curating two expansive experiences. Borja, Callahan, and Long (2014) explain it best: The role of social support in being able to thoughtfully tell one's story, and come to terms with experienced violence, is paramount to owning one's own story.

This literature review seeks to understand how the inclusion of others aids in one's own search for sharing disclosure and understanding after experiencing sexual violence. I will review existing research related to Communication Privacy Management Theory, the Self Expansion Model, Self-Discrepancy Theory, and the important role of listening in the self-disclosure after experiencing sexual violence. The historical background, and past research this literature provides will give reasoning to my proposed research questions.

## The Self Expansion Model

The human curation of relationships is what makes being human meaningful. This need for deep, meaningful relationships was at the forefront of Aron and Aron's (1986) work to have a deeper understanding of the theoretical and applied questions that come with the curation of close and long-lasting relationships. When thinking of what it means to create a relationship, one must remember the time commitment it takes to have a well-defined relationship that has the ability to include another person's sense of self to one's own. This curation process includes disclosure on behalf of both parties, showing genuine interest in one another, and the commitment of time to acquire closeness between the two (Aron and Aron 1986, p. 2). Aron and Aron (1986) explicitly define self-

expansion, saying: “that positive emotions broaden people’s sense of self to include others.” The conjuring of positive sense of self through social contagion furthers the idea that self-expansion is possible through emotionally rich conversation.

The self-expansion model explains first that people seek to expand their potential efficacy, and second, that a major way they do this is through close relationships. Those looking to expand their efficacy are often attracted to the dissimilar other, or somebody who contrasts against them. This psychologically based model continues to explain our relationships, whether they be familial, romantic, or platonic friendship.
The other identity, perspectives, and knowledge combine into the other’s self-concept (Aron & Aron, 1997).

A major way that individuals look to assimilate the dissimilar other is by “including others in the self” (IOS, Aron & Aron, 1986, p. 3). To measure the closeness experienced in pair-bonded relationships, Aron et al. (1992) designed the IOS Scale. The IOS Scale acknowledges that relationships are a give and take transaction. Just as one can gain experiences, identity, and values from their relationship, they transversely give their partner their perceived good experiences, identities, and values to help in their self-expansion as well. The relation between the two constructs is so integrated that, in essence, pair-bonding could be described as the inclusion of the other in the self and the inclusion of the other in the self is certainly an example of pair-bonding (Branand, Mashek & Aron, 2019).

The motivational principle of this theory posits that people are constantly looking for ways to expand themselves (Aron, Lewandowski, Mashek, & Aron, 2013). The motivational model is the most pertinent aspect of this framework because of the natural

humanistic instinct to be attracted toward difference and change that can be found by investing in another (Aron & Aron, 1997). As previously mentioned, the self-expansion model theorizes that people are constantly looking to expand their sense of self. To accomplish their self-expansion through self-efficacy, resources are needed. People seek people who can be resources for them to complete this goal (Aron & Aron, 1992). Social status, knowledge, experiences, community, and possessions are all aspects that might make someone view another as a viable social resource. We as humans are motivated by our need for resources. Our humanistic need to see resources in the people we invest time into (Maslow, 1967), urges us to find partners who are able to supplement us with those resources. As western perceptions of individuality grow, so does our perceptions in what resources we need. Rather than desiring our monetary needs be met, emotional needs have become paramount in romantic endeavors (Aron & Aron, 1992). Pairing our humanistic want for self-efficacy with our need for deep relationships forms our need to both connect and share with others.

Recent research that uses self-expansion as a framework focuses on partners looking to expand their sense of self outside of their monogamous relationship. Lewandowski and Ackerman (2006) used a sample of college students' self-reported self-expansion variables, which included the inclusion of the partner in the self and current and potential self-expansion from the outside relationship. Common self-expansion variables include intimacy, companionship, sex, security, and emotional involvement. The search for self-expansion through infidelity accounted for a large portion of the difference in self-reported susceptibility to infidelity. VanderDrift et al. (2010) conducted a similar study using romantic partners after they reported lower self-

expansion and investigated the ways they explore alternative mates. The cross-sectional study worked to find how romantic relationships that have adequate self-expansion would lead to failures in their motivational bias. Failures of motivational bias included devaluing alternative partners' potentially attractive attributes, alternatively favoring their partners. However, those who felt nourished intellectually or supported by their partner were more likely to find alternative partners' abilities more attractive and ones they would like to mirror. Those who did not feel mentally stimulated or supported and lacked self-expansion experienced higher rates of infidelity. This further elucidates our need to better understand how to sustain relations between an individual and their included other. Self-expansion necessitates a nourishment of new ideas, however when the new ideas run out, the other may look elsewhere.

The inclusion of others in the self, or IOS, has been proven as a staple in feeling successful in the efforts put forth to further expand the notion of self. Previous research has even suggested that one doesn't need to know the other individual personally. Shedlosky-Shoemaker, Costabile, and Arkin (2014) sought to find how parasocial relationships aid in the expansion of self. Parasocial relationships refer to a one-sided relationship with another entity that feels extremely personal to the individual. However, the other entity often does not know the individual and/or the depth of that imagined relationship. They propose that this expansion of self happens when there is a cognitive overlap of perceived similarity in background or narrative: (a) cognitive overlap with the character and (b) perceived self-expansion. Additionally, the study worked to find the role of psychological transportation, or one's ability to be entranced in a story, on cognitive overlap and self-expansion experienced in relation to an

unfamiliar character (Shedlosky-Shoemaker, Costabile, & Arkin, 2014, p. 560). To test this, they had participants read a first-person story about triumph. Participants were given a questionnaire that inquired about their perceived psychological transportation, their inclusion of others (i.e., the fictional character), and most importantly, the similarity to the character and one's ideal self. This study supported that self-expansion is possible when characters have believability to their audience. Transparency in the characters own self expansion inspires onlookers to continue to seek ways to have similar experiences.

The work needed to expand the notion of self is clearly important. The inclusion of the other has proven itself to be an important tenet in doing so. However, individuals must decide how to share the information that aides in self-expansion. This includes how one negotiates how and when to disclose information. Privacy considerations are paramount to make sure survivors feel in control of their disclosure. The literature proves the importance of accepting the other. However, seldom are platonic, meaningful relationships investigated. Emotional intimacy goes beyond romantic partnerships. This study will aim to further investigate the notion of emotional intimacy through disclosure in platonic relationships. Through investigating the notion of likeness, we can better understand the motivational factors as to why individuals decide to disclose.

**RQ #1: Does self-expansion theory necessitate likeness in order to achieve self-expansion?**

Enacting a boundary-controlled environment would be paramount in creating a positive survivor experience (Ullman & Peter-Hagene, 2014). However, in the context of sexual violence, these boundaries become much more important. Sexual violence

survivors lose a large amount of control after their attack. Allowing victims to regain control over their life, and their stories, is extremely important to their healing journey (Middleton et al., 2016). This work should be empowering for participants. PMT/CPM provides us a framework (McBride & Bergen, 2008) to talk about disclosure, but not too much about participant feelings or the listeners' post disclosure (O'Connor, 2005).

Communication research on sexual violence is limited because of the taboo nature of the topic. However, the less we talk about the topic, the more taboo it will become (Angelo, 2008). Disclosure requires two parties: The sender and receiver. Little has been written on the receiver's perspective. The inclusion of others is a huge pillar in self-expansion. However, the role of the other has yet to be explored in the realm of self-disclosure.

**RQ #2: How does the inclusion of another help survivors of sexual violence heal?**

The perfect victim myth has plagued survivors for decades. Many try to fit into being the perfect survivor years after they begin their healing journey. It can be questioned that survivors yearn for their previous selves, before becoming a survivor. Understanding the yearning for ones "ought self" or the self that others think they should be to earn social understandability and love.

**Privacy Management Theory**

The core property of privacy lies in one's capability to manage others' access to private information (Altman, 1975). Altman and Taylor's (1973) Social Penetration Theory was the original starting point for Privacy Management Theory (CMT). Altman and Taylor posit that self-disclosure is necessary for social penetration or getting to the

others' center core of who they are, thus creating a deeper connection and bond. However, Petronio (1991) knew there was more to how people decide to self-disclose and our natural human desire for privacy. Petronio's theory explains that we are all owners of our private information. We have the agency to decide who knows what about us with full knowledge that once we give someone that knowledge, they too have the agency to share that information, though it is not moral (Petronio, 1991). To aid in this process, loved ones create privacy rules to better manage the privacy for the disclosure (Petronio, 1991). In this process, people develop privacy rules based on criteria set by the disclosure. These rules are often used to conceal or reveal information based on cultural norms, gender, context, risk factors, and numerous other factors used to help protect anonymity and the face of the one disclosing (Petronio, 1991).

