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I am submitting herewith a thesis written by Alison Megan Nathanson entitled “The Risk of Responding to Acquaintance Sexual Assault: How Perceived Social Costs Affect Risk Appraisals and Behavioral Responses in College Women.” I have examined the final electronic copy of this thesis for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts, with a major in Psychology.

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The Risk of Responding to Acquaintance Sexual Assault: How Perceived Social Costs Affect
Risk Appraisals and Behavioral Responses in College Women

A Thesis Presented for
the Master of Arts
Degree
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Alison Megan Nathanson
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Abstract

Evidence suggests that female victims of sexual abuse are revictimized more often than non-victimized females, placing them at risk for the negative consequences, including increased psychopathology, medical issues and interpersonal difficulties. Research is needed to protect childhood sexual abuse survivors from the risk of further sexual assault. The present study examines if victim status and perception of social costs inhibit heterosexual females' perception of risk and behavioral response. Results indicate that victim status affects the perception of risk and that sexually abused women in a high social cost condition use less assertive behavioral responses. Implications of these findings for sexual assault prevention and interventions are discussed.

Keywords: Violence; sexual abuse; risk appraisal; behavioral responses

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Chapter 1

Introduction and General Information

Currently on college campuses, acquaintance sexual assaults are becoming increasingly common, creating an immense need for improvement in acquaintance sexual assault prevention programs (Pinzone-Glover, Gidycz, & Jacobs, 1998). In effect, more than 25% of college women acknowledge unwanted sexual experiences to varying degrees at a given point during their high school or college years (Brenner, McMahon, Warren, & Douglas, 1999). A variety of factors have been posited to explain the high percentage of sexual assault during the college years, including increased alcohol consumption, rape-supportive environments within a social context and a lack of parental supervision (Warshaw, 1988). These factors have been implicated in increasing the vulnerability for sexual assault among college students (Ullman, 2003). Other theories imply that the college scene provides a vast array of ambiguous sexual situations (Clay-Warner, 2003). Despite the multitude of probable factors, the reality is that sexual assault continues to occur regularly, affecting millions of women across the country. For the purposes of this study, the question will be addressed regarding sexual assault as a continued common occurrence within college populations.

Chapter 2

Acquaintance Sexual Assault

Prevalence of Acquaintance Sexual Assault

Research indicates that women between ages 16 and 24 years are at greatest risk for rape (U.S. Department of Justice, 2000). This age range coincides with the average age of college students. Moreover, the 2003 Bureau of Justice Statistics Report on violent victimization of college students indicates that between 1995 and 2000, 74% of rapes and sexual assaults were committed by someone known to the victim (U.S. Department of Justice, 2003). In addition, the National College Women Sexual Victimization Survey estimated that 9 out of 10 college women knew the man who raped them (Fisher, Cullen, & Turner, 2000). Abbey, Ross, McDuffie, and McAuslan (1996) found that 95% of sexual assaults against college women were perpetrated by an acquaintance. Despite the high prevalence of acquaintance sexual assault, date rape is still thought to be underreported. This may be because women often do not label their experiences as "rape" or "sexual assault," which may be more likely if it involves someone they know (Layman, Gidycz & Lynn, 1996). Taken together, the research suggests that college is a potential breeding ground for rape to occur based on the age range of the individuals and also, the likelihood that males will be relatively well-acquainted with the female through common social interactions during the college scene. The prevalence of sexual victimization of female college students suggests the importance of continuing to identify correlates of female sexual victimization within this population. Identifying relationships between risk factors and various forms of sexual aggression would allow for prevention programs to directly target variables relevant to college populations.

Ambiguous Situations

College provides a lifestyle which may lend itself to ambiguous and risky situations for young females. Commonly in the college social scene, students are pressured to engage in binge drinking and attending parties in order to feel accepted within social circles. As with other age groups, college students seek out social acceptance in the form of friendships and romantic relationships. Research suggests that social status holds high importance for college students (Heatherton, Kleck, Hebb and Hull, 2003). Furthermore, as theorized by Erikson's Psycho-Social model, college age individuals (approximately aged 18-24) are entering into a stage of development in which they will either experience intimacy or isolation (Erikson, 1950). At this stage, college age females are eager to blend their identities with friends and fit cohesively into a social group. In essence, Erikson's Psycho-Social Model implies that individuals in this stage of development are so afraid of rejection, both within a social group and by a potential romantic partner, that they are moved to protect themselves from experiencing such a feeling or lowering of social standing. In order to avoid isolation and establish the socially desirable stage of intimacy, heterosexual college females are pushed to date or socialize with men; often unwittingly placing themselves at risk for acquaintance sexual assault. In essence, normal socializing and acting within the developmental milestone actually serves as a risk factor for future sexual victimization, particularly in interpersonal contexts where a woman is likely to be perceived as a vulnerable target (Parks & Miller, 1997).

Stranger Rape versus Acquaintance Sexual Assault

On the other hand, women are socialized to fear strange men more than males with whom they are acquainted (Breitenbecher, 2000; Burt, 1980). They are taught to protect themselves against the possibility of being randomly attacked by men. However, research indicates that 80%

of rapes are committed by someone the victim knows (Hickman & Muehlenhard, 1997).

Therefore, though urged to protect themselves against stranger rape, women are in fact inadvertently exposing themselves to potential perpetrators (i.e., male peers in college).

Although stranger rape certainly occurs within the college age group, the majority of sexual assaults have been repeatedly shown to be perpetrated by an acquaintance at a much higher rate than a stranger (Koss, Dinero, Seibel, & Cox, 1988). Since women encounter possible assailants through social settings, it may be difficult to perceive when social norms (i.e., dating, parties and sexual encounters) are being blurred by the presence of sexual risk.

Chapter 3

Childhood Sexual Abuse

Childhood Sexual Abuse and College Females

Despite the fact that all women are at risk for acquaintance sexual assault, some women are at a greater risk for being victimized during the college years. Interestingly, research has suggested that a specific population of female college students is often the primary target; women with a sexual abuse history. The first study investigating sexual assault in college students, conducted by Koss and Dinero (1987), studied an extensive sample (32 schools and 3,187 participants) in an effort to establish a connection between childhood sexual abuse (CSA) and adult sexual assault. Within the study, Koss and Dinero (1987) found that 66% of the adult rape victims had a history of CSA whereas only 20% of the women with no history of sexual victimization were victimized later in life. Thus, it was demonstrated that CSA victims were approximately three times more likely to be raped than non-CSA victims. More recent studies suggest that victims of CSA may be at a greater risk for sexual re-victimization in adulthood (Messman-Moore & Long, 2000), indicating that many of these acquaintance sexual assaults in a college population likely involve victims of childhood sexual abuse (Messman-Moore & Brown, 2006). Furthermore, research indicates that women who experienced CSA (childhood sexual abuse) are twice as likely to be subsequently victimized in adulthood (Gidycz et al., 1995).

Also, studies focusing on the occurrence of adult sexual victimization have found that CSA survivors are much more likely than non-victims to experience subsequent victimizations or revictimization (Briere & Runtz, 1987). Stevenson and Garjarsky (1991) found that 73% of CSA victims were revictimized as adults during college years; indicating a significant relationship

between unwanted sexual experiences during childhood and later unwanted sexual encounters among college students. Women exposed to multiple victimizations tend to develop worse complications than those who experience a one-time victimization (Gold, Milan, Mayall & Johnson, 1994). Quite clearly, a specific population of women is being assaulted and with the staggering percentage rates of rape on college campuses across the country, it is essential that action be taken to rectify these traumatic incidences.

The construct of childhood sexual abuse

Before delving into the posited theory, which may shed some light into the link between childhood sexual abuse and subsequent adult victimization, it is important to define the construct of childhood sexual abuse. The fundamental characteristic of any childhood sexual abuse includes the force or coercion of a minor into sexual activity by an adult. The specifics of sexual abuse of a minor range in severity from bodily exposure of the perpetrator to completed penetration. Definitional variability exists in the sexual abuse literature. Senn, Carey, and Vanable (2008) suggest that this variability in definition makes it difficult to compare results across studies of sexual abuse and outcomes. Furthermore, Senn and colleagues (2008) noted variability in the *methods* used to assess CSA exposure. This meta-analysis found that researchers use a variety of methods to determine CSA status, including structured interviews, extensive questionnaires, allowing participants to define their own abuse, and age discrepancies in sexual activity. Consistency in the method of assessing CSA exposures would provide researchers with a common ground for examination. Unfortunately, the limitations that have plagued the CSA literature, which include methodological and definitional issues as well as the standardizing of assessment tools, also plague the revictimization literature.

