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THE PSYCHOLOGY OF DISCLOSURE: WHAT BREAKS OR MAINTAINS THE SILENCE ON SILENT PROTEST DAY AND BEYOND?

A research report submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree

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Declaration

I, Lungile Gama Lechesa, declare that this is my own unaided work. It is being submitted for a Masters degree in Clinical Psychology at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination at another university.

Signed: 

Date: 20 July 2017

Abstract

This research project is a part of a larger umbrella study that aims to explore the perceived psychological effects of Silent Protest day at the University of Witwatersrand. The research participants were students that participated in the event, whether or not they have been victims of sexual violence, or participated to show support for those who have.

The intention of this research project was to identify factors that influence the disclosure of sexual violence on the Silent Protest day but also in general, and to explore the process of, and reasons for keeping silent about or disclosing the experience of sexual violence (whether to one person or to many).

Sexual violence is a considerably big problem in South Africa, and unfortunately the majority of sexual offences go unreported. It has been shown that survivors of sexual violence often display signs of psychological distress and might develop a psychological disorder. The silence and stigma around sexual violence can prevent victim-survivors from reporting incidents and most importantly from seeking help. Research has shown that emotional inhibition about and/or nondisclosure of traumatic events is significantly associated with psychological problems such as dissociation, anxiety, depression, PTSD and mood disorders.

The aims of this research project were therefore to get a better understanding of the nuances surrounding the actual process of disclosure on Silent protest day and in victim-survivors lives, to explore why individuals decide to, or not to, disclose sexual violence, and the emotional and psychological aspects and effects that are elicited and experienced within that process. Five participants that had participated in the 2015 Silent Protest were interviewed.

The themes that emerged from the research were: factors that may prevent disclosure; factors that may facilitate disclosure; factors that appear to have a mixed effect on disclosure; and the researcher's reflections on participants' disclosure to her. Underlying these themes were various sub-themes such as feelings of shame, not

knowing how to disclose, fear, having the opportunity to disclose; the nature of the relationship to the perpetrator; anticipated reaction from others; the survivor's general feelings on disclosure, and their views of other survivors' experiences of disclosure. The findings imply that the ability to tease out and understand the survivors' internal processes from the external factors is key in aiding the actual process of disclosure in a supportive manner.

Mangoane Nthati, I dedicate this to you.

You will live in my heart forever.

I can feel you beaming with pride.

Thank you, I love you.

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1 Introduction

'And of course I am afraid, because the transformation of silence into language and action is an act of self-revelation, and that always seems fraught with danger. But my daughter, when I told her of our topic and difficulty with it, said, "Tell them about how you're never really a whole person if you remain silent, because there's always that one little piece inside you that wants to be spoken out, and if you keep ignoring it, it gets madder and madder and hotter and hotter, and if you don't speak it out one day it will just up and punch you in the mouth from the inside."

In the cause of silence, each of us draws the face of her own fear – fear of contempt, of censure, or some judgement, or recognition, of challenge, of annihilation. But most of all, I think, we fear the visibility without which we cannot truly live.'

Audre Lorde (1984)

The introduction to this research study including the background information on sexual abuse, sexual violence¹ and rape will be significantly lengthy due to the complex nature of the subject of sexual abuse and disclosure. In order to adequately position the research, it is imperative to provide the context of what it means to be a survivor of sexual abuse locally and globally. In this thesis the use of the word *survivor* has been chosen over the word *victim*, and will be used throughout the thesis, the choice was made because the label *victim* might seem to imply damage and an ongoing helplessness which can arguably be harmful and disempowering for individuals (Russell, 1991). The term *survivor* also recognises the resilience and in some instances the agency of the survivor (UN Women, UNFPA, WHO, UNDP, & UNODC, 2015). The research is not a study of sexual abuse, but a study of the silence and the stigma that stems from being a survivor, and what that means individually and socially. The intention of this research is to identify factors that influence disclosure of sexual abuse and the process of silence and disclosure. This will ideally have the sociopolitical effect of empowering individuals that have been sexually violated in finding ways to breaking the social stigma and silence around sexual abuse thus resulting in social injustices (Sigworth, 2009), and the negative

¹ The terms sexual violence and sexual abuse will be used interchangeably in the study.

effects of sexual violence being addressed. If there is greater psycho-education and awareness, this will hopefully facilitate disclosure (if desired) to a significant other/s and/or a therapist or counsellor. In addition to this, it is also important for therapists, clinicians and other health care practitioners to understand the difficulties surrounding the disclosure of sexual violence and the psychology and dynamics of disclosure, in order to be even better able to provide adequate support and treatment.

The research is a part of a larger umbrella study at the University of Witwatersrand (WITS) that aims to explore the perceived psychological effects of Silent Protest day on students that have been victims of sexual abuse and those that participate in the protest by way of support (whether or not they have been subjected to sexual abuse).

By way of introduction, Silent Protest day is an annual event that is essentially a protest against sexual violence and the silencing of victims of sexual abuse. The inception of the protest was a collaboration with Rhodes University and the One-In-Nine Campaign with the aim to create more awareness around sexual abuse and encourage survivors to break their silence (Padmanabhanunni & Edwards, 2015). The Career, Counselling and Development Unit (CCDU) at WITS has for the last four years, arranged the 'Sexual Violence = Sexual Protest'. It has successfully become the longest running protest of its kind in Africa. Rhodes University has held the protest day for the last eight years, beginning with 80 participants, with WITS and University of Kwazulu Natal (UKZN) joining the movement in 2013. By this time, the protest had grown significantly at Rhodes to 1500 participants, and 3000 participants nation wide.

At WITS, the Silent Protest day begins with a briefing about the day. Thereafter people can choose whether they wish to participate as a victim/survivor or supporter. Participants can choose whether or not they wish to participate via having their mouths voluntarily taped shut from 8:00am until 3:30pm, this is entirely optional. The significance of the taping of the mouth is to highlight the silencing associated with sexual violence, while at the same time protesting against this very silence and standing with survivors and allowing the participants to have a solid

experience of this silence themselves. In addition to this, participants choose which slogan t-shirt to wear, for example one that says “Survivor” or “Solidarity with women who speak out” (Padmanabhanunni & Edwards, 2015). The participants that choose to wear the survivor t-shirt attend a briefing to create awareness around emotions that may be evoked in them and encourage them to seek support from family and friends (Padmanabhanunni & Edwards, 2015).

The Silent Protest march takes place over lunchtime, with protestors gathering at West Campus to march to Senate House on East Campus, where they are addressed by speakers. The day culminates in a “Breaking the Silence” ceremony (Padmanabhanunni & Edwards, 2015) where the protestors share their reflection on the day as well as stories of their abuse. During the week before the actual day, one or two anti-sexual violence activists are asked to begin the “Breaking the Silence” part of the day, where they relay their experiences to the audience. Then if participants in the protest want to share their stories during the “Breaking the Silence” ceremony they contact the organisers to put their name on a list at the start of the day or during this latter part of the day. Unfortunately not everyone whose name is down on the list would have had the opportunity to share their story either due to time constraints or the saturation of the material being shared.

The intention of this day is to provide a platform for survivors of sexual abuse to feel supported and they are potentially enabled, should they wish to, through the process to break the silence about their own sexual violence. Awareness of sexual violence in South Africa and on campus is anticipated to be achieved through this day, as well as the hope to facilitate the de-stigmatisation of breaking the silence.

As mentioned above, participants choose which t-shirts to wear as part of the day, and in essence the choice of t-shirt that a *survivor* chooses to wear communicates something about their readiness or their status of disclosure. Those that choose to wear the survivor t-shirt are openly declaring that they have experienced sexual violence in their lives. The choice of the silenced t-shirt on the other hand may imply that a survivor may be ready to disclose but they have not. It could also be that by

choosing that t-shirt, the survivor is silently disclosing without having to use their voice and speaking their trauma into existence (Herman, 1992). It may be that it allows them to have some agency and control over their disclosure and could be perceived as some kind of protective disclosure. In light of the topic of disclosure, the choice of the silenced t-shirt embodies the psychological factors that this research project aims to understand.

Sexual violence, sexual abuse and rape in South Africa are an extensive problem with a majority of the sexual crimes not being reported and therefore never coming to the attention of the criminal justice system and perpetrators of these offences not being punished (Vetten et al., 2008). South African Police Service statistics for sexual offences in 2013/2014 indicated that there were 62 649 reported cases across South Africa (“Crime Statistics| SAPS (South African Police Service),” 2014), however research shows that many acts of sexual violence are not reported (Sigworth, 2009), and these statistics do not paint a true reflection of the extent of the problem of sexual violence in the country. The large number of these sexual crimes not being reported has harmful effects on society. With perpetrators not being deterred, more people are at risk of being victims of such violence (Fleming & Kruger, 2013), and research has shown that survivors of such traumatic crimes are more prone to psychological distress and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (Hérbert, Tourigny, Cyr, McDuff, & Joly, 2009), thus further eroding the fabric of our society.

Since the inception of this research project, there has been an increased awareness of sexual violence on South African university campuses and advocacy for survivors to break their silence and seek help, resulting in the birth of campaigns such as Marie Claire’s #ClassOfConsent (Marie Claire, 2017). This campaign followed protests and the reports of sexual violation on some South African university campuses and students being displeased with the manner in which they were ineffectively dealt with by the university management (Sherwen, 2017; Stellenbosch University, 2016; Taunyane, 2016). On one campus when a student reported being sexually assaulted in her room by a fellow student, the residence facilities officer responded by saying that is why the girls were told to keep their doors locked (Sherwen, 2017). On another

university campus it emerged that following reporting being sexually assaulted by a fellow student, the complaint was ineffectively managed and the survivor was made to continue living in the same residential building as her alleged perpetrator while management investigated her claim (SABC News, 2016). On another campus, there were 21 cases of rape and sexual assault reported and the survivors reported being too afraid to report the alleged incidents because the university management was seen to have a negative attitude towards survivors (Sesant, 2016). These incidents sparked a week of anti-rape protests resulting in the university suspending academic activities (Mail and Guardian, 2016). The university management obtained an interdict against students protesting and the police in attempts to disperse protesters used pepper spray, rubber bullets, and some students were arrested. This further enraged protesters as these actions by the university and the police were felt to fuel the injustice of sexual violence, feeding into the silencing, the stigmatisation and victimisation of survivors of sexual violence (Macleod & Barker, 2016).

There have also been many other protests that have caught the attention of the media and the two worth mentioning have involved South African President Jacob Zuma as well as American President Donald Trump. In August 2016 as President Zuma delivered a speech during the local election results announcement, four women holding placards referring to his rape trial in 2006 silently stood in front of him with their backs to him. This was shortly after the death of Khwezi, the woman who President Zuma had allegedly raped and had been acquitted of the crime. One of the placards read “I am one in 3” (eNCA, 2016a) which is a reflection of how many women are violated but even with such high statistics a significant amount go unreported. When President Zuma concluded his speech, security reportedly pushed the four women off the stage and escorted them out of the venue. This ‘silent protest’ staged by these four women caused displeasure, particularly amongst the African National Congress (ANC) Women’s league (eNCA, 2016b). It is ironic that after having the courage to report President Zuma, Khwezi was publically shamed and silenced. Regardless of the outcome of the case, ten years later the alleged crime against her had not been forgotten. The protest was organised by the One in Nine Campaign with their intention being to highlight how the South African criminal

justice system was inherently flawed and against women. The emphasis was placed on the notion that just because President Zuma was acquitted does not mean the rape did not occur (eNCA, 2016b).

Internationally, The Women's March on Washington (USA) is a campaign that was established to advocate for women's rights ("Women's March on Washington," 2017) and the one held in January 2017 was not just limited to Washington DC, but it gained global support with sister marches taking place in various countries and continents, marching for women's rights and some against newly elected President Trump. Although there were various messages being communicated, perhaps the most prominent and collective one was against the treatment and view of women following President Trump making derogatory statements about women's rights and their bodies. Some of the placards had messages such as "Women's rights are human rights", "We will not be silent", "My body, my choice" (Smith-Spark, 2017), and dozens of elderly women were seen holding placards that had the message "I can't believe I still have to protest this shit" (Reston, 2017). Perhaps some of the most resounding messages of the day were "Pussy grabs back" and "Our rights aren't up for grabs and neither are we" (Sharman, 2017). Following the global success of this march and the sister marches, the organisation has introduced action protests such as Hear our Voice whose purpose is to engage elected government officials and demand that the issues and concerns raised are heard ("Women's March on Washington," 2017).

With the advent of social media platforms, such campaigns, movements and protests are more readily accessible and the advocacy of women and children's rights has appeared to have acquired more clout in most layers of society. These movements not only aim to increase awareness around sexual violence, but they also play a role in giving a voice to the silenced. It is therefore important to mention that this thesis is not a critical analysis of Silent Protest day or of the other campaigns, but an analysis of the factors that influence or prevent survivors from disclosing their experiences of sexual violence. Reference to Silent Protest day will however be made throughout the thesis as it was the main platform through which the participants were reached, but in

and of itself, like other awareness campaigns and movements, it plays an important role in the facilitation and understanding of disclosure.

1.1 Research Aims

The aims of this research project were centred around its fundamental purpose which was to explore the process of disclosure through the reports of survivors of sexual violation with the hope that this will lead to an identification of some factors that might be seen to facilitate or prevent disclosure. An important research aim is to get a better understanding of the actual process of disclosure, the types of disclosure and the emotional and psychological aspects and effects that are elicited and experienced within that process.

Within the context of Silent Protest day, one of the research aims was to understand what it is about Silent Protest that facilitates or makes the process of disclosure easier. The intent is to also understand what factors prevented participants from disclosing on the day itself when the opportunity arose (at the Breaking the Silence ceremony), and whether the participants that chose to disclose on the day had disclosed before (outside of Silent Protest) and how that process of disclosure happened. Part of this is to understand the reported psychological effects of the silent period, meaning what people report happens in that period that some survivors decide to silently stay with their experience, how long they stay with silence and what eventually results in them disclosing. The other part is to understand what factors made it easier for some survivors to immediately disclose their experience of sexual abuse or violation, who they chose to disclose to and how they felt about the process of disclosure.

1.2 Rationale

There are several objectives for the current research project, and agency is an important aspect of the rationale. By investigating the silence and secrecy around the experience of sexual abuse or violation, it is hoped that some of the reasons for this might come to light. In turn this might hopefully empower people through greater awareness and knowledge about the silencing effect of sexual violence.

Research shows that psycho-education on the topic of sexual abuse and the silence that often accompanies it could empower women, men and children that have been abused in one way or another to come forward about their experiences (Heath, Lynch, Fritch, McArthur, & Smith, 2011). The research is intended to add to the available literature and to have the socio-political effect of empowering individuals, through psycho-education and awareness, to be able to assist people around them that might disclose their experiences to them, as well as empower they themselves to have the courage to comfortably disclose their experiences and if such is desired, to seek therapeutic assistance. The risk for being a victim of sexual violence is associated with, but not restricted to, factors such as lower socio-economic status, specific cultural contexts, use of alcohol and substances, and situations of greater gender based-inequalities (Sigworth, 2009). It is important for therapists, clinicians and other health care practitioners to understand these risk factors and the psychology and dynamics of disclosure in order to be able to provide adequate support and treatment.

This research is intended to begin to fill a gap in the literature around the disclosure of sexual abuse. Currently the bulk of the sexual abuse research is centred around Child Sexual Abuse (CSA), and the disclosure of CSA (Diaz & Manigat, 1999). The sexual abuse of children crosses all boundaries such as religious, educational, cultural and social, and therefore child sexual abuse is a hugely researched area (Diaz & Manigat, 1999). Research also shows that most children do not disclose their sexual abuse until they are adults (Rickerby, Valeri, Gleason, & Roesler, 2003), which makes this study more important with regards to understanding disclosure and how children and adults that have been sexually violated can be empowered to disclose and seek help, as well as to prevent repeated abuse in children.

It is also imperative to also acknowledge and understand that sexual abuse happens to people, men and women, of all ages and disclosure is the common factor with regards to psychologically coping with the trauma (Fleming & Kruger, 2013). Furthermore, the focus of most of the research has been in the area of sexual abuse and the adverse psychological effects of the trauma, however there is rather limited literature

regarding the actual process of disclosure. This research project is an attempt to draw attention to the actual process of disclosure and how the experience of silence can be used to make platforms such as Silent Protest day more comfortable and meaningful and helpful to survivors of sexual abuse.

It is hoped that this research project might contribute towards knowledge and awareness in the area of sexual violence and its aftermath in respect of the psychology of disclosure and non-disclosure. The research will hopefully be able to create greater awareness and the generation of more support structures for survivors on campuses and in society at large. The overarching hope is to empower survivors to break the silence and to seek help.

2 Literature Review

The literature review will begin by positioning sexual abuse and rape in the South African and global context in order to provide a background of the seriousness of rape and to problematize the non-disclosure of these crimes. Following the history and definitions of rape and sexual abuse, an overview of the statistics of reported cases of rape and sexual abuse is given with an understanding that if all cases were reported the numbers would be significantly higher. Cultural, psychosocial and economic factors that may contribute to the high rates of sexual abuse particularly in the South African context are then explored, followed by how rape culture and rape myths may be influential in the disclosure or non-disclosure of sexual abuse. After having positioned sexual abuse, the literature review goes into the definition and theories of disclosure in more detail. Here the psychological challenges of disclosure, the factors that prevent and influence disclosure as well as the benefits of disclosure are reviewed. Disclosure of child sexual abuse is discussed separately as it is understood that it is a different process to adult disclosure.

2.1 Rape, Sexual Abuse, Sexual Violation and the Question of Disclosure

Rape is an age-old crime, with its origins being traced back to the Bible. It is not a new phenomenon but seems to have existed as far back as history, before slavery, through slavery and into modern day society. Despite rape having been around for centuries, and albeit the significant increase in studies of rape, the epidemiology of rape remains complex and not easily understood. As it stands, it is understood differently in different countries, cultures, religions and socio-economic groups (Meel, 2008). In some instances, rape is understood to not be about sex, but about power and authority and imitating masculine domination (Coetzer, 2005), and in some cases of gang rape, it is regarded as male bonding and sexual socialisation (Coetzer, 2005), or for entertainment (Jewkes et al., 2012). In some instances, a woman is raped by her partner or delivered to a gang by her partner as punishment (Jewkes et al., 2012). Overtime with reports of sexual abuse not just being limited to male perpetrator and female victim, the definitions and recognition of different types of

sexual abuse, perpetrators and victims has evolved (Kramer, 2014) however male perpetrator to female/child victim remains the most researched and visible.

In as much as sexual abuse is a global problem, the varying definitions of it can be a problem with regards to comparative statistics across countries as well as research in academic studies (Sigworth, 2009). Although there are these different definitions, the core is that it involves unwanted sexual advances and actions on a person. Sexual abuse was previously considered as just penetrative rape, however it is defined as any form of sexual violence that is uninvited, such as penetrative intercourse, touching, rubbing, penetration by objects or fingers, oral sex, anal sex (Gilroy & Carroll, 2009), unwanted touching of a sexual nature, forced prostitution and sexual exploitation (Sigworth, 2009), and in this research non-directive and non-contact sexual abuse is included. Rape is defined as non-consensual penetration of the vagina, mouth or anus with a penis, body part or any object (Sigworth, 2009). Forms of non-direct and non-contact sexual abuse include requests for sexual activities, forced exposure to pornography and forced exposure to genitalia (Jolly, 1993), unwanted sexual comments, psychological intimidation, the threat of physical harm (Sigworth, 2009), and verbal sexual abuse. Sex stress is defined as when the survivor had given consent, but the encounter went beyond what was agreed and the survivor could not stop or control the act (Carretta, 2011). Although consent was initially given, sex stress is still a violation against the survivor if at any point they changed their mind and/or said no. Pressured sex is when an individual is threatened with a consequence for not complying with the offender (Carretta, 2011). The non-direct and non-contact definitions were generally used with regards to children, however this research study will apply it to across all ages as it is considered to be uninvited sexual advances. Furthermore, this research will consider anything that the participants feel to be sexual abuse as sexual abuse. It is also important to note that in this research, sexual abuse and the disclosure thereof is applied to male-female, female-male, male-male and female-female perpetration.

Sexual abuse against women and girls is a global problem, and in South Africa the rates are extremely high and unfortunately these sexual violent transgressions are

underreported (Fleming & Kruger, 2013). Statistics indicate that every 35 seconds someone in South Africa is raped (Naidoo, 2013), and one in every five women are sexually abused, and in most instances by an intimate partner (Meel, 2008) or someone known to them. A noteworthy number of girls' first sexual experience is non-consensual (Coetzer, 2005), and 20% of teenage girls and 13% of teenage boys living in the south of Johannesburg would have experienced sexual abuse before they turn age 18 (Andersson & Mhatre, 2003). Soweto and the townships in deep south of Johannesburg have been referred to as the rape capital of the world (Andersson & Mhatre, 2003). The Rape Crisis Cape Town Trust indicated that between 2011 and 2012, the rate of reported offences across the nation was 64 514 sexual offences. It was indicated that if the statistics included the unreported cases, the total number of sexual offences between that period would be at an estimated high of just over 500 000 for the country ("Rape in South Africa | Rape Crisis," 2015). Only one in every 20 rapes is reported (Naidoo, 2013) and due to the lack of reporting rape and sexual abuse, they are considered to be the safest crimes to commit in South Africa (Coetzer, 2005).

Like all with all other traumatic incidents that may happen to an individual, not all survivors will have the same reaction to sexual abuse. Some studies have suggested that not all early experiences are experienced as traumatic (Smyth, Hockemeyer, Heron, Wonderlich, & Pennebaker, 2008), however more studies indicate that rape and sexual abuse are most of the time experienced as traumatic. By virtue of people being different, some survivors will have more negative reactions and present psychologically different to other survivors (Boyd, 2011). In the same manner, some survivors will disclose of their experience before others and some might even not disclose at all. One study states that women in South Africa are more likely to disclose their sexual abuse (Coetzer, 2005), however many more indicate that rape and sexual abuse is underreported in South Africa for many reasons. The premise of this study is to understand what breaks the silence and what psychological effects survivors experience in the process of disclosure.

2.2 Cultural, Psychosocial and Economic factors in South Africa

Rape within the South African context is an aspect of the culture of violence of the country, and in addition to this there are other multiple factors that connect sexual violence to other forms of violence. The World Health Organisation World Report on Violence and Health (2002) indicates a number of societal factors as risk factors for sexual violence that are highly relevant in the South African context, and these are predominantly linked to gender inequalities and the poverty and social inequality of most survivors (Dosekun, 2013; Meel, 2008; UN Women, 2017). These factors include but are not limited to the use and abuse of alcohol and drugs, attitudes and beliefs that are supportive of violence against women, exposure to aggressive individuals and previous experience of sexual abuse as a child (Sigworth, 2009).