Privacy Management Theory has been explored within numerous fields, but especially in the familial, organizational, and telecommunicative realm. Misoch (2015) worked to find how self-disclosure online impacts its users. In this qualitative study, the researcher watched and read the comments surrounding videos that disclosed about one's own battle with self-harm. The researcher hypothesized that the increase of anonymity online would increase the likelihood of greater self-disclosure online. Over 70% of videos watched were visually anonymous and used usernames that omitted any possible real identity of the actor. It was found that people were able to share more sensitive information when they felt that their identity was covered. Most importantly, it gives individuals the chance to have ownership over their personal information. Often, individuals are hesitant to share personal information out of fear that others will misinterpret their story or their intentions (Petronio, 1991). However, disseminating this

information anonymously online can create the feeling that it is okay to misinterpret them because they will never know the real them.

Frampton and Child (2013) sought to analyze organizational relationships in light of Privacy Management Theory. This framework was used to understand how working professionals respond to coworker Facebook friend requests. Through snowball sampling, students at a mid-sized midwestern university were asked to send a survey to 20 contacts that were Facebook users and full-time employees. Upon screenshots of the 20 people emailed, participants received extra credit. Over 312 participants were found through this sampling tactic. These individuals completed a survey that asked them if they accepted Facebook friend requests from coworkers in the form of a yes or no question. They were then asked how they handled being friended by their coworkers. Lastly, they were asked if they made any modification to their privacy setting or the posts they made after they accepted a request. Participants were then asked to complete the 6-item interior family privacy orientation measure, reframing the measure to the organizational notions of privacy, rather than family (Morr, 2002). The results found that oftentimes, workers accepted the friend requests of their coworkers. The majority of participants said that they did not revise their privacy settings after accepting coworkers' requests, which surprised the researchers. This could hypothetically suggest that people are willing to be more frivolous with their privacy management online. The context the internet provides, the publicity of being on a social network, removes the need to manage your privacy—or at the very least changes perceptions of one's private self online.

Privacy Management Theory has seldom been used to speak on the terms of those who have come forward as survivors or victims of sexual assault. This is particularly interesting because of the cryptic relationship of sexual violence and the shame associated with the crime (Henry & Powell, 2015). The abuser often creates the grounds of the privacy rules or who gets to know about the crime committed. Out of fear and shame, survivors and victims feel like they must agree to the rules (Ramirez & Lane, 2019). The responsibility survivors feel to tell their story to be their own advocate is exhausting. Survivors have already lost a huge amount of control after an assault; it is important that they know they have control over their body and perception (Ullman, Peter-Hagene, 2014). The literature surrounding privacy management theory lends survivors the boundaries to control how and when they tell their stories. This is particularly present in sexual crimes that are perpetrated on minors.

Petronio, Reeder, Hecht, and Mon't Ros--Mendoza (1996) consider underage abuses in their study that focuses on children and adolescents who experienced violence under the age of 18. They conducted 38 face-to-face interviews with participants who experienced violence in childhood and/or adolescence about how they worked to disclose their status as a survivor or victim of childhood sexual violence. Because of the sensitive nature of the topic, researchers enacted boundary access rules in order to protect individuals' privacy and anonymity. They asked a series of open-ended questions that were then analyzed and transcribed by the research team. How these questions were asked and how the sample was acquired followed PMT boundary access. They asked the participants to describe conversations they had with others that were centered around boundary access and boundary control. The idea of understanding boundaries and the

boundary rules around young adults who have experienced sexual violence is the goal of this thesis. The influences of the acceptance of boundaries given by the sender has the possibilities of creating more meaningful post-traumatic communicative situations. Questions around boundary access asked questions that pertained to the kinds of criteria needed to disclose. Researchers were primarily interested in the characteristics of the first person that they told. Environmental considerations were also asked, including what time of day and where the conversation took place and why they felt it was necessary to disclose when they did. The boundary control questionnaire included who they wouldn't tell and how they worked to control the dissemination of their story. This study is an excellent example of the power of disclosure and its environmental factors that are not always considered. Past research has inquired about the reasoning behind choosing the person to disclose, but it's within the contextual conditions that can make the experience of disclosure meaningful, and healing for both parties.

PMT reminds us how we need to be careful with other people's stories, especially while conducting qualitative work. While Petronio (2002) and her research team sought to find answers, there had to be a careful methodology that included the involvement and role of a social worker. The social worker's primary place was to be a social advocate for participants. The idea of having a social advocate whose main focus is to ensure the safety of the participant further encourages the idea previously mentioned. The inclusion of another can be a powerful tool to encourage survivors to tell their truth

Survivor first research that focuses on the survivor in the present day, rather than what had happened to them in the past, is severely lacking. The legal system is a window into how we forget the survivor over their survivor narrative. Campbell (2012) reviewed

the problem of sexual-assault case attrition. Campbell mentions that survivors' contact with investigators has often left them feeling anxious, depressed, and overall upset. Stobl (2004) spoke to the anxiety survivors feel during legal procession. Often, these legal entities are some of the first entities survivors disclose to. The negative feelings that occur can be attributed to having this first admittance to violence be centered with the violence, rather than the survivor's wellbeing. Labeling those who have experienced violence as victim or survivor without knowledge of how they have metabolized that experience may result in the sender feeling like there process is delayed if they do not feel comfortable with the survivor label.. Instigating labels of victimhood or survivor may instigate feelings of dysphoria.

Privacy management has an important role for survivors after violence because it provides control. Telling a story of survival is never easy, but at the minimum it should be empowering. However, this disclosure can bring negative emotions associated with victimhood. Anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder are common after violence. Disclosure can trigger these symptoms and cause a lapse in victims' sense of self (Rubin, Berntsen & Kindt-Johansen, 2008). This discrepancy between who they knew themselves to be and who they are now may have serious impacts on how they choose to disclose.

Creating meaningful boundary rules has been proven in the previously mentioned literature to create a layer of safety for individuals. This study works to understand what different privacy boundaries survivors put into action. With any identity, labels become an important aspect when first introducing included others into who you are. Labels

matter. The inception of calling someone a survivor before they mourn their victimhood may intercept a privacy boundary for the sender.

**RQ #4: How do survivors work to set meaningful privacy boundaries when sharing their survivor narratives?**

Privacy boundaries aid survivors to take control of their narratives, including who they allow to know this sensitive information; how it is told also gives the control back into the survivor's hands. Contextual influences in conversation before disclosure can give us a better understanding if disclosure must be transactional between the sender and receiver. By understanding the setting and background information needed for a positive disclosure experience, we can better understand what the survivors in our lives need to self-expand.

**Self-Discrepancy Theory**

Self-discrepancy theory was originally developed to be an extension of multiple theories such as self-inconsistency theory, cognitive dissonance theory, and the imbalance theory (Heider, 1958). However, Dr. Edward Tory Higgins (1987) sought more out of his original framework. Previous theories only focused on negative and positive emotions associated with individuals' self-concept. Higgins, conversely, was the first to assign specific emotions and affects to the disparity.

Self-discrepancy calls upon the occurrence of when your self-concept, or your perceived self, does not align with your ideal self. Oftentimes, people associate a negative life event to their actual self now. There are numerous negative self-discrepancies that occur after one experiences a traumatic event. This theory's primary goal is to understand which contrasting ideals cause negative emotions. The structure of this theory is three-

fold. The first is to (1) identify the discomfort felt by people holding contrasting ideas about what they have experienced versus others perception of their experience as well as the (2) emotional vulnerabilities felt by the emotional discrepancies. Lastly, the theory considers (3) the role of the discrepancies in influencing the different kinds of discomfort participants may be experiencing. These can be labeled as the three basic domains of the self: the *actual* self, the *ideal* self, and the *ought* self (Higgins, 1987). The actual self refers to the attribute that you, or someone else believes, you, actually have. The ideal self refers to the attributes that you wish to have. The ought self speaks to the attribute that you believe you *should* have (Strauman, 1996). The different domains are all analyzed by the different standpoints of their own and others. Own refers to participants' perception of themselves, while the other is classified as a meaningful others perception.

Barnett and Womack (2014) sought to find how the distance between one's ideal and ought self and one's own and others' perceptions influence college students' self-esteem and possible narcissism. In their hierarchical multiple regression analysis, they found a positive relationship between actual-ideal and actual-undesired self-discrepancies predicted self-esteem. Similarly, Bond (2014) distributed an online questionnaire to 573 LGB adolescents. Surveys were divided among high schools and were delivered to the schools' Gay Straight Alliance, with parental consent before giving the questionnaire. The selves questionnaire (Higgins et al., 1985) was used to measure self-discrepancies. Their measure asked participants to list up to ten attributes associated with different domains of self. The selves questionnaire was scored following Higgins' (1985) protocol. Participants' answers of their actual selves were compared to their ideal self answers by

outside coders who were not aware of the meaning of the study. A large amount of high esteem answers centered around the social support of friends and family members that offset the negative media representation of their identity.

However, this study has numerous limitations, which are referenced to in the text. One of their biggest missteps was priming their subjects about their identity and then asking for background information on how they found that identity to be most true. While this priming proved helpful in orientating subjects' answers to be more identity focused, it influenced their natural flow of answers. While this priming made answers more applicable and easier to sort through for researchers, researchers missed the opportunity to achieve genuine reactions about one's identity. This might have impacted the answers of those who have intersectional identities.