Despite the varying construct definitions, childhood sexual abuse is an important area within psychology to examine. Research suggests that children exposed to sexual abuse have higher rates of a number of psychological disorders (Brayden, Deitrich-MacLean, Dietrich, & Sherrod, 1995; Kaltman, Krupnick, Stockton, Hooper, & Green, 2005). Specifically, problems with interpersonal functioning are also common among those who experienced CSA, including dating violence, sexual problems, reduced self-esteem and higher probability of experiencing re-victimization later in life (Finkelhor & Browne, 1985; Kendall-Tackett, Williams, & Finkelhor, 1993; Messman-Moore & Long, 1999; Van-Bruggen et al., 2006). In addition to the psychological concerns, survivors of sexual abuse may also suffer from an increased amount of medical issues, including increased risk of unintended pregnancy and higher risk of sexually transmitted infections (Senn, Carey, Venable, Coury-Doniger, & Urban, 2007). Thus, in order to provide sexual abuse survivors with the utmost protection against repercussions related to their trauma, it is important to help prevent further victimization.

As aforementioned, the definition of sexual abuse tends to vary within the CSA literature. Thus, for the purposes of this study, the Long (1999) definition of CSA will be used due to its predominant use in prior studies attempting to link trauma histories with risk for future revictimization. According to Long (1999), CSA is defined as one or more of the following: a) abuse perpetrated by a relative, b) greater than 5 years age difference between the victim and the perpetrator or c) threat or force was involved if there is fewer than a five year age difference between the victim and the perpetrator.

Chapter 4

Risk Appraisals

Individuals tend to hold beliefs about their personal susceptibility to harm. These beliefs are essential for how individuals judge what to interpret and respond to and furthermore, what steps they take to self-protect (Weinstein, 1984). In order to effectively self-protect, resistance efforts must take into account those beliefs and the appraisal processes through which individuals determine any risk presented within the environment. Within the sexual assault literature, research suggests that women perceive stranger sexual assault to be more of a personally relevant threat (Armstrong, 2006; Hickman & Muehlenhard, 1997). Thus, based on this fear, women may take more precautionary and protective steps to ensure that they are safe from the threat of becoming a sexual assault victim by a stranger. It would appear that women are reflecting a heightened response to perceived threat as dictated by society and subsequently, actively attempt to reduce their exposure to risk.

However, risk perception occurs on multiple levels and becomes unclear within a familiar setting. Within one level, there arises the perception that a situation feels uncomfortable to the point that an individual registers threat. Another level of risk perception involves an attempt to determine how well we could handle the threat and subsequently, attempt to reduce the risk associated with that threat (Weinstein, 1984). These ideas are also relevant to acquaintance sexual threat, but there is an additional level of risk perception that poses some of the greatest challenges. Since trust frequently develops between individuals who know each other, the common social interactions seen in college add much more uncertainty to the recognition of threat within a situation. Thus, within the risk appraisal literature, the question lingers regarding

the perception of the threat that a male acquaintance potentially poses, how one can and should respond, and the positives and negatives of the likely outcome.

Chapter 5

Social-Cognitive Theory

Based on this notion of general risk appraisals, Nurius and Norris (1996) proposed a theory to explain women's behavioral responses to the threat of acquaintance sexual assault. Social-Cognitive Theory examines women's cognitive appraisals as an explanation for their subsequent behaviors. The first type of cognitive appraisal, known as primary risk appraisal, attempts to ascertain at what point women perceive a situation to be potentially harmful or threatening. Primary risk appraisals serve to protect women from harm since such appraisals have been shown to increase the likelihood of assertive behavioral responding (e.g., method of leaving the situation). The second type of appraisal, known as secondary risk appraisal, is suggested to follow the primary risk appraisal. After experiencing the primary risk appraisal, women theoretically feel at risk and in danger, which then forces them to decide how to proceed within the situation. The secondary risk appraisal demands that these individuals appraise the risk of responding to the situation in terms of potential social and personal costs. Thus, primary and secondary risk appraisals are believed to influence women's behavioral actions in response to the threat. Nurius and Norris (1996) suggest that behavioral responses to threatening situations are important in terms of identifying who may be at risk for revictimization. Presumably, women who behave in less assertive, compliant or passive ways are the ones most likely to be revictimized. Overall, an individual may perceive that there is danger being posed by a perpetrator, but determine that she needs to protect her social standing or protect how others perceive her. In essence, she may attempt to use an exit method that may minimize the damage. Therefore, the individual may choose to use non-verbal behaviors (i.e. shrugging away or attempting to move away from the perpetrator) or verbal, but indirect language (i.e. "I think we

should wait”) in order to leave unharmed. Similarly, another individual may choose not to react at all (i.e. passively) due to fear about his/other response. The three components work together to create an outcome, either of leaving the situation unharmed or being sexually assaulted.

Primary Risk Appraisal

Nurius and Norris (1996) define primary risk appraisals as the point in which one perceives herself to be at risk or in danger. For the purposes of this study, primary risk appraisal will be defined as the first moment that a female feels threatened. Nurius and Norris (1996) suggest that individuals assess situations for possible harm (Nurius, Norris, Young, Graham & Gaylord, 2000). With respect to acquaintance sexual aggression, this involves assessment of whether the situation is neutral, poses benefit or poses harm. It also involves the woman noticing some aspect of the situation or the man’s behavior that is divergent from her expectations. People encode and interact within the situation in a fairly automatic mode prior to feeling some semblance of threat. Thus, certain cues must disrupt this automatic stream of processing (i.e., interpretation of man’s behavior in social or intimate terms) and cause the women to go into reactive mode (i.e., risk appraisal in determining how capable he may be of harming her) (Nurius et al., 2000).

Primary risk appraisal has been measured in a variety of ways. In a retrospective study conducted by Nurius & Norris (2000), female participants were asked to recall an “unwanted sexual advance by an acquaintance.” Once the information was gathered, the participants were asked to measure the extent to which male behaviors indicated coercive behavior (from the woman’s perspective) and also, to what extent the participant felt uncomfortable. The “Threat Cues” were broken up into two different behaviors: a) emotionally manipulative behaviors (3 items) and b) isolating/controlling behaviors (4 items). The participants used a self-report

measure in order to indicate the behaviors that occurred/did not occur in her particular situation. In another study by Breitenbecher (1999), primary risk was assessed by having female participants watch a videotape in which the scene escalated into rape. Participants were asked to identify risk factors for sexual assault that they perceived. The results indicated that non-CSA and CSA participants were both able to identify risk factors within the videotape. Lastly, in a study conducted by VanZile-Tamsen (2005), participants were given a written hypothetical vignette in which a man followed a woman into a bedroom and acted in a sexually inappropriate manner. The participants were then asked to rate their feelings of discomfort within the situation. The CSA participants indicated a similar amount of discomfort as did the non-victim participants. Aside from methodological differences, these studies were problematic in accurately detecting primary risk appraisal for several reasons. For instance, in the VanZile-Tamsen (2005) study, all participants read the vignette in its entirety and then retroactively reported feelings of discomfort. However, in real-life threatening situations that are ambiguous, perception of threat occurs in varying degrees during the situation. Similarly, in the Breitenbecher (1999) study, the participants were shown video clips of a rape escalating situation and then asked to determine risk factors *after* viewing the clip. Realistically, these types of methodology do not accurately determine primary risk appraisal.

Other findings indicate that women need specific cues from the male assailant in order to perceive real danger, which can be confusing in an acquaintance encounter where certain behaviors are considered “normal” (e.g., buying drinks for the women, wanting to spend more time together). In a study by Nurius and colleagues (1996), participants were asked to determine if certain statements from the male assailant to the female participant might be risk factors for sexual assault. The study found that “a higher level of ambiguous cues are needed relative to

clear threat cues regarding sexual aggression for women to feel uneasy or endangered.”

Similarly, a study conducted by Hock and colleagues (1996) suggested that “ambiguous cues that generate more than one meaning are associated with slow reactions and require a shift to deliberate processing.” The idea offered from both studies was that unless a female had a clear indication that a man’s actions/intentions are threatening, she would not have reason to interpret the situation as risky or respond to him. These studies appear more relevant within the acquaintance sexual assault literature in that the situations were more ambiguous and the participants did not know what to expect from the situation.