2.2.1 Gender inequality

Sexual violence is most likely to happen in cultures where there are rigid gender roles and the idea of male superiority is strong, emphasising dominance and male honour (Sigworth, 2009). In some traditional and rural communities, a woman's place is still in the kitchen and nowhere else. Women, particularly wives are seen as inferior to men, and are expected to cater to the family and abide by the husband's rule, being the head of the house and the family. This is no longer confined to just the rural areas as over time with urbanisation, more men move with their families to the cities for employment. In such families, the woman does not have a voice including matters concerning finances. Employed women who earn more money than their husbands are more prone to being abused by their husbands as a means of them compensating for their feelings of emasculation and exerting power (Carretta, 2011), thus putting a majority of South African women at risk of rape, particularly partner rape.

Where there is domestic violence, a woman is less likely to gain the support of the extended family, as it is believed that such matters should be between husband and wife, and therefore they should be resolved by the two. Approximately one in four South African women are abused by their male partners, and around 80% of women living in rural areas are victims of abuse (Boonzaier & De La Rey, 2003). These women are more likely to be re-victimised and remain silent because they are

financially and/or emotionally dependent on their husbands, or they are pressurised by their family or their husbands to remain in their current situation (Andersson & Mhatre, 2003; Boonzaier & De La Rey, 2003). In addition to this it is a common belief that a woman should be readily available for her husband's sexual needs and desires. This social ideology ingrained in male entitlement may often deny women their right to refuse sex and as a result fails to recognise marital rape (World Health Organisation, 2002), despite studies showing that 70% of women are subjected to physical and sexual abuse by their intimate partners or husbands (UN Women et al., 2015).

2.2.2 Poverty

Low economic status and poverty is one of the contributors to sexual abuse and failure to convict perpetrators. In 2003 in Meadowlands, South Africa, the police stated that 90% of reported rape cases were against children 12 years or younger, and out of those reported, only 20% of the perpetrators were convicted due to parents dropping cases for R50 (Coetzer, 2005). With the rates of HIV/Aids being so high in South Africa, child rape increased with the belief that having sex with a virgin will cure the illness (Coetzer, 2005; Meel, 2008). With these children being unprotected by parents or guardians, they are more likely to be re-victimised. With poverty being so high, many families are forced to sleep in one room and children often witness their parents having sexual intercourse, and in some cases, these children go out and imitate their parents (Coetzer, 2005).

Early childbearing is also closely associated with high levels of poverty and low levels of education, with adolescents from this background three times more likely to give birth than those from a more affluent background (OECD, 2013). These young women are also less likely to have access to or control over their reproductive health, and with increased risk of sexual violence, they are more susceptible to being infected with HIV. The circumstances that these young women find themselves in often perpetuate the cycle of unemployment and being heavily reliant on men and social policies (OECD, 2013; UN Women, 2015).

There is still a significant gap in the labour force, with women being financially dependent on men, which is one way of stifling female empowerment (UN Women, 2015). Linked to gender inequality and cultural factors, some cultures deliberately prohibit women from earning an income, making them fully dependent on men (Carretta, 2011), rendering those in abusive relationships more vulnerable and trapped in the abuse and silence. An added problem to the cycle of abuse is that most economies heavily rely on underpaid or unpaid domestic work that is provided by women (UN Women, 2015) which puts them at risk of being abused by male employers in an already unregulated market.

2.2.3 Flawed social systems

Another factor that is relevant to South Africa is the failure of systems and services to acknowledge sexual violence and hold perpetrators accountable for their actions. The combination of this with poverty associated with most communities increases people's vulnerabilities to repeated sexual violence (Sigworth, 2009).

2.2.3.1 Legal and medical system

In some instances the police and legal authorities are to blame for failed convictions and lack of trust of the public in the police and legal systems. The 2015/2016 Victims of Crime Survey conducted by Statistics South Africa (Statistics South Africa, 2017) indicated that over the last five years there has been a steady decline in the satisfaction with the police across South Africa. Andersson and Mhatre (2003) indicated that there was an increasing amount of corruption in the legal system with case documents going missing at police stations. This results in failure to convict perpetrators, but it also sends out and reinforces the message to survivors of sexual abuse that they are most likely not going to be believed or that it is pointless to report the crime(s) committed against them. Despite many efforts at improving the justice and policing systems in low to middle income countries, it appears that the systems are still not functioning at the appropriate level necessary to address the severe nature of physical and sexual assault, and they are found wanting in providing safety to the survivors (UN Women et al., 2015). In some police stations in Gauteng, something as basic as the lack of training of how to handle the cases and reporting procedure becomes the stumbling block in the investigation (Andersson & Mhatre, 2003).

Lack of physical evidence in the form of injuries makes it difficult for the survivor to prove that the sexual assault was not consensual, and is one of the requirements for building a case in court (Boyd, 2011; Vetten et al., 2008). This is one of the ways in which the legal and justice system dismally fails survivors, as having to prove that their violation was not consensual can be a process of re-traumatisation. Although the law implements such stringent procedures to mitigate against false accusations, it seems as though it is overly skewed towards intimidating survivors, thus resulting in them not wanting to report or pursue legal charges (Andersson & Mhatre, 2003).

The health care system plays an imperative role in the collection of evidence, however in some cases survivors are not attended to within the required time period (Andersson & Mhatre, 2003). In state hospitals where survivors do not have the luxury of immediate care, they often have to endure the long wait to be seen by the correct health care professional, while having possibly been subjected to tired and un-empathic auxiliary staff. Furthermore, with the high risk of HIV infection, survivors require prompt medical care in order to be provided with post exposure prophylaxis (PEP). It is therefore a matter of great concern that PEP is often not available outside urban areas, but also that some police and health care professionals that work with rape survivors are uninformed about PEP (Coetzer, 2005). Like the police services in South Africa, the state medical facilities such as the hospitals and clinics have a reputation for at times not being helpful. Survivors that have prior experience of this (or have heard this from others) may feel as though they will not be believed or will be judged by the service providers, resulting in them not reporting their assault (Lanthier, Du Mont, & Mason, 2016).

2.2.3.2 Tradition and culture

Traditional or cultural systems can (in)advertently play a role in the perpetuation of physical and sexual abuse against women and children. *Ukuthwala* is a cultural practice that involves a girl being forcibly taken from her home or village to that of a suitor with the aim of forcing the girl's family into negotiations for her to enter a customary marriage. The girl and her family may know about the suitor's family coming to take her, but in order to maintain her maiden innocence for herself and her family's self respect, she is required to put on an act and appear to be unwilling even

when she is (Mwambene & Sloth-Nielsen, 2011). This public act of pretending to be an unwilling party despite being willing is uncannily reminiscent of survivors being accused of having been willing in their sexual violation. Upon arrival at the suitor's home, the girl is meant to be placed in the care of the women in the family and her parents are to be informed of the *thwala*. This is a measure that was put in place to protect the girl, as sexual intercourse is not part of the custom. It is however interesting to note that in the event that sexual intercourse does occur and or the girl falls pregnant, the suitor is required to pay an extra 'beast' in addition to the *lobola* (Mwambene & Sloth-Nielsen, 2011). This sexual interaction is referred to as 'seduction' (Mwambene & Sloth-Nielsen, 2011) and can essentially be paid off. Although this customary practice is now being mal-practiced and girls as young as 12 are forced to marry older men against their will (Mwambene & Sloth-Nielsen, 2011), it has been recognised that even when accurately practiced, it does open up girls and women to the risk of abuse, especially when the girl and/or her family has not given consent to the *thwala*. Efforts to thwart such customary practices that reinforce patriarchal laws that serve to oppress women's rights have resulted in global debates around whether or not 'Western' ideologies are being imposed on African traditions (Kasambala, 2014). Whether or not these debates are valid or not is beyond the scope of this research, however what is important to bear in mind is that in most cases these traditional views may often result in the silencing of survivors of sexual abuse.

2.2.4 The personal and social sequelae of rape and the effects of disclosure and non-disclosure

As has been mentioned many times, sexual violence can have detrimental and long lasting side effects on the psychological and physical health of survivors (Starzynski, 2010). As already mentioned, rape can be experienced as a traumatic experience and more often than not, results in survivors suffering from psychological difficulties such as depression and anxiety (Carretta, 2011). Survivors of rape may also present with various psychological sequelae such as sexual dysfunctions, sexual distress, low self-esteem, substance use and suicidal attempts or ideation (McAuslan, 1998).

With the high rate of HIV/Aids infection, sexual violence is considered to be a potential risk for loss of life (Coetzer, 2005), resulting in survivors being doubly victimised and traumatised. In South Africa, children under the age of 14 cannot get tested for HIV or have any medical procedure done without parental consent, and therefore they cannot be given medication for HIV exposure without disclosing their abuse to an adult (Coetzer, 2005). Survivors of sexual violation should be provided with post exposure prophylaxis within 72 hours of the assault (UN Women et al., 2015), and it requires being tested first, so this means that unless a child discloses to their parent or guardian they are unable to get assistance and therefore have a higher risk of being infected with HIV. A study conducted in 2001 indicated that rape had become more prevalent than tuberculosis (TB) as the greatest threat to women's health in the Western Cape, which was known to have one of the world's highest rates of TB infection (Coetzer, 2005). With the exception of contracting a sexually transmitted illness or HIV, loss of life of a survivor can also be caused by a violent rape.

The financial implication on survivors as well as the economic cost on government and the medical sector can be high. South Africa has a high prevalence of child sexual abuse (UNICEF & International Budget Partnership, 2016) and a study conducted in 2015 showed that violence against children in South Africa cost approximately R238.58 billion (Fang, Fry, Ganz, Casey, & Ward, 2016). Children as with other survivors need to be treated with PEP within 72 hours of their rape, more so children as the HI virus spreads quicker than in adults (Cullinan, 2017). The treatment of PEP alone costs approximately between R961,52 per person and R1455,44 per person for triple therapy in cases of gang rape and severe injuries (Cullinan, 2017). In addition to this survivors may require other medical care as well as psychological counselling. In state hospitals the government covers these costs whereas in the private sector patients are financially responsible for their medical care. This can be expensive particularly if the treatment and care required is not once off but recurring. Because of the often traumatic nature of sexual violence, survivors may suffer psychological implications and may be required to take time off work or studies. There are also financial implications to the government as well as the

survivor should they decide to pursue legal charges against the alleged perpetrator(s).

The lack of reporting these violent crimes is not unique to South Africa, it is a global problem (Hunter, 2011; Huong, 2012) and it poses a challenge in addressing the psychological effects of sexual abuse as well as skews the statistics (Hunter, 2011) and prevents perpetrators being punished for their crime(s) (“Rape in South Africa,” 2015). In understanding the phenomenon of silence, the process of disclosure and the factors that influence disclosure, health practitioners including psychologists are able to empower survivors of these heinous violations to disclose their traumatic experience(s) in order to obtain therapeutic and medical assistance. Disclosure can be particularly important in children in order to prevent further abuse (Hérbert et al., 2009).

2.3 Rape Culture and Rape Myths

Rape culture refers to the notion that sexual violence has become normalised and accepted by society (Prochuk, 2013) and is perpetuated by myths such as a woman was raped because she wore a revealing outfit. In the South African context, men are still socially, culturally and traditionally in positions of authority and power and this allows for them to suppress and oppress women, including using sexual coercion (Mgoqi, 2006). With the general acceptance of South Africa being a violent country and men taking advantage of women and children, intertwined with the rape myths can mean that some survivors may have difficulty conceptualising their experience as rape because it did not meet the criteria of a rape as defined by society. Some survivors may choose to remain silent because of the rape myths discussed below.

2.3.1 Stranger rape

The most common fallacy is that people who are subjected to sexual violence will often be victims of people they do not know. The stereotypical rape scene is one where a woman was walking alone in the evening and was abducted by a man/men she does not know. This belief is often coupled with theories that the rape victim was inappropriately dressed, and quite possibly inebriated (Kramer, 2014). This is however frequently not the case. A study looking at single and multiple perpetrator

rape in Gauteng, South Africa indicated that stranger rape is more often than not when it is perpetrated by a group of people (Jewkes et al., 2012). Out of the 1886 rape dockets opened in police stations across Gauteng, 16% of these were gang rapes, and a majority of them occurred in open or public spaces (Jewkes et al., 2012). The Victim of Crime Survey conducted by Statistics South Africa in 1998 (Boonzaier & De La Rey, 2003) indicated that 64% of rapes occurred at home or near the home and in 60% of all rapes, the perpetrator was known to the victim (Andersson & Mhatre, 2003; Boonzaier & De La Rey, 2003; Coetzer, 2005; Statistics South Africa, 2017).

2.3.2 Rape and race

With the racial and political history of South Africa, it would be erroneous to discount the role that race plays in the understanding and the reporting or disclosure of sexual violence. Rape is often written about as narratives of race as opposed to gender violence, which results in the perpetuation of the stereotype of the Black man as being the perpetrator (Kramer, 2014; Moffett, 2006; Russell, 1975). What may often not be taken into consideration is that the majority of the population in South Africa is Black and therefore the chances of a perpetrator of crime being Black are higher.

Historically, the rape of slaves was regular and routine, both at the hands of the White slave master and the Black males. Race, gender and power have played a dominant role in the raping of women globally, and have resulted in the oppression of women of colour (Long & Ullman, 2013). Slaves were expected to be quiet and speak only when spoken to, and this oppressive silence has become cultural trauma where even this expectation of silence has become silent (Henderson, 2013). During apartheid White on Black violence was justified as it was perceived as the Black people being put in their place, and in the same breath rape is often seen as keeping (independent) women that threaten the patriarchal culture and men's egos in their place (Moffett, 2006). This power dynamic may result in some survivors being too afraid to report their experience of sexual abuse.

In South Africa race is still a significant factor in perceptions of crime and violence (Shefer, 2010), and in the study by Dosekun (2013) investigating how women that have not experienced sexual violence perceive and understand rape, a White female

participant indicated that she thought of rape as being directly linked to poverty and so located in township areas, which are predominantly Black or Coloured. In the same study, a Black female participant responded to say that White women are afraid of Black men and the media generally portrays Black men as being perpetrators of such crimes. Interestingly, she indicated that her opinion was that she could not say what racial group she expects the perpetrator to be because rape is *not spoken about and it happens behind closed doors* (Dosekun, 2013). This perception of a Black man being the perpetrator may result in some survivors not reporting their abuse. The manner in which the legal system persecutes Black men (longer sentences) (Tillman, Bryant-Davis, Smith, & Marks, 2010) as opposed to White men that have been found guilty of rape only worsens the stereotypes and perceptions. Additionally if a female (Black or White) was sexually assaulted by a White middle class male, she would likely not report the crime expecting that she would not be believed (Gqola, 2015; Russell, 1975; Washington, 2001). These perceptions are problematic not only in reinforcing racial stereotypes but also in creating barriers for survivors to report the sexual crimes committed against them.

2.3.3 Good girls don't get raped

Issues of gender inequalities extend far beyond economic status and academic opportunities. In a patriarchal society, the dominance of men and powers of masculinity is silently reinforced by societal views of gender roles where women, wives and daughters are expected to be good and behave in accordance to whatever is deemed as appropriate culturally and adherence to social norms (UN Women, 2017). Women and girls that are no longer virgins are deemed to be damaged goods (Mgoqi, 2006) and become less attractive to eligible bachelors and in some cultures the woman brings shame to her family (Maluleke, 2012). From a religious perspective, a woman should maintain her innocence and virginity for her husband and the loss of this is a source of shame. Outside of religious beliefs, most women perceive rape to be a foreign concept that would never happen to them. This view may be (un)consciously influenced by the stereotypical view of how a rape victim looks, dresses and behaves. There are some societal beliefs that a woman cannot get raped (Russell, 1975), only promiscuous women get raped and they possibly enjoyed the attack (Mgoqi, 2006). When they do become a survivor of sexual violence, it may

become incredibly difficult for survivors to make sense of their experience in relation to their beliefs about rape and about themselves, and as a result may remain silent about their experience.

2.4 Definition and Theories of Disclosure

Disclosure is defined as the process in which an individual, or in this instance a survivor of a traumatic experience manages the psychological boundary between their inner private world and their external environment (Hoffman, 1993). There are multiple factors behind disclosure that are all underpinned by who to tell, how to tell and when to tell (Malatji & Makhubele, 2014). In most cases, it is easier to use denial as a form of psychological defence. This can be in instances where the survivor is not ready to deal with what happened to them (Malatji & Makhubele, 2014).

Agency refers to an individual's ability to make a resolution to implement their decision and move towards pursuing a goal (Carretta, 2011), and it is key in whether a survivor discloses or not. A lot of survivors' choice to disclose is often influenced by a myriad of factors including reactions of those around them. Historically in the African American communities, women were told things like what happened in their homes remained in their homes (Washington, 2001), you cannot trust everyone with your business, or if it is not spoken about it did not happen (Brazelton, 2010). It is opinions and cultural-societal factors such as these that influence whether survivors exercise their agency to disclose or to remain silent.

In this thesis, nondisclosure or silence is defined as having not told anyone of your experience. There has not been disclosure to a family member, friend, someone in your social circle, or the authorities such as police or health care practitioner about the sexual violation/s.

2.4.1 The psychological aspects of disclosure

The fundamental problem of nondisclosure of sexual abuse is the psychological effects that the survivor suffers from post the traumatic event (Hérbert et al., 2009), often displaying characteristics of psychological distress, such as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) (Masho & Ahmed, 2007), depression and anxiety (Broman-

Fulks et al., 2015). Further more, it has been shown that women and children that have been sexually assaulted are at a higher risk of re-victimisation (Anderson, Guajardo, Luthra, & Edwards, 2010). Regardless of whether the sexual abuse took place in childhood or as an adult, the psychological effects can be just as harmful to an individual. Research has shown that emotional inhibition or nondisclosure of traumatic events is significantly related to the abovementioned psychological problems and that the disclosure of painful or traumatic memories can have a positive and beneficial effect on psychological and physical health (Ellis & Cromby, 2012). A study looking at the effects of Clinician assisted emotional disclosure of sexual abuse (Anderson et al., 2010), indicated that out of 670 female college students that were screened for a history of sexual abuse and current levels of psychological symptoms, 25% of them reported sexual coercion or rape, of which 40% of them presented with clinically significant psychological distress.

Studies on sexual abuse have indicated that there are number of reasons that survivors keep silent and that these are complex and interact. It has been indicated that factors that contribute to silence include self blame, fear of judgment (Heath et al., 2011), fear of retaliation by the perpetrator, the personal humiliation and shame of being a rape victim, reluctance to cause pain to loved ones, lack of knowledge of the criminal justice system (“Rape in South Africa,” 2015), lack of support as well as fear of not being believed (Fleming & Kruger, 2013). One of the fundamental problems facing disclosure of sexual abuse is the stigma that is carried with being a survivor of the crime. Society still subscribes to rape myths, which makes it even more difficult for a survivor to tell their experience (“Rape in South Africa,” 2015). Some of these rape myths such as rape by a random stranger and putting blame on the survivor result in really inhibiting the survivor from coming forward.

2.4.2 Disclosure

Disclosure is the first step in seeking help after having suffered a traumatic event such as sexual abuse (Tillman et al., 2010). Some survivors of sexual abuse may choose not to disclose their experience immediately, they may stay with the silence and secrecy, only to find that it is a heavy burden psychologically, and this results in them disclosing. This disclosure is often driven by the inability to no longer be able to deal

with the anxiety, the fear, the shame, the blame and overall heaviness of the experience (Plummer, 1995).

Research has found that survivors that are assaulted by a stranger (Tillman et al., 2010) or physically injured during the attack are more likely to seek help and disclose than those that are not (Carretta, 2011), particularly to formal support structures (police or medical authorities) (Starzynski, Ullman, Filipas, & Townsend, 2005). Whether the process of disclosure is experienced as containing and supportive is dependent on how the service provider responds to the survivor (Collings, 2005). If the survivor experiences it as a positive experience, they are more likely to continue disclosing, however in some cases, it is experienced as a negative experience for survivors – particularly when the injuries are mild or absent (e.g. tearing), then the act of sex is deemed to have been consensual (Jewkes et al., 2012). Some magistrates have dismissed cases due to survivors not having had visible injuries (Jewkes et al., 2012), the blame is (in)directly placed on survivors for not having fought back. In such instances where survivors are made to feel judged and not believed by the people that are meant to be in a position to help, the silence and stigma is reinforced (Ahrens, 2006).

Survivors may find that once they have disclosed and they are in therapy, they are more able to talk about the experience and to find ways to effectively deal with the psychological trauma of it (Padmanabhanunni & Edwards, 2015; Plummer, 1995). An interesting aspect of choosing to disclose is that most survivors choose to disclose to family and people close to them as opposed to formal authorities, as there is a perception that the informal structures will be more supportive and understanding of their experience (Villarreal, 2014). This perception is not incorrect because if the survivor has a positive experience of disclosure with someone in their lives, they then have a daily support structure (Tillman et al., 2010) as opposed to a formal structure which may be a once off interaction.

2.4.3 Non-disclosure

The stigma and secrecy around sexual violence is a meaningful factor in the reasons survivors of sexual abuse remain silent. In some instances, this silence and secrecy

results in a lot of women being blind to the possibility of sexual abuse. A study looking at how women that have not experienced sexual violence view rape indicated that some women think of rape and sexual abuse as a far away concept that is not close to home (Dosekun, 2013; Russell, 1975). One participant in this study likened rape statistics to HIV/AIDS statistics, saying that it is something you hear about but people generally do not talk about it (Dosekun, 2013).

The study by Padmanabhanunni and Edwards (2015) looking at rape survivors' experiences of Silent Protest day showed that even some participants of Silent Protest feel ashamed and may even regret participating in the protest as a survivor. One of the participants that was part of the study reported not wanting to wear the survivor shirt because she did not want to be viewed as "tainted" (Padmanabhanunni & Edwards, 2015). Another participant that was participating in the protest for the third time and wore the survivor shirt felt victimised when people she knew could not look at her (Padmanabhanunni & Edwards, 2015). Such reactions reinforce the stigma behind being a survivor of sexual abuse and as a result discourage survivors from breaking their silence. Over time there has been a shift with regards to the number of men reporting sexual abuse, however the numbers are still low. Male disclosure is deemed to be particularly more difficult as society dictates that men should be stronger and that men do not cry (Corbett, 2016; Meduric & Nel, 2011).