Self-Discrepancy Theory is often used in the context of image. Perhaps most popularly, studies using self-discrepancy focus on body image. Vartanian (2012) asked both male and female participants to answer Higgins (1985) selves questionnaire. Questions centered around respondents perceived attributes of their bodies, or their actual self versus the attributes of their ideal self, or ideal body. Researchers also have proposed another way to measure the different selves within this theory. By providing participants with a list of attributes and having them assign each within the different combination of self, we can better compare the nuances and differences between participants' perception of their actual, ideal, and ought self in a more controlled way. However, within this standardization, we miss exactly what we were looking for, the further nuances of those discrepancies.

Self-Discrepancy Theory started primarily as a psychology-based theory. However, as the study of this theory has developed, its uses have become more communication based. This theory is continuing to grow into an important aspect of interpersonal communication. Brewin and Vallance (1996) sought to understand the role of violence in childhood and the role of violence had in their identity formation. The identity formation was associated with discrepancies between participants actual self and their ought self. Participants noted their extreme anxiety around others' expectations of who they will be in the future. There is no road map to be a perfect survivor. Facing this adversity as a child has unforeseen future impacts on participants. Many feel guilt after their trauma, wondering if their identity will be centered on this survivorship. Questions were centered on participants future development were often met with anxiety for participants. A depressive pattern was found surrounding those who were questioned about their actual perception of self and who they wished to be in the future, considered the ideal self. A total of 66 participants filled out the questionnaire along with the Conflict Tactics Scale. A limitation of this study is that small number of respondents. However, it is understandable because of the nuanced participant they were looking to fulfill the survey. Results also found there was a lack of correlation between violence and vulnerability, suggesting there are more mediators that need to be considered. Looking conceptually at this study, the types of vulnerability factors or other self-discrepancies should have been a larger mediating factor.

Self-Discrepancy Theory and Self Expansion have been used in tandem before. Campbell, Sedikides, and Bosson (1994) hypothesized that romantically tied participants would report being closer to their ideal selves than would romantically uninvolved

participants. Researchers worked to also identify whether or not a reduced self-discrepancy reported by romantically tied participants would be related to their overall well-being and higher self-esteem versus their romantically uninvolved counterparts. Subjects were undergraduate students recruited at a large public school in the Midwest. There were 128 subjects who were in a minimum 8 month long heterosexual relationship in this study. These participants had to also take the Relationship Assessment Scale (Hendrick, 1988) and have a total relationship satisfaction score of 28.5 out of 35 to be considered for the study.- After responding to these statements, participants were asked to take another questionnaire, the Pelham and Swann's (1989) Self-Attributes Questionnaire. The reasoning behind the questionnaire was to rate their closeness to their actual self, and the closeness to their ideal self on a series of 10 different attitudes. The attitudes they tested included intellectual ability, social competence, artistic ability, athletic ability, physical attractiveness, leadership ability, common sense, emotional stability, sense of humor, and discipline. Subjects rated themselves on a 10-point scale between the extremes “top 5%” and “bottom 5%”. Participants further explained themselves on another 10-point scale ranging from “very short of my ideal self” and “very much like my ideal self.” The last questionnaire given to the same participants was the Psychological Well-Being Scale (Ryff, 1989). Subjects rated their level of well-being along 6 domains: positive relationships with others, autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, purpose in life, and self-acceptance. The results were consistent with their hypotheses. Both romantically and non-romantically involved participants did not differ in ratings of their actual self. However, romantically involved individuals reported being significantly closer to their ideal selves. In the end, romantically involved subjects tended to report

higher psychological wellbeing, thus, self-expansion. This study only begins to answer the question of how we value outward likability. It brings an interesting question to the surface: How do people work to define their ideal self? It is understandable that participants would find their ideal self met when they start meeting consistent communication and care for another. However, platonic relationships and their depth are sorely underrepresented and valued in these communication situations. Platonic relationships have the potential, if tested, to create a community and fulfill important relational roles. Acknowledging the difference between one's ought self and ones ideal self could give more clarification about how these different relationships fulfill these senses of self.

This idea of including the other in your expansion of self is a continued idea throughout both self-discrepancy theory, self-expansion, and privacy management theory. This suggests that having adequate social support is an important pillar to reaching your ideal self. It is an important pillar because the inclusion of another gives you someone to lean on that encourages you to become your most ideal self.

RQ #3: What discrepancies in survivors' idea of their "ought self" lead to prolonged paralysis of disclosure?

Literature has provided us a notion of an expedited healing process that survivors must go through, often having to tell their narratives before they are ready. The telling of these narratives span from having to testify in front of a court to having to disclose to a group of friends or family members for the purposes of believability. The idea of having to be the "perfect victim" can further plague narratives, and their breadth of honestly because of previous notions on what a "good" survivor story looks like. The

perfect victim narrative often is a survivors ought self of who they think people wish them to be.

**Framing Blame in Sexual Assault**

Violence is pervasive in its nature. It seeps into everything we know. Hearing of sexual violence in our classrooms, to our neighbors, loved ones is no longer looked upon with furrowed brows and gut wrenching "*we are here for you*" speeches. Rather, the admittance of being acted on in violence is met with "*how did this happen*?" (Sabina & Ho, 2014). Media portrayals of violence and the perfect victim have a lot to do with how others deal with their classmate, neighbor, or loved ones' experience with violence (Alaggia & Wang, 2020). Social support has taken on a new, more nuanced role in survivor advocacy.

*The Perfect Victim*

Often, coming forth as a victim of sexual violence is a delayed process because of the nuances of sexual violence. Whether or not you will be believed has been framed on how sexual violence is portrayed on media platforms (Uy, 2011). Frese, Moya, and Megías (2004) sought to understand how rape myths and situational factors infiltrate our bias. Researchers asked 182 psychology students to put four judgements to three different rape situations. The judgements include victim responsibility, perpetrator responsibility, intensity of trauma, and likelihood to report the crime to the police. The situations put forth included a date rape, marital rape, and stranger rape. The Rape Myth Acceptance Scale (RMAS) (Burt, 1980) was used to understand their attitudes and understanding of sexual violence. Those who had higher RMA scores put more blame on the victim than those who scored lower on the RMA

scale. These myths were created by western standards of shame and guilt but have been perpetuated by media portrayals of what victims should do to not be liable for their attack, rather than placing the blame on the perpetrator.

Criterion for having a case for prosecuting an assault has aided in curating the perfect victim paradigm. The perfect victim was not intoxicated, they fought back, they reported immediately, they were caught off guard (Barraca, 2017). The list could go on and on about what a salient case looks like in the 2020s. This perfect victim paradigm is pervasive; it can be seen as the through line for many movies and television shows that hinge on violence. However, being a perfect victim is not the reality for many survivors. The nuances of interpersonal violence make it hard to report and share. Believing survivors is paramount in healing and restoration for survivors (Miller & Cromer, 2015). Miller and Cromer sought to understand the delayed disclosure for childhood sexual assault (CSA) survivors. Participants who had experienced CSA completed a survey about their experiences. The survey used was Brief Betrayal-Trauma Survey (Goldberg & Freyd, 2006). Upon completion, a vignette of a survivor of CSA was used. A Likert scale was used to measure the believability of the story, 0 being not at all believable, and 5 being very believable. The results proved that many survivors of CSA did not disclose because of fear they would not be believed by the important people in their lives. It was a particularly higher probability that those who have experienced a successful disclosure process were more likely to believe other survivors of sexual violence. It is proposed that empathy of fearing to not be believed is what catapulted the blind believing of survivors.

**Social Support**

Sexual violence can cause a multitude of physical and social harms, from psychological distress, to repeated abuse, to physical health problems (Gutner, Rizvi, Monson, & Resick, 2006). However, these manifestations of trauma do not have to be suffered alone can be alleviated by social support. Patterson, Greeson, and Campbell (2009) put fliers all over the city of Chicago, noting that they were looking to interview female survivors of sexual violence, whether they sought help or not. The research team recruited 186 adult women to participate. Participants began their interview by being asked if they sought "legal, medical, mental health systems or rape crisis centers for post assault assistance" (Patterson, Greeson & Campbell, 2009, p. 129). If they referenced that they did not seek outside support, they were asked a series of questions about why they chose not to disclose, the preventive factors that kept them from disclosing, and whether they regretted not seeking help. A thematic content analysis was conducted on the transcripts of these events along with testing empirical assertions within the data. Results found that survivors were reluctant to find support because of the anticipation of rejection. This was consistent whether that rejection came in form of not believing the event occurred or that their assault wasn't valid based on the nuances of the event. Another reason for not reporting was not believing in the legal system, knowing they would be asked to report and not wanting to do so out of skepticism of the legal system to help. Many survivors felt confident in their coping skills and didn't think the legal process would aid them in their own individual healing process. With widespread publicization of a failed system, many found it hard to believe that there would be a sufficient end to their case. The major theme found in the study was the self-protection participants enacted on in fear that they would also be mistreated by

professional personnel. Many participants noted feeling worried about probing questions about a story they aren't always ready to tell. They often felt that they would "require them to disclose the rape in detail and answer numerous, potentially invasive questions" (Patterson, Greeson & Campbell, 2009, p. 132).