Inconsistencies with Primary Risk Appraisal Methodology

The inconsistencies within the primary risk appraisal are significant enough to warrant further research. First of all, the method of placing one’s self into a situation through a written or videotaped vignette may present challenges in accurately determining risk appraisal. However, for the area of sexual assault, the vignette methodology presents as the only means of recreating a realistic situation while remaining within the protection of psychological ethics. Essentially, the method of determining primary risk appraisal is to assess for feelings of “threat” by the participant through hypothetical situations (i.e., vignettes). Although vignettes can not account for all the individual differences between each person’s definition and perception of ‘threat,’ they are the core method used within the current sexual assault literature (Messman-Moore & Browne, 2005; Nurius, Norris, Macy & Huang, 2004).

The sexual assault literature generally displays the escalation of a threatening scenario or vignette into an acquaintance sexual assault between two fictitious characters (i.e. the participant and a perpetrator) in an all-at-once fashion. By allowing the participant to read the entire vignette from beginning to end, the participant ultimately determines that a rape occurs and then has to

retroactively determine her initial feeling of threat. This method has been criticized in past literature because the participant can determine that the situation will ultimately lead to rape whereas in a real life situation, this is not typically pre-determined (Pinzone-Glover, Gidycz & Jacobs, 2006). Objectively, many people would likely respond to a sexual assault situation by indicating that they were threatened. Thus, the standard manipulated experimental methodology for acquaintance sexual assault and revictimization literature, which presents the vignette all-at-once, may not be truly indicative of primary risk. Thus, in the current study, the written vignette will be presented in a line-by-line fashion rather than all at once, as is customary. With this new methodology, the participants will not be aware that the scene will escalate into an acquaintance sexual assault. When responding to each line, participants will be asked to indicate their feelings using a list of emotions for each line of the vignette. Once the participant endorses 'threat' from the emotion panel after reading a line of the vignette, it will be defined as primary risk appraisal. In essence, this new methodology will be better at determining primary risk appraisal from a more realistic perspective.

Primary risk appraisals deficits among childhood sexual abuse survivors

Recent research suggests a multitude of outcomes on the risk appraisals associated with childhood sexual abuse survivors. For instance, some research indicates that risk of sexual assault may be intensified if the individual is unable to recognize and respond appropriately to potential threats (Cloitre, 1998). Furthermore, research also suggests that when compared to women with no history of assault, CSA victims exhibit poorer risk recognition (Meadows, Jaycox, Stafford, Hambree, & Foa, 1995) and take longer to respond to assault-related threats (Meadows, Jaycox, Orsillo, & Foa, 1997; Wilson et al., 1999). In addition, a study conducted by Smith, Davis, and Fricker (2000) showed that women with a history of child sexual abuse

appraised risky activities as unlikely to result in negative outcomes in comparison to women without an abuse history. Overall, the studies suggest that a history of sexual assault may be associated with alterations in risk appraisal processes, such that women who experience sexual abuse in childhood or have a trauma history are not as apt to recognize the potential risks associated with interpersonal interactions, and therefore may not be as likely to respond with self-protective and assertive methods (Smith et al., 2000; Wilson et al., 1999). As dictated by Norris and colleagues (1999) as well as a study conducted by Wilson and colleagues (1999), the ability to recognize risk stems from cognitive appraisal processes, which are believed to reconcile an individual's behavioral responses to possible interpersonal threats. Within the area of threat involving acquaintance sexual assault, this may be essential due to often ambiguous situations, such as a date or a party, in which threat signals or cues may be unrecognizable to sexual abuse survivors.

The inability to recognize risk or a deficit in the cognitive appraisal of risk may be linked to revictimization (Meadows, Jaycox, Stafford, Hambree, & Foa, 1995; Wilson, Calhoun, & Bernat, 1999). Within a potential acquaintance sexual assault situation, a woman's response to the threat may be contingent upon her ability to evaluate the situation and the actions of the perpetrator. For many researchers, the hypothesis follows that childhood sexual abuse survivors may experience risk appraisal deficits or a virtual inability to recognize risk. In one study, Messman-Moore and Brown (2005) conducted a prospective study that examined a woman's ability to recognize and respond to a threat of sexual assault in order to assess the likelihood of victimization over the course of eight months. Participants who recognized the threat later in the encounter were more likely to be assaulted than those who recognized the risk earlier. Interestingly, Meadows et al. (1995) found that women who reported multiple adult

victimizations reported significantly delayed responses to presented risk than those reporting a single adult victimization. In a subsequent study, Meadows, Jaycox, Orsillo and Foa (1997) used ambiguous situations that intensified the feelings of threat; asking the participants to indicate when they experienced discomfort and at what point they would leave the situation. The new findings suggested that CSA women, regardless of single or multiple victimizations, choose to leave the situation much later than women with no history of CSA. Yeater and O'Donohue (2002) found that single assault victims were delayed in responding to threat. In fact, CSA participants did not endorse feeling uncomfortable and leaving the situation until *after* physical contact. Similarly, Marx & Gross (1995) found that women with abuse histories had difficulties identifying risk in potentially threatening situations. In a study conducted by Soler-Baillo (2005), the findings indicated that past victims showed longer response latencies than non-victims of CSA.

Chapter 6

Secondary Risk Appraisals

Social Costs

Based on the Social-Cognitive Theory (Nurius, 1996), the secondary risk appraisal provides more information to the decision making process that occurs after the primary risk appraisal. The secondary risk appraisal aides the female with assessing the social consequences of her perception and subsequently, may dictate how she should respond. More specifically, the individual determines behavioral response style based on desired perception by others (Nurius, Norris, Young, Graham & Gaylord, 2000). In essence, if a woman overreacts to or misreads a man's cues, then she risks rejection, not only by a man with whom she might want a relationship, but also by her closest peers (Nurius et al., 2000; Stroebe & Stroebe, 1996). Studies conducted by Beyth-Marom and colleagues (1993) and also by Sanderson & Cantor (1995) found that people reported a number of concerns when determining how to respond to threat, including anxiety about the reaction of peers and the potential of damaging a significant relationship.

However, situations that present as ambiguous, may lead to further questioning and self-doubt. Fundamentally, the behavior of the assailant must be judged for danger and/or threat by the victim and yet, it may be in itself unclear. For instance, especially in a college setting, parties and dates often involve alcohol or situations in which a man and a woman are alone in a car, a dorm or apartment. Since typical dating or socializing patterns are also potentially threatening, it may be difficult to perceive behavior that is actually threatening. Furthermore, as explained in the Nurius study (2000), there is also a cost-benefit analysis, which examines the potential costs, both personal and social, following the response in a particular way to the threat. For instance,

the social repercussions associated with the response to the situation might warrant a shift in behavioral response. The ambiguity of the situation may allow for more blame towards the female or even protection for the perpetrator. If the victim has imbibed alcohol or agreed to spend time alone with him in an isolated location (i.e. his or her apartment), she might have cause to believe that she will be judged for her behavior. There is some research to support this idea as many cultural myths of rape in the past have historically blamed the victim (i.e. “She should not have been wearing that” or “She asked for it”) (Burt, 1980). Thus, in order to protect herself against the stigma of being socially blamed, the victim may attempt to reduce her social consequences by responding another way.

Social Costs for a CSA Survivor

The fear of being stigmatized by a peer group may be even more critical for a victim of childhood sexual abuse for a variety of reasons. As Finkelhor and Browne (1985) suggested, CSA survivors often feel as though they are to blame for the abuse they endured; that in some way, they elicited the abuse. Thus, many survivors of abuse feel a sense of shame and/or guilt about what happened to them. This sense of shame and guilt may follow them into adulthood and afflict the manner in which they perceive themselves (Van Bruggen et al., 2006). If the child sexual abuse survivor finds themselves in a similarly risky situation that is escalating in the level of danger, they may be more inclined to again blame themselves for getting into the situation (i.e. “it’s my fault because I drank alcohol” or “it’s my fault because I went home with him”). The blame from the abuse may lead to the victim feeling stigmatized by others; as if she is “dirty or bad” in some way. A survivor of CSA who already feels shame and stigma from the trauma would likely want to prevent any more negative associations with her subsequent sexual experiences. Thus, a CSA survivor may feel more compelled to protect herself from further

blame within her social life and this compulsion to self-protect may result in the avoidance of assertive attempts at prevention.

Furthermore, as Finkelhor and Browne (1985) suggest, CSA survivors might also suffer from traumatic sexualization, in which a CSA survivor's sexual development is inappropriately shaped by premature sexual learning and experience. In this capacity, a CSA survivor may not realize that her male acquaintance is acting in an inappropriate manner until it becomes more difficult to remove herself from the situation. She may not equate the interaction with the acquaintance as abnormal, based on previous experience, whereas a non-victim of CSA might immediately or more readily detect that something about the situation is amiss. As indicated by Maker and colleagues (2001), sexual abuse victims tend to internalize their negative view of self and fail to protect themselves adequately. Thus, these core beliefs stemming from their traumatic experience more often appear to place CSA survivors on a path towards sexual revictimization.