One of the factors contributing to the stigma around sexual abuse and violence is the messages that society sends that women and children should be taught how to not be raped. This usually revolves around the idea that women and children should not make themselves 'vulnerable' by dressing in a certain way or being in certain areas. As a result, some survivors choose to remain silent because they fear what will be said (Lachance, 2006) and what the consequences of breaking the silence may be. In many cases of hearing of a rape, the survivor's 'role' in the rape is questioned, such as what they were wearing, if they were inebriated or if they were in the wrong place at the wrong time (Jewkes et al., 2012). Such messages result in survivors not disclosing because they feel they are to blame for what has happened to them (Coetzer, 2005). When the survivor experiences victim blaming and such messages,

or they are denied the help and services that they need, they are more prone to secondary victimisation where they re-experience the trauma of the sexual abuse and also feel as though their experience is minimised (McAuslan, 1998; McElvaney, Greene, & Hogan, 2014; Washington, 2001). Their own sense of self-blame and fear of being blamed by others closes down the opportunity of them disclosing. Re-traumatisation not only occurs from survivors feeling re-victimised by the same people that they sought help from, but they can also experience it from telling the story over and over again, which is often a deterrent in the pursuit of legal prosecution of their perpetrators. Some survivors may also remain in silence out of fear of their perpetrator seeking retribution (Carretta, 2011) and in some instances this silence may allow for the continued cycle of abuse.

Some individuals do not recognise themselves as ‘victims’ of abuse either due to the perpetrator being a partner, family member or a known person (Jewkes et al., 2012) and the abuse is explained away, or they have become accustomed to being abused and perceive it as being normal (Bottoms et al., 2014). Depending on the extent that some (Black) survivors have integrated the idea of Black women being strong, some women may not disclose as a result of feeling that they should be able to handle what has happened to them (Brazelton, 2010; Long & Ullman, 2013; Washington, 2001). Some survivors become too afraid to proceed with a case against someone they know or they are ‘forced’ to arrive at a ‘settlement’ with the perpetrator (Andersson & Mhatre, 2003).

It has been found that some survivors use primitive coping mechanisms such as repression and they “forget” about their experience of abuse and are therefore less likely to disclose (Herman, 1992). In addition to this, survivors that have chronically dissociated from their horrific experience are also less likely to disclose (Bottoms et al., 2014). In line with wanting to forget about their ordeal, it was found that survivors that do seek medical treatment and get put on PEP often do not complete their 28 day treatment because every pill they took served as a reminder of their sexual abuse (Cullinan, 2017). Some people do not even seek treatment as they fear

that it will be admitting and perhaps making their abuse more real in their minds (Bottoms et al., 2014; Carretta, 2011).

Survivors may question whether or not it was useful for them to disclose, particularly if they had a negative experience of their first disclosure (Ahrens, 2006). They then know that disclosing does not help them nor does it make them feel better, it only causes more pain and anger and thus they remain silenced. In some instances, the reaction that survivors receive from the person they decide to first disclose to may even reinforce their own doubts about whether they are to blame or not and if perhaps they were mistaken and it was not a rape (Collings, 2005). Other survivors may have already questioned whether or not their experience qualifies as a rape, and so when they have a negative experience of disclosure, their doubt is reinforced and they are more likely to remain silent.

2.4.4 Disclosure by child victims

With regard to child sexual abuse, disclosure is essentially the process of the child informing an adult about their abuse (Hunter, 2011). There has been a lot of research done around the disclosure of child sexual abuse, and different types of disclosure and factors that influence the disclosure have been identified. Fear of disclosing often stems from the child being scared that the perpetrator will harm them or a member of their family if they tell (Sorensen & Snow, 1991). Linked to this fear is also that the child is afraid that they will not be believed, especially if the perpetrator is someone the child or the family knows (Collings, 2005). Other factors include feelings of shame, particularly in male children (Hunter, 2011) and the child not knowing that they have been abused (Collings, Griffiths, & Kumalo, 2005).

Children that have been sexually abused are more likely to disclose to their peers, parents or other people they are close to (Bottoms et al., 2014). Older children are more likely to disclose than younger ones due to them having more of a concrete understanding of what has happened to them and also having the ability to communicate it better (Bottoms et al., 2014). Where a child is repeatedly abused by the same perpetrator, it can be assumed that the perpetrator has easy access to the child and may be emotionally close to the child, which may deter or delay

disclosure. The longer that a child delays disclosure, the more likely that they will not disclose as they become afraid of the consequences of having kept silent (Bottoms et al., 2014).

With regards to the actual manner in which a child discloses, the types of disclosure have been grouped under two umbrellas. The first is accidental disclosure, where disclosure happened by chance, and the second is purposeful disclosure where the child makes a conscious effort to tell an adult (Sorensen & Snow, 1991). Child sexual abuse may result in negative psychological functioning and well being later in life such as depression, suicidality, impairments of self-concept and many more. The disclosure of sexual abuse for a child can be an important life changing moment (Rickerby et al., 2003), and therefore it is important to understand this process of disclosure for children and how it can be used as an opportunity for healing and containment.

2.4.5 Benefits of disclosure

With public forums such as the Silent Protest, survivors tend to disclose at the “Breaking the Silence” ceremony once they have heard other survivors’ stories. Participants have reported feeling a sense of relief that they are not the only ones that have experienced such harrowing incidents, they were not to blame, and that in fact there is nothing wrong with them as people (Padmanabhanunni & Edwards, 2015). The effects of public disclosure or marches like Silent Protest have been likened to the Truth and Reconciliation process where victims and perpetrators are given an opportunity to tell their story and thus providing a catalyst for the healing process (Padmanabhanunni & Edwards, 2015).

Some survivors seek psychotherapy and counselling services after they have disclosed their experience for the first time. Those that continue with therapy reported alleviation of the emotional and psychological pain they had experienced as a result of having endured sexual violence (Carretta, 2011). Therapy is generally a difficult process, therefore it should be noted that for survivors to continue with the process implies seen and felt psychological benefits. The process of therapy and disclosure

may also provide motivation and hope for survivors and prevents use of dysfunctional and destructive coping mechanisms such as substance use (Hook & Andrews, 2005).

The literature discussed is indicative of the complex nature of the disclosure of sexual abuse. There appears to be more of an understanding of factors that result in non-disclosure as opposed to factors that encourage disclosure. In understanding what factors may encourage disclosure, this study will hopefully not only assist in empowering survivors of sexual abuse in encouraging disclosure should they choose to, but it will hopefully add to the literature on reasons for disclosure.

3 Research Method

This chapter will discuss the methods used in conducting the research to explore the process of disclosure of sexual abuse.

3.1 Research Design

The research is a qualitative study using an interpretivist-phenomenological approach, which aims to understand and interpret the participants' lived experiences, and determine the meaning of those experiences (Tuohy, Cooney, Dowling, Murphy, & Sixsmith, 2013). A qualitative research design was chosen as it allows for interaction and deep engagement with participants, enabling a true understanding of the phenomenon being studied (Terre Blanche, Durrheim, & Painter, 2006). Phenomenology is about the nature of existence and the way of being (Walker, 2011) and so the use of a phenomenological approach allows for a deeper understanding of how the participants have experienced disclosure, how they perceive it and how they have made meaning of their personal experiences of disclosure (Murray & Holmes, 2014). By virtue of being a recipient of each participant's disclosure, as a participant observer in a phenomenological study the researcher is afforded the opportunity to be a part of each participant's disclosure and witness how they make sense of the experience. In being a participant observer, the researcher's emotions and reactions to each participant's story will be phenomenologically present in the interpretation and understanding of each process and experience of disclosure, allowing for a rich interpretation of the data. Exploring the meaning of the researcher's reaction in a qualitative research may deepen the reflexive analysis and position the researcher where more focus can be put on the actual experience of disclosure and not the participant (Gemignani, 2011).

In conducting the interviews an open-ended interview guide using a questionnaire (Appendix 1) was used. In such a sensitive study, a face-to-face interview is possibly the ideal way to collect data in that it provides human interaction as well as allows for the researcher to clarify responses as well as observe the participant and get some insight into their thoughts and feelings (Terre Blanche et al., 2006). By asking open-ended questions, the researcher allowed the participant an opportunity to have an

exploratory discussion thus providing more detailed information regarding their experience (Terre Blanche et al., 2006). This inadvertently provided the researcher with more detailed and textured material to work with, resulting in aspects of disclosure the researcher had not considered.

With the research aims of getting a better understanding of the process of disclosure in mind, the overarching research questions are as follows:

1. What factors might make it difficult for survivors of rape, sexual abuse or violation to disclose their experience to significant others in general, as well as on Silent Protest day?
2. What factors seem to make it easier for survivors of rape, sexual abuse or violation to disclose their experiences to significant others in general, as well as on Silent Protest day?

3.2 Sample

The only criteria for participation in the study was that interested participants should be survivors of sexual abuse, regardless of age or sex. With the nature of the research being phenomenological, it was imperative that participants be survivors of sexual abuse in order to be able to give a first hand account of their personal experiences of disclosure.

In using the Silent Protest day as a platform, it was understood that anyone that may be interested in talking about their experience could participate, including staff members of the university.

3.2.1 Participants

The research sample was comprised of five female participants who were all students at the university and had participated in the 2015 WITS Silent Protest day. All participants were above the age of 18 and had indicated that they understood what the research was about and provided their consent for the researcher to contact them for participation in the research.

3.3 Procedure

The process of recruiting participants was conducted on the morning of the Silent Protest. Individuals that had signed up to participate in the protest were approached as they were registering for the march and collecting their t-shirts. The researcher introduced herself to participants as they walked past and presented the research to them. Participants were informed that the research would be investigating factors that influence the disclosure and non-disclosure of sexual violation, and if they were interested and willing to be interviewed by the researcher they provided their contact details. Thirteen participants had shown interest in participating in the research and had provided the researcher with their contact details. Post the Silent Protest day, the individuals that had provided their contact details were sent a detailed email informing them of what the research was about and what the interview would entail. The participants were requested to indicate if they were still interested in participation and appointments were scheduled with the interested individuals. Once a suitable date and time was agreed on with each participant, the interviews were conducted in a therapy room at the Emthonjeni Clinic at WITS, which allowed for the privacy of each participant. At the beginning of each interview the participant was given a face-to-face participant information sheet as well as a face-to-face interview informed consent sheet requesting participation in the research and giving permission for the interview to be recorded. Participants were also informed about their rights as potential participants and of the free counselling service that was offered as part of this research project (see Ethics section). Once participants understood their rights and were fully informed about what the research process would entail, they signed the forms and the interviews began.

3.4 Data Collection

Upon receiving signed informed consent, the instrument used for data collection was an open ended questionnaire. For the purpose of transcription for accuracy as well as immersion in the data, each interview was recorded and was on average 2 hours long. The open-ended questionnaire was designed to obtain a rich narrative of each participant's experience of disclosure. The questionnaire began with general questions about the Silent Protest, and as it progressed it went into more detail about

participants' experiences of disclosure in their personal lives. As above-mentioned, the intention was to not limit participants in their description of their experiences, but to provide an in-depth account allowing for a meaningful analysis to be made. The questions were related to disclosure, however they were carefully designed to not directly ask participants about their actual experience of sexual abuse.

The participants appeared comfortable in the interviews and although none of them were asked about their experience of sexual abuse, they all offered to tell the researcher about their experiences. It seemed as though by speaking about their actual experience, the participants were setting a context for the researcher and therefore spoke about their occurrences of disclosure with more depth and emotion. This will be discussed further in the thesis.

3.5 Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted using thematic content analysis, which is a method of analysing patterns and themes in data, allowing for a comprehensive description of the data (Ben-Ari & Enosh, 2010; Braun & Clarke, 2006; Mabuza, Govender, Ogunbanjo, & Mash, 2014). Thematic content analysis offers flexibility in that it is not grounded in particular theory or approach, providing a more comprehensible form of analysis as well as the ability to be employed in different theoretical settings (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This allowed for ease of reporting the participants' realities, feelings and experiences whilst having the flexibility to analyse and make meaning of this data and make informed interpretations from the material. It provides a platform to acknowledge the way participants make sense and meaning of their experience of disclosure whilst inferring it to the reality of society and the views that are placed on sexual abuse and the silence surrounding it (Rubin & Rubin, 1995).

The analysis of the data was done using the following process prescribed by Braun & Clarke (2006). The researcher familiarised herself with the data by repeatedly listening to the recordings, transcribing the data and reading over it a number of times. Once familiar with the data and initial ideas jotted down, codes were generated according to interesting features across the data and then collated the data to each code. The codes were then organised into possible themes and matched to data that

was relevant to each. The themes were analysed and reviewed to ensure that they worked in relation to the coded extracts and the entire data set. Once the themes were named and refined, a discussion was produced based on the themes.

The overall benefit of using thematic content analysis for this study is that it offers social as well as psychological interpretations of the data (Mabuza et al., 2014) which will assist in using the study to create an awareness of the silence and secrecy surrounding sexual abuse and violation, and empower survivors to get therapeutic help. This method of analysis also allowed for a thorough analysis of the process of disclosure in that it highlighted similarities and differences in the data, and offered a concentrated view of the material (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

3.6 Ethics

This section will discuss in detail how ethical considerations were made in the design and conduction of the study. Due to the sensitive nature of the research topic, a lot of deliberation went into ensuring that a safe and containing research environment was created for the participants. Once approval from the Human Research Ethics Committee was obtained, getting informed consent was imperative in order to protect the participants and ensure that were fully informed and understood that they would be discussing a sensitive topic with the possibility of difficult emotions being stirred up.

By virtue of responding to the email informing participants about the study, or contacting the researcher to participate in the research, it was assumed that the participant was a survivor of sexual abuse and had disclosed prior to Silent Protest Day or on the day itself. Being subject to a traumatic experience such as sexual abuse often results in psychological distress and difficulties, and the process of disclosure of a traumatic experience is imperative in coping with the trauma and improving psychological well being (Ellis & Cromby, 2012). Having disclosed their experience of sexual abuse, this population is key to understanding the process of disclosure and how to use this knowledge to empower other victims of sexual abuse to report their experiences and seek therapeutic help, resulting in the study being potentially more beneficial than harmful. The information found from the research will become useful

and important in implementing structures in place to assist survivors of sexual abuse to receive the appropriate psychological help as well as to mitigate factors that prevent disclosure.

Data collection for the study was managed carefully and participants were fully informed about what to expect from the interviews and the overall research. Due to the sensitive nature of the research, particularly taking into consideration the nuances around disclosure, before the interview began participants were informed of the below:

- They may refuse to answer any questions they are not comfortable with
- They have the right to withdraw from the study at any given point
- They may stop the interview process at any time
- They would be required to verbally answer some questions
- The interview would be the duration of 1-2 hours
- They would be debriefed at the end of the interview if requested
- The researcher may use direct quotes of the participant's words spoken
- They can request and will receive the research results upon request
- They would be put into contact with the necessary channels for obtaining psychological assistance if participation in the research caused distress
- The tape and transcripts would only be heard, read and processed by the researcher and their direct supervisor
- All tape recordings and process notes would be accessible to the researcher and their supervisor only. They would be kept on a password protected laptop and memory stick
- All recordings would be destroyed after the research is complete
- No identifying information would be used in the transcripts or research report

It could not be known for certain beforehand whether participants would have disclosed their abuse to others, before the interview or not, however it seemed more likely that they would have disclosed to another individual/s before the interview because of their willingness to participate, however this turned out to not always be the case. By participation in the Silent Protest day, particularly protestors that

disclosed on the day (either by telling their story at the Breaking of the Silence, or wearing a Survivor t-shirt), there appeared to be an emotional and psychological readiness to talk about their experience of sexual violence. Notwithstanding this there is obviously a difference between privately disclosing to one person, face-to-face, and a public disclosure. The process of public disclosure is likely to be more difficult and may imply that the individual feels willing and able to disclose their experience to a group of people within the Silent Protest Day session. Albeit this, the researcher was highly mindful to take special care when interviewing the participants about their experiences to try to minimize the chance that they would be re-traumatised by the sharing of their experiences. The questions in the interview were also carefully designed to not persuade disclosure or lead the participants to elicit details about their experiences of abuse or violation.

In instances where the researcher observed the participant becoming overwhelmed or distressed, the interview was paused and the participant's level of comfort was assessed. It is important to mention that although the research questions were designed to not elicit details of the participant's experiences of sexual abuse, all of the participants chose to disclose their experiences to the researcher. It may be that each participant may have been on some level ready to speak about their experience. It may have also been that the research environment may have provided some factors that could have facilitated disclosure. This will be discussed further in the thesis.

Participants were informed that therapeutic services would be available to them through the CCDU and Emthonjeni Clinic, should they experience distress as a result of their participation in the study. In the event of the therapeutic services being required, Dr Esther Price and Dr Yael Kadish, who are both clinical psychologists and lecturers at the university, had agreed to be the liaison between the Emthonjeni Clinic and the research study, thus providing easier access to psychological services for participants that may require them.

In addition to the above, any information that could be used to identify the participants was not included in the interview transcripts or the writing of the

thesis. Participants' anonymity was protected by assigning each of them pseudonyms in the report.

Reflexivity in research is important in ensuring that the researcher does not exert too much influence whether intentionally or unintentionally on the research findings. It enhances the quality of the findings by highlighting the researcher's interests, position and role, and how these factors affect the research process (Jootun, McGhee, & Marland, 2009). To guard against the researcher's biases and influences on the research findings, the researcher kept a journal throughout the research process to remain insightful and aware of any factors that may cloud her judgement.

Due to the nature of the research where the researcher was part of the disclosure process, reflexivity becomes important and yet challenging because the researcher being female and identifying with the female participants, was privy to the traumatic narratives of the participants' experiences while discussing a traumatic and emotionally laden topic of sexual abuse. By becoming a participant observer (Johnson, Avenarius, & Weatherford, 2006), the emotional reactions invoked in the researcher by the participants' stories became integral in the analysis of the data, however care was taken in ensuring that the data was not contaminated by having a debriefing session with a psychologist following each interview. This allowed for the researcher to process and separate the feelings that were aroused in her and focus on thinking about those emotions in an interpretative phenomenological manner, making sense of each participant's experience of disclosure (Marecek, Fine, & Kidder, 1997).

4 Findings and Discussion

*We can learn to work and speak when we are afraid in the same way we have learned
to work and speak when we are tired.*

*For we have been socialized to respect fear more than our own needs for language
and definition, and while we wait in silence for that final luxury of fearlessness, the
weight of that silence will choke us.*

*The fact that we are here and that I speak these words is an attempt to break that
silence and bridge some of those differences between us, for it is not difference which
immobilizes us, but silence.*

And there are so many silences to be broken.

Audre Lorde (1984)

4.1 Introduction

This chapter will begin by giving the sexual abuse/narratives of each participant so that these narratives can be kept in mind in the subsequent presentation of the themes and discussion. The decision to begin with these initial orientating short synopses was taken in order to make this chapter easier to follow. This will be followed by a presentation of the themes and sub-themes - factors that may prevent disclosure (shame, fear, when the perpetrator is family, feeling psychosocially unready to disclose, lack of trust in formal support structures and previous negative experience of disclosure); factors that may facilitate disclosure (silence as agency, participation in anti-rape campaigns, and the need to be understood); factors that appear to have a mixed effect on disclosure (delayed disclosure, not wanting to be seen as a victim, cultural barriers to disclosure, being sexually violated by a stranger, not knowing how to tell and partial disclosure); and the researcher's reflections on participants' disclosure to her.

The findings of this study indicated that disclosure is complex in nature and there are a myriad of factors that influence whether or not a survivor discloses. Qualitative research allows for the researcher to locate meaning in the participants' stories as opposed to imposing meaning on to them (Washington, 2001), therefore at the risk of making the mistake of generalising the findings to all survivors of sexual abuse, it is

acknowledged that sexual violence can be a deeply traumatic experience and not all survivors will present psychologically in the same manner. It should also be understood that by virtue of being a recipient of each participant's story or disclosure, the researcher became part of the phenomenon of disclosure that was being researched. This not only put the researcher in a position to gain good insight into the survivors' experiences of disclosure, but it also allowed for first hand experience and understanding of what it means to be on the receiving end of disclosure. This is also an important aspect in the further learning and understanding of disclosure.

Although the research around the actual process of disclosure may be on the rise, sexual abuse and rape are arguably well researched and there are numerous findings documented. In order to analyse and narrow the data to themes relevant to disclosure in this study, data was studied with the overarching research questions in mind.

Out of the five participants interviewed for this study, only one of them was not a child sexual abuse survivor, and she was also the only participant that had never disclosed her sexual abuse prior to the interview. Of the remaining four participants, all of them were child sexual abuse survivors, and three of the four had subsequently experienced sexual violation in their adulthood. All of the four had partially disclosed prior to the interview, however full disclosure was only made to the researcher. None of the child sexual abuse disclosures were made immediately after the incidents, the disclosure only occurred in later years. Although this sample is a microcosm of the campus let alone the country, it is significant enough to note that disclosure is indeed not common.

In introducing each participant and briefly telling their story, it is hoped to give a feeling of each participant as a human being and not a statistic. It is reiterated again that all factors that could be used to identify the participants in this study have been eliminated.

Theme: Factors that may prevent disclosure	
<i>Sub Theme</i>	<i>Sub-Sub Theme</i>
Shame	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Society's stigma and judgemental gaze • Guilt and self-blame
Fear	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fear of the perpetrator • The futility of disclosure
When the perpetrator is family	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Secrecy enforced by the family • Protection of loved ones
Feeling psychologically unready to disclose	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inability to reconcile with their sexual abuse • Uncertain if it was sexual abuse • Desire to forget about their experience
Lack of trust in formal support structures	
Previous negative experience of disclosure	
Theme: Factors that may facilitate disclosure	
<i>Sub Theme</i>	<i>Sub-Sub Theme</i>
Silence as agency	
Participation in anti-rape campaigns	
The need to be understood	
Theme: Factors that appear to have a mixed effect on disclosure	
<i>Sub Theme</i>	<i>Sub-Sub Theme</i>
Delayed disclosure	
Not wanting to be seen as a victim	
Cultural barriers to disclosure	
Being sexually violated by a stranger	
Not knowing how to tell	
Partial disclosure	

Table 1 Emerging themes

4.2 Participants' Stories

The following are the personal accounts of the five participants. There is an additional very important layer to this research project that will be discussed further on. As will be evident, the research topic is the disclosure of sexual abuse, but in their participation, all the participants, although not asked to do so, made disclosures to the researcher detailing their sexual abuse and violation. This added complexity to the research enterprise in various ways as the researcher became a participant-observer (Gilgun, 2008).