In a system where citizens expect their legal system to further hurt and traumatize them, where else do survivors turn? Many survivors have turned to social media and online advocacy groups for solace. Bogen, Bleiweiss, and Orchowski (2019) looked to explore the potential for social support via social media sites. The study conducted worked to explore social reactions to sexual violence disclosure using the Twitter hashtag- #NotOkay. Over a five-day period, 305 pieces of content were collected. Ullman's (2000) Social Reactions Questionnaire served as a preliminary coding guide. Themes that were found included "egocentric and distracting social reactions." These were classified as more negative reactions. Many commentors mentioned that the only reason you would post about something is to get a reaction. Most responses were positive and emerged with the themes of providing emotional support, providing tangible or informational aid, and expressing validation and belief. This study proves the positive experiences of social support, even if you cannot see your supporters.

Eysenbach et al. (2004) sought to find the effects on health and social outcomes of computer-based peer to peer communities and electronic self-support groups that are used by those facing health and social challenges. This metanalysis found that community was built in online communities that were explicitly labeled as "peer-to-peer" or explicitly for those who identify with said community. The study notes the lacking in

research about online communities, because most “peer to peer communities have been evaluated only in conjunction with more complex interventions or involvement with health professionals” (Eysenbach et al., 2004, p. 6).

Neuwirth and Federick (2004) wanted to understand role of peer and social influence on communicative acts related to drinking behavior. A survey sample of 549 students were asked to evaluate three social settings involving the consumption of alcohol. These included: being sober and offering to drive the car of someone who has been drinking, asking someone who has been drinking and is loud and obnoxious to be quiet, and requesting that no alcohol be served at a graduation party. The actors in these scenes also changed between being an acquaintance and a close same-sexed friend. A nine-point scale was used to evaluate their reactions. The results found that a person's own attitude and self-efficacy played an important role in bystander interaction. Above all else, peer influence and majority attitudes were found to be associated with the willingness to make alternative opinions known. Those who bear witness to the after effects of another's recovery after a traumatic event can be labeled as a bystander to recovery. One's own self-efficacy is powerful, whether or not they are willing to intervene in potentially harmful behaviors after the fact is huge it being a helpful advocate for a survivor.

**Gaps in the Literature**

The gaps found within this literature review proved stark. Little has been spoken about in the realm of disclosure and self-expansion. Much research that inquiries about sexual violence~~,~~ focused more on the act and actor rather than the survivor. The literature that surrounds adults learning to reckon with violence is low. Self-expansion is sought

after by relating oneself to a positive counterpart in hopes to open one's horizons. It can be hypothesized that survivors could do the same by having a positive fellow survivor counterpart to learn from or by having an encouraging social support experience. Thus:

**RQ #1: Does self-expansion theory necessitate likeness in order to achieve self-expansion?**

**RQ #2: How does the inclusion of another help survivors of sexual violence heal?**

**RQ #3: What discrepancies in survivors' idea of their "ought self" lead to prolonged paralysis of disclosure?**

**RQ #4: How do survivors work to set meaningful privacy boundaries when sharing their survivor narratives?**

# CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

The review of survivor literature and existing theoretical framework largely focused on quantitative survey results. However, many survivors of sexual violence often report that they "feel like they are just another number." This is exactly why it is important we look at this study through a qualitative lens. The purpose of this study is to evaluate the ways survivors of sexual violence work toward self-disclosure with others. As explained in the previous chapter, disclosure can aid in the expansion of oneself and coming to terms with traumatic events. The vocalization of one's experience with violence is one of the hardest things a survivor can do, because vocalization is the admittance that it happened (Phelps, 2011). This chapter's purpose is to give a full description of the design that is be used for this study. This section will explore (a) the nature of qualitative work, (b) review its sampling approach, and (c) explicate the data collection and analysis.

## The Nature of Qualitative Work

Qualitative research methods are imperative in "providing rich descriptions of complex phenomena" (Shaeffer, 1999, p. 1101). Qualitative work allows subjects to speak outside the parameters given to them, to speak freely without the worry of there being a "wrong answer." Rather than relying on a generalizable hypothesis or a general set of numbers, hearing the perspective of survivors can give us the chance to further understand nuances that come with disclosure.

### *Snowball Sampling*

Due to the serious nature of the topic of hand, snowball sampling has proved to be the most ethical (Noy, 2008). Snowball, or referral, sampling is the best sampling method

to use when asking participants such personal matters, without them feeling like they have "outed themselves." However, when done ethically, snowball sampling can "lead to dynamic moments where unique social knowledge of an interactional quality can be fruitfully generated" (Noy, 2008, p. 328; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Hay, 2005; Limb & Dwyer, 2001). Snowball sampling starts with a willing participant, and if the subject has any other contacts that they believe could be another subject, may give you that contact, and so on. When working with highly stigmatized groups, it is often hard to find willing participants who have a survivor narrative that they are willing to share. However, when you find a pocket of willing participants, interviews are filled with meaningful data to better understand the small group (Zhou & Sloan, 2015).

Purposeful sampling aids in researchers' validity because it "lies in selecting information-rich cases for study in depth" (Suri, 2011). The sample used in this study will include men and women from the ages of 18 -29 who have disclosed sexual violence to a close partnership. The purpose of this younger age range is to give an even acknowledgement of the impact the MeToo movement has had on the younger generation. Social media has acted as an archive for the MeToo movement that younger generations more readily revisit. The 18-35 age range actively witnessed this movement in their social media feed from a young, pivotal age—perhaps even before they identified as survivors. This has the ability to influence participants in innate ways. Men, women, and non-binary individuals were welcomed to participate in this study. Sexual violence is pervasive and can affect anyone, regardless of sex or gender. While gendered differences in communication are acknowledged (Henry & Powell, 2015), it is important that we acknowledge survivors of sexual violence as equal in their ability to contribute to the

conversation about their own identity as a survivor. This partnership does not need to be romantic in nature, but a relationship that is close in nature. Subject anonymity and ethical concerns will be covered under IRB approval (Appendix B) to ensure those concerns are not a problem.

The goal of sampling is to reach saturation. Saturation is "referred to the point in data collection when no new additional data are found that develop aspects of a conceptual category" (Johnston et al., 2010, p. 3). Snowball sampling has been named a difficult sampling method because it could arguably go on forever. However, without finding new shared themes or ideas emerging throughout the text, the research team can conclude that data saturation has been achieved (Francis, et al., 2010). The saturation of this study was considered reached once reoccurring themes began to be seen at a minimum of 3 participants (Johnston et al., 2010). These participants will be interviewed for approximately 1-1.5 hours about their disclosure practices with loved ones. All participants were found on the subreddits r/Sexual_Assault violence and r/assaultsurvivor. Reddit is a notably "young" app that appeals to a younger demographic, making the information sharing app the perfect ground to find participants for this study. A biographical survey will be sent to the group for recruiting purposes. This short survey will ask race, age, and whether or not they are interested in participating in the study. I will be careful to make sure to orient my call toward survivors of sexual violence. Upon completion of the survey, participants will be asked if they knew any other survivors in their network that would be willing to be interviewed.

**In-Depth Interviewing**

Interviewing participants is most apt for this study because it allows subjects to divulge the nuances of their experiences as survivors of sexual violence. It is within those nuances and intricacies of stories that will make this analysis full of meaningful results that have the potential to answer the research questions proposed in the previous chapter. Interviewing is an all-important method for feminist scholars to "use to gain insight into the world of their respondents" (Hesse-Bibder, 2007, p.114). This world building that interviews allow for is the perfect way to understand survivors' perspective and how they arrive at their answers. Giving participants the platform to speak honestly and freely is an honor and responsibility, especially interacting with participants who have been silenced in the past.

Socialized norms often keep survivors from speaking on their experiences (Neuwirth & Frederick, 2004). This fear of speaking out may keep participants from feeling like they can speak openly and freely. This is exactly why a semi-structured interview style is the best method for interviewing. Semi-structured interviews call for a fully realized interview guide (Appendix A). This fully realized set of questions are the questions that I plan to put forth to participants. It should be noted that no subject is required to answer a question. Individuals are able to enact their own free will to skip questions and omit information. The order of when I ask the questions and flow with the conversation is subject to change, based on participants' responses. As previously mentioned, disclosure is extremely difficult for survivors and may bring back negative emotions. However, having the space and choice to disclose without fear of judgement, being cut off, or even feeling like their story is a burden is paramount to make sure this is a positive experience for individuals who are interviewed for this study. I will refrain

from verbally cutting a participant off or reorienting them completely. Semi-structured interviews will take place virtually via the video communication site, Zoom. Zoom is the best application to conduct interviews of sensitive nature because of the physical boundary a camera allows. Participants also have the opportunity to choose the place that they find most comfortable to tell their disclosure story. Semi-structured interviews also allows me to encourage participants to speak out and also control the environment to ensure important questions are answered.