Social Costs and Revictimization

Fundamentally, it is important to study risk among CSA survivors since, regardless of a risk appraisal deficit, research suggests that those who have a history of CSA are at a significantly higher risk for revictimization (Briere & Runtz, 1987; Koss & Dinero, 1989; Messman-Moore & Long, 2000). In fact, one study found that 32% of CSA survivors experienced adult sexual assault whereas 13.6 % non-victims experience ASA (Gidycz, Coble, Latham & Layman, 1993). Another study found that CSA survivors were 2.4 times more likely than non-victims to be victimized in adulthood (Wyatt et al., 1992). Overall, research has consistently demonstrated childhood sexual abuse as a factor associated with a greater risk for adult sexual assault (Arata, 1999; Cloitre et al., 1996; Messman & Long, 1996; Messman-Moore & Long, 2000)

Since a previous history of sexual abuse is a risk factor for future victimization and/or revictimization (Arata, 2002; Stermac, Reist, Addison, & Millar, 2002; Casey & Nurius, 2005), it is especially important to examine reasons why this may be the case. Specifically, it might be important to look at stigma as an element affecting the survivor of sexual abuse (Nurius et al., 1996). Presumably, the female would want to protect herself from any further stigma, especially if she paid heavily in social costs (i.e. people talking about her, losing the respect of the guy). If the sexual abuse that occurred during childhood left her with a sense of being “dirty” or “tainted” as Finkelhor and Browne (1985) describe, then it would make sense that if peers were to find out about an attempted or completed rape, she would have the potential to become re-stigmatized. College rape statistics estimate that freshman students are more likely to be raped within the first few weeks of school (Smith, White & Holland, 2003). Thus, based on the Social-Cognitive theory posited by Nurius and colleagues (1996), it appears plausible that though risk may be perceived by the individual, they might not want to ruin their social standing by calling attention to a potential rape in the middle of a party. Social status is important for college students, especially since they are attempting to establish themselves for the first time, without their family and without the social support from their childhood friends. Thus, it is important to note that younger, inexperienced females in a college setting may disregard their intuitive reaction to the feeling of threat and remain within risky situations (i.e. remain at the party, keep drinking more at parties or alone in dorm rooms with men, etc.).

Chapter 7

Behavioral Responses

Method of Behavioral Response

The manner in which risk is appraised is often implicated in the exit choice of the individual leaving a threatening situation. With regard to behavior outcomes, Nurius and colleagues (2000) indicate that women typically respond within the framework of three different behavioral responses to the threat of an acquaintance sexual assault; assertive, indirect and passive. Recently, research has started to focus more on how women actually respond to the threat of sexual assault once they perceive risk. This is especially important since the manner in which a woman leaves the threatening situation may ultimately be more indicative of a completed rape than a non-completed rape.

One method of leaving a threatening situation is assertively. An assertive method of responding to acquaintance sexual assault is defined as being decisively assertive or defensive when attempting to resist unwanted sexual activity with the potential assailant. Females will respond either using assertive statements (i.e. "Get away from me!"; "Stop touching me") or physically (i.e. pushing them away, abruptly getting up, struggling). Research consistently shows that women who engage in assertive actions are more likely to avoid rape than those who do not (Ullman, 1997). In fact, Clay-Warner (2002) found that those who assertively participate in physical resistance rather than using verbal strategies are more effective in reducing the likelihood of completed rape.

On the other hand, an indirect or diplomatic method of behavioral response is defined as an attempt to prevent the rape and leave the situation without calling much attention to herself while also trying to prevent physical injuries from the assailant. These individuals are much less likely

to use physical methods and much more likely to use verbal tactics in order to get out of the risky situation (i.e. jokingly indicating that his behavior is unwanted or giving the man “the cold shoulder”). For example, indirect verbal responses revolve around the idea of diverting the assailant’s attention or diffusing the situation with verbal redirection (i.e. “Why don't we do something else?”) Clay-Warner (2002) suggests that indirect behavioral responses or verbal strategies are much less effective than physical resistance. Victims of sexual assault are more likely to use non-forceful verbal behaviors than are non-victims (Ullman & Knight, 1992).

Another form of non-forceful behavioral responses is reported as passive or immobilized. A passive method of response is defined as not attempting to stop the rape from occurring, either through physical or verbal prevention. Passive responders are described as those who are unable to respond and may appear immobilized during the threat of an attack (Galliano, Noble, & Travis, 1993). Research suggests that females use passive behavioral responses in order to mitigate the injuries they perceive that they would sustain from responding physically or using verbal intervention (Atkeson, Calhoun, & Morris, 1989; Norris, Nurius & Dimeff, 1996; Nurius et al., 2000). Furthermore, some females within a sexually threatening situation are ultimately unable to respond. These women become immobilized when faced with a significant threat to safety (Galliano, Noble, Travis, & Puechl, 1993).

A prior relationship with the assailant was found to affect the victim's use of self-protective actions (Atkeson et al., 1989). More specifically, a person who is being attacked by an acquaintance was seen as more likely to use verbal self-protection strategies. In other studies, victims were less likely to use physical resistance or assertive measures if they knew or had a prior relationship with the assailant (Koss, Dinero, Seibel, & Cox, 1988; Ullman & Siegal, 1993). Turchik, Probst, Chau, Nigoff, & Gidycz (2007) found that participants used non-forceful

tactics if the perpetrator was known prior to the assault and also used less assertive tactics for fear of losing the relationship with the perpetrator. The form of behavioral response is particularly important in that it seems to indicate if a rape actually occurs in the threatening situation.

Research suggests that CSA survivors more often respond with either indirect and/or passive behavioral techniques (Galliano, Noble, & Travis, 1993). In order to avoid negative social repercussions, a CSA survivor may prefer to react in a manner that would prevent harm socially. The issue that arises with appraising risk under the guise of maintaining social status is that it often results in less assertive behavioral responses (i.e. indirect and/or passive) (Atkeson, 1989). Unfortunately, less assertive behavioral responses have been shown to ultimately increase the probability of a completed rape (Ullman & Knight, 1992).

In addition to protection of social status, feelings of powerlessness play into the sexual abuse survivor's belief about the outcome of ambiguous situations. Thus, in an acquaintance sexual assault situation, a CSA survivor may believe that nothing can be done to prevent the completion of rape. As suggested by Ullman and Knight (1992), this belief may lead to a passive/immobilized response, which increases the likelihood of sexual assault. Similarly, the argument can be raised that a trauma victim may attempt to protect themselves physically and prevent further sexual trauma by not responding to the situation. This may especially be prevalent in cases of childhood sexual trauma survivors since they may have not been able to respond assertively as children and thus, gravitate towards more passive responses due to fear, uncertainty about the situation and/or size of the perpetrator (Maker, Kemmelmeier, & Peterson, 2001). Based on these speculations, it is important to better understand how Primary risk appraisal translates into a CSA survivor's behavioral response.

Chapter 8

Current Study

Aims of the Study

The current study will examine risk appraisals in college students and their subsequent behavioral responses in an acquaintance sexual assault situation. We hope to narrow down the inconsistencies discussed in previous research about primary risk appraisals. Furthermore, we are hoping to determine how/if social stigma may play into a college female's behavioral response to acquaintance sexual assault.

Based on the issues described above, the current study had four primary aims: (1) To test the utility of a new technique for assessing primary risk, which displays a vignette one line at a time instead of the usual method of "all-at-once." The primary risk will be determined once the participant indicates that they feel "threatened" by a line of the scene and we will consequently assume this to be primary risk appraisal.; (2) To assess secondary risk, participants will determine their method of responding to 'Ted,' a fictitious acquaintance portrayed as a potential perpetrator within the social cost and the main vignette, by weighing potential costs to their social status.; (3) To determine whether primary and secondary risk appraisals influence the type of behavioral response, and (4) To determine if victims of CSA will assess and respond to risk differently than non-CSA participants based on their appraisals. Based upon previous research and theory, the following hypotheses were examined:

Hypotheses of the study

A. Despite the inconsistencies in previous literature, we speculate that participants with a history of CSA will take longer to respond to risky situations compared to non-victims. This expectation is based on the belief that variability in previous methodology did not allow for

accurate portrayal of primary risk appraisal. Furthermore, the significantly higher rate of acquaintance sexual assault among CSA survivors indicates necessity for further investigation in the area of primary risk appraisal. Thus, there will be a main effect for victim status.