Janet

Janet is in her early 20's and her first incident of sexual abuse was when she was about six to seven years old. For a year she was repeatedly raped by her cousin, and she remained silent until she was age 14. Janet only remembered when she as age 13 that she had been sexually abused, and so she had been silent for eight years. Her disclosure of her sexual abuse at age 14 was accidental. Her mother had discovered

that Janet was sexually active and in looking for a way out she disclosed to her mother that she had been sexually abused as a child. She never disclosed the details of the abuse to her mother or to anyone else. She subsequently experienced further sexual violation in the same year of the interview for this study. She had been raped by her boyfriend's friend at a party, and she partly blamed herself because she had been drinking and had fallen asleep. Upon waking up with her assailant on top of her and realising what had happened, Janet left the party in a state and on her way she phoned her best friend and told him what had happened. She pleaded with him to not tell her mother, however he called her mother and informed her of what had happened. It may be of importance to note that Janet's mother was a survivor of sexual abuse and had been open to Janet about her experience; therefore Janet's reluctance to disclose to her mother is of significance. During the interview, Janet made mention of a sexual relationship she had when she was under 16 with an older man and it dawned on her as she spoke about the relationship that it had been statutory rape but it was difficult for her to have thought about it in that way. It was Janet's second time participating in the Silent Protest. The first time she participated she wore a Solidarity t-shirt and her second time she wore a Survivor t-shirt. Although she had worn the Survivor t-shirt, prior to this interview Janet had never fully disclosed her experiences of sexual violation.

Ntombi

Ntombi also in her early 20's, is also a survivor of child sexual abuse. Ntombi had been sexually, physically and emotionally abused by her brothers and her uncles from when she was age four until age 12. Ntombi was later sexually abused throughout her life by different men. Ntombi was participating in the Silent Protest for the second time, however the first time was two years prior and she had not worn a t-shirt. In this Silent Protest she had worn the Silenced t-shirt and had not shared her story at the Breaking of the Silence ceremony. Ntombi's disclosure of her sexual abuse was incidental, it was not by choice. As part of the Zulu tradition, Ntombi underwent regular virginity tests done by her grandmother, and despite not being a virgin (from the sexual abuse), Ntombi's grandmother 'cleared' her with every test, which resulted in Ntombi being confused about what had happened to her and what it meant. At a

later stage in her life, it emerged that she was not a virgin and was rumoured to have lost her virginity to a boy from her neighbourhood and her family did not approve. Ntombi received a public (physical and verbal) lashing from her aunt and her grandmother did not come forward to say that Ntombi had not been a virgin from childhood. Ntombi's various disclosures of her experiences of sexual abuse are rather haphazard and may be a reflection of her inner world and how she has made sense of what has happened to her. She recounted the different times she disclosed in a flippant manner and appeared to be confused by when she told, whom she told and why she decided to tell.

Nandipha

Nandipha is in her early 20's, and she was sexually abused by her uncle when she was nine years old. This was Nandipha's first experience of the Silent Protest, however she had been part of the running of the protest and not as a protestor so no t-shirt was worn. When asked if she would participate in the Silent Protest again, Nandipha said no.

Nandipha lost her mother when she was eight years old and was subsequently sent to live with the paternal side of her family. Her father did not live with the family as he was based in South Africa, and so Nandipha was in the care of her paternal grandfather, aunts and uncles. During this time that she lived with the paternal family, where she was repeatedly sexually abused by her father's brother. At that time, Nandipha did not understand what had happened to her, but she described an innate fear and knowing that she could not speak about the incidents. When Nandipha was in her early teens, she became exposed to sexual intercourse on television and it was only then that she understood what had happened to her. Upon this realisation she suppressed the thoughts and did not speak about it. When Nandipha moved to South Africa when she was 15 years old, she began having symptoms that she described as "strange" including enuresis and following numerous inconclusive medical tests, she concluded that perhaps her illness was due the rape. Nandipha then resorted to destructive behaviour such as excessive partying and drinking in order to numb her pain. She described her disclosure as having been

unintentional; her father had become upset with her over the partying and the drinking and in the midst of the confrontation she disclosed that she had been acting out of character because she had been sexually abused by her uncle as a child. Her father did not believe Nandipha and accused her of lying and this resulted in a breakdown in their relationship. Nandipha expressed her desire to repair her relationship with her father at the cost of forgiving her uncle and having him admit to his brother that he did rape her and also explain to her his reasons for having done so. Nandipha strongly expressed that until such a time that her uncle confesses and her relationship with her father is repaired, she has no desire to speak about rape, inclusive of further disclosure. Nandipha indicated that because of the damage her disclosure caused, she regrets disclosing.

Lerato

Lerato is a 20-year-old who was sexually abused by her cousin from when she was six years old until she was age nine. Lerato lived with her aunt, who made her share a bedroom with her cousin, and so for three years she was raped repeatedly. Lerato remained in her silence for 13 years, only partially disclosing to her boyfriend when she was 19 because he began speaking about having sexual intercourse. Her experience of disclosure was not as she had imagined, she had told him that she was sexually abused as a child, but however did not receive the interest or support she thought she would get from him, and so she never disclosed further.

This was Lerato's first experience of the Silent Protest and she had worn the Silenced t-shirt. When asked about her choice of t-shirt despite not having fully disclosed, she indicated that it was something that she did not think about, she had just chosen the t-shirt but made it very clear that it did not mean that she was ready to disclose again. Lerato had initially been very tentative about participating in the study, and her ambivalence about disclosure also showed in her choice of t-shirt. It felt as though she was ready to disclose, but felt trapped or confined by her fear of hurting her mother and causing problems in the family.

Lerato was the only participant that appeared to be fully in touch with her emotions in regards to her sexual abuse experiences and spoke about her ordeal with raw emotions. Her demeanour and the way she told her narrative had an emotional effect on the researcher. It felt as though Lerato was yearning to having a space where she could be heard and helped, but was afraid of doing so. At the end of the interview Lerato asked about therapy and wanted to know more about sexual abuse. She indicated that would want to read up more on sexual abuse, but felt as though until she was ready to disclose, she had a handle on her emotions.

Refilwe

Refilwe is in her mid 20's and she was raped by her boyfriend when she was 22 years old. Refilwe had remained silent for two years and this was her first experience of disclosure. This was Refilwe's first experience of the Silent Protest and she had worn the Solidarity t-shirt. When asked about her choice of t-shirt, she said that she had only joined the protest to support survivors of sexual abuse, and she had not fully understood the concept behind the t-shirt. She then added that as far as she had been concerned, she had never been sexually violated.

Refilwe comes from a very traditional and religious family and she could never disclose to them because she should not have had a boyfriend in the first place. As far as her family was concerned, her only focus should have been school and her studies. She later added that the family she originates from believed in a man being the head of the household, and such things as a wife reporting domestic abuse would be frowned upon – the wife would be told that she needs to go back to her husband and resolve the matter privately. With this upbringing in mind, Refilwe has always believed that women do not have a voice.

Out of the five participants, Refilwe is the only one that had not been a survivor of child sexual abuse. In addition to this, although her perpetrator was known to her, he had not been a family member. She spoke about her experience in a detached manner, occasionally laughing in a dismissive way.

4.3 Themes

The themes that emerged from the research are closely linked to the findings in the literature review. It appears that regardless of place (as most of the studies were conducted overseas), most survivors share similar feelings regarding their decision to disclose or not. It also emerged that there were more factors that prevented disclosure than those that influenced it. The themes will be presented as following – factors that may prevent disclosure; factors that may facilitate disclosure; factors that appear to have a mixed effect on disclosure; and finally, the researcher's reflections on the participants' disclosures to her.

4.3.1 Factors that may prevent disclosure

This section discusses factors that appear to discourage disclosure. It was found that some of the factors below are not unique to the participants, but they are reflected in other research studies.

4.3.1.1 The complex nature of shame

All five participants shared experiences of shame in relation to their experiences. With each participant, their shame was complex and multi-factored, inclusive of other emotions such as fear, being judged and feeling as though they were to blame for their abuse.

4.3.1.1.1 Society's stigma and judgemental gaze

Sexual violence is a crime of sex, and sex is a function of intimacy. Disclosing it may feel akin to the way Adam and Eve felt, ashamed of being naked in 'public' and exposing all (Huston-Wong, 2003). Society informs us that we need to hide our nakedness, and so there is a veil of secrecy and stigma that becomes attached to the disclosure of sexual violence. The survivor is left with a feeling of indecent exposure and fear of society not approving, particularly because women are taught not to be raped; they are taught that they need to behave and dress in certain ways in order to avoid being taken advantage of (Henderson, 2013). Survivors of sexual abuse are repeatedly warned to not speak about their experience (Migdow, 1994) and perhaps because of the stigma and secrecy surrounding sexual abuse, there appears to be an unspoken understanding that by disclosing, the survivor renders themselves vulnerable and open to being shamed and judged by society and to a large extent,

themselves. Indeed the idea of their peers on campus knowing that they had been sexually abused was a big issue for all the participants. Although Janet wore a Survivors t-shirt, she spoke about how uncomfortable it was for her to walk through the crowd wearing the t-shirt. She indicated that she knew some of the people that had participated in the protest that were survivors, but they chose to not wear the survivor t-shirt. While Janet did not explicitly speak about how this made her feel, it may be that her discomfort of knowing that some survivors did not feel comfortable to wear the t-shirts made her question her own decision to wear the survivor t-shirt. She shared:

Janet: Uhm, there weren't many people wearing survivors t-shirts, and I know of a few people who are survivors that weren't wearing the shirt, so it was just uncomfortable like especially like walking through students who weren't part of the protest, and it was just like a declaration to everyone.

Her feelings of discomfort seemed to be strong feelings of shame and vulnerability, she added:

Janet: And I actually took my shirt, like, the survivors t-shirt off while we were sitting in class just because I didn't...I felt uncomfortable sitting amongst my peers wearing the shirt.

Like Janet, Lerato expressed the shame of people that see her on campus knowing that she was a survivor of sexual abuse. Below, she alluded to the idea of people knowing that she was a survivor as feeling trapped by the shame.

Lerato: Well, I don't like eyes being all on me, and I know people might not know you but when they walk around campus they'll remember you, and they might whisper amongst themselves that hey, this is that girl that did what not, what not. I don't think I would feel comfortable with that [...] I feel like someone stabbing you cos you know people are looking at you and there's nothing you can do about it. And it just feels like you could disappear maybe.

Ntombi expressed feeling as though perhaps the shame that she would experience by disclosing on campus and by default to her peers, would be easier to carry if she had some material wealth.

Ntombi: It's one of those things where it's like...maybe I'm not ready yet in my varsity stage to disclose. I feel like it would be better when I've got further than I want, I don't care what you say (giggle). You can point your fingers but I'm driving a Merc you know? Jokes aside, but I mean maybe that's true. It's not about the fact that, they'll talk about, bad about oh my gosh she was the one, it's just that you know in this society and especially in this world we live in.

Ntombi seems to be expressing the wish to gain an admirable social standing through the trappings of success (a Mercedes) as a kind of shield against what she imagines

people's judgments of her would be, as a sexual abuse survivor. Within the context of South Africa, particularly in the younger population, material wealth gains the individual some level of respect, and perhaps Ntombi has rationalised that once she has gained respect through visible possessions and social rank, the shame of disclosing will be quashed.

Shame is complex in that it can be both a cognitive and affective experience (Fleming & Kruger, 2013). Unlike feelings of embarrassment, shame is associated with the way an individual feels about themselves, as opposed to how they feel about their behaviour (Migdow, 1994). Although not directly said, this feeling of desiring a positive social standing (or avoiding the anticipated negative one they expected to come from disclosure) may be a reason why some survivors choose to remain silent. This seems to imply that participants' experiences have lowered their self-worth (Boyd, 2011) and this leads to feelings that disclosure will make their 'lower social status' evident to others. Nandipha indicated that because she is known to have a certain type of disposition, people would not believe that she was raped but would in fact shame and judge her. The idea that the strong, no nonsense taking person she is regarded to be was raped, appears to leave Nandipha feeling like she would be seen as weak and docile, which she appeared to experience as being shaming. She shared:

***Nandipha:** I've become this person that will never be played nga ma authi (played with by men). So I've become this person who's very intelligent, very clever you know. If I say something like that, it would be hard for them to believe. So to judge me by what I am right now, rather what I was, I was naïve when I was young. So I feel like it would be difficult for them cos I've grown up to become this woman who's like power... Who can maybe go to the parties and not be in the risk of getting raped you know? Who's always on the look out. So they'll always judge me by the character that I am right now and say "aaah, you sure?"*

All the participants shared the feeling of not wanting to be judged by other people, and it seemed as though their shame resulted from the judgement, which appears to be linked to the stigma that society has placed on being a survivor. It has been shown that in various therapeutic settings including those with patients that had not suffered traumatic experiences, there was still difficulty disclosing secrets that they considered would result in them being judged by others (Corbett, 2016; Hook & Andrews, 2005; Huston-Wong, 2003), and it is seen here with the participants. In this instance the disclosure of the secret does not alleviate the survivor's pain or conscience, it only

adds to the feeling of shame. Even in considering participation in the study, Refilwe reflected that had the researcher been a male, she would have opted out of participating out of fear of being judged. Refilwe originates from a traditional family with traditional views and so her fear of being judged by a male interviewer may be attributed to the traditional/cultural views that feed into the gender inequalities discussed in the literature view. Women are taught that they are subservient to men and they have no agency when it comes to sex (Tillman et al., 2010), and in addition to this women do not speak (to men) about such things (Maluleke, 2012; Neville, Heppner, Oh, Spanierman, & Clark, 2004). She voiced the below:

***Refilwe:** You know after the protest they asked us how was the event and all those things, and there'll be like, there'll be someone who'll interview you, I just pray that it's not a man because (starts laughing) I wouldn't have been able to talk to you about this if you were a male person. Because firstly I was ok, he was gonna judge me.*

With such traditional views being prominent in some South African cultures, it can be assumed that in some instances immediate disclosure is prevented or delayed because a survivor did not have access to a female person to talk to, but also because it may result in being condemned by the community or family. This is yet another example of how perceptions can result from the stigma and the shame that stems from it. Nandipha powerfully describes her fear of judgement and in her explanation it was interesting to note that she correlated disclosure to judgement and behaviour that is socially unacceptable. She shared:

***Nandipha:** Sometimes you disclose and maybe you don't get the help that you need. Or sometimes you disclose and people start judging you... I know some people that disclose and then probably they start dating and changing boyfriends. Not that it's the thing that was affecting them, society would be like no, "it's because she knew the, you know, the penis when she was young," you get the thing? ... It's that thing of judgement... So you disclose and some people treat you bad and... You disclose and one day you go irrational for whatever reasons and it's like "no, it's getting to her head" you get the thing? It's just like disclosing HIV. So you do something and people always link it. So you become hysterical for whatever reason, probably someone disappointed you, then they always try to link it to say probably it's that thing, it's getting into the mind. So, such things you know? And you find it's not about that, it's not that. Yeah. I think there might be negativity, you get judged firstly, and secondly I think...I think just judgement, it's the one thing if my, ever my situation was different, probably it was someone else, and I disclosed, probably I'd be scared for judgement. Probably to say if I do this they'll always say you know, link it to this. So if I don't get married at the age of 30 like everybody does, they'll say maybe it's rape. If I turn to be a lesbian for whatever reason, rape will always be linked to say probably because. So judgement is the negative part if you disclose, to me.*

Nandipha paints a picture of a person (woman) that essentially has to live their life on proverbial eggshells. She paints a picture of a woman that is hysterical, has loose morals, is 'un-marryable' and sounds borderline unstable. All the features that society paints of a woman that lacks self-respect and integrity. A woman that is defined as such not by her actions but as a result of a crime that was committed against her. As seen in the literature, in some cultures women that are no longer virgins, be it by choice or seemingly sexual violation, are considered to be damaged goods (United Nations, 2017), but it appears that this idea has permeated cultural boundaries and is now a notion that society in general prescribes to and survivors may feel compelled to not disclose that they are no longer 'innocent and pure'. Ntombi expressed her shame at being in high school and having to pretend that she was still a virgin. She shared:

Ntombi: Like I said, when I got to high school...everybody is a virgin, everybody is doing this you know...you know the purity of everything in high school you know. When people are still innocent and all that, and it's like, ok, I, I have to join in you know. Uhm, maybe I am also? That's what I'd think.

Although Janet also lost her virginity through childhood sexual abuse, she considered her first consensual sexual relationship (at age 14) to be when she lost her virginity, however she shared being ashamed of this young age:

Janet: I mean even if I look at like uhm, the statutory rape. I've never, you know how when people come and talk about like, oh my God, how old were you when you lost your virginity? I'm always so ashamed to say that I was 14, like I even hide that. So no, like I have never actually, disclosed all my incidents.

In the same way that women are seemingly expected to preserve their innocence, what appears to be paramount is the idea that women should be taught how to not be raped. People are raised with the notion that women should behave and dress in a certain way in order to deflect any male attention, and in the societal mind a woman that was raped was most probably indecently dressed, implying that they invited the male attention that led to their rape. Refilwe shared that she always had in mind that survivors feel ashamed to have been abused because they feel as though they did not meet the standards set by society. She expressed:

***Refilwe:** No the women themselves, they feel ashamed, they feel like, I brought this to myself...I feel like well, the society itself is silencing the victims. Like they're being silenced because they feel like 'no it's your fault, what were you wearing?' Or 'why were you drunk?' or 'why did you go wherever with him?' You know, that's my problem. I think the society itself. That's where the problem lies.*

Nandipha echoed this view by sharing what was essentially judgemental views of what was said about people that wore the survivor t-shirt on Silent Protest. As seen in the discussed literature and from what Nandipha shares, it is seen how these views of what a survivor should and should not look, dress and behave like (Russell, 1975) are deeply permeated in society. Nandipha shared:

***Nandipha:** This other girl, was putting on very heavy make up, she was white, wearing like mini skirt you know, wearing that survivor t-shirt. So my friends come to me, "yho chomi, she's wearing a survivor, yho but the way she's wearing a skirt and the make up though. Do you think she just like the t-shirt?... Is it because she likes the survivor t-shirt, does she even know what it means? I doubt she's the type to be raped this one, you can see her." So I feel like the writing the t-shirt like survivor, silence, what, what...people will start judging you, ok you're dressed like this but you claim to be raped and you survived. How come, you know? Probably you asked for it or rather you didn't ask for it or you're just lying you know?*

The views shared by her friends also echo how Nandipha feels about not being able to disclose; her friends perceive her to be a certain way and their idea of a survivor would probably result in them judging and not believing Nandipha. The fundamental problem with this is that women become hostage to society and its conflicting and hypocritical ideas of what and how a woman should look, dress and behave (Russell, 1975). Criticism is placed on women that are regarded as not making the effort to be attractive to men, however should that attractive woman be raped, she is blamed. In cases where women have disclosed their rape or sexual abuse, they have been questioned on what they were wearing, their sexual history, if they attempted to fight off their attacker and in some instances how their body responded to the rape (Russell, 1975), insinuating that the survivor may have enjoyed their attack. This view unfortunately perpetuates the shame and the fear of judgement that survivors face.

Like many other survivors and non-survivors that subscribe to the rape myths seen in the literature (Tillman et al., 2010), Refilwe never thought that she would be sexually abused let alone by her boyfriend. Now the difficulty she faces in disclosing her sexual abuse is two-fold – she was not inappropriately dressed and her perpetrator was her boyfriend. Disclosing this may leave her feeling ashamed because as she had

previously assumed, she may be perceived as having been inebriated or inappropriately dressed, and thus she fears being judged and shamed. She said:

Refilwe: *I always thought ah, these women, these women these women. But now I know no, it's not our fault.*

Researcher: *When you say you always thought 'these women, these women, these women' what do you mean?*

Refilwe: *Because that's what the society taught me. No she was raped because she was wearing mini skirt, you know. She was drunk. She's the one who opened the door; she's the one who agreed to go with him wherever.*

As seen with the participants, survivors may be affected by the meaning of being a survivor that has been created by society. Traumatic events do not only affect the individual survivor, but they affect society as well (Tillman et al., 2010), which may be a reason why society is seemingly quick to distance itself by applying stereotypes and stigma. The denial, repression and dissociation from these traumatic events is shared by the survivor, who they choose to disclose to, and to a certain extent society (Herman, 1992; Omarzu, 2000; Starzynski et al., 2005; Starzynski, 2010). By disclosing an experience of sexual violence, a survivor is asking the recipient to share and hold the trauma of their experience with them. An experience that is horrific and carries stigma that nobody wants to be associated with. As a survivor, Janet shared knowing that it was expected of her to be silent and ashamed – as prescribed by society:

Janet: *Because there's this whole stigma about how like, if these things have happened to you, how you're supposed to keep quiet and how you're supposed to be ashamed...*

A survivor's decision to disclose will be a result of the interaction of internal factors (e.g. their personality, their acceptance of rape myths, their coping style) with external factors such as reactions they receive (Dworkin & Allen, 2016; Mgoqi, 2006; Migdow, 1994) and unfortunately due to the stigma and secrecy, most survivors choose to remain silent because of anticipated judgement and shame.

4.3.1.1.2 Guilt and self-blame

Survivors of sexual abuse that are burdened by feelings of self-blame are more likely to not disclose (Ahrens, 2006; Migdow, 1994), particularly those that carry the burden of shame and belief that they had a role to play in their abuse. By virtue of feeling as though they are or should be to blame, survivors may then avoid speaking out of fear of being blamed and their doubts or fears being validated (Lanthier et al.,

2016). Some survivors feel as though they did not fight hard enough, they did not fight at all, or they somehow played a role in their attack (Mgoqi, 2006). Like many other survivors, Refilwe felt as though she had angered her boyfriend and so felt that she was to blame for her abuse. She shared:

***Refilwe:** Cos I thought it's my fault. Or maybe I contributed somehow. And I think that's what most women think. So yeah.*

It appears that Refilwe has internalised the cultural ideas of being a woman that she had been raised with. For her to feel as though she had angered her boyfriend and as a result brought on the abuse, it shows a level of acceptance that a woman has no agency (Andersson & Mhatre, 2003; Sigworth, 2009; Tillman et al., 2010) and is therefore silenced.