## Study Design

### *Sampling*

Sampling. Sexual violence is an unfortunately pervading issue that reaches many demographics. It is within the nuances of these experiences that make this research meaningful. Facebook and Facebook groups have become a safe space for survivors of sexual trauma to come together and share their everyday hardships (Rambe, 2013). As previously mentioned, r/Sexual_Assault violence and r/assaultsurvivor were the subreddits where all of our participants were initially found. There will be a short participant survey form. Ideal participants would be (1) over the age of 18 and (2) have experienced sexual trauma after the age of 18 years old. Other demographic questions will be asked as well, such as race, age, and sexual orientation. From this volunteer-based sampling, we can hope that further snowballing can happen.

*Procedure*

Participants were found through the subreddits r/ r/Sexual_AssaultViolence and r/assaultsurvivor. Upon completion of a demographic survey and pre-interviewing questions, participants will be asked to sign up for an interview time. Participants will

receive full consent debriefs after filling out the survey, pre-interview, and post-interview. Informed consent will be given to participants digitally to review, and verbally pre- and post-interview. Participants will be asked to sign for written consent. I plan to remind participants before and after that they can omit any information they wish to remove at any time. The interview can be stopped if they wish to do so. However, interview spans may fluctuate depending on how the interviewee chooses to expand their points. All personal and identifying information will be removed from the record. I will offer participants the opportunity to create their own pseudonyms as well. The sequence of questions will remain the same across participants to ensure the diversity in answers are due to the diversity of participants rather than the questions asked (Gordon, 1975). The exploitative nature of expanding on narratives is a pervasive problem I fully recognize. Ensuring social support for participants is at the forefront of importance. I wish to extend an offer to allow participants to have a supportive person with them for the interview. This supportive person will not be participating in the interview, and any information given from the supportive person will not be recorded or documented. However, the entirety of the interview will be recorded via Zoom, both vocally and visually as well as being documented for transcriptive purposes.

*Ethical Considerations*

The subject matter at hand is extremely serious in nature and may invoke intense emotions. As a trained advocate and certified trauma informed person, I plan on employing this knowledge in the construction of my interview questions, reaction, and follow ups. IRB approval (Appendix B) and consideration extremely important as well, to be sure that no one feels like they were taken advantage of, or they didn't know how this

information was being used. Using a broad questioning series was an important asset for participants to look inward and expand in ways they feel is best in their interest. In the beginning of each interview, I was sure to reiterate and make clear if at any moment the participant needs to stop, and restart or stop the interview entirely, they can. Removing one's interview from the record will always be an option as well.

*Data Collection*

Qualitative measures are best for this study because we are looking to evaluate the ways survivors of sexual violence work toward self-disclosure with others (Treadwell & Davis, 2020). Semi-structured interviews will be best used for this process. Allowing participants to be able to expand, or not in occurrence to their answer will be extremely important when trying to see themes within their answers. Keeping the sequence the same will also prove important as aforementioned.

*Analysis*

Self-Discrepancy Theory (Petronio, 1991) lends us an established list of perceptions, including actual/own vs. ideal/own, actual/own vs. ideal/other, actual/own vs. ought/other, actual/own vs. ought/own. These will provide insight on how survivors might idealize their others.

Beside fulfilling the self-discrepancy tenets, thematic analysis is the best option for this study because it requires identifying, analyzing, and interpreting patterns of meaning within one's content (Clark & Braun, 2015). Initial coding of items and major themes were individually coded by me, the primary researcher and then a singular outside researcher also generated their own initial codes to ensure reliability. The key categories guided the results. There are three different pieces of content that were searched for.

Themes within (1) How they came forth as a survivor (2) origins of their relationship with who they first interpersonally disclosed with, and (3) how they now feel authentically themselves around others.

Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase step guide for thematic analysis has been used as a guide, giving us a six-step process:(1) Become familiar with the data, (2) generate initial codes, (3) search for themes, (4) review themes, (5) define themes, and (6) write-up.

Through looking at the nature of qualitative work, reviewing its sampling approach, and explicating the data collection and analysis, we can see the important intent of qualitative work when working with survivors of sexual violence.

# CHAPTER IV: RESULTS

After conducting 4 semi-structured interviews, I conducted a thematic analysis. The initial thematic analysis focused on the recurrence, repetition, and forcefulness (Owen, 1984) that the participant presented in the transcribed data. After the initial analysis, another professional conducted their own thematic analysis of the transcribed data. Once the initial themes were generated by both parties, the accuracy of these themes were confirmed. The results of the

study is organized by research question, with other themes presented after.

As a reminder, both RQ 1 and 2 investigated the roles of self-expansion in disclosure. RQ 1 asked if self-expansion theory necessitates likeness in order to achieve self-expansion? By inquiring if likeness plays a factor in who is included in the initial disclosure, we can begin to investigate if survivors would prefer to disclose to someone they feel like would metabolize their situation similarly, or who have gone through a similar experience to aid in the process of coming forward as a survivor. RQ 2 investigates in need for the inclusion of the other, an important tenet in self-expansion theory. The question asks how does the inclusion of another help survivors of sexual violence heal? By understanding the inclusion of a trust other in their narratives we can start to investigate in this other is included in their survivor narrative. RQ 3 asks: what discrepancies in survivors' idea of their “ought self” lead to prolonged paralysis of disclosure? The previously mentioned literature supports that media has had a profound impact on the survivor narrative and has furthered the notion of the “perfect victim.” However, the MeToo movement has showcased a wonderful arrangement of diverse survivor narratives. However, this arrangement has allowed survivors to pull themes of

what a normal narrative looks like, or their ought self within their identity as a survivor. RQ 4 asked: How do survivors work to set meaningful privacy boundaries when sharing their survivor narratives? With disclosure, comes privacy boundaries (Petronio, 2002). Whether these boundaries are outright vocalized by the sender, or are latent within their initial disclosure, these boundaries are important to further understand how we can come to a public understanding of what boundaries should be expected by allies and receivers.

As previously mentioned, this section's purpose is to explore the results of this initial study. This section will be organized by research question, with other emergent themes presented throughout the data.

**Self-Expansion after Violence**

*Inclusion of the other*

Research question two (RQ2) asked how the inclusion of another person helps survivors of sexual violence heal. Self-expansion recommends close relationships, often developed through inclusion often developed through the inclusion of another (Aron & Aron, 1987). The intertwining of these identities may be the byproduct in participating in events that are novel, interesting, and even challenging (Aron, Norman, Aron, McKenna, & Heyman, 2000).

All participants noted that the event of violence in their lives necessitated the inclusion of another. Bella, a 25-year-old woman chose her pseudonym because of the French meaning of the word Bella meaning beautiful. She explained "What happened to me was awful, and nearly broke me, if something beautiful can come out of it by telling my story that's what I want." The choice of choosing their own pseudonym was given to

each participant. Bella went on to highlight the importance and challenge of disclosing to her choice of other she noted that, “I quickly started to lose my sense of self. I could barely get to my classes let alone eat and take care of myself. I think that’s when people started to see cracks in my facade. People kept asking ‘what's up with her...,’ ‘are you really okay?’ What was I supposed to say? ‘Oh, no, I was just raped but I am okay?’ No. I needed to tell someone to, um, I think to just let someone into what was up with me. At least to just acknowledge that it happened.” Bella found it hard to acknowledge what had happened to her. Acknowledging that it was time to start thinking of how to start healing, the inclusion of the other was one of the first to come to mind. Alex had a similar experience but mentioned that he didn’t feel as though he had the language for what had happened until he, himself had time to metabolize his experience. It was several years later when he decided it was time to come forward. “I decided to tell someone who was in my friend group because it felt like I had been holding on to it, and so many other things for too long. It wasn’t really premeditated, it just kind of happened.” Elise mentions that the inclusion of others came more as second nature to her. “After it happened, I had to pull my car over and I texted in the group chat telling them what I thought just happened.” All participants noted that including another individual into their narrative made them feel less alone or alleviated them of a notable burden of truth.

***Likeness in the Inclusion of the Other***

Research question one (RQ1) asked: Does self-expansion theory necessitate likeness in order to achieve self-expansion? Self-Expansion theory and self-discrepancy theory both test our desire to surround ourselves with people that aren’t exactly like us, but instead ones we aspire to be like. However, we do surround ourselves with

likeminded individuals because the safety of familiarity and likeness is comforting (Ashton & Lee, 2008).

*Differences in the Other*

Participants noted that the person they first disclosed to felt second nature. The person they initially disclosed to was often a close friend that "they told everything to." Alex explained in a moment of extreme emotion the person he disclosed to asked him "what's going on" and that gave Alex the gateway he needed to know someone cared and wanted to listen to him. "She was kind of the glue that held our friend group together, she was a fixer, she was also a year older than me, but she just felt much wiser." Alex went on to mention that this person went into action in being there for him.