B. Based on the literature indicating that social stigma is especially important for college students to avoid, we expect that participants who are randomly assigned to the high social cost condition will take longer to respond to risk compared to participants who are randomly assigned to the low social cost condition. Therefore, there will be a main effect for social costs.

C. Taken together, we expect that participants with a history of CSA who are randomly assigned to the high social cost condition will take the longest to respond to risky situations due to their desire to self-protect against further stigmatization within a same-age peer group. Hence, there will be an interaction effect between victim status and social costs.

D. Based on the literature, we expect that the CSA participants randomly assigned to the high social cost condition will report using more indirect and/or passive behavioral strategies as opposed to assertive behavioral strategies when compared to CSA victims who are randomly assigned to the low social cost condition and all non-victims overall. Thus, there will be an interaction effect between behavioral strategies and social costs.

Chapter 9

Method

Procedure

College students from a southeastern university interested in receiving credit for an Introductory Psychology class were offered the opportunity to complete a survey through a university-sponsored online database. Based on the brief synopsis provided and an indication of being female and heterosexual, these students were able to participate in the study titled ‘Interactions with Male Acquaintances’, or Phase 1. The participants responded to eight questions that corresponded with a range of sexual abuse experiences that occurred prior to the age of seventeen (see Appendix A). Once the participants completed the eight questions, they were offered the opportunity to participate in Phase 2 of the study by providing an email address for the Primary Investigator. Once women were deemed eligible based on their responses to Phase 1 of the Interactions with Male Acquaintances, emails were sent inviting them to participate in an online study designed to assess their perception of risk during an interaction with a vaguely known male acquaintance. However, the participants were only informed that the study involved the examination of a college student’s social experiences and aimed to determine their reactions to a hypothetical scenario depicting an encounter with a male acquaintance at a party (see Appendix B). An informed consent containing this description and risks/benefits of participation followed. Once consent was obtained, participants received and were asked to respond to a vignette that described an interaction with a classmate, named Ted (see Appendix C). Women were instructed to read and respond to the vignette as though the situation described actually happened to them. After participants completed a question which assessed their emotional response following each line of the vignette, they were instructed to complete the

demographics questionnaire and the Behavioral Responses Questionnaire, in that order. Once women completed the survey, they were thanked for their participation and awarded course credit or extra credit in psychology courses.

Phase 1

Participants

Within the present study, 330 heterosexual female college students who were taking an Introductory Psychology course at a large southeastern university were screened with an online database (Phase 1) in order to determine eligibility for Phase 2 of the study. The participants were limited by gender (female) and sexuality (heterosexual) in order to best fit the experimental methodology as dictated by previous literature (Messman-Moore & Long, 1999).

Within the responses from Phase 1, approximately 31.1% of the participants had been sexually abused to a varying degree, which is fairly consistent with the literature regarding the number of CSA cases (Messman-Moore & Long, 2000). The participants who qualified for Phase 2 and endorsed an interest in continued participation by providing an email address were contacted by an email from the Primary Investigator. Within the email, there was a link to the survey through the website SurveyMonkey that the participant could click on and complete the survey during a time deemed convenient by the participant. Based on the information gathered during the first phase of the study, approximately fifty participants who experienced childhood sexual abuse and approximately fifty participants who did not experience childhood sexual abuse were randomly selected and contacted in order to participate in Phase 2. Since there were participants who did not choose to fill out the second phase of the study, twenty additional CSA and twelve additional non-CSA participants were contacted in order to reach the desired sample size of approximately one hundred participants.

Measure

Life Experiences Questionnaire. (LEQ; Long et al., 1999). The Life Experiences Questionnaire is a self-report instrument that assesses demographic information and childhood sexual experiences. Child sexual victimization was screened with a series of eight questions that assessed sexual experiences ranging in severity. Child victimization was defined as contact abuse prior to age 17, which must have met at least one of the following criteria: (a) abuse perpetrated by a relative, (b) more than 5-year age difference between victim and perpetrator or (c) if less than 5-year age difference between victim and perpetrator, threat or force was involved.

The Life Experiences Questionnaire was revised in order to specifically examine childhood sexual abuse in a population of *college females* and was a revised version of the Past Experiences Questionnaire (PEQ) (Messner et al., 1988). Internal consistency for the eight questions used to screen for childhood sexual abuse in the LEQ was calculated with a sample of 145 college females (Messman-Moore, Long, & Siegfried, 2000) and is good (Cronbach's $\alpha = .89$) The LEQ also demonstrated reliability and validity in previous research conducted with college women (Messman-Moore & Brown, 2000). The test-retest reliability was shown to be good. With the present study, the internal consistency was excellent and showed a Cronbach's α of .88.

It should be noted that the Life Experiences Questionnaire (LEQ) was used in place of the more commonly cited Sexual Experiences Survey since it specifically targets childhood abuse and more clearly defines the boundaries of childhood sexual abuse within the instructions. In prior research, the Sexual Experiences Survey (SES) is often posited to lack the full range of individuals who experienced childhood sexual abuse as opposed to sexual assault after the age of fourteen. The Sexual Experiences Survey examines sexual assault since the age of 14 years old

whereas the Life Experiences Questionnaire examines sexual abuse that occurred prior to the age of seventeen and incorporated at least one of three criteria aforementioned (please see above) that indicates childhood victimization. The LEQ was used in order to gather a wider range of individuals who experienced sexual abuse during their childhood years.

Phase 2

Participants

Participants were 99 heterosexual female college students currently enrolled in an Introductory Psychology course at a large southeastern university who reported having experienced some form of victimization during childhood prior to the age of seventeen on the Life Experiences Questionnaire (Long et al., 1999). The participants were all 18 years of age or older. They were provided with a lengthy consent form which informed them about the study and were provided with referral services information prior to participation in the second phase of the study. The early placement of the referral services within the online survey was deliberate in the event that a research participant decided to forgo the completion of the survey, but required additional information about services. Participation was voluntary and was compensated with course credit. Demographic data for the sample showed that 15.2 % were 18 years old, 35.4% were 19 years old, 27.3% were 20 years old and the remaining 22.2 % were 21 years old or older. Most participants were freshmen or sophomores (86.9%), Caucasian (86.3%), and currently in a committed romantic relationship or dating romantically (91.2%) with the average dating length of 10 months.

Measures

Interactions with a Male Acquaintance. A scenario was constructed to resemble a “typical” undergraduate social interaction that, over time, evolved to be a threatening

acquaintance sexual assault situation. For purposes of the study, the information provided to the participants prior to the vignette was matched to specifics about the university and the surrounding town. In this capacity, the participants could truly place themselves in the scenario in a realistic manner. Two scenarios were pilot tested in order to determine the differences between a posited low social cost condition to the participant versus a high social cost condition. In the low social cost condition, the participant was informed that they had just arrived at the university (which many of the actual participants are freshman or beginning students), but that many of her hometown friends were attending the same university. Furthermore, in this scenario, the participant felt attracted to the fictitious male peer from an Algebra study group, 'Ted', but it was minimal interest. However, in the high social cost condition, the participant was informed that she recently arrived at college and did not have a social group. After joining an Algebra study group, the participant was invited to attend a party with potential new friends. Thus, the participant was meant to acknowledge the possibility of gaining new friends. Furthermore, in this high social cost condition, the participant was informed that she was highly attracted to 'Ted' and strongly considered him as a possible future romantic partner. The difference between the two social conditions theoretically was that in the low social cost condition, the participant had the support of life-long friends and mild interest in a new guy 'Ted.' However, in the high social cost condition, the participant did not have the support of her hometown friends, was new to the school and the location and was extremely interested in dating 'Ted.' This added information was used as an experimental tool to bolster the secondary risk appraisal (Nurius, 1996), which suggests that females make decisions about responding to acquaintance sexual assault situations based on weighing social costs.

The scenario contained numerous examples of possible costs to social status based on the participant's response to Ted (e.g., loss of friends or stigma). Given the relative importance of perceived social costs to our research question, we created two scenario conditions at varying levels of social costs to be pilot-tested (i.e., low and high). Based on pilot data collected from a sample of 86 undergraduate women, we determined that the low and high social cost condition to be methodologically based on its comparability to past research (Nurius, 1996). In addition to the above, pilot-test participants were also asked to complete several questions related to scenario realism on a scale ranging from no agreement (0= Do Not Agree at All) to the complete agreement (8= Agree Completely). Participants indicated that they perceived the scenarios to be very realistic ($M = 6.73$; $SD = 1.95$). Participants were also asked whether they were able to and whether they did imagine themselves in the scenario ($M = 7.43$; $SD = 1.13$). Together, pilot data suggest that the scenario reflected a real-life social interaction during college in which the participants placed themselves.