Janet's feelings of blame go as far back as her childhood sexual abuse. Although she recognises that she did not cause her abuse, she spoke about feeling as though had she spoken about it, the abuse would not have continued for as long as it did. Her shame appears to be more evident in her subsequent abuse where she shares having been drunk. It is most likely that her shame is directly linked to the stated perceptions that survivors are likely to be inebriated. It has also been found that adults who were abused as children are more likely to carry feelings of shame and self-blame should they be sexually assaulted again in their adulthood (Tillman et al., 2010). Janet shared:

***Janet:** As a child like I didn't understand what was happening, and I thought it was ok in that moment...I think it's because I allowed it. [...] That's like a, a kind of regret... Uhm, with the first one...I regret not talking sooner. Uhm, cos if I had spoken after the first time it happened, it wouldn't have happened like over and over again. [...] My second one I'm very open about, uhm, just because like I, I was passed out (chuckles) uhm, I've actually also stopped drinking cos of that incident... I had blacked out like I've done so many times, and I told my boyfriend I was going to sleep, so I went downstairs, was in bed. [...] I woke up in the middle of him like having sex with me and uhm, so it's kind of, like I don't carry any, like I mean I did at the beginning uhm because I was like oh, if I hadn't drunk that night... if I had locked the door, or if I hadn't gone to the party. So I did at the beginning and I did carry some blame, but I don't anymore. So I think that's why it's easier for me to talk about that, that incident.*

The ways in which the self-blame is carried is unnervingly extensive. The reasons expressed by the participants are perhaps indicative of the deeply penetrative and intrusive nature of sexual abuse. Something horrible and unthinkable has happened, and in trying to make sense of it, or the inability to make sense of it, faulty thinking

such as self-blame may come into play (Russell, 1975). When asked if she would ever disclose her childhood sexual abuse, Lerato became uncomfortable and her sense of blame and deep shame became evident in her tone and as she spoke. Lerato shared that she would never disclose because even though she was as child at the time of her abuse, she did not want to risk being blamed for allowing it to happen, and she hesitantly added that she does not recall saying no. She shared:

Lerato: *I felt like it was somehow my fault cos I was young. And people wouldn't believe me. [...] They'll be like you guys know each other. And why, it's like you never said anything, you just went along with it, so. Cos I don't think I ever said no. I don't think I ever did (voice dropping) [...] Maybe I could've done something. Said no, something. I don't know. Yeah (sigh). I don't want like...people to think that somehow I was involved in or whatever. And they probably think maybe it wasn't what she says it was. It was voluntary and... [...] So I didn't want, like the whole family to know and, people wouldn't understand they'd probably say it's somehow my fault.*

Ntombi carries a sense of blame for the sexual abuse that happened to her in her teens and later on. She speaks of not being able to say no to men and in some instances feeling as though she put herself in a situation where she was at risk of being sexually abused. She reported having a neighbour, who she confided in, but he would repeatedly have sexual intercourse with her and although she did not want to, she found herself almost allowing for it to take place. Ntombi shared the below:

Ntombi: *I kept quiet. I allowed them to touch me even though I was uncomfortable with it and I was unhappy with it. I, I allowed it to happen. So that's just a big struggle for me. It was like, but you let it happen. So I used to blame myself for everything. [...] You really scared of what people will say like yeah, from your aunts to your family, around, whatsoever, around you and. You always, for me I felt like I blamed myself for a lot of things, like so, I, I wouldn't talk about it because I'd feel like I partook in it? And I could have stopped it but I didn't, so now it's my shame to live in... Lie in that bed.*

By virtue of feeling responsible, Ntombi concluded that she would be blamed for her abuse (Ahrens, Stansell, & Jennings, 2010). She therefore chose to remain silent in order to avoid the shame that would result from the anticipated blame.

The idea of being shamed on top of having been abused may feel like secondary trauma to the survivors (Boyd, 2011; Collings, 2005). After having endured such violation, the thought of being blamed for it or being judged appears to be enough to make survivors remain silent. Lerato mentions that she was afraid of being blamed for being raped and that it would be thought that she conceded to the act, while she was in fact only six years old when the incidents occurred. To a non-survivor of

sexual abuse, it may be difficult to understand how Lerato, who is now an adult, is afraid to disclose because she is afraid of being blamed when it is clear that a six year old could never consent to sexual intercourse. The difficulty appears to reside in that a lot of survivors feel as though they are to blame for their assault happening to them (Russell, 1975; Ullman, Starzynski, Long, Mason, & Long, 2008), and the separation of how their own sense of self blame, external blame and the shame that results from it may feel like an insurmountable task, and survivors would rather remain silent. Furthermore, shame develops sooner in childhood than feelings of guilt and self blame (Migdow, 1994) and as a result survivors of childhood abuse may carry a deeper sense of shame and inability to disclose. However, research has shown that these fears of being blamed or being judged are not unwarranted, and in fact most survivors that experience negative disclosure, unsupportive disclosure or disclosure where they were blamed or judged prevents further disclosure (Ahrens, 2006). Not knowing what is real versus what is an internal thought process could also make it difficult for survivors to make sense of their experience.

Shame can result in immense psychological pain (Fleming & Kruger, 2013) and may leave the survivor feeling as though they are in a position where they have to choose between the humiliation of shame or survival (Andersson & Mhatre, 2003; Herman, 1992). The idea that as a result of the dogmatic views of what appropriate female behaviour should be is one of the reasons survivors remain silent is concerning. There appears to be a fine line between living in torment of silence or living in the torment of disclosure. Survivors may feel that either way, there will be consequences that result in shame and inadequacy. Typically all other crimes such as murder and robbery result in the perpetrator being put on trial, however it appears that sexual abuse is the only crime where the victim is put on trial and further victimised (Vetten et al., 2008). Conceivably the option of silence feels safer as it lacks the added shaming and stigma attached to disclosure.

4.3.1.2 Fear

Fear is a theme that is comprised of a number of various sub-themes, and all the participants expressed some fear. This fear did not speak to just being afraid for their safety or their lives, but it extended to being afraid of the psychological and social

consequences of disclosure. These types of fear may be overlooked or misunderstood, but listening to the survivors speak about the fear, it is clear that it the type of gripping fear that is better if not only understood by the person experiencing it.

4.3.1.2.1 Fear of the perpetrator

As shame has shown to be a constant factor in the non disclosure of sexual abuse (Fleming & Kruger, 2013) in addition to intimidating survivors and silencing them using fear, perpetrators may also use the knowledge that their victims will not expose themselves as leverage (to be shamed) when committing these crimes (Herman, 1992; Migdow, 1994). Ntombi was threatened to not ever disclose her abuse and the identity of her perpetrators, but she was also made to feel as though she deserved the abuse. Knowing that she would have to disclose her multiple experiences of sexual abuse as well as emotional abuse may have left her feeling as though she would be confirming the possibility of being the horrible person she was made to feel like. She shared:

Ntombi: I think I was, like ashamed?... I don't know if they did or they didn't, but I think I was threatened. Not to speak. Someway somehow you don't, you don't speak of it. Cos the same people that did this stuff to me, are the same people that would emotionally abuse me. They would say a lot of bad things about me, say all these things in, in order for me not to even be able to speak. Like I'm focussing on what they have to say about me and I'm explaining myself and they're telling me that I'm just this horrible person. I never got the chance to actually speak about them, and when a person whose been doing all these things to you comes to your face and says, no but you did this and did that you're like is this really happening? Like you feel like you're nuts.

It appears that as a result of her physical and emotional abuse, Ntombi felt a combination of shame and fear; fear of what would happen if she told, fear of what people would say, and fear of being judged and stigmatised. This internalised fear and shame that Ntombi feels is likely to have influenced her silence (Migdow, 1994) and is an example of how difficult it can be to tease out the different emotions that survivors feel (Hopson, 2010), where there is not one clear reason for non-disclosure. Overshadowing the overwhelming fear would be an injustice in expressing just how potent it appeared to be. Janet shared a story about someone she knows who was “petrified” to disclose that she had been sexually abused:

***Janet:** I think it's because they're scared of what other people will say. I know that's the case with the one person. Uhm, she was petrified, and I mean like after that day, like when they took the tape off, cos you had to face people when you took the tape off... like she was "I wanna remove the tape" and then I think it was a week later and she messaged me and she was like "listen I told"... So I think for her it was the biggest thing about what other people would say and just making herself vulnerable, she didn't want to do that. In terms of other people, I think it's because like, like we're made to feel ashamed of what other people do.*

Although Janet was not as "petrified" to disclose her own abuse, it was clear that this other person's paralysing fear of being judged, shamed and stigmatised stood out for Janet and she expressed not being able to make sense of how she could have been so afraid of the people in her life. Fear of the perpetrator is common in child sexual abuse, where the child is threatened into remaining silent (Aucamp, Steyn, & van Rensburg, 2013). When an adult who is a child sexual abuse survivor does not disclose because of the same fear, it is indicative of just how intense and ingrained this sense of fear becomes (Migdow, 1994). While Janet could not understand the other person's fear, she shared her own inexplicable fear of her cousin. Even now as an adult with the knowledge that her parents will not die if she told, she is still afraid. She expressed:

***Janet:** At like 7 he was telling me that if I told people that my mum would die, or my parents would die. I know that's not like the case, but I think that when I was 14 and I was telling my mum, and the fact that it could get back to him, I think that scared me so much. Like because he had instilled this fear, not, I don't think I logically believed that anything would happen to my parents, I think it was more like, this like subconscious fear of what might happen if it got back to him.*

Like Janet, Lerato expressed a fear of being threatened by the perpetrator, however she added an element of the fear of being questioned and reminded about her ordeal in her daily life as well as the fear of the perpetrator seeking revenge if they were to get arrested, which is common amongst survivors (Carretta, 2011). Lerato said:

***Lerato:** (nervous giggle) Ok if let's say you were raped by someone that's like a well known person, and you know if you talk you're gonna get killed so, I don't think talking about it would be a right thing to do. And even if you tell someone like a close friend, they're gonna want you to talk more about it and tell other people about so that person can get arrested or something so, in that case no. Eish, well in my case I don't think I'll ever tell anyone.*

It is unfortunate that men in prominent positions and positions of power have been seen to have a higher chance of not being held accountable for their crimes and the survivor gets shamed instead (eNCA, 2016b; Gqola, 2015; "Women's March on

Washington,” 2017). As a result of this, most survivors may not disclose their abuse with the knowledge of this.

Janet, Lerato and Ntombi are now adults who still live with the fear that their perpetrators instilled in them. It would be assumed that, as an adult, one no longer has reason to be afraid of the threats made by the perpetrator, however it appears that is not the case with some child sexual abuse survivors. Survivors are taught not to speak up and to be afraid, and as a result survivors would rather remain silent and to an extent remain trapped under the control of their perpetrators (Migdow, 1994). Ntombi was again threatened to remain silent by her neighbour that repeatedly abused her. Below she describes what felt like a fear that kept her trapped in the perpetual cycle of abuse:

Ntombi: Maybe because it wasn't new to me? It was something that I had known and experienced so I knew not to talk about it or that, he also threatened me. He threatened me said, told me if I tell anyone, I don't know what he promised me, but (giggles) if I tell anyone, that's what he said. So all those years, he could do as he pleased. Like if he wanted to call me over to sleep with him, he would try to, he would do all those things. Even after dating my friend cos he knew that it was our little secret, but he was...yeah, he knew so.

The silence resulting from fear may be attributed to the traumatic aspect of abuse, where during the act of sexual abuse the perpetrator instils a deep fear and sense of powerlessness in the survivor. More often than not, particularly in child sexual abuse, the fear is accompanied with messages that the survivor is bad, deserving of the abuse or worthless (Aucamp et al., 2013), resulting in the shaming and silencing of the survivor.

4.3.1.2.2 The futility of disclosure

The participants shared a sense of hopelessness and felt as though nothing would come of their telling and therefore they believed it better to remain in their silence. Lerato elaborated more on this as she spoke about feeling as though thinking and speaking about her ordeal could not undo what had happened to her. As seen in some literature, some survivors do experience talking about their abuse as re-traumatizing (Collings, 2005), which is similar to what Lerato described below:

Lerato: *There's nothing you gain from it. Not that you feel better, you just feel sad. Then maybe you cry, and then, and then you look in the mirror and your eyes are red and you still think about it again. So...and it's not like you're saying it to help someone, at the end of the day so it's like, I did nothing, well I spoke about it but what did it do? Nothing. [...] But overall, it doesn't change. Like next time when you think about it, uhm, it won't change that now you think at least I told someone. No, it's just the same feeling. So.*

Lerato indicated that nothing would be done about her disclosure. This “nothing” can stem from the fear that telling causes a re-experience of the pain and the pain cannot be taken away. Knowing that all that disclosure produces is pain and the risk of not being believed, some survivors may choose to remain silent (Ahrens et al., 2010; Dworkin & Allen, 2016). As seen under *shame*, as a result of feelings of worthlessness and insecurity (Rickerby et al., 2003) some survivors like Lerato may even feel as though “nothing” will come from their disclosure because they are not important:

Lerato: *I didn't think it was important for someone to know. It's like what happened happened. It's not important to talk about it.*

Refilwe shared Lerato's sentiments that nobody would care, but this was masked by the feelings of shame and self-blame she carried. It might have been that she really did feel as though no one would care, or it may be that this was a result of being too ashamed and so she resolved that remaining silent was better because no body would care anyway. She shared:

Refilwe: *That's the main, shameful. And fault, that it's my fault. And also that no one, no one cares, no one will listen you know. Even if you say something, what is it that they're gonna do? How will they help you? I think that's where my problem was.*

Again, the complex mix of emotions that Refilwe appeared to experience can result in disclosure being difficult for a survivor (Dworkin & Allen, 2016; Sylaska & Edwards, 2014; Taylor, 2015). Ntombi experienced similar complex emotions (shame and self blame), however in her case her negative experience of disclosure with her family left her feeling as though keeping the family secret was more important than what she had experienced (Vermeulen & Fouche, 2006). As seen with some survivors (and to be discussed in more detail shortly), a negative experience of disclosure can result in survivors not wanting to disclose further (Moors & Webber, 2012). Ntombi expressed a yearning to have had her family (after she disclosed her abuse) to be warmer, more accepting and understanding. She said:

Ntombi: Well I would have liked...them to be more warm like to be more understanding, to just give me a shoulder to cry on. And, actually have a click, like oh, so this is what's been happening...But, uhm, that's not what I got, no...It was more like, okay. But I really wanted people to just be like, oh wow ok, I understand... Now it all makes sense why things happened a certain way, but I guess it's asking for too much for people to be looking at my life. [...] What was the point of the whole story? It's like people just look out for themselves you know .

The feeling of not being cared about and believing that nothing will come of disclosure may lead to survivors not only not disclosing to their family and friends, but some may also believe that seeking psychological and physical help is pointless (Ahrens & Aldana, 2012; Ahrens, 2006). This heavy cloak may feel like acceptance however it bears negative connotations as some survivors, like Ntombi, may wear it as a burden. Ntombi not only felt as though disclosure was pointless, but she also felt as though her experiences of sexual abuse had come to become a part of who she is. She appears to have internalised her abuse to the extent of identifying with herself as a bad object that is susceptible to abuse (Lemma & Levy, 2004). It is very likely that Ntombi carries a lot of psychological pain; however this acceptance she expresses may result in her confusion about whether or not to disclosure and seek help. She shared:

Ntombi: Ya, well most of my years, most of my life that's what I've being doing but now I'm trying to, I know that obviously it, it's sort of like, there's no running away from it? It's who I am, partially or I've become or whatever. But with that being said, I just want to let go of a few things. Just tell a few things...

In some cases of child sexual abuse where the child is abused by a family member or someone close to the family, the survivor may feel as though an adult in their life knew and in their mind that adult failed to protect them (Bottoms et al., 2014; Rickerby et al., 2003; Vermeulen & Fouche, 2006) and this can be experienced as not being cared for. The survivor may feel that the protection did not happen when it was most necessary and as a result they may feel that disclosure (as an adult) might be futile, leaving them helpless and feeling let down again, which incidentally was the case with Ntombi and her grandmother. Although it is not certain if Lerato's aunt knew about her abuse, Lerato shared feeling as though her aunt knew about her abuse, but did nothing about it. She said:

Lerato: *I think it was more than, like just what happened. I...things like, my dad was, he lived there but he didn't even come see (us). My dad lived let's say 45 min drive away, and my mum lived three hours away. [...] My aunt only had boys. She had three boys. So she wanted a girl. That's why she kinda like said I must come stay with her. But then the thing is there were four bedrooms in the house. And every son had a room and she had a room. And she didn't make me sleep with her, she made me sleep with one of her sons. I didn't like that. Cos I then I was forced to do things and, it was just not a... Like there were so many factors that were involved, and I never felt like I could talk... I was never really happy there. [...] I didn't like the fact that I had no say in what happened. Like, I had no say, like when I went to bed at night, it was like, I feared that it might happen again. And there's nothing I can do about it. I just have to listen, then yeah, go through it and then it's over and then I sleep. But I feel like my aunt knew. I don't know why, I feel like she knew but she never did anything about it.*

Although Lerato's parents did not live with her, it seems that in her mind she felt as though they also let her down and did not protect her by sending her to live with her aunt, and perhaps not having noticed that she was unhappy. Lerato may have felt as though disclosing to her parents or her aunt (as a child) would be disrespecting them, which would be culturally inappropriate (Maluleke, 2012) or making them feel as though they were responsible, particularly because she felt as though her aunt “*made her sleep with her son*”. This precarious position of adhering to cultural expectations whilst also feeling the need to protect family may leave survivors feeling ambivalent about disclosing.

In other instances, the knowledge that nothing will be done, inclusive of the law failing to convict perpetrators may result in survivors not reporting the crimes committed against them (Dosekun, 2013; Russell, 1975; Vetten et al., 2008). Nandipha expressed how she felt about disclosing with the expectation that nothing will be done below:

Nandipha: *So you look at the circumstances and say ok, if I disclose, will the perpetrator held liable? Then under such circumstances I, I can advise someone to disclose. But if you know that the perpetrator is dead or something or, I just feel like it's a waste of time. Rather pray about it and forgive and forget I mean. Nothing out manoeuvres the punishment of God. That's what I believe. [...] I feel like if ever the justice is supposed to be done, there is only person who can do it and it's God.*

Perhaps this rings more true for Nandipha because nothing positive came from her disclosure, however it has been found that other survivors share the sentiment that nothing in the form of punishment or justice will result from their disclosure (Boyd, 2011; Vetten et al., 2008).

4.3.1.3 When the perpetrator is family

With the exception of Refilwe, all the participants were sexually abused by a family member. Research shows that being a survivor of incest or abuse perpetrated by a relative or a family friend makes disclosure of the abuse more difficult (Collings, Griffiths, & Kumalo, 2005). Based on what the participants reported, it seemed that there were two layers of secrecy around sexual abuse within a family – not wanting to create drama, the need to protect their loved ones and the family keeping the secret.

4.3.1.3.1 Secrecy enforced by the family

By virtue of being born into a certain environment and raised with certain sociocultural values, we are shaped by those values and environment, including the decisions we make and how we make them. For some survivors, this means that the disclosure of sexual abuse that was perpetrated by a family member or a friend of the family becomes even more complicated and will most likely remain a secret (Aucamp et al., 2013; Migdow, 1994; Vermeulen & Fouche, 2006). It will either be the survivor's secret, or if they disclose to a family member it will most likely remain a family secret (Rickerby et al., 2003). This then means that the perpetrator is more likely to get away with the crime.

When Ntombi was a child she underwent regular virginity testing by her grandmother. Although she was no longer a virgin due to being sexually abused by her half brother, her grandmother cleared her as a virgin with each test. At a later stage in her adolescent years, it emerged to the family that Ntombi was no longer a virgin and she was publically punished and shamed by her family for having had sexual intercourse with a boy.

***Ntombi:** So, akere they do this virginity thing, testing thing... So the day they decide to say I'm not a virgin, which was supposed to be known a long time ago, but anyways [...] So (chuckles) they decide they find out oh Ntombi is not a virgin anymore... So they decide to hit me and, hmm, I was in the room whatsoever with my aunt, this woman who she decided to hit me with. My dad was there, my brother, the biggest skoon who's been doing this whole thing, he's sitting there. Everybody else is rejoicing for the other brothers, I don't know why, I don't know why they hated me but yes so, so my aunt decides to hit me and they're like yeah we knew it, we knew it. Everybody is saying all those things, my aunt, uh hits me. Hits my head on a rock. Strangles me til I piss myself, all these things are happening and they're all watching. And the worst thing was like he was yeah, I knew it, I knew you were just a slut. [...] Cos they know I'll keep quiet. They knew, I think they knew who am I gonna tell? Like even when I went to the doctor the doctor was like, you need to actually arrest this woman who did this like... And but I didn't. So I don't know whether the aunt knew, but I don't know, I'm just saying ukuthi (that) all of these years you had never seen it and you only see it now? I don't get it I still don't get it and then you beat me and make this huge deal. So that now ok, it's off you, I don't know now whether it's off their case, ok now she's damaged one ok, that's it now. Like it happened outside there because she's damaged, she's messed up you know, it didn't happen here.*

Ntombi was shamed and confused about what had happened to her. By being punished for not being a virgin sends the message that loss of virginity is a secret, and indeed that is what Ntombi's grandmother did by falsely declaring Ntombi as a virgin. Her grandmother's silence may have also played a significant role in Ntombi's silence during the period of her abuse (Rickerby et al., 2003). Research has shown that in cases of child sexual abuse where a (non-abusing) adult essentially keeps the secret or does not believe the child's disclosure, the silence and the secrecy is reinforced (Collings, 2005).

Nandipha's family also played a role in reinforcing the stigma and secrecy around sexual abuse (Rickerby et al., 2003). It is not clear why her grandmother did not advocate for Nandipha's innocence but Nandipha is left hoping that (when on her deathbed) her grandmother will eventually tell her father that she believes Nandipha was raped by her uncle. Furthermore, Nandipha's sister tells her that she believes him, however she is not willing to corroborate Nandipha's story to their father. Nandipha shared:

***Nandipha:** Only my sister believed me. Cos she said, he even tried it one day on her. The sister was there when I disclosed. She came to me the following day and said "I'm the only one who believes you because he once tried it with me when we were in the rivers swimming, and we were like kids. Then I ran away. It could be that yeah, you're telling the truth". So now when I told my father, he called my sister and my sister denied. My sister said, "no I didn't say that". And then she said "why did you say that to the dad? I was just telling you I believe you, you didn't have to go running. Yeah, I'm just telling you that I believe you". That's it. Yeah.*

It is also not clear why Nandipha's sister does not want to confirm her story, but it highlights the idea that it should be something unspoken. Nandipha's case is a complex one and she is left feeling as though she should have never disclosed because it cost her a relationship with her father. The reaction she received from her father was non-supportive (Collings, 2005) and is shown to result in further non-disclosure (Ahrens, 2006).