Elise mentions one of her close friends was in that group chat she first disclosed to. The others in the group chat were gone for spring break, and this person, Jess, was still on campus. "When I first met Jess, she was goth, and pagan, and different from anyone I had ever met when I first came to college, I grew up in a very conservative area. But she was great. She met me at my dorm, and she took me to get food, which is something that I didn't even think of and was very attentive to my needs and just sat with me for the night." Elise mentions the physical difference the two had previously; however, the more she spoke of Jess, the more and more similar they became. They now both have very similar careers and are still very close friends. Interestingly, when asked to describe Jess and her best qualities, she mentions "When I think of Jess, I think of her like just an ability to read people's like, body language or just the way they're talking or anything and knows what to offer that person." Elise described herself in a very similar

way, noting “I’m a person who really cares about other people and tries to look at the world in like, in all of the ways that pushes for justice and equality, and I am very much someone who likes to fix things.” Characteristics that she admittedly prescribed to her current self, she also prescribed to Jess.

*Similarity in the Other*

Elise mentioned that her roommate, best friend, Cal was the other one of the people in the group chat. “My roommate, best friend, like, they are one of the best people I’ve ever met, we met during freshman orientation. And just immediately we clicked, and it was, like, just, we always say we are the same but distinct. We are like the same person in two distinctly different people, because we just have the same sense of humor, the same vibe, even the same speaking patterns.” This description of her friend was unprompted and said with the biggest smile of pride and admiration. Elise goes on to say Cal jumped to immediacy, even coming home from break early. Elise described her ideal self: “As I continue to get closer to that ideal self, it becomes, again, someone who doesn't keep thinking about how do I become perfect, Elise, it's just like, how do I be me and be okay with that?” Elise mentions that she is still unsure about what her ideal self looks like, because she is still unsure of who her actual self is. However, her friendship with Cal has supported her in her finding of her actual self because she gets to see herself the way Cal does. She mentions that Cal knows how to support her and loves her as she knows her now. When asked to describe the best quality of Cal, Elise explains that it’s their “Empathy, they feel so much and so deeply for everyone in their life, and just will do anything to help support or comfort them, no matter where they are, or what they're dealing with.” This empathy is the empathy that comforts Elise to know she doesn’t need

to have a super defined ideal self that she should be striving for, because she had asserted that she sees Elise as a whole person. To know that she is worthy of care, and that she doesn't have to hold this information alone. This has proved a common theme for all participants. The empathy that the respondent has shown them continues to be an awe-striking quality they hope to show in themselves.

Shelly was assaulted by a family member. The first person that she decided to disclose to was her cousin Meredith. Meredith was also assaulted by the same family member. Similar to many of the other participants interviewed, Shelly had no plans of disclosing. It wasn't until Meredith and her went back into their family history that Shelly felt like it was time to talk about what had happened. This was before she knew that Meredith was assaulted by the same family member. While Shelly had been assaulted once, she found out that Meredith had been routinely abused for about 12 years. Shelly and her cousin Meredith always had a close relationship. "She was like, my idol when we were growing up, you know, she was beautiful and carefree and athletic. I just felt like she was always so happy, like, just a happy person, a fun person." Shelly looked up to her cousin, and even mentioned that they shared everything: "There wasn't a whole lot that I didn't share with her." Shelly was adamant that they go to other family members and let everyone know what this person had done. Almost immediately, Meredith "just removed herself from the situation and then used a lot of avoidance techniques. Rather than like, I was like, let's go we got to address this hit head on." Both Shelly and Meredith had different ideas for what should happen with both of their experiences. At first Shelly saw Meredith as a trusted member of her support system that turned into someone who has a very similar story to her, nonetheless with the same assailant. They both had different

methods of going about healing from the situation. Shelly prides herself on being a strong-willed person. When asked how she would define herself the first thing she wanted to note was:

"I always wanted to be the person that I, like, my daughter would be proud of, I don't even have a daughter yet. But, you know, I'm like, big feminist, and I'm gonna raise my kids as such, and I want to make sure that, you know, when they come to an age where they can kind of understand this and why, you know, I'm so interested in this really difficult topic. And I want to be able to talk to them and tell them what I did, and have them be like, "Wow, my mom's really strong."

However, it should be noted that not everyone wants to speak out. Sexual violence effects individuals differently. How these individuals choose to rationalize the violence they experience is up to their own discretion. Shelly mentions through reflection and conversation she realized that her and Meredith's narratives are similar but also so different. "While I was assaulted as an adult, she was assaulted as a child. A lot of her survival had been relying on the false narrative he gave her that this is love. And that he does this to her because he loves her. And the fact that he assaulted me as well kind of threw a wrench in that narrative." Shelly and Meredith are two different people, with two very different experiences. The similarities they hold did not add to their understanding of the violence they had both experienced by the same perpetrator. If anything, it disrupted their understanding of how they should metabolize each of their experiences as individuals. However, it should be noted there is no right way to process violence. In both cases, they had the initial reaction to hold this trauma in silence. The inclusion of the other has influenced and forced them to come to terms with what happened, not by

choice. While this admittance of violence helped Shelly, Meredith is still trying to find ways to verbalize her experience with violence.

After Bella was assaulted by a man who she names "the random guy at the bar," she reflects on the relief she felt after she went to the hospital alone. "The nurses were all like, 'You're so brave,' and there was a police report, and all I can think about is that there are people out there [that] don't have out right violence happen to them when they are raped. They are manipulated, and they know the person. I felt so guilty because I was believed so fast because I had bruises and physical evidence." Bella goes on to note that technically, her first disclosure was with medical professionals; and she acknowledges the guilt she felt for being believed because she knows people who aren't. "I was afraid to tell my friend, Sadie, because she went through hell our junior year trying to be believed by our own friends." Coming forward as a survivor can be even harder to a fellow survivor because the included other may still harbor unidentified feeling after their experience with sexual violence.

Disclosing to another survivor of sexual violence comes with its own set of difficulties. The fear to bring them back to where they were, the fear of having to put them in the survivor position before you know they're ready, and other concerns make disclosing to another survivor difficult. Bella notes that this is exactly what stopped her from speaking out in the first place. "For a few months, I said I just got in a fight outside and went home by myself. I felt really bad for lying to her because all I wanted to do was talk to her about it because I knew she knew what I was feeling but I just couldn't. I would just go on my own and try to figure everything out." The direct aftermath of experiencing sexual violence is seldom talked about and is hard to understand if you

haven't gone through it before. Having another person who can bolster and understand your feelings and the process can be extremely helpful. Bella did eventually feel the weight of going through this process alone and mentions she felt direct relief after: "It felt like forever since Sadie and I really talked. After telling her we cried. I even told her I was afraid to tell her, and she said everything I really hoped she would. She wasn't mad, she just wanted to be there for me now." The fear of being rejected by your included other is a understandable standpoint. However, throughout the participants responses, their included other never wanted to poke holes in their stories. Rather, their included other wanted to work to understand what the survivor needs to further expand themselves.

**Ought-Self Paralysis**

Research question three (RQ3) asked what discrepancies in survivors' idea of their "ought self" lead to prolonged paralysis of disclosure. The ought self speaks to one's self that they think other people want them to fit into (Higgins 1987). Across participants, they all described themselves first as a survivor of sexual violence. Though Elise mentions that "I have PTSD from sexual assault, as part of like, dealing with trauma and like little things that, I think there are still things I'm still like, survival mode for." This furthers sexual violence as a part of their overall identity. Bella and Shelly noted similar ideas about being called "brave" after disclosing. Bella mentions: "Hate being called brave. I didn't really have a choice in what happened, nor did I have to be brave to get through it."

Shelly mentioned that having her family find out about what happened to her and Meredith at the same time was hard to explain: "Our timeline for healing is so different.

And that was really hard because I felt like I was doing wrong by wanting to take different courses of action than her." Shelly mentioned there was almost a comparison with reactions and how well they were carrying the weight of violence after everything came to light.

Alex mentioned that he felt as though he regressed in college. "There was this person, who was also a survivor, and you know, with social media and such she always talked about how she's healed, and it was in a post that she was like 'my partner has helped me heal so much blah blah blah.' I felt bad about it because that is something I very much struggled with and I was mad that she's been 'healed' in such a shorter time frame than me." The ability to compare our journey with another is easier than ever because the #MeToo movement has emboldened many to come forward. However, with this comparison comes negative self-talk as to why others get to be "free from this burden."

Social media portrayals of survivorship have had a profound influence on many participants' perception of their journey. Social media allows us to post about ourselves and share sensitive information to a group of people who we know will read. The #MeToo movement, the online movement started by Tarana Burke and amplified by Hollywood to confront workplace sexual harassment and assault took the internet by storm and gave people the place to share their narratives, this has also opened the doors for social comparison about said survivorship. Bella mentioned: "About a day or two after the assault, I remember laughing, like belly laughing with my friends and then feeling immediately guilty. Like how dare I feel joy, all the people in the movies are like brooding out their windows and I don't know… You read about things people have gone

through and they don't laugh with their friends on the way to McDonalds you know?" Elise too mentions that she also mentioned posting on social media about her healing journey and being floored by the positive responses that she received. Social media and media depiction of survivors does have a lasting effect on their viewers. Social media has had the impact to encourage survivors to speak out, but also telling how they should move and behave afterwards as well.