Demographics. Participants completed a demographics questionnaire which assessed age, academic level, ethnicity, religious background, relationship status, and intimate relationship history.

Positive and Negative Affect Scale (PANAS; Watson, Clark, & Tellegen, 1988). Based on the Positive and Negative Affect Scale, seven different mood choices (i.e. calm, angry, happy, upset, surprised, threatened, and excited) were posed to the female participants after each sentence of the vignette. These moods/affects were taken from the PANAS in order to determine the primary risk appraisal, which was operationally defined as the first instant in which the female felt threatened by Ted. Thus, an equal number of negative and positive moods/affects were taken from the PANAS in order to provide the participant with a plethora of choices

indicating their subjective response to vignette at that point. At the point in which the participant indicates a threat, it will be noted that she experienced a primary risk appraisal.

In general, the alpha reliabilities are all acceptably high, ranging from .86 to .90 for PA (Positive Affect) and from .84 to .87 for NA (Negative Affect) (Watson, Clark, Tellegen, 1988). This was tested within a college population and shows good reliability within such a population. The alpha for the current study was fairly low (Cronbach's coefficient $\alpha = .62$). This may be because only select emotions were used or that the participants were forced to indicate a reaction to an increasingly risky situation. However, since the PANAS was merely used to indicate the point at which the participants indicated "threat," which was used to show primary risk appraisal (see Appendix D).

Behavioral Responses to Ted (Macy, Nurius, & Norris, 2007).

Questions related to the participant's response to Ted's behavior were adapted from a previous study conducted by Macy et al. (2007), which focused on the behavioral responses of females within an acquaintance sexual assault situation. The questions, which were derived from a study conducted by Macy and colleagues (2007), were 23 defensive strategies that assessed how likely it was that they would engage in each behavior. These items were derived from the literature on assault resistance as well as from preliminary pilot testing in which we queried respondents about defensive strategies by Norris et al. (1996). Scales measuring situational coping in response to sexual aggression have been used previously and found to have satisfactory psychometric properties (Norris et al., 1999; Nurius et al., 2004; Nurius et al., 2000).

Behavioral coping responses comprised several items assessing specific strategies. Based on the 23 items, three behavioral response patterns were established (Assertive, Indirect and Passive) and divided into three separate corresponding scales. The items were scored on a 5-

point scale ranging from 0 (*not at all like my response*) to 4 (*very much like my response*). The Assertive Response Scale comprised eleven items, including “raised my voice and used strong language” and “became physically defensive” ($\alpha = .81$, $M = .87$, $SD = .72$). The Indirect/Diplomatic Response Scale comprised eight items, including “told him that I liked him, but wasn’t ready for this” and “nicely told him I didn’t want to have sex” ($\alpha = .69$, $M = 1.53$, $SD = .87$). The Passive/Immobilized Response Scale comprised four items, including “felt paralyzed and unresponsive” and “struggled at first, but stopped when I thought it was hopeless” ($\alpha = .54$, $M = 1.73$, $SD = 1.03$). For the current study, the Assertive Response Scale was $\alpha = .74$, the Diplomatic Response Scale was $\alpha = .74$ and the Immobilized Response Scale was $\alpha = .53$. When the Diplomatic and Immobilized Response Scale were collapsed into one scale, the α was $= .77$.

Chapter 10

Results

The current study was designed to investigate the relationships between self-reported childhood sexual abuse, latency to respond to risk, social costs to the individual and their behavioral responses. Based on previous research, three potential behavioral responses were considered: assertive, indirect and passive behavioral response. For the purposes of the current study, victim status was measured as a categorical variable. Similarly, the social costs to the participant were measured as categorical, in that they were either a high social cost condition or a low social cost condition. Participants were randomly assigned to social cost conditions to both the abuse and the non-abuse groups. Latency of threat perception was measured by the line at which the participant first indicated feeling threatened based on a new methodology of presenting a vignette in a line-by-line fashion. Behavioral response was also measured as a categorical variable and determined within three separate behavioral response scales (i.e., Assertive, Indirect, or Passive).

Prevalence of Childhood Sexual Abuse

Of the 330 participants screened during Phase 1, 92 participants or 31.1 % had experienced some degree of childhood sexual victimization. Of the eight questions provided in the Life Experiences Questionnaire (LEQ), the range of victimization severity was: 10.3 % (one incident), 4.8 % (two incidents), 3.6 % (three incidents), 2.7% (four incidents), 4.2% (five incidents), 1.5% (six incidents), 3 % (seven incidents) and 0.9% (eight incidents). The mean total score on the Life Experience Questionnaire total scores was 1.02 incidents, with a standard deviation of 1.94. Of the 330 participants in Phase 1, 223 participants or 67.4 % indicated that

they had never experienced any childhood victimization. Five participants or 1.5 % did not complete the Phase 1.

Among Phase 1 participants, there was a relative range of severity of childhood sexual abuse experiences. Since this study was designed to examine a broad range of childhood sexual abuse experiences in comparison to the latency and behavioral response type, the severity of CSA was not controlled for in terms of placement within the high social or low social cost conditions.

Victim Status in Risk Perception

We first hypothesized that abuse victims would experience a delay in their response to threat. To test this hypothesis, an independent samples t-test was used to establish the relationship between victim status and latency response. The independent samples t-test supported this hypothesis, $F(1, 96) = 8.1, p = .005$ (see Table 1). Participants who endorsed a history of sexual abuse had longer responses ($M = 17.0, SD = 4.3$) than participants who did not endorse a history of sexual abuse ($M = 14.3, SD = 4.5$). Along with this, the Cohen's d effect size was .58, which suggests a medium magnitude for the main effect.

Social Costs and Latency in Risk Perception

We hypothesized that the participants in the high social cost condition would take longer to respond than those in the low social cost condition. To test this hypothesis, an independent samples t-test was used to establish the relationship between social cost condition and latency response. The independent samples t-test did not support this hypothesis, $F(1, 96) = .132, p = .546$ (see Table 2). Participants who were randomly assigned to the high social cost condition did not have longer latencies ($M = 16.0, SD = 4.7$) than participants who were randomly assigned to the low social cost condition ($M = 15.4, SD = 4.6$).

In addition, we hypothesized that the participants who both reported a history of childhood sexual abuse and were randomly assigned to the high social cost condition would have the longest latency in perceiving risk than those participants who were randomly assigned to any other condition or who were not sexually abused (i.e., high social cost condition with no sexual abuse history, low social cost with no sexual abuse history or low social cost with sexual abuse history). To test this hypothesis, a univariate analysis of variance was used in order to determine an interaction between victim status, social cost condition and latency response. The univariate analysis of variance did not support this hypothesis, $F(1, 94) = .77$ (see Table 3 & 4).

Participants who were randomly assigned to the high social cost condition and reported a history of sexual abuse did not have significantly longer responses to risk perception ($M = 17.4$, $SD = .91$) than participants who were randomly assigned to the either social cost condition with a non-victim status ($M = 14.5$, $SD = .92$; $M = 14.3$, $SD = .92$) or the low social cost condition with a history of sexual abuse ($M = 16.6$, $SD = .91$).

The Relationship between Victim Status and Social Costs

Finally, we hypothesized that the participants who endorsed a history of sexual abuse and were randomly assigned to the high social cost condition would be more likely to respond in either an indirect and/or passive manner in comparison to the other possible groups (i.e., high social cost condition with no sexual abuse history, low social cost with no sexual abuse history or low social cost with sexual abuse history). The behavioral responses were categorical and grouped into three separate subscales: assertive, indirect or passive behavioral responses (see Appendix E). To test this hypothesis, a Multivariate Analysis of Variance (MANOVA) was used in order to compare means across several groups and in order to test for interaction effects. The MANOVA did not directly support this hypothesis $F(1, 96) = .283$, $p = .09$; $F(1, 96) = .38$, $p =$

.54. Participants who were randomly assigned to the high social cost condition and endorsed a history of sexual abuse did not use more indirect or passive behavioral responses ($M = 13$, $SD = 1.48$; $M = 7.615$, $SD = .7$) than other group participants who were randomly assigned to other cost conditions or indicated a history of sexual abuse (see Table 5 & 6). However, though the participants who reported a sexual abuse history and were randomly assigned to a high social cost condition did not select more indirect or passive behavioral response tactics, they choose a significantly lower amount of assertive behavioral response tactics $F(1, 96) = 3.85$, $p = .05$; ($M = 22.12$, $SD = 2.21$) in comparison to the non-abused participants given the same high social cost condition ($M = 31.75$, $SD = 2.30$). The Cohen's d effect size was 4.2, which suggests a large effect.