Janet's mother found out while Janet was still a child that she was abused by her cousin, however it does not seem as though any action was taken. Janet is still afraid to fully disclose the nature of that abuse to her mother out of fear that she will confront her cousin or his mother which may result in conflict (Rickerby et al., 2003; Vermeulen & Fouche, 2006). Disclosure can be influenced by the action of others (Omarzu, 2000) and research shows that the lack of action on her mother's part may also send Janet a message that perhaps she should remain in fear and that she should not disclose any further (Collings et al., 2005; Collings, 2005). It is unknown why Janet's mother has not taken any action, but what is known is that it possibly perpetuates the stigma and the secrecy (Collings, 2005) by colluding with Janet's silence.

Although Refilwe was not assaulted by a family member, she knew that her family was a rigidly traditional one and she felt she would never be able to disclose her sexual abuse. She shared:

Refilwe: *You won't (laughs). I come from an African family. You won't. They'll be like no, no, go back to your husband and children. They won't even listen to you...Women are inferior, you have no say in anything.*

As seen here and in the literature review, Refilwe's abovementioned view is unfortunately a common one in South Africa with a lot of families still prescribing to cultural beliefs that serve as barriers to disclosure (Andersson & Mhatre, 2003; Carretta, 2011; Sigworth, 2009). In general, families can either be a source of great support to a survivor, or they could be great source of hurt and disappointment (Foster, 2014) in response to their disclosure.

4.3.1.3.2 Protection of loved ones

There is often a common fear of tearing the family apart (Stroud, 1999) which can prevent survivors from disclosing as well as rendering the family member(s) that were disclosed to silent for the sake of keeping peace or perhaps not knowing which family member (between alleged abuser and the abused) to believe. Lerato explains below that she did not disclose because it would create drama in the family, but she also states that her not wanting them to know would also result in blame and shame. She said:

***Lerato:** Well, it was a family member so...I didn't want too much drama and... [...] When I was six I went to pre school and then, I stayed in a town with my, she stayed in a town, so I stayed with my aunt in town so. And it was her son that used to... (begins crying) [...] So I didn't want, like the whole family to know and, people wouldn't understand they'd probably say it's somehow my fault. [...] And people wouldn't believe me. And also it would hurt too many people. My mum, so many people involved. Cos it's a family member and you don't want family drama...*

Janet was sexually abused again as an adult, and although she had partially disclosed her child sexual abuse to her mother, she initially felt compelled to not disclose this particular incident. She shared:

***Janet:** The second incident? My mum was very emotional, so I felt more like I wanted to help my mum deal with it more uhm, it's a very co-dependent relationship (laughs) no I'm kidding. She, like I mean she, she flew back up like the next day. Uhm, and by then I had calmed down... I don't know, uhm, how do I feel speaking to my mum? I kind of, I mean even to this day when I bring it up; I bring it up in a very logical way. Like I deal with things logically, I don't deal with things emotionally. Like I'll say something like (light laugh) what did I say, like I'll talk about, I mean, I still have the outfit that I was wearing, and I'd be like oh my God this was the outfit I was wearing when I was raped! Like I, you know what I mean I don't deal with things emotionally. I cut myself off cos it's easier not to feel and to understand things than to deal with them.*

According to Janet, she deals with situations logically, and she knew that telling her mother would result in her becoming upset and she felt the need to protect her. Janet's mother was a survivor of sexual abuse herself and she had been open about her experience and to a large extent had attempted to protect Janet from enduring the same pain. She was understandably upset when she discovered that Janet had been abused as a child and had assured Janet that she could always speak to her about anything. With the second assault, Janet carried a sense of guilt at having drunk too much and felt that she played a part in allowing herself to be vulnerable and as a result raped, and it may be that the thought of disappointing her mother was too

unbearable. It could be that not wanting to tell her mother was an attempt for Janet to protect herself from the disappointment she thought she would feel when her mother found out. Lerato expressed her feelings of not wanting to hurt people (assumedly her mother) by telling her about her sexual abuse. But in line with the theory of Janet protecting herself from disappointment, Lerato alludes to the notion that by remaining silent, she also protects herself from the pain. She shared below:

***Lerato:** I think it takes a lot of guts to talk about it cos you have to consider a lot of people's feelings. It's not just about you and what you went through. People might try comfort you but actually it hurts them, it might even hurt them more than it hurt you. And staying silent is a way of you protecting yourself and others in a way. More specifically yourself cos people look at you funny. [...] I can't imagine it being someone that if I told it wouldn't hurt them more than it would hurt me.*

This idea of protecting themselves by not disclosing (under the guise of protecting their loved ones) can be seen with other survivors that were abused by family members (Rickerby et al., 2003; Stroud, 1999). The realisation of the betrayal by someone they trust may put them in a position where by disclosing to their family, it can result in them hurting their family and imposing that same sense of betrayal on them (Aucamp et al., 2013). This would then result in the survivor feeling responsible for imbuing pain on their family. As seen, it creates a perpetual silence of guilt and pain. Ntombi described feeling as though she could never break her mother's heart by telling her about her abuse, also insinuating that her mother's absence might have led to her lack of protection (from the abuse). She said:

***Ntombi:** I know my mum, I want, the reason I don't wanna tell her is because like it will break her. Like she's, she was all the way in the UK and she works very hard and all that, and it's like...it's not necessary for her because I'm dealing with it? And I'm helping the others around me to deal with it. But just for interests sake one day I'll tell her. [...] Yeah, I know but, eish my mum. When I think about it it's like what is she gonna do with this information, it's just gonna make her unhappy. It's just gonna upset her so much. And, that's it you know? Maybe I can carry it better than she can? So. [...] If I was vulnerable about it. No, my mum's delicate. She's a big baby. She's really a big baby. My mum would get so hurt, she, she, she'll make it messy, she'll throw things around. She'll probably call these people and how dare you and, it's just gonna be messy. [...] Yeah, I don't want to add this to her. So it's like once she's stable I'll be able to tell her. When I, when I can see that my mum is fully relaxed.*

Ntombi may feel as though she would be perceived as blaming her mother, and it could also be that by convincing themselves that remaining silent is a way of protecting their loved ones from being hurt is a way of survivors holding to a sense of control and agency (Omarzu, 2000). In doing so, some survivors tell themselves that

they (having endured the ordeal) are better capable in dealing with the pain than their loved ones. Ntombi found herself in a situation where her mother was away and she had to be the maternal figure in her home. This essentially meant that she was unable to fall apart in the moment, however the question of why she did not disclose later remains. It appeared that by telling herself that she needed to be strong for her siblings afforded Ntombi some psychological scaffolding until such a time she was ready to psychologically deal with her disclosure (Dworkin & Allen, 2016). She shared:

***Ntombi:** Yeah, it was just God yazi (you know). I mean every environment I was in was probably not good for me? I just didn't act out on it, but I was just never fine I was just very lost but very much in control cos I had to take care of my kids, my mum's kids.*

***Researcher:** So you had to basically keep it together (**Ntombi:** Yeah) like you couldn't just fall apart because now who's gonna take care of the kids (**Ntombi:** Yeah)*

Both Lerato and Ntombi have also reasoned with themselves that being a burden on their mothers is just not worth their disclosure. Lerato shared what seemed to be an added sense of shame and guilt that would result from hurting her mother on top of all the challenges that her mother has faced. She said:

***Lerato:** It's just...I don't know it just...you know it hurts people cos (sigh)...and also like recently my mum has been through a lot [...] Like all those things, and I don't want to like tell her something and then leave. And then she'll be like, my, I wonder how my child is. Cos she doesn't know how, if I'm dealing with things the right way and all those things. So I don't wanna like hurt her and then not be around for her to see that I'm fine, cos she will constantly be worrying about me and...like she won't sleep and all those things. And I just feel like she's been through too much already. And for me to just tell her would be another thing that would eat...and my mum doesn't talk.. So even if I told her she probably would never tell my aunt that I told her, or anyone that, ok maybe like my fa..., her family from my mum's side. Like, maybe she would tell them, but it would never be thing that everyone knows about it. So I feel like she'd just eat her inside and she would have so many questions to ask so many people, but she would never actually ask them cos she's not someone that talks... And even if she's angry you'll never see that she's angry, so...*

As seen with the participants wanting to protect their loved ones (particularly their mothers), there appears to be an element of the child protecting the adult, when it should have been the adult protecting the child either from the abuse. This is not an infliction on the participants' mothers, but it seems as though it is a shared feeling among child survivors of sexual abuse, and is perhaps important in understanding the disclosure of child sexual abuse. As already indicated, this particular research focus

was not on the disclosure of child sexual abuse, however it has emerged that it may play a role in the disclosure thereof in adulthood.

4.3.1.4 Feeling psychologically unready to disclose

For disclosure to be beneficial and psychologically effective, it has to be voluntary (Campbell, Greeson, Fehler-Cabral, & Kennedy, 2015) and the survivor needs to see a need for their disclosure (Dworkin & Allen, 2016). If a survivor is not psychologically ready to disclose they may not benefit from the experience but it may also be experienced as traumatic and likely to result in further non-disclosure. Some of the participants indicated not having been ready to disclose post their abuse.

4.3.1.4.1 Inability to reconcile with their sexual abuse

It appeared that some of the participants were still unable to reconcile their sexual abuse with their lives and they thought and spoke about it as something external to them. They often made reference to their rape without calling it rape or for example Refilwe speaks about it as if it happened to ‘them’ and not her, she appeared to have difficulty identifying with herself as a survivor. She said:

Researcher: *There’s something that you said that I wanted to, oh yes, when we were talking about how the silent protest can be made more meaningful (Refilwe: Yes). You said **they**.*

Refilwe: *(Laughs) I didn’t say we?*

Researcher: *No*

The researcher noticed that in conversation with the participants she also struggled to use the word rape and it felt as though it became an unsaid rule of engagement to not make direct reference to rape. There was something jarring about using the word rape, and the researcher became sensitive to calling it rape lest it upset or offend the participants. This is perhaps something that could be studied further as in retrospect it may have felt as though there was collusion with participants in discouraging or avoiding talking about rape, and in the long run possibly preventing disclosure. Janet spoke about it as *these things*:

Janet: *Because there’s this whole stigma about how like, if **these things** have happened to you, how you’re supposed to keep quiet and how you’re supposed to be ashamed... So the fact that I didn’t keep quiet made it, and so soon after **the thing** made it easier to...yeah. And I don’t think I would have done it if I didn’t have the support structure of my friends here on campus.*

Lerato also spoke about her abuse without naming it, but more interesting is that she referred to it as an action that she would have done, and not something that happened

to her. In keeping with the theme of not being ready to disclose, it appears that Lerato's decision to remain silent was influenced by her not being ready to deal with the discomfort (and shame) that comes with being known as a survivor. She shared:

***Lerato:** Well, I don't like eyes being all on me, and I know people might not know you but when they walk around campus they'll remember you, and they might whisper amongst themselves that hey, this is **that girl that did what not, what not**. I don't think I would feel comfortable with that.*

When speaking about her rape, Ntombi spoke about it in a suggestive way, which could create space for misinterpretation. More often than not term "sleep with" implies willingness. Ntombi said:

***Ntombi:** You know ok so, my situation is not...uhm, it's it's a family thing. So growing up I think it started when I was four years old? My brothers, uncles they **used to just sleep with me**.*

Throughout her interview, Ntombi thought about her abuse as though she was to blame, and it seems that this is also seen in how she speaks about it. It appears that Ntombi may be unable to reconcile the good and the bad in herself. Both her narrative and way of being were fragmented and disorganised. She reported three various versions of her first experience of disclosure, and it felt as though through all her experiences of sexual abuse and violation she endured, she not only split her external world but her sense of self is also fragmented. Ntombi shared:

***Ntombi:** I disclosed it to one of my cousins. So the thing with my stories is, is there's always something new, something new, and something new, so it's very hard to tell exactly what went on for these 12 years, 11 years cos I only disclose when I remember? And some things I guess I choose not to remember cos at night maybe automatically I'll start thinking about the incident, or incidents, you know. But other than that I don't think about it, but it only (snaps fingers) and then it goes away. [...] I did but I've got a habit like I told you I don't know whether it's my coping mechanism or what. I've got a habit, when I tell my story I start making it seem like a light show. Like now it's like ok and then mum came through and we went to do this like it becomes like that, you know.*

The delivery of her narrative and the manner in which she presented herself in the room left the researcher with a sense of not being able to connect to Ntombi and at some point questioning the veracity of some her narrative. She spoke very nonchalantly about what had happened to her, with no emotion in her voice as though she was telling someone else's story. The intention of this study is not to ascertain Ntombi's relational or attachment style, however research has found that children that were abused by people who are meant to care for them make it incredibly difficult for the child and later stage adult, to make sense of the relationship because trauma is

essentially an attack on attachment (Farber, 2008; Lemma & Levy, 2004). This then may make it difficult for the survivor to fully come to terms with or make sense of their traumatic experience. This can come out in the way in which disclosure happens, and with Ntombi it becomes fragmented and confusing. The importance of this is that her disclosure style may have an effect on the response she receives, which in turn may or may not have an effect on her decision to disclose further (Ahrens et al., 2010; Campbell et al., 2015).

4.3.1.4.2 Uncertain if it was sexual abuse

Perhaps one of the reasons that survivors may not be able to reconcile with their abuse is if they are uncertain that it was sexual violation. Not knowing they were raped was one of the reasons that the participants did not disclose their abuse. As child sexual abuse survivors, they did not understand what had happened to them (Aucamp et al., 2013; Schonbucher, Maier, Mohler-Kuo, Schnyder, & Landolt, 2012), however the interesting thing is that even when they realised what had happened, they did not disclose. Janet expressed not understanding what had happened to her, but in what she says it can also be seen that there is a sense of shame and guilt. She shared:

***Janet:** Cos it was, it's a...like as a child like I didn't understand what was happening and I, and I thought it was ok in that moment. So I think that's what it is. I think it's because I allowed it*

Lerato also expressed not knowing what happened to her and in what she says her own sense of blame and shame also comes through. She said:

***Lerato:** Mmm, like...when you're older you know what's happening actually. When you're younger you're like ok, so this is happening, what does it mean? And you're still learning. Like you see it on TV but it doesn't make sense at that age. And when you're older I guess they'd be like he knew better, you also knew what was happening (heavy sigh), I guess.*

Nandipha also shared how she did not understand what had happened to her:

***Nandipha:** So if you like it's normal, probably what he did, it's normal. You know you're in homesteads and, and you are a kid. Then something about rape is not there. You don't know. You don't even understand what the guy is doing to you. Is it rape, is it what? What do you call it? I didn't even understand... Then when I grow up and when you start learning things, there is sex, there is rape, and then if someone does this... I thought it's normal, it's one of the things that happen in life. I was young believe me and naïve. So when you're in Zim in rural areas, you start knowing about sex probably when you're like 18, 19... Unlike if you're here in South Africa you see it on TV, oh that is sex. You get the thing?*

Ntombi shared feeling confused about what had happened to her, especially because her grandmother never said anything after the virginity tests. She also gave a sense that the abuse was normalised because it seemed to her that “everyone was doing it”. She shared:

Ntombi: They'd chase the other kids away and do stuff and, things that I was really not ok with or uncomfortable with and... It's like everybody was doing it so it felt like somewhat this is ok? So, the fact that everyone was doing it, it was confusing. And uhm (clears throat) so my granny, she was one of those people. Uhm, you know in our culture siya hlola? We get checked for virginity. This confuses me. These people would do this. And I think when I look back I think my granny was aware of what was going on. So, ok, my brother would force us to go sleep with him and then do whatever he wanted to. It was just yeah, messy. And I'd feel ashamed like I did something wrong so I wouldn't tell anyone and then we'd wake up in the morning and my granny would be like okay every girl line up, we're coming for the check up you know. And then like oh yeah everything is perfect, it's great you know. So that was confusing for me. One moment this is happening and one moment you're saying I'm fine. So, I'm fine.

With the exception of being a child and not understanding what has happened, some survivors do struggle to think of their experience as abuse or rape. This confusion is usually tied to cases where the perpetrator was a known and trusted individual to the survivor, such as an intimate partner (Fleming & Kruger, 2013; Mgoqi, 2006). Refilwe reported having felt very angry and ashamed but also confused at what had happened to her. Because she was raped by her boyfriend, she had not thought of it as rape (Logan, Walker, & Cole, 2013). She said:

Refilwe: Ashamed, angry. I don't know, I was very angry. I was very angry. But then at the same time I was like, ok, you know what, I'm just gonna let it go because I don't, I don't even understand what happened to me but something happened. I was very angry; I don't wanna lie to you. And it affected me to a point whereby I, I struggle to be in contact with men you know? That's my struggle. I think the struggle still continues.

Janet had initially only made reference to two (clear) incidents of sexual abuse, but during the interview she had a revelation that she may have also experienced statutory rape. When asked more about why she had never thought about this incident as statutory rape, she responded to say that she loved him. She shared:

Janet: Yeah, so if there's something else that has come up, like a similar thing that's come up, uhm, because I suppose you could say like when I lost my virginity at 14, he was 19, so it's statutory rape, uhm. I suppose that situation made it, I don't know, I don't know how to like. It's very strange that I don't consider that like, yeah. You see I've like, I did like two years of psychology so I've like, yeah, I've never actually, yeah. [...] Because I was young. And I, and I loved him (laughs) uhm, so in my mind it was ok

Survivors that are raped by intimate partners often have difficulty conceptualising their experience as rape (Mgoqi, 2006) and Janet and (to an extent) Refilwe rationalised their sexual abuse as having been something emotional and affectionate (Logan et al., 2013). It may be that speaking about rape in direct relation to themselves not only makes it real to them, but it also makes them feel like victims; which may remind them of the feeling of being helpless and vulnerable, and that may be too much to bear (Mgoqi, 2006). As indicated, disclosure becomes even more difficult if the perpetrator was an intimate partner (Boonzaier & De La Rey, 2003). The interlinking of these themes is indicative of just how difficult the process of disclosure is. Refilwe speaks about how disclosure for her was not an option because she was abused by her boyfriend and so no one would believe her. It is however important to note that she also makes reference to survivors that were abused by family members, and in her mind that makes their abuse worse than hers. Her minimizing her experience makes it more likely that she will not disclose further (Dworkin & Allen, 2016). She shared:

Refilwe: Because yeah (laughs). No, no, the thing is for me, when it happened, because this person was my boyfriend; I didn't think it was what it was. I just thought no it's my boyfriend; I made him angry earlier on. Maybe you know, I deserve to be punished or whatever. So to me it wasn't, it's, it's, not the same. For them it was strangers or their uncles, or whatever. For me it was actually someone who, you know people know that ah these two, love birds, so its, that's why I didn't disclose it. That's where the difficulty was.

If a survivor is being abused by an intimate partner or spouse, not only do all the other factors such as shame and blame play a role in her silence, but the cultural burden of tradition where her family will possibly be unsupportive (Anderson et al., 2010; Boonzaier & De La Rey, 2003; World Health Organisation, 2002) may also play a significant role. It becomes even more difficult to leave such a relationship if there are children involved and/or the abused spouse is dependent on their partner. Some of the psychological processes involved in the decision to disclose are akin to those involved in leaving a relationship where one is abused. In some cases the abused partner or spouse may take long to leave because they are terrified of the consequences, or they may even believe they are in love and quite possibly made to believe that they are loved by their abuser (Barron, 2009). This confusion of intimacy versus pain can also be seen in children who are sexually abused (Bottoms et al.,

2014). They may confuse the charm and manipulation of their perpetrator for love, and as a result they end up not disclosing.

4.3.1.4.3 Desire to forget about their experience

Linked to not being ready to disclose was the participants' desire to forget about their traumatic experiences and suppressing the emotions tied to them. Wanting to forget an unpleasant experience is natural and in occurrences of traumatic experiences it may serve as a protective defense mechanism. Repression entails turning away the memory, associated affect and acknowledgement of an event to the unconscious mind motivated by the desire to forget about the event (McWilliams, 2011). Lerato shared wanting to forget about her experience as soon as she left to live with her mother. She said:

***Lerato:** When I was, okay when I moved away to stay with, my mum, I guess, I forgot. I forgot all about it in a way. Things were fine, so I didn't think...like it's difficult to remember what you were thinking. So I don't really remember what was going through my head, but I can only remember the most recent years, and I didn't think about it. I guess when I thought about it I pushed it away, the thought away. And then there was never a thought of telling someone. I don't think I ever felt like I should talk to someone about it so...but it was more like just trying to forget, or only remembering occasionally when something happens, then you're like no, don't think about that. Yeah.*

Some unwelcome events will follow the process of desiring to forget, however others may be so unbearable to the survivor that the event is never registered in their episodic memory and they only become aware of the traumatic event at a later stage in their lives (Herman, 1992; Lemma & Levy, 2004). A psychological process of repression / dissociation / forgetting appears to have happened for both Janet and Nandipha subsequently after their abuse. Janet spoke about having depression in her childhood and teen years, and she recalls her mother fetching her from school and on the way home she burst into tears and did not know why. She related that during that period in her life she was constantly crying so it was not unusual and as a result both her and her mother did not pay much attention to her tears. It may be assumed that Janet's sexual abuse played a role in her depression (Boyd, 2011) as well as quite possibly the tears on that specific day because she subsequently remembered that she had been raped by her cousin. She shared:

***Janet:** Uhm, well my first instance of uhm, sexual abuse, I, I didn't speak about. It happened when I was young so I didn't speak about it until I was about 13 cos I didn't remember it. And the one day I kind of just... it just all came back, uhm, so I was silent for many years.*

Nandipha grew up in the village and it was only when she moved to the city to live with an aunt that she became exposed to sex. She tells of having seen sex on TV and it triggered the memory of her rape, and then just as quickly as she had remembered she then forgot about it. When she moved to live with her father in South Africa, sex and rape were more prominent in the media and Nandipha remembered her abuse. She then developed enuresis and following numerous medical tests; she concluded that the cause of the enuresis was her rape. Nandipha expressed wanting to forget about her abuse until such a time her uncle confesses. She shared:

***Nandipha:** There's never been a day whereby...probably I forgot all about it...ok I saw it on TV and said, ok that was rape. I remembered about it and then...it went blank, that's it. I carried on living my life, enjoying the city life you know?... I feel like... I should have, but never in any one day did it cross my mind to tell her. Or never in any day that did it cross my mind that I was raped. It, it crossed my mind the day when I was watching TV and I saw it. I said fine, and then, second ago, second then its gone. Like that. It just, my mind just went blank, that's it. Then I came to South Africa. I start urinating now and then. Go to the doctors, nothing. Kidney nothing. This this, nothing. Then it comes back again now. Not only that but also because South Africa, rape is always being spoken here and here. [...] Cos I just want to forget that it happened. I still urinate frequently now and then, but, I've told myself probably it's another problem. Probably it's not the rape...one day I'll find the real problem, what's happening with my bladder. Even when I'm watching something on TV and they're talking about rape, I just feel like, it's so disturbing, I just feel like, they can't, they shouldn't talk about that yeah, it's, it's disturbing... I feel like they should just not talk about it.*

It is unclear what specific event or trigger brought back the memories of their abuse for Nandipha and Janet, however it is clear that a psychological process of forgetting and remembering played a possible role in their silence (Herman, 1992).