Interestingly, all participants have made an effort to work with other survivors, from working at a woman's center to now being a full-time violence prevention advocate at a university. These survivors of sexual assault all felt it necessary for their ought self to give back to the survivor community. To feel like they are being an active part of making the world a better place for survivors of sexual violence.

**Privacy Boundaries**

One's curated privacy boundary is personal, and individual for every person. This can be especially hard when you feel like your body has been used as a weapon for violence. Both through one's body and through one's narratives, creating meaningful privacy boundaries was imperative for all participants.

Shelly mentions that at first it was hard to tell people about what happened because it felt "really heavy". However, she says that, "I knew I couldn't press charges. I knew Meredith wasn't willing to press charges. And so all I could do was talk about it. Like that was all I could do was use my voice." Shelly now feels comfortable sharing this information with others because she enjoys having the control over her own narrative.

Bella mentioned that she feels that this information is really personal, and information not everyone needs to know about her because "people look at you like

you're a baby bird with a broken wing, I don't want to be seen like that. I think it's important to share with my close friends and my boyfriend because it does have a huge influence on why I am the way I am." Disclosing violence lets people into a huge part of yourself, giving access to information that is unique and private to every person. Bella continues, "When I do let people into that info, I keep it very surface level, they don't need details. But I did tell my boyfriend the whole, whole story because… It affected my intimacy with him." Disclosure goes beyond telling people that you are a survivor of sexual violence, it comes with questions. What happened? Where were you? Who did this? These are all questions that could lead the survivor to thinking that you possibly don't believe them at the end of the day without knowing the trauma they went through in detail.

Alex mentioned that he has regretted disclosing before because he has felt like his story has been a weapon for other people. "When you disclose, people remember, like really remember. I remember my friend was in a really bad relationship and her boyfriend disclosed it to me and I was like 'um, how did you know that and are you using this shared trauma to have an in with me?'" Finding out someone else has disclosed your story before you had a chance can be traumatizing. Survivors have lost a huge amount of control, losing control of their personal narrative is a huge loss for them as well.

**Conclusion**

Overarchingly, participants found disclosure to be freeing. Most participants found it helpful to disclose to someone they felt had a similar experience. However, knowing that someone else has a similar experience can come with ideas of their response. Not wanting to add another heaviness to someone's emotional load was a

continued worry for participants, but all were relieved to know that their disclosure was welcomed and accompanied with help and support. The idea of being a “perfect victim” was pervasive. Media had a huge influence on participants' sense of self as a survivor. Seeing an important part of their sense of self acted out on social media and television still has a lasting effect on the way they choose to exist as themselves.

# CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION

The goal of this chapter is to further explore the intricacies that sexual violence that lends itself to open dialogue from both the send and receive. Through further expanding on the research questions and theoretical implications and limitations we can continue to see the nuances that further complicate the disclosure of sexual violence and its pervasive nature. This section will also look at the possible continuation of research and possible limitations of this study.

## Summary

This study uncovered themes surrounding self-expansion and self-discrepancy when making meaningful privacy boundaries for those who have experienced sexual violence. The self-expansion model explains that people are motivated to enter relationships in order to enhance the self and increase self-efficacy (Aron & Aron, 1987). Aron and Aron (1987) defined self-efficacy as one's own belief that they are competent enough to have meaningful opinions and make meaningful choices. Self-efficacy in this context, self-efficacy is one's ability to know that healing after experiencing sexual violence is possible, and how they choose to go about a healing process. Self-discrepancy theory explains that "people hold beliefs about what they're really like—their actual self—as well as what they would ideally like to be—their ideal self—and what they think they should be—their ought self" (Orellana-Damacela, Tindale, & Suarez-Balcazar, 2000, p.1).Thus, this thesis has been able to unveil how people negotiate their privacy boundaries through those who they disclose to and how close to one's ought and ideal self the receiver is. These finding were found through face-to-face semi-structured

interviews with participants who have experienced sexual violence. The research questions were four-fold:

RQ #1: Does self-expansion theory necessitates likeness in order to achieve self-expansion?

RQ #2: How does the inclusion of another help survivors of sexual violence heal?

RQ #3: What discrepancies in survivors' idea of their "ought self" lead to prolonged paralysis of disclosure?

RQ #4: How do survivors work to set meaningful privacy boundaries when sharing their survivor narratives?

Overarchingly, the results showed a need for casual privacy boundaries to relieve some of the initial heaviness from the situation. Survivors found it easier to disclose after feeling as though their disclosure was warranted due to the situation. It was found likeness in the receiver was not required. RQ1 asked about the likeness between the receiver and the sender, attempting to understand if likeness would encourage the sender to disclose. The idea of perceived likeness is an encouraging factor, suggesting that the sender could see their potential self post-disclosure in the receiver. Alex mentioned that seeing people online have such success learning to love their bodies with their romantic partners made him jealous. He mentioned that above all else "I really want to love my body and to be intimate with someone romantically like that, that would be me living my real ideal life to be completely shallow and honest." However, this is not a shallow want at all. To love oneself enough to give without worry to another. Interestingly, when thinking of the person he had first disclosed to and what their best qualities are, Alex made sure to highlight in an excited tone "she is the type of person to tell you exactly

how it is, or at least her take on how it should be." Alex disclosed to someone who was willing to accommodate his needs, and never gave him a reason to be self-conscious about her. We can deduce that she is not the person to be straight forward about what they think. Being able to speak one's mind, and not be afraid of the possible outcome is a part of learning to love yourself, and to love yourself wholly.

Transversely, participants noted trepidation when disclosing to known survivors. This trepidation is best described by participant Bella: "I was afraid to tell my friend, Sadie, because she went through hell our junior year trying to be believed by our own friends." Seeing another friend struggle in their survivorship can cause uneasiness out of fear for bringing up negative emotions for the other. Bella continued to mention that she almost felt unworthy of the believability of her story compared to her friend Sadie. What we can deduct from this is that survivors want to feel justified in their experience. Survivors understand how pivotal this initial conversation can be, especially if they have been the receiver themself. Knowing the possibility of reigniting negative feelings, made Bella want to avoid disclosing to Sadie because of the possible fall out.

RQ2 inquired about the inclusion of the other to help the survivor heal. All participants in this study noted the idea of their experience of sexual assault as a heavy weight weighing on them. Participants continued to note that while they initially pondered not telling anyone, when they did disclose, they felt that heavy weight get lighter. Bella noted that her initial disclosure was to medical professionals and law officials but then made a note, "I don't think that really counted as me disclosing, disclosing it felt sterile and just a part of a process." Further proving that meaningful communication is a part of disclosing to share the heavy weight of survivorship with

another. Though Elise mentioned that she pulled over her car to disclose to her friend, she mentions going through the idea of concealment. It wasn't until one of her friends asked, "how was the date?" that she felt prompted to disclose. What we can deduct is that the more the receiver can create space for disclosure, and dialogue, the more likely the sender is to disclose. Disclosure is the first step to including the other because it breaks down emotional barriers between both parties (Kang & Kim, 2020). Disclosure aided in self-expansion after violence because the disclosure process is usually started with the other disclosing before the survivor, making this process an exchange. This exchange can leave the sender and receiver feel useful. But across the board, the start to all four participants' healing journey was disclosure, because it was, as Bella put it, "an admittance that something so unutterable had happened."

Disclosure gives space for survivors to come to terms with what has happened to them. Especially in a world where "bravery" is perceived as paramount when disclosing sexual violence. RQ3 asked if there was a type of paralysis that came with being survivor because of the way society has named those who have experience sexual violence as a survivor. This appeared to be true across participants in this study. Media have given the public an idea of what the aftermath looks like for someone who has experienced violence (Rodenhizer & Edwards, 2019). However, individuals' responses to stress are different and occur on a spectrum (Cortina & Kubiak, 2019). These media portrayals often confirm survivors' ideas of having to "just move on," often not wanting to disrupt their loved ones' lives with the heaviness of their situation. Survivors' ought-self confirm the "perfect victim" narrative. The perfect victim narrative speaks to the normative behavior that wouldn't have led someone to sexual violence, that sexual violence is only

tragic when it occurs to the innocent and unsuspecting (North, 2018). A narrative of bravery doesn't fit right in a lot of survivors' vocabulary and description of their ideal self. Respondents noted the vocabulary their receiver used for them, rather than the incident. Shelly cringed when she vocalized being called brave. Bella elaborated, "Hate being called brave. I didn't really have a choice in what happened, nor did I have to be brave to get through it." Other participants noted similar feelings in the context of being a survivor and victim. It is lucky to have survived, but to be brave you have to do something courageous, and surviving isn't necessarily courageous. Many participants noted their ideal selves as being mothers, to teach and educate others, and to fully love themselves. None of these definitions of their ideal self lay within their survivor identity. Being a survivor is a part of who they are; It has affected how they interact with the world. However, there are so many other factors of their identity they are fighting to explore.