Chapter 11

Discussion

The current study sought to examine the relationship between childhood sexual abuse, acquaintance sexual assault and risk appraisals among heterosexual female college students. Improving on previous research, the current study used a new methodology, which presented a risky situation in a vignette form, line-by-line, in order to show increasing threat within an ambiguous social situation in college without the participant knowing the entire story. Results showed that indeed for the participants who experienced a history of abuse, the perception of risk was delayed in comparison to those participants who did not experience a history of abuse. Despite some conflicting studies, there is more literature to suggest that survivors of childhood sexual abuse may be more apt to respond slowly to risk when presented with a threatening situation than those without a trauma history (e.g., Soler-Baillo, Marx, & Sloan, 2005; Wilson, Calhoun & Bernat, 1999; Yeater & O'Donohue, 2002).

Variable methodology has been implicated as the culprit in improper distinction of risk. With the use of a new methodological tactic, the implication follows that without knowledge of the end result of a situation, survivors of sexual abuse may be more likely to misperceive risk than adequately perceive it. Furthermore, research indicates that childhood sexual abuse may decrease one's perception of risk for sexual assault later in life in that it may skew their ability to respond appropriately to the threatening situation (Maker, Kemmelmeier, & Peterson, 2001). This may be the connection to higher percentages of revictimization among sexual abuse victims than non-traumatized individuals.

On the other hand, it appears that social cost alone does not impact the individual's perception of risk. This finding may suggest that although avoidance of social stigma may be

important for college students, it does not hinder their primary risk appraisal. Furthermore, the findings do not suggest that individuals with a sexual abuse history placed in a situation where high social costs are at stake will perceive risk any slower than other individuals. Thus, it seems feasible that social stigma may not play a role in terms of the initial perception of threat. That is, when individuals are presented with a high risk social cost, they will be able to perceive threat, regardless of a victim status.

Interestingly, although social cost and victim status did not dictate how an individual perceives threat, they are implicated in how the individual *responds* to that threat. The results indicated that although sexual abuse victims in a high social cost situation do not use more indirect and/or passive behavioral techniques than those without a history of sexual abuse, they tend to select less assertive methods of escape from a potentially threatening situation. Thus, it appears plausible that a sexual abuse survivor might be more inclined to protect their social standing by avoiding assertive methods of exiting a risky situation. On the other hand, responding less assertively to sexual abuse may also have been more adaptive for victims during childhood in order to protect themselves from further harm. Regardless of the mechanism, this is important information for researchers as assertive methods of behavioral response are implicated in avoidance of sexual assault. In a college campus situation, in which threatening situations may arise (i.e. fraternity parties, dating and interaction with alcohol), this may be critical in order to decrease the likelihood of a sexually abused individual becoming revictimized.

More research examining behavioral responses and social costs in conjunction with a victim status is needed to determine the causal directions among these variables for revictimization. However, these findings highlight the importance of increasing awareness of

sexual threat among victims of childhood sexual abuse, as a reciprocal relationship among these variables is likely.

Limitations

Within this study, there were several limitations that should be addressed. One limitation was that this data was collected online, which provides some possible complications. For instance, if the participant is completing the study online, she may not answer as thoughtfully as within a controlled laboratory situation. Furthermore, surveys online may prompt participants to answer haphazardly without paying specific attention to the instructions of each measurement. Additionally, as stated in previous literature, it is difficult to recreate a rape-like situation that can easily translate into a real-life scenario (Cue, 1996; Nurius, Macy, & Huang, 2004). This is especially complicated with a written vignette in which a participant is asked to imagine themselves in the situation. However, this study attempted to change the usual written vignette, which is given to the participant all at once, into a line-by-line situation in which the element of surprise was used in attempt to establish a similar situation in real-life. Despite the change in the presentation of the vignette, it is hypothetical nonetheless and thus, presents as difficult to translate perfectly into a realistic situation.

Clinical Implications

The major clinical implications of this study center on the notion that due to the high prevalence rate of acquaintance sexual assault on college campuses currently, more efforts need to be made in order to rectify the overwhelming statistics. Unfortunately, childhood sexual abuse is a complex social problem that is implicated within many ecological layers and may be difficult to eradicate. However, what can be fixed or improved on a more local level is the implementation of applicable sexual assault prevention programming throughout college

campuses in the US. Currently, the protocol for sexual assault prevention within college campuses comes in the form of dividing the genders into two separate seminars where the girls are taught to be cautious when spending time with unknown males and mindful of drugs being slipped into alcoholic drinks at parties. Sexual assault prevention programs need to be overhauled and changed to reflect the research, which suggests that sexual abuse victims are more likely to be revictimized and the type of behavioral response is essential for escape from a sexually threatening situation. Furthermore, regardless of risk appraisal deficits or victim status, acquaintance sexual assault situations tend to be fairly ambiguous and thus, leave more room for errors in decision-making.

The current literature indicates that the manner in which the female leaves the situation is implicated in acquaintance sexual assaults. Thus, prevention programming needs to focus on reacting to the perpetrator once the potential victim feels threatened or uncomfortable in any capacity and equipping college women with a set of tools with which to pull from. If college women are educated about the manner in which to react to the threatening behavior of an assailant (i.e., more assertive and definitive about what they want and do not want), they may find it less uncomfortable to exit a situation and more clear about how to proceed. Ultimately, it would behoove college females to understand that sexual coercion in any capacity may be damaging and lead to long-term psychological and/or physical issues. Thus, although the assertive response to a threatening situation may feel uncomfortable for certain individuals, it will be temporary in comparison to repercussions of a sexual assault.

The findings of the current study highlight the detrimental impact of both childhood sexual abuse and acquaintance sexual assault, as well as the complex nature of risk appraisals within these individuals. The results indicated that sexual abuse survivors are more likely to

experience a delayed perception of threat and less likely to use assertive methods of responding to the perpetrator. Therefore, intervention and prevention programs for childhood sexual abuse survivors and female college students should focus their efforts on increasing awareness of risk within familiar social situations, teach females adaptive methods for responding to a threatening situation and encourage college campuses to better educate their students about the risk of rape within common social settings. With an increase in psycho-educational programs on college campuses regarding acquaintance sexual assault, the staggering rates of rape may slowly begin to diminish.

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Appendices

Appendix A
Life Experiences Questionnaire (LEQ)
Phase 1 Questions

Childhood Sexual Experiences. It is now generally realized that many women and men, while they were children or adolescents, have had a sexual experience with an adult or someone older than they were. By sexual, I mean behaviors ranging from someone exposing themselves (their genitals) to you to someone having intercourse with you. These experiences may have involved a relative, a friend of the family, an acquaintance, a stranger, or another individual. Some experiences are very upsetting and painful while others are not, and some may have occurred without your consent.

Now, please think back to your childhood and adolescence (before your 17th birthday), remember if you had any sexual experiences, and answer the following questions.

EXCLUDE:

- Voluntary sexual activities with a dating partner no more than 5 years older than you were.
- Consensual sexual play with a peer no more than 5 years older than you were.

Report below activities that occurred without your consent or were unwanted or that happened with a partner more than 5 years older than you or that happened with a family member.

1. During childhood and adolescence, did anyone ever expose themselves (their sexual organs) to you?
(1) Yes (0) No
2. During childhood and adolescence, did anyone masturbate in front of you?
(1) Yes (0) No
3. During childhood and adolescence, did anyone ever touch or fondle your body, including your breasts or genitals, or attempt to arouse you sexually?
(1) Yes (0) No
4. During childhood and adolescence, did anyone try to have you arouse them or touch their body in a sexual way?
(1) Yes (0) No
5. During childhood and adolescence, did anyone rub their genitals against your body in a sexual way?
(1) Yes (0) No
6. During childhood and adolescence, did anyone attempt to have intercourse with you?
(1) Yes (0) No
7. During childhood and adolescence, did anyone have intercourse with you?
(1) Yes (0) No
8. During childhood and adolescence, did you have any other sexual experiences involving another person not included above?
(1) Yes (0) No

Appendix B Social Cost Conditions

Low Social Cost Condition:

You recently started school at UT with a group of close friends from high school. You like to spend your free time with them. The group of you will often go to parties and other social events together. You have made other friends at UT, such as the people in your Algebra study group, but tend to prefer hanging out with your high school pals to any of your newer UT acquaintances.