4.3.1.5 Lack of trust in formal support structures

Literature shows that survivors have been repeatedly let down by formal support structures to the extent of there being a belief that reporting sexual abuse to these formal structures will not result in any help for survivors (Sigworth, 2009; Tillman et al., 2010; UN Women et al., 2015). All the participants expressed feeling as though reporting to formal structures would be futile. In a study by Ahrens (2006) looking at the impact of negative disclosure on further disclosure, one of the survivors interviewed had a horrible experience with the police when she went to report her rape. Despite having gone immediately to the police station and having undergone the necessary medical examination, which had concrete evidence, the policeman who took her statement accused her of wanting to ruin her perpetrator's future "I came to

them in my most vulnerable state. I'd just been victimized and I walked into a place that was male dominant and what they did or did not do for me hurt me. Emotionally, mentally, very bad. They formed an opinion that will probably take a lifetime to undo" (Ahrens, 2006, pg. 267). This survivor was further silenced by her perpetrator's brothers when they threatened to rape her little sisters if she pursued the case, and not surprisingly, she was too afraid to report the threat to the police.

Indeed some of the participants in this study have been let down by formal structures, while some did not even consider reporting their abuse to them with the anticipation of not being assisted. Janet is unfortunately one of many survivors that were silenced when she went to report her abuse to the police. The female officer that assisted her discouraged her against reporting the alleged crime, telling her that it was going to be Janet's word against the perpetrator and that it didn't help Janet's case that she had been drinking when it happened. Janet's shock at her experience with the police officer was still evident as she spoke about it:

***Janet:** I mean turning me away the first time and saying, I mean she even, I said to her, I was like, cos I had gone with the intention of reporting it that day. And I told her that I, I wasn't sure if I should. And that's when she said to me that there would be no point because it's my word against his uhm. She even like wrote down her number in case [...] cos I had said to her, I was like my family and my friends, like they want me to report it. Then she gave me the number, her number and said that if they want to phone and just confirm that I'd reported it like they can. So I was like (laughs) so I mean I still have her number! Cos in case they didn't believe me that I reported it to the police so she was kind of helping me like (**Researcher:** Lie) yeah, and that's not on! Like that's not. I mean at the time I was very thankful because I didn't want to report it. I was being...manipulated into like rewarding it, yeah.*

The reputation that police have is unfortunately notorious and as a result some survivors do not even think of reporting their cases. Ntombi shared:

***Ntombi:** The one that I would have reported is the guy, my so-called friend, the one that used to make to talk to him over the phone about sex and blah blah. He's a lawyer, he knew what he was doing was wrong. I wanted to tell but, it's it's also like, but he didn't rape you. But, this guy has, he's a lawyer, like he's gonna find a way out of it. Speak out for himself. And you were drunk, that's how our police treat us. You were drunk, you were there, what the hell did you expect? So, most of the time the reason why I don't think of the cops is because yho (exclamation) cops!*

Refilwe shared her mistrust of the police and reported having friends who went to report their assaults but were not assisted by the police. She shared:

Refilwe: *Like no one listens, like even if you go report it, like if you get sexually violated now, you go to the police station, they won't even listen to what you're saying. No one cares. I don't think it, it, it would have been different. [...] It's just like when you report it at the police station; they'll be like 'no we can't help you'. [...] No. It's the same thing you know, as, for me I don't think I trust police that much. Maybe that's where my problem is. Cos the thing is I have friends, friends who tried everything but they were never helped. So for me it's gonna, it was gonna be like if they didn't help my friends, then what makes me think that they'll help me? So I don't think I'll report. [...] Especially if you don't have any physical injuries or anything. They won't believe you. They'll be like ok, you consented to that. So maybe he didn't give you the money you agreed on or whatever then, go home. That's, that's where the problem is.*

Researcher: *So do you feel like if you come in and you've got physical injuries and you're bleeding.*

Refilwe: *That's when they will, yeah. They'll take you serious then. But other than that no, they won't. So we need something more.*

What Refilwe speaks about is also a well-known phenomenon. Unless a survivor has physical evidence, which is usually considered as physical injuries, they are not easily believed when they disclose (Jewkes et al., 2012; Vetten et al., 2008). A survivor may have reported the case to the police only for the case to be dismissed in court due to lack of sufficient evidence (Diaz & Manigat, 1999; Russell, 1975; Starzynski et al., 2005). Nandipha and Lerato are also aware of this and aside the fact that Lerato's perpetrator was family, she highlights the fact that the lack of evidence not only makes it harder but it may also re-traumatise the survivor because they are then essentially put on trial for a crime that was committed against them (Ahrens, 2006).

Lerato: *That's even worse (laughs). There's statements there's...(sigh)...no. [...] Like, I don't remember. I was young and I've tried to forget and it happened. So I don't really remember details, like I can't tell you how many times. I can't, I've... I didn't count. But, and they'd want to know so much that, and evidence that I don't have. I've got nothing and it's just, it's like my word against his kind of thing and...*

Nandipha expressed her feelings that because she was raped by a family member, the family would not be willing to take action and report the case to the police (Collings, 2005). She said:

Nandipha: *Yeah, I feel like even if I disclose since he is family, they won't be willing to take him to the police. I mean maybe again if something that happened long time ago and in Zim... it happened long time ago and it's just my word against him and... I'm not willing to go to court and you know. So, 'I didn't rape you, I raped you, I didn't rape you, I raped you'. So such things you know? You think that it happened long time ago so. [...] The proof. You know, if I disclosed I was gonna be taken to the doctor, I was gonna be checked, you get the thing? I'm a law student, I know such cases, how the break, how emotional, how traumatising it is. And I don't want to be part of that. Seen it, read about it, I don't want to be part of that.*

What Nandipha expresses is reflected in the literature where family becomes torn between offender and offended; resulting in not reporting the abuse but also insisting that it be kept a secret (Rickerby et al., 2003; Vermeulen & Fouche, 2006). The participants were also cognisant that reporting their abuse would entail the retelling and repetition of their ordeal, which can be re-traumatizing for survivors (Ahrens & Aldana, 2012; Carretta, 2011) so they opted to not do so. Nandipha echoed this below:

***Nandipha:** What makes it traumatising? The whole, recalling the experience. Like I'm doing right now, very traumatising if you can ask me. [...] And to know that the person did it and he's saying I didn't. So who did it? You did it, I know and he's in court... That thing, again. So I don't know how will feel if he, if ever he said he didn't do it.*

Another element of not wanting to report abuse to the police is being made to feel as though they (survivors) were to blame for their abuse (Ahrens, 2006; Prochuk, 2013). Ntombi expresses how it can be a shameful experience, particularly if it becomes known in the community and nothing comes from the reporting. She shared:

***Ntombi:** So it gets everyone involved and it just exposes a lot and it, it sucks when it doesn't work out, it's shameful, the whole town knows [...] We'll go to the cops. It's no longer and issue of you did this to me and I didn't like it. And I want you to deal with it. Now it's more of like interrogation of what was I doing? What happened with me, why, you know? And now I have to now and talk about what was I doing, was I sleeping, what position, why, you know all that. Was I drinking, why was I drinking with this man, do I trust him enough to go to the, I have to answer all those questions, and it it's, it doesn't help me feel like I'm doing the right thing by telling.*

As seen from what Nandipha and Ntombi have said, going to court goes beyond just the retelling, but it also entails being interrogated and this could easily create doubt and shame for the survivor, particularly if the survivor is made to feel as though they were responsible for the crime (Russell, 1975, 1991). Wanting to forget about their experience then appears to be a probable solution.

Other than the legal and medical authorities, other formal support structures can include the church. After the confrontation and explosive disclosure with her father, Nandipha's stepmother took her to church to speak to a Pastor. It appears that although her father had accused her of lying, her stepmother had believed her and attempted to help her. Nandipha's experience with the Pastor did not leave her feeling any better or feeling as though she could ever disclose again. She shared:

Nandipha: *It was a male. So I just cried. He was like “ok, I heard that you were raped.” And then he talked about God. Yeah he was called and told I’m bringing my child who was raped. So I didn’t even disclose. So it was a matter of me crying and being told that God is gonna heal me... He talked for 10 minutes and me crying, sorry it’s not your fault, God is gonna, that’s it. So I wouldn’t call it disclosure to him... So I would say you’re the third person.*

Researcher: *So do you feel that was helpful for you or it wasn’t?*

Nandipha: *It wasn’t. It was more like a sermon you know? And me crying, being told, depending the verses. It wasn’t helpful at all. I felt like I wanted to tell the pastor that I lied.*

Nandipha’s disclosure with the Pastor may have felt ineffective to her because she had not voluntarily disclosed to him, she was there because her stepmother had insisted (Campbell et al., 2015; Dworkin & Allen, 2016) and for disclosure to be effective it has to be volitional (Dworkin & Allen, 2016; Migdow, 1994).

For Refilwe the feeling of not being able to trust the police to provide sufficient help extends to the health care system (Lanthier et al., 2016) as well. She shared:

Refilwe: *...When you go, the question they ask you is how old are you? They say ‘ah ah, you know this youth, blah blah blah’. So I think that’s the problem that we have. Cos the nurses will be like no girl, we have important patients to deal with, we’ll see you afterwards. [...] So I think that’s the problem we as young people we are facing. Police, nurses, same thing.*

It is rather unfortunate that survivors perceive the structures that should be the primary source of help as stumbling blocks to their disclosure and their desire to seek help (Campbell et al., 2015; Dworkin & Allen, 2016; Lanthier et al., 2016). In attempting to address these shortcomings, it has been suggested that more training should go into equipping the individuals that would assist survivors with adequate interpersonal skills (Lanthier et al., 2016).

4.3.1.6 Previous negative experience of disclosure

In a study looking at the impact of social reactions on disclosure, it was found that survivors who had a negative experience of disclosure after disclosing within three days of their abuse stopped further disclosure (Ahrens, 2006; Dworkin & Allen, 2016). Disclosure can be considered as a help-seeking process and so even when a survivor has been silent for a significant period of time, when they do seek help and they experience a negative reaction to their disclosure, they could revert back to silence (Campbell et al., 2015; Lanthier et al., 2016; Migdow, 1994). Out of the five participants, Nandipha and Ntombi are the two that had particularly negative experiences of disclosure.

Ntombi had multiple experiences of negative disclosure. She was publically beaten and shamed by her family, she was raped by her neighbour after disclosing to him, and she was rejected by her friend when she told her. She shared how with almost every disclosure she made she was left feeling as though she should have just remained silent. She shared:

Ntombi: Hmm, disclosure... It can be negative. Like not everybody is going to give you the answers you're looking for. Then you might go back and kill yourself, who knows. I remember when I told my boyfriend at the time, I was like yho my brothers did this to me. He was like 'oh, ok, so my mom', you know, he carried on. He pretended like it didn't exist. I wanted to die. Literally I wanted to throw myself. So just be careful where you disclose so, it can be very negative. The reactions are terrible and you need to learn how to deal with that [...] Yeah, it's always like, should I, should I have done it? And, I could have just kept quiet. Like seriously reactions when you speak about these things, people don't know how to react. They really don't make an environment for us.

The hurt and disappointment that Nandipha felt when her father did not believe her may have felt like a secondary victimisation to her (Long & Ullman, 2013; Starzynski et al., 2005). She is left feeling as though her disclosure was not a positive thing and perhaps telling herself that it is all a figment of her imagination will help her move on and forget about it. And quite possibly as a result of not having been believed and her perpetrator getting away without punishment, Nandipha added that unless some retribution would come from disclosure, telling is not worth the pain that ensues.

Nandipha: The people who are supposed to believe me don't believe me. You get the thing, probably I should also not believe myself... I shouldn't believe I was raped. Cos the people who are supposed to be believing me are not believing me. I'm the only who believes myself, so probably I should just...tell my mind I was not raped. I was lying. It's just an imagination.

Nandipha's sexual abuse was not just a loss of her childhood and virginity, but by disclosing it was a loss of her happiness, trust and relationship with her father. She insisted that until such a time her uncle apologises to her for having lied to her father about raping her and also explaining to her why he raped her, she would not think or speak about rape.

Nandipha: I wanna have the relationship that I had with my dad. So my mum passed away when I was very young... so the only love that I knew was my dad and now it's lost. And I, I feel like... I'm a complete orphan even though I'm not and that breaks my heart. I see the love that my dad gives to other kids. And with me it's now different, no longer that love... That's why I suppose I just want that love and relationship from my dad again. I don't want to go around seeking love from the boyfriends. I want love, family love. That's why maybe I want the guy to tell my dad. I don't want to cause problems or fighting in the family. I'm willing to forgive the guy as long as he just tells me why he did it yeah, and to apologise. I don't have the thing of saying I want justice to be done to me, it's fine.

Trauma can be experienced as a loss of something (Lemma & Levy, 2004) and for Nandipha her loss was more emotional and in an attempt to understand that, she could have processed her sexual abuse as more of a loss of her father and not so much an attack on her mind and body. By being rejected by her father, Nandipha might have felt as though he was failing her for a second time, as he had not been around to protect her eight-year-old self from being abused by her uncle (Collings, 2005; Rickerby et al., 2003). In not believing her, she may have felt re-victimised and essentially re-silenced by the person she thought she could trust the most (Ahrens, 2006). Nandipha's decision to not speak about rape or to disclose any further is certainly comprised of a myriad of complex psychological and oedipal factors that would require further psychotherapy to be unpacked and understood.

Ntombi's repetitive negative experiences reinforced her belief that she would be blamed for her abuse, judged, shamed and not believed, which is all not conducive to further disclosure. Both Nandipha and Ntombi's experiences can be re-traumatising and also reinforce the negative things they have come to believe about themselves (Boyd, 2011). The theme of negative disclosure is apparent across most of the overarching themes and is therefore important to take into consideration. It becomes a difficult factor to work with as it encourage silence, it adds a layer of complexity by reinforcing all the other factors that discourage disclosure, it also makes it increasingly difficult for these survivors to be identified and assisted.

4.3.2 Factors that may facilitate disclosure

The following section discusses the factors that appear to have a positive influence on disclosure. Although none of the participants had made full disclosures prior to the interview, they all shared what they believed would have made disclosure easier for

them. Having said that, it may be important to bear in mind that the following factors that they identified were either not enough on their own to encourage their disclosure, or they are reflection of what they thought would make disclosure possible.

4.3.2.1 Silence as agency

The lack of disclosure is often perceived as having possible damaging effects to survivors of sexual abuse (Hopson, 2010) and it is argued that in many cases silence is enforced on the survivors. Silence is hardly ever thought of as the deliberate withholding of information (Henderson, 2013) and there is limited research that shows that for disclosure to be beneficial it has to be volitional (Dworkin & Allen, 2016; Hopson, 2010; Migdow, 1994; Omarzu, 2000).

One way of viewing silence as agency is thinking about how soon after their sexual assault survivors choose to disclose. Research has shown that during the first acute days of the trauma of abuse, some survivors are not ready to disclose and will only be able to do so once they have processed their ordeal (Ahrens et al., 2010; Aucamp et al., 2013; Lanthier et al., 2016). Some of the participants indicated that in order to disclose, there has to be a certain level of healing and acceptance that they needed to have gone through (Starzynski, 2010). Janet nicely articulated that the seven year old her could not have spoken about her ordeal because she had not processed it. Even at her current age, she struggles to think and speak about what happened to her as a child. She shared:

***Janet:** I think people find it easier to speak when they have dealt with things yeah, uhm and even though I, I pretend like I've dealt with things I don't always think that I have, cos it always comes out in different areas of my life. I think the day that you can openly speak about your experiences is the day that you've like truly healed [...] Yeah, and it's the 7 year old that is processing it and the 7 year old can't, uhm whereas 22 year me, 22 year old me like, can deal with it and can like talk about it.*

Ntombi shared how her healing process enabled her to be able to disclose:

***Ntombi:** I spoke about it in therapy...uh I, sort of had to face things that I wasn't willing to face. Come to the realisation of what was really going on because when I went to therapy, she started from the basics, and I started remembering the things that I had forgotten. I started having to put everything in front of me and find a way to deal with it [...] Now I started dealing with it cos I had to think back and realise how it made me feel, how it makes me feel now, do I wanna talk to those people, do I wanna confront them do I not wanna confront them? Like it made me think of... a way forward but at the same time realise that this thing happened, and the more you pretend like it didn't happen you're ruining yourself cos I'd find myself in very messy situations.*

Lerato expressed what seemed to be a process of healing and acceptance that she needed to go through before she could be okay with disclosing. She said:

***Lerato:** ...It's like being quiet about something for so long that, it becomes something that you hardly think about and... And sometimes it does come back. Like you do think about it and then, but like, say if someone, maybe you spoke to someone it wouldn't be a thing that when you think about it hurts you.*

Despite Nandipha's reluctance to disclose further, she acknowledged that a process of healing is required in order to be able to speak about the trauma. She shared:

***Researcher:** Ok. So you feel up until, so the apology will will, basically help you to heal (**Nandipha:** Yes). And then once, sorry, once you've healed you'll be able to talk about it. Is that what you're saying?*

***Nandipha:** Yes. I'll be able to talk about it, participate advise, you know, to do all sort of things. Unite with the other survivors, yes.*

Disclosure is a decision to share personal information with another and Ntombi explicitly states that for her, disclosure is a choice and decision to let people in. There is a sense of needing to exercise her agency in when, whom and how she tells her story (Omarzu, 2000). She shared:

***Ntombi:** No, it's one of those uhm, even if somebody else were to tell, to tell somebody else, it's like, it's fine. However you wanna to share it. Like I'm sharing it because I just want, I'm letting you guys in. And then with the other people, the ones that I still wanna share with, the kids and other people who have survived this uh, I just wanna tell them like seriously you can get out of this.*

Survivors may also decide to remain silent because they do not want to be thought of as victims, but at the same time they may struggle to think of themselves as survivors, which has connotations of "strength and hope" (Henderson, 2013, pg. 3). Refilwe shared having a different idea of herself as a survivor after learning that what she had gone through was not unique to her. She said:

Refilwe: Well, I feel like now I'm more open about this thing and I'm, I don't feel that shame. Cos the reason why I didn't wear the survivor this year is because I was like oooh no, what will people say around campus? You know that thing? So I think that's where my problem is. So, if we do away with this stigma, then I think.

Researcher: So are you saying next year you won't feel the shame?

Refilwe: Maybe I will, but not as much as I did this year and the previous years.

Researcher: So what would make it easier for you to wear the t-shirt next year?

Refilwe: Because now I know better. I know that it wasn't my fault.

Lerato shared her revelation that she was choosing silence and had the choice to break it (Omarzu, 2000). She said:

Lerato: Maybe, like it makes you feel like you're not alone in all of this, it has happened to so many people. It made, like...it made my think a lot like, about myself, why am I keeping silent when other people are so, they talk about it. And they're not...afraid or they're not ashamed of what happened, so, I think I would.

There appears to be a need and desire to be strong and perhaps taking control and having agency where they previously were denied it (Washington, 2001). Ntombi expressed how she got to the realisation that the way her abuse made her feel and what she did about it was in her control. She said:

Ntombi: Now I started dealing with it cos I had to think back and realise how it made me feel how it makes me feel now, do I wanna talk to those people, do I wanna confront them do I not wanna confront them?. [...] I don't wanna hold it for anyone anymore so I don't mind telling somebody, like and what makes it even more possible, I always want to know if somebody has every experienced something like that cos I want them to talk.

Janet clearly expressed her agency when she said that she does not want to disclose, but she knows the value in disclosing:

Janet: (laughs) It's funny because I don't wanna disclose myself. It helps you heal, it like, it starts that process... Just for you to know that like, what happened to you wasn't normal but you're normal... especially if you disclose to someone else, like most of the time they disclose to you. So you find people who have been through the same things as you or similar things as you, and it kind of just shows you that you're not like, alone. Yeah.

The recognition that they had the power to control when and how to disclose appeared to be empowering for the participants. It is not lost on the researcher that although they had never fully disclosed, they chose to participate in this study and share their stories. There is an implication that by doing so, the participants may be communicating something about it being easier to tell their stories to a stranger (Moors & Webber, 2012).

Lerato: *And yeah I, like I just thought about it and I'm like I've been silent for so long. So maybe it's about time I talk and...(sigh). Like it always hurts you when you talk about it, but maybe it would hurt less.[...] It's not so bad. It's not, cos you're a stranger it's easier. I think if it was someone I knew it would be...if I see your reactions in a certain way I would stop. Or I wouldn't tell you everything else. [...] Cos...(sigh), you're not... A stranger doesn't know you can say no but you behave like this so you probably, whatever and also I won't see you all the time and be reminded that oh I spoke to her about that or...*

Nandipha shared that disclosing to a stranger would be easier for her:

Nandipha: *Maybe to someone who doesn't know me. Who's not gonna judge me for this character that I am you know? The clever Nandipha, the intelligent, the smart you know? You know, the fast forward Nandipha, you get the thing? It would be better to disclose to someone who doesn't know me at all.*

The decision to disclose in this particular setting, where the findings of the research will be used in the advocacy and empowerment of survivors of sexual abuse may be another way the participants chose to use their voice. The anonymity allowed for them to manage their social lives (Omarzu, 2000) while it seemed as though the knowledge that they would somehow play a role in assisting other survivors like them was a factor in them disclosing in this forum (Baker & Bevacqua, 2017; Khorana, 2016). Refilwe shared:

Refilwe: *But if I want to open this forum and assist other women I can't assist them if I'm not brave myself. I have to be brave, I have to be able to speak up so that they will be assisted as well. [...] I'm gonna join the survivor forum... I want to actually help a lot of women out there.*

Ntombi shared a similar feeling of wanting to disclose and share her story to empower other young women. She shared:

Ntombi: *Cos I wanna show them that it's not the end of the world. You actually need to get up and do something. Speak about it, run away from it, do something. I actually really wanna open something like a wellness centre for kids where they can just go play. Play sports, do whatever you know? It it's, automatically your mind is away from what's happening and you actually feel comfortable, you'll talk. Somebody is gonna be there for you, it's really a big dream of mine so, I want to tell those people that actually it could change their lives.*

There appears to be a fine balance between disclosing in public (or to many people) and disclosing to a handful of close people. Disclosure is also understood to be a choice that a survivor makes and is more often than not in relation to what the survivor hopes to gain from their disclosure (Campbell et al., 2015; Omarzu, 2000). Research has shown that agency in disclosure is perhaps more important than previously thought (Ahrens et al., 2010; Campbell et al., 2015; Migdow, 1994; Omarzu, 2000; Starzynski, 2010), and that the period that survivors choose to remain

silent may not be as damaging as thought of but can actually be a precursor to healing and disclosure (Dworkin & Allen, 2016; Ellis & Cromby, 2012; Lanthier et al., 2016). With the above in mind, and the knowledge and understanding that disclosure is beneficial, it becomes difficult to determine to what extent can silence also be beneficial and perhaps a catalyst in healing. Understanding silence as agency and having the ability to differentiate it from denial is conceivably another area that can be studied further in assisting survivors.