RQ4 aimed to further understand the privacy boundaries survivors developed. All noted that this information feels extremely private. But they were motivated once another started to disclose their own sensitive information. It was found across participants that their survivor identity was one that they didn't feel like a surface level relationship needed to know unless the relationship deepened. What we can take away from our participants is coordinating their privacy management was paramount for participants. Participants, like Bella, found that opening up to their intimate partner about the details of their assault was paramount because she felt that context was needed to be able to understand her in intimate situations. However, other participants found themselves less concerned about what exactly happened to them during the attack. Participants found

disclosing helpful not because it was a chance to tell the story of what had happened, but to give their close friends background on how to support them during this time. The coordinated boundaries speak to the parameters the senders put on the information given. It was found that survivors implied this information should not be shared through their delivery. Many prefaced their statement with “I felt like I should share this information with you” by putting the earnest on the receiver that this information is explicitly for them, and it is a hard story to tell, put the boundary management off the shoulders of the survivor and with their ally.

**Limitations**

This study initially sought to identify the nature of media in survivors' disclosure. However, through this exploration, many roadblocks were found. Finding a group that would allow exploratory research was extremely hard to find. These survivorship spaces are understandably sacred for many. A safe space full of people who understands where you are coming from. Being a survivor myself, Facebook groups were the place where I first saw people be fearless in their disclosure. However, we forget that these pages are subjective and have their own inner politics. After following the guidelines in asking to post my call for participants with proper documentation of IRB approval, a member of their 5-person moderating board responded. I was shocked when the moderator said: “We don’t appreciate research requests because this is a safe space.” Yes, this is a safe space, a safe space I have been a part of since I was 18 years old. They promptly removed me from the group for my request. As survivors creating safe spaces for survivors to speak honestly, and frankly we need to encourage spaces, safe spaces, to better understand our communicative processes through meaningful research. Closing our community from

these meaningful educational possibilities only further creates an echo chamber. How will we get the general public to understand these communicative responses, when we as a community refuse to understand them through safe practices?

My sample ended up being a smaller group that was full of adults recently graduated or currently undergoing higher education. This idea of anti-research seemed to be pervasive across groups and affected my sample size. The educated nature of my sample led to many having preconceived notions of my methodology and them "trying not to mess me up." Them guessing what my ideal answer would be became an anxiety point for some.

**Directions for Future Studies**

This study has a lot of exciting possibilities. A replication of this study for those who have been on the receiving end of disclosure could be an interesting extension to this study. Understanding the previous understanding of the survivors' sense of self against the receiver's idea of said survivors could illuminate themes of how the survivors' sense of self and belonging impacts the other. There is a possible extension of comparing storylines. Having the survivor describe their disclosure process next to the receiver could reveal noticeable themes about how memorialization of traumatic events are metabolized by both parties. The comparison of said stories would not be for the sake of continuity and "truth" in the statements, but to understand what really stands out for both parties. The retraumatization of the receiver was a major theme throughout this study's data. Seeing the attributes that the receiver attaches to their stories could help understand why and how to avoid retraumatization for both parties.

Interviews can be daunting to those who are unfamiliar with the methodology. By providing a short answer survey may yield more results that are less about saving face.

The literature about listening in conjunction with interpersonal violence is seriously lacking. Understanding the internal processes of the receivers is paramount to further understand the potential memorable messages. Memorable messages are "verbal messages which may be remembered for extremely long periods of time and which people perceive as a major influence on the course of their lives" (Knapp, Stohl, & Reardon, 1981). Understanding the reasoning processes that come along with these messages could bolster how to better be there for loved ones learning to understand the violence they have experienced.

Fortunately, none of my participants noted having experienced boundary turbulence, or clashing ideas about the privacy boundaries previously vocalized by the sender (Petronio, 2002). Understanding these trespasses can give us another point of view about when disclosure harms rather than helps. Understanding these forces can give us even more understanding about where miscommunication takes place when coordinating boundaries.

Social media had a huge impact on participants. Understanding media use and what the modern "perfect victim/survivor" looks like will further contribute to future lines of research within the context of survivors self-esteem post violence. In the wake of the #MeToo movement, it is important to understand how we can combine healing with advocacy.

**Conclusion**

In conclusion, this study's aim was to understand the disclosure processes of survivors of sexual violence. These disclosure practices included the likeness and inclusion of the other, the paralysis of the ought self, and how privacy boundaries are negotiated and managed. It was found the inclusion of another into one's survivor narrative was extremely important in order to feel completely supported and/or understood. Media portrayals of what survivorship looks like has impacted what survivors felt like they should be doing post-violence. How they should interact with people and their world changes immensely after the inclusion of the other. Privacy management included the encouragement to reveal this information after the receiver revealed something personal about themselves. However, the information of being a survivor was personal, and for those in the survivors personal, inner circle.

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# APPENDIX A

## Interview Guide

Thank you for your participation in this study. Your responses are extremely valuable. The interview will begin to be recorded if that is still something you are okay with. Your responses will be kept anonymous; I invite you to let me know if there is a preferred pseudonym you would like used. Any personal information will be omitted as well. If later you wish to strike in anything from the record, please do not hesitate to let me know so we can have it removed. If upon reflection you decide you want something removed, please feel free to contact me directly and I will remove the information. If at any time you would like to stop the interview, we can do that. You are completely free to not answer any of the questions presented; we can always move to the next.

1. How would you define your experience with violence?
2. How would you define yourself, as you know yourself now?
    a. How would you describe your most ideal self?
    b. Have you ever felt like there are expectations for who you ought to be after your experience with violence?
3. Who was the first person you told after?
    a. Do you have a close relationship with this person?
4. Why did you choose this person to tell?
    a. Where were you when you decided to disclose?
    b. Did you ever feel obligated to disclose this information?
5. Did your experiences with violence impact how you set boundaries with others?

6. What did you feel was the most important influence in your healing journey?
7. Is there anything else you would like to share about your experience?

# APPENDIX B

## CONSENT FORM

Approval Number: IRB-2202001-EXM

Name of Project: Disclosing for Closure: Negotiating Boundaries for Self-

Expansion After Violence

Researcher(s): Jadah Morrison, South Dakota State University

You are invited to participate in this interview centered research study because you have confirmed that you are over the age of 18 and you have indicated experiencing past sexual violence after the age of 18. The information outlined in this consent form is to help you navigate whether you would like to participate in this study. I urge you to take your time reading this form and contact the researcher with any questions you have.

Why is the research being done?

The aim of this study is to identify self disclosure habits of those who have experience sexual violence after the age of 18 and how these disclosure habits influences ones need for self-expansion.

What will I do in this study?

This study will be performed solely through interviews. Interviews will be held solely through the video and audio calling device, Zoom. Through zoom your one on one interview will be transcribed and recorded using the platform. Verbal quotations will be taken from the transcription, however audio and visual representations will not be. Interviews will span from one hour to one and a half hours. You will be interviewed on your disclosure habits, past and present and the environmental influences that led to disclosure. You will also be questioned on your self identity as a survivor of sexual violence.

Can I say “No”?

Absolutely. You can say no in any part of the interview process. You have complete control over your information. Being in this study is completely up to you. If you don't want to participate in the interview, you can refuse the invitation. If there is a particular question you would not like to answer, you do not have to answer it, we can move to another. If you would like to stop the interview entirely, we will do so without question. If after the interview you decide you would no longer like your information in the study, the information will be removed. Whether it be the complete interview or a small subsection. There is a chance for this study to be published in a scholarly journal, so if

even 20 years down the line, you no longer want your information involved in the published study it will be removed. To have information removed you can email me at jadah.morrison@jacks.sdstate. You will never be required to answer a question or retain your information in the study.

Are there any risks or benefits to me?

Since we will be talking about a serious, personal topic, potential emotional distress is a possibility. We urge you to curate a self care plan post interview. As researchers we are not qualified to provide counseling services and we will not be following up with you after this study. If you feel upset after completing the study, or find that some questions or aspects of the study triggered distress, talking with a qualified clinician may help. Through calling the helpline 800.656.HOPE (4673) you will be connected with a trained staff member from a sexual assault service provider in your area. We understand the power of social support and invite you to have a member of your personal support network with you during the interview. However, if your social support answers in the interview, it should be known that their input will be stricken from the record.

In research there is always the potential for a confidentiality breach. While this breach is unlikely, you will have the power to create your own alias if you so decide. We will also be striking any identifying materials from the record.

We do not expect you to benefit from being in this study. Your participation is appreciated.

What will happen with the information collected for this study?

Once our interview is completed, we will go through the transcript and remove any identifying markers and change any names used. After, your interview will undergo a thematic analysis. Looking for themes that relate with our research questions. The same process will be undertaken by two other research assistants for reliability purposes. However, these research assistants will not have access to the original transcription with possible personal markers.

Who can I talk to if I have questions?

If you have questions about this project or if you have a research-related problem, you may contact the researcher, Jadah Morrison at Jadah.Morrison@jacks.sdstate.edu. If you have any questions concerning your rights as a research subject, you may contact SDSU's Research Integrity and Compliance Officer at 605-688-5051 or sdsu.irb@sdstate.edu.

Statement of Consent

By clicking "I agree" below you are indicating that you are at least 18 years old, have read this consent form, had any questions answered, and agree to participate in this research study. Please print a copy of this page for your records.

I agree

I do not agree