Today in Algebra class, you learn about a party being held somewhere in West Knoxville. Most of the people in your study group plan to go and want you to join them. You learn that Ted, another member of the study group, is likely to be at the party tonight. He has talked to you a couple of times, and you are interested in getting to know him better. You think the party sounds like fun and plan to drive out there with your usual high school group.

High Social Cost Condition:

You recently started school at UT without knowing anyone. It has taken several months, but you are starting to make friends. For instance, you really like the people in your Algebra study group, especially Ted. You immediately notice him because of his intelligence, sense of humor and attractiveness. Everyone in the study group loves Ted, and several of girls in the group admitted to having a “crush” on him.

Today in Algebra class, you learn about a party being held somewhere in West Knoxville. Most of the people in your study group plan to go and want you to join them. You learn that Ted, the guy you really like, is likely to be at the party tonight. He has flirted with you a couple of times, and you want to get to know him better. You think the party sounds like fun and plan to drive out there with several of your friends from the study group.

Appendix C
Acquaintance Sexual Assault Vignette

1. You and four of your friends attend a party. One of your friends agrees to be the designated driver and drive the five of you there in her car.
2. You and your friends get acquainted with other people at the party. Everyone is having a good time, and people begin to dance as the music gets louder. You begin dancing with your girlfriends.
3. You notice a guy you know, Ted, approaching you. You and Ted are both in the same algebra class, and you've studied together on several occasions.
4. Ted comes up to you and your friends, and begins dancing with you. You are flattered by Ted's attention, as he is really good looking and popular.
5. In a joking voice, Ted says, "You look great tonight!"
6. Ted puts his hands on your shoulders, and then starts to lean in towards you as he dances.
7. You jokingly tell him to "Back off!" and Ted calls you a "Flirt."
8. As he puts his arms around you Ted says, "Man you look sexy tonight in that outfit."
9. As you continue dancing, one of your friends gets sick and the other decide to take her home.
10. You are having a good time and don't want to leave yet. They agree to come back for you later.
11. As the party begins to die down, Ted invites you to go get something to eat. He offers to drive in his car.
12. You walk with Ted to his car and get in. You drive to Taco Bell.
13. While you are eating, he suggests that you go with him to his apartment. He wants to show you his new saltwater fish tank and listen to some music.
14. You aren't ready for the night to end. You agree to go to his place.
15. You notice as you are driving that you don't recognize this part of town. He pulls into the driveway of the apartment complex and you walk to his apartment.
16. You walk into the living room and he shows you the tank. He puts on some slow music.
17. Ted says again, "I'm so attracted to you. You are so smart and so beautiful. Would you ever be interested in a guy like me?"
18. He turns to you and begins kissing you on the lips, and puts his tongue in your mouth.
19. Even though you push him away, Ted kisses you again, this time more passionately, and reaches for your breast. He says, "I know that you have a secret crush on me. Otherwise, you wouldn't have come here."
20. Ted begins to un-tuck your shirt and reaches for your bra.
21. You try to block his hands, but he grabs both of your hands and holds them down.
22. He pushes you down on our back, continuing to kiss you passionately and somewhat forcefully.
23. As he continues to pin your arms down, he begins to unbutton your pants.
24. He yanks down your pants and panties. He unzips his jeans.
25. You try to push him off, but he has sexual intercourse with you.

Appendix D
Positive and Negative Affect Scale
(Questions to follow each line of the rape scenario)

Please indicate which of the following emotions best describes how you currently feel
(choose one):

- ☐ Calm
- ☐ Angry
- ☐ Happy
- ☐ Upset
- ☐ Surprised
- ☐ Threatened

Appendix E

Behavioral Responses

The following items include a variety of ways women have responded to sexual aggression. Please indicate how you think you would have reacted at the time in response to the situation described between you and Ted. There are no right or wrong answers.

0=Not at all like my response; 1= A little like my response; 2= Fairly like my response; 3= Quite a bit like my response; 4= Very much like my response.

- 1) Jokingly told Ted he was coming on too strong.
- 2) Nicely or apologetically told Ted that I didn't want to have sex.
- 3) Tried to get Ted to do things I was comfortable with, like kissing or hugging, but not sex.
- 4) Faked the arrival of others (e.g. I know my roommate is coming to pick me up soon).
- 5) Tried to stiffen my body and not respond to Ted's actions as a way of showing my lack of interest.
- 6) Shrugged or turned my body away from Ted.
- 7) Made an excuse as to why I didn't want to have sex.
- 8) Told Ted I had to leave.
- 9) Told Ted that I liked him, or found him attractive, but that I wasn't ready for this.
- 10) Tried to discuss with Ted how uncomfortable he was making me feel.
- 11) Told Ted that I wouldn't like him, or wouldn't go out with him anymore, if he didn't stop or if he tried to force me.
- 12) Started tearing up or crying.
- 13) Told Ted clearly and directly that I wanted him to stop.
- 14) Raised my voice and used strong language (e.g. "Hey, LISTEN! I really mean it!")
- 15) Clearly rejected or insulted Ted (e.g. "You jerk, you're acting like an adolescent!")
- 16) Threatened Ted that I would tell friends about his behavior.
- 17) Threatened Ted that I would tell the police or some authority about his behavior.
- 18) Ran away or attempted to run away.
- 19) Pushed Ted away.
- 20) Became physically defensive (e.g., hitting, kicking, scratching)
- 21) Suggested that I had a weapon (e.g. something sharp, like keys) or that I would do something to physically hurt Ted.
- 22) Feels overwhelmed that I felt almost paralyzed and was unresponsive to what Ted was doing.
- 23) I would yell or scream loud enough for someone to hear me.

Table 1

Delayed Risk Responses for Victims in Comparison to Non-Victims

Victim Status	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
CSA	48	17.0	4.6***
No CSA	50	14.4	4.4

$p < .05$; Cohen's $d = .58$

Table 2

Responding to Risk Based on Perceived Social Costs by College Females

Social Cost Condition	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Low	49	16.0	4.7
High	49	15.4	4.6

$p > .05$

Table 3

Mean Latency of Risk Appraisal Based Upon Perceived Social Costs and Victim Status

Social Cost	<u>CSA</u>			<u>No CSA</u>		
	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Low	24	16.56	4.01	26	14.25	4.98
High	25	17.40	4.70	24	14.54	4.34

 $p > .05$

Table 4

Examining Victim Status and Social Cost in the Delay of Risk Perception

	Latency Of Response			
	MS	SS	<i>F</i> (1,94)	<i>p</i>
Abuse	163.54	163.54	8.0	.006***
Condition	7.84	7.84	.38	.54
Abuse*Condition	1.84	1.84	.09	.77

p<.05, Cohen's *d* = .58

Table 5

Victim Status and Social Cost in Behavioral Response of an Acquaintance
Sexual Situation

Behavioral Responses	Low Social Cost/ <u>CSA</u> (n=24)		High Social Cost/ <u>CSA</u> (n=25)		Low Social Cost/ <u>No CSA</u> (n=26)		High Social Cost/ <u>No CSA</u> (n=24)	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Assertive	27.88	2.3	22.12	2.2	28.65	2.2	31.75	2.3 ***
Indirect	15.75	1.54	13.00	1.48	14.42	1.48	16.75	1.54
Passive	8.01	.73	7.62	.70	6.96	.70	7.38	.73

$p < .05$, Cohen's $d = 4.2$

Table 6

Examining Victim Status and Social Cost in the Behavioral Response

Behavioral Response				
	MS	SS	<i>F</i> (1, 94)	<i>p</i>
<i>Abuse</i>				
Assertive	676.67	676.67	5.32	.023***
Indirect	36.64	36.64	.65	.42
Passive	11.58	11.58	.91	.34
<i>Condition</i>				
Assertive	44.27	44.27	.35	.56
Indirect	1.11	1.11	.02	.89
Passive	.02	.02	.001	.97
<i>Abuse*Condition</i>				
Assertive	489.37	489.37	3.85	.06
Indirect	160.84	160.84	2.83	.09
Passive	4.85	4.85	.38	.54

 $p < .05$

Vita

I received my B.A. from DePaul University in June 2005. My current research interests are in the area of sexual assault and childhood sexual abuse, including revictimization of traumatized individuals and susceptibility for psychopathology in those who have experienced abuse as children.