4.3.2.2 Participation in anti-rape campaigns

It appeared that in most instances, their participation in the Silent Protest had an overall positive psychological influence on the participants. When asked about their general feelings regarding disclosure, the participants indicated that it was important to disclose and the irony of their own personal non-disclosure was not lost on them. Janet expressed the below:

Janet: It's a topic that's very like, close, to like my life. And it's something very important to me; it's always been a very important subject. [...] Sexual violence is very like, prominent...like and a lot of people that I know, so I find it extremely important to talk about it. My mum has always, like made it like clear that it's something that shouldn't be hidden, it's not something to be shameful about. [...] (laughs) It's funny because I don't wanna disclose myself (laughs). It helps you heal, it like, it starts that process... Just for you to know that what happened to you wasn't normal but you're normal. Uhm, and especially if you disclose to someone else, like most of the time they disclose to you. So you find people who have been through the same things as you or similar things as you, and it kind of just shows you that you're not like, alone. Yeah.

In tandem with what Janet expressed, it has been found that disclosure may occur as a response to another person's disclosure (Brazelton, 2010) and participation in such a protest may result in this type of disclosure. In addition to this, Janet points out the healing effect that the protest may have. Psychological healing and readiness may be a precursor to disclosure (Dworkin & Allen, 2016; Omarzu, 2000). When speaking about their experience of the Silent Protest, all of the participants expressed how much the experience empowered them, and how hearing other people's stories encouraged them. For Ntombi the experience made her realise that she was not the only one that struggled with the fear and other difficult emotions that came with being a survivor. She shared:

Ntombi: ...even if people are not comfortable with telling their stories, but it's more encouraging to know that you're not the only one. You know that other people actually have experienced what you experienced. Most of the time we don't want to communicate our deepest, deepest fears so when you realise that that thing that scared you once, actually scared somebody else, you're allowed to feel it you know? That's what my experience was with the first one, oh my God I'm allowed to feel this, I'm allowed to cry because before that I was just like oh okay, it happens.

Refilwe expressed the same emotions that being in the presence of other people who have experienced sexual abuse normalised her experience, but she added a sentiment that perhaps most survivors who have not (fully) disclosed may feel – the need (or pressure) to do something, which may hopefully result in priming for disclosure (Grecco, Robbins, Bartoli, & Wolff, 2013). She shared:

Refilwe: It's just that they empowered me. The way that people were telling their stories... You know when this happens to you, you feel like I'm alone. This only happened to me and all those things. But when we gather around with other women, you actually tend to see that you're not alone. This happened to a lot of women before. And if you don't do something, you don't do something it will continue.

Lerato echoed the feelings of realising that she was not alone and that sharing her experience may be comforting and helpful. She said:

Lerato: I guess you get comforted, and you know you're not alone. And sometimes talking, I might talk to a friend and only to find out they've been through the same thing. So, you can get people to actually support you and lean on if you talk. And share your experiences. And also people get to understand you more. No, not people that, I didn't mean it like that (laughs). No like, people who went through it but they are not psychologists. [...] Also the silent protest was kind of eye opening. I've never been to something like that, so yeah. It was actually... you feel ok I'm not alone in this and... what's the worst thing that could happen if I talk?

Lerato raises a point that clinicians may overlook - that talking to just anyone and talking to someone who has walked in your shoes has a different meaning (Henderson, 2013). This may then imply that some survivors choose to remain silent until they have the 'right' person to talk to, someone who can fully understand their experience.

The participants recognised the importance of disclosure and the notion of healing and advocacy was present but it appeared that it was difficult for the participants to consider themselves in the role. Janet shared:

***Janet:** I was (nervous giggle) speaking to someone about it the other day...it's so much easier to listen to someone's story and be like, wow they have so much courage. Uhm, and the fact that they make themselves so vulnerable. And you admire people like that. But once, once it's your turn to be put in that kind of situation you're kind of like (gasps) and you don't think that, well I don't think that people will take things from my story, if that makes sense.*

Although they were able to recognise the power in having a voice, some of the participants' feelings of shame and guilt overshadowed this and was perhaps a factor that may play a role in survivors not disclosing their experiences of sexual abuse. The immediate exposure that society has to conversations about sexual violence is in the media and public platforms. Some survivors may then decide to remain silent about their experiences because they consider disclosure to be a public thing that may well leave them feeling overwhelmed and vulnerable (Omarzu, 2000). As clinicians this poses the question of how then these survivors are assisted if they are not known of. In this difficulty lies the implicit assumption that disclosing to one or two people that are not clinicians renders the disclosure as not beneficial (Hopson, 2010; Starzynski et al., 2005; Sylaska & Edwards, 2014).

Courage appears to be a factor that most of the participants identified as necessary for disclosure, and their participation in this study could have been influenced by the knowledge that they could tell their stories with the safety of anonymity (Khorana, 2016) and absence of judgement. Janet conveyed how having seen other survivors' courage empowered her to be able to wear a Survivor t-shirt. She shared her hopes of her disclosure having the same effect on other survivors:

***Janet:** Well for me it was easier because I had seen people wearing survivor shirts the year before and I think you just need, and I don't know how to do it, but you just need those five to ten people to wear it for other people to say (**Researcher:** To get the courage) yeah. Like I mean the one reporter came and spoke to me because I was wearing the survivors' shirt (almost whispering) the one Wits Vuvuzela woman, and uhm, after she had asked me for all these quotes and stuff she said "I should be wearing that shirt". And I was, all I wanted was for one person to get the courage like maybe next year, maybe next year she'll wear that shirt.*

Lerato shared that her participation in the study was influenced by the courage of the other survivors (Khorana, 2016). Like Janet, she also shared hopes of one day having the courage to empower other survivors the way she had been empowered to disclose. She said:

***Lerato:** Yeah it's like wow I, you know when you look up to someone you're like wow that's brave and they inspire me to maybe, I think that's why I decided to talk to you. If I'd never been part of the march but I gave you my numbers I don't think I would've ever spoken to you about it... I don't think they've forgotten about it, or it makes them feel like it happened or it's less painful for them cos they've spoke about it. But it just shows that they can talk about it and they've accepted that it happened and all those things. But I know talking about it doesn't make it less painful, maybe you just get used to talking. So...I did look up, but I don't think, or maybe I'm not ready. Or I haven't...you know it starts with something small, and then maybe one day you'll be able to have the courage to talk to a large crowd or something but, maybe that's the way it's supposed to start. It starts small and then yeah.*

Perhaps one could argue that just by participating or attending empowering initiatives such as the Silent Protest does not necessitate that survivors disclose their experiences. It could be that for those that are not yet ready to tell their stories, just being a part of such a movement and recognising that their experience is not unique to them and finding a sense of normal and belonging is the beginning of a healing process. Despite the limited literature regarding the relationship between participation in anti-rape campaigns, it appeared that participation in such campaigns is beneficial to survivors and may encourage help seeking behaviour such as disclosure (Khorana, 2016).

4.3.2.3 The need to be understood

A paradox to remaining silent out of the fear of not being believed and a common feeling amongst the participants was the need to be heard and understood. The participants expressed feeling the need to speak about their experiences, on condition that the recipient of their news would be understanding, would not blame them and they would be given the opportunity to speak without interruption or judgement (Ahrens, 2006; Collings, 2005). As it is seen above, the participants indicated that one of the reasons for their silence is the fear that they will not be believed, however there is a deep-seated desire to be heard and understood and for their experiences to be validated (Boyd, 2011; Brazelton, 2010; Easton, 2013). This is an important finding as it shows that in as much as they need to be heard, their silence is to a certain extent them exercising some agency and protection from their fear of being disappointed. Ntombi shared her desire to be understood and her experience validated:

Ntombi: *Ya it would... cos you know there's nothing better than a safe place you know where you can feel like you can talk and all that...I need a place where I can talk and be heard. Even if you don't say anything, just keep quiet let me talk, understand me you know? When I have spoken, the number of times I have spoken to people, it just ended up being about them, yeah basically because if you didn't use it against me, you did something...You know, it's very hard to find people*

Researcher: *To listen to your story*

Ntombi: *Yeah...I don't feel judged. I felt like somebody listened. They listened to understand, not listen to give an opinion or give an answer or you know. [...] It wasn't about anybody else but me. And that was the first time I realised that I'm important.*

In addition to wanting to be understood, participants placed emphasis on the need for a supportive, accepting and validating platform. Refilwe shared her relief at having a conducive environment (the interview) for her disclosure. She expressed her need to have been understood and her feelings validated. She said:

Refilwe: *A bit relieved and maybe that someone can actually listen because I never thought that anyone will actually sit and listen and understand what I'm saying because people just don't care. I feel like the society itself, it doesn't care. It doesn't care. We blame the victims more than the perpetrator.*

As already shown in the thesis, one of the positive influencers for disclosure is the knowledge that the survivor will be believed (Collings, 2005; Lanthier et al., 2016) and in doing so they will be validated. Janet echoed this and said:

Janet: *I can't remember the poet, I can't remember, she had said that when, if a victim comes to her, she always believes her. And I find that like one of the most important things. Yeah.*

It has been shown that a negative experience of disclosure can result in the cessation of disclosure (Dworkin & Allen, 2016), and so it is only natural to assume that a positive experience of disclosure will have the opposite effect. Although this may be the case, it is important to recognise that disclosure can vary from being a once off experience to a lifelong on-going experience (Ellis & Cromby, 2012; Omarzu, 2000). What this implies is that if a survivor has a positive experience of disclosure as described above, that once off disclosure may be all they need for it to fulfil their psychological needs, or that it could result in on-going disclosure. What appears to be a gap in the literature is if there is a difference in the benefits of once off disclosure and on-going disclosure. Furthermore, there is limited research to show if and how there is a difference between disclosure to informal support structures (family and friends) versus formal support structures (medical, legal and perhaps even therapy). It is readily assumed that for a survivor to benefit from disclosure they need to be in

therapy and although this is the case it does not discount the benefits of having the daily support from family and friends (Starzynski et al., 2005; Starzynski, 2010). In most instances, a survivor will disclose to a family member, a friend, medical or even legal authorities. It is most likely that by the time they get to a therapeutic space, other psychological side effects would have been present which may be the reason they sought therapy.

4.3.3 Factors that appear to have a mixed effect on disclosure

The themes discussed in this section are factors that appear to either facilitate or prevent disclosure dependent on the survivor's circumstances. All of the participants displayed some ambivalence about disclosing. This was initially seen during the participant engagement stage of the research. Out of the thirteen participants that had indicated interest in the study (on the morning of the Silent Protest, refer to Methods section), only Janet and Refilwe readily agreed to be part of the research. Lerato, Ntombi and Nandipha, along with the other eight interested individuals responded to the email, however they expressed concerns and requested more time to think about whether they would participate or not. Following further email interaction with the eleven individuals, only Lerato, Ntombi and Nandipha opted to participate in the study. As already mentioned, Lerato and Ntombi's ambivalence was also seen in their choice of the Silenced t-shirts (refer to Methods section). None the less, by opting to continue with the research, it implies that despite their uncertainty, Lerato, Nandipha and Ntombi wanted to share their stories. The subthemes are considered as ambivalence because although all five participants gave reasons why they would not consider further disclosure, it must be held in mind that by having agreed to participate in the research and by volunteering to fully disclose to the researcher, they were participating in disclosure. Research shows that over time as the various needs (mental, emotional and physical) of a survivor change, the decision to disclose may also be revised (Campbell et al., 2015; Dworkin & Allen, 2016).

4.3.3.1 Delayed disclosure

Delayed disclosure may be perceived by some survivors as being pointless and futile, leaving them ambivalent about disclosing (Dworkin & Allen, 2016). It may feel as though their delayed disclosure will result in them not being believed (Easton, 2013)

but also being blamed and being accused of having ulterior motives. Lerato expressed her fear of not being believed because she did not disclose during the period of her violation. She shared:

***Lerato:** And people wouldn't believe me. [...] Also, people will be like why after all these years you decide to actually talk about it if you wanted to really talk about it without hurt...not really without hurting, but for the right reasons maybe you would have said something a long time ago. [...] Now it would seem like I'm saying it now, to get people in trouble to hurt people. Why are you talking now?*

Lerato conveyed that because she had not spoken about her abuse while it was happening, she anticipated that people would expect her to be 'over' the pain because it happened long ago. Perhaps she interpreted her boyfriend's lack of interest as a sign of her pain not being relevant in the present. As a result she has chosen to attempt to 'forget' about her pain, anticipating that further disclosure would be futile. She shared:

***Lerato:** ...Cos you're hurt then maybe you should've spoken earlier. And some, maybe people think you can forget about it. Yeah it's like after a while you forget about it, you'll be fine so by now maybe I should've forgotten about it.*

Like Lerato, Nandipha had not disclosed her childhood abuse until she was an adult. Unfortunately with her experience of disclosure, her fear that delayed disclosure would result in disbelief and questions about her motives turned out to be true. Based on the reaction she got from her father, she is left feeling as though disclosure after a period of time has lapsed is futile. Nandipha said:

***Nandipha:** And secondly if you think of the time, he'll be like why didn't you say at the time you know? Why didn't you tell anyone? All those questions you know, you ask yourself. [...] Now all those things, you think about them and you feel like eish there is no hope.*

It has been found that the fear of not being believed is common and the actual experience of it can deter further disclosure (Ahrens & Aldana, 2012; Ahrens, 2006). Perhaps Nandipha's father expressing that there might have been a possibility but her silence (as a child) resulted in his disbelief leaves Nandipha feeling confused and conflicted about whether or not to disclose further, or if she should leave the past in the past.

Although the participants did not immediately disclose after their assaults, at some point they partially disclosed and all of them fully disclosed to the researcher. This is

reflective of the idea that disclosure can be influenced by a change of various aspects in an individual's life (Dworkin & Allen, 2016). It may also be a strong indicator that perhaps the participants are on the path to being psychologically ready to disclose and seek help if desired (Campbell et al., 2015).

4.3.3.2 Not wanting to be seen as a victim

Research indicates that some survivors do not disclose because they do not want to be treated differently or treated as victims (Lanthier et al., 2016). Lerato speaks about not wanting to be treated differently, as though there is something wrong with her and when she related this there was a sense that being treated in this way would make Lerato feel as though she were 'less'.

***Lerato:** I think...they wouldn't know how to, like be around you. It's like it creates awkward situation. Cos they feel like, you think about that the whole time maybe, and they don't know what to say to you. [...] I don't want them to look at me differently or behave differently around me, and not to talk about certain things because I'm around. [...] Cos when they treat you differently you start...you're not gonna want to be around them anymore, and then you start feeling like every time you see them now, cos they treat you differently it's like oh they're thinking about that, and then you start thinking about that. And if you're supposed to be enjoying it, having a great time you just start thinking about all your problems and then yeah. [...] It's like, when you... let's say you were involved in an accident and you've, you're burned...and people when they look at you now, they feel sympathy towards you. They treat you like oh are you fine, can you walk? Can you, let me open the door for you, it seems like you can't do that. So I don't want to be seen as someone who went through something, you constantly reminded that no, people think that I am not the same as they are.*

Nandipha echoed Lerato's sentiments; during the interview she also spoke about how people expect a survivor of sexual abuse to be demure and quiet, which is what one would expect of a 'victim'. Nandipha shared:

***Nandipha:** So it's the thing of being said you were raped. You're a victim actually. To them you're not a survivor you are raped that's it. You are raped, they feel pity for you. Or not even pity, probably you asked for it you know? So they expect you to dress in a certain way if you're wearing that survivor t-shirt probably. And they expect you to maybe speak in a certain way, or they expect you to be, I don't know, somehow.*

***Researcher:** It's interesting that you're saying being a survivor of rape, you see that person, that survivor, as somebody who's quiet and shy and...*

***Nandipha:** They expect you to be like that [...] Cos even my dad say that.*

The perception that society has of how a victim should be or look like does seem to influence how some survivors make sense of their abuse in relation to their internal and external worlds. Splits are created where they attempt to protect themselves from being labelled as a victim, but also from feeling like a victim. The reason the word

survivor was used over the word victim in this study is that it is recognised that the word victim has negative connotations, presenting the idea of helplessness and damage (Russell, 1991; UN Women et al., 2015), which survivors do not want to be seen as. An important consideration is that perhaps survivors not wanting to be regarded as victims is also suggestive of a readiness to seek help (Dworkin & Allen, 2016). By virtue of the participants participating in the protest as well as the study, it can be assumed that they view themselves as survivors (with agency). Their full disclosure to the researcher is key in the recognition of their readiness to break their silence.

4.3.3.3 Cultural barriers to disclosure

As seen in literature, some factors such as culture can cause difficulties and injustice when dealing with sexual abuse and the disclosure thereof. One of these is the notion of being a virgin and preserving that purity for marriage (Maluleke, 2012; Mgoqi, 2006). Subsequent to the first virginity testing that revealed that Ntombi was no longer a virgin, her grandmother should have taken action in determining what had happened and how. Her reasons for not having done so are unknown, however in some cultures the importance of being a virgin is emphasised and young girls are celebrated for maintaining their virginal innocence as it brings pride to her family as well as increasing her *lobola* value (Maluleke, 2012; Mwambene & Sloth-Nielsen, 2011). But outside of such traditions, the idea of a virgin bride who is pure and chaste remains more attractive and is how a female's value is measured to her family (UN Women, 2017). Perhaps Ntombi's grandmother silence was motivated by this, but in the process it resulted in Ntombi remaining silent about her abuse.

Nandipha speaks about the traditional and cultural roles that men and women play in the rural villages akin to the one she grew up in. The gender roles that are imparted onto children invariably teach us that women are inferior to men (Maluleke, 2012; Shefer, 2010), and as she related, she knew from a very young age that she was not allowed to discuss such things with her grandfather because he was a man.

Nandipha: I mean speaking to a male person especially when you're a village girl, speaking to male, a male person about such things you know, is sort of an abomination, taboo, talking about sex to a male person

Like Nandipha, many other young girls and women are taught to keep silent about such matters, and therefore these young girls and women are never taught about sex and sexuality (Tillman et al., 2010; Washington, 2001) rendering them ill equipped and potentially vulnerable. In the same vein, girls and boys who are taught about sex are taught the typical how to not fall pregnant lesson, but hardly ever what to do in the event of sexual abuse (Washington, 2001). If a child did receive a warning about how to protect themselves, it would always be in relation to strangers and never friends or family. This then makes it even more difficult for (child) survivors to disclose. Although Nandipha's father specified her silence as grounds for not believing her, they both probably know that due to the stated cultural aspects, Nandipha would have not disclosed.

Although these cultural factors are a reality to many South Africans, the influence of Western ideas (including Western education) may make it easier for survivors to overcome those barriers and seek help.

4.3.3.4 Being sexually violated by a stranger

There is a common belief among survivors that it is easier to report stranger rape (Washington, 2001) and in keeping with rape myths, is the belief that rape can only be committed by a stranger (Russell, 1975). Acceptance of rape myths makes disclosure more difficult if the assailant was not a stranger (Starzynski, 2010), and it may leave a survivor feeling as though had they been assaulted by a stranger it would be easier to report or speak about their ordeal. The participants echoed the belief that stranger rape would be easier to disclose. Janet stated that if rape is not "random" then disclosure may not happen. She said:

Janet: Like if it was a random, like if was walking in the street and it happened in the street, then yes, uhm. But no, for any other circumstance.

Lerato indicated that rape by a stranger would eliminate the difficult aspects of having to deal with the family fall out that she fears. She shared:

Lerato: If it was a stranger now it does make it easier because then there's no family fights, it's not like...yeah. He can say she never said no or anything. With a stranger you know you don't want to do this thing and there's no way that they can say but maybe you said yes, in a way so. The stranger it makes it easier, but then when it's family it just complicates things

Refilwe could not disclose her sexual abuse because she had thought that it had been her fault. She further added that rape by a stranger could also put her life at risk – which is interesting to note that she does not consider her own rape as having been put in danger (which ties into the theme of not being psychologically ready to disclose). She shared:

***Refilwe:** No because all along I thought it's my fault. But now if someone just grabbed me in a violent way without my consent and do whatever he does, I might get pregnant, or I might contract HIV. This is my life at stake. So I won't, keep silent, I'll make sure I fight. If this police station they don't assist me, I'll go to another one. Or if they don't I'll go to, to, to social workers or all those things. I know one way or another they will assist me. I won't keep quiet.*

Having been sexually violated by someone they know, the participants have other reasons for non-disclosure, such as avoiding family conflict, and so they spoke with some conviction that they would have reported stranger rape. Research does indicate that whether or not the perpetrator was known to the survivor or not, the stigma and the secrecy around sexual abuse remains (Brazelton, 2010; DeLong & Kahn, 2014; United Nations, 2017). This not only begets the question of whether or not it is easier to report stranger rape, but it also highlights just how many intricate factors combine to influence disclosure or non disclosure (Long & Ullman, 2013; Starzynski, 2010; Ullman et al., 2008).

4.3.3.5 Not knowing how to tell

In this thesis, not knowing how to tell encompasses the participants not having the right opportunity to speak about their ordeal, not knowing who to speak to or feeling like they do not have a support structure to confide in. It also implies that the participants had a desire to disclose. Although it does not make it the only factor, it may be that that desire is one of the important factors that could result in immediate disclosure (Dworkin & Allen, 2016). Janet expressed not being able to bring it up in conversation but indicated that she would have told her mother at some point. She said:

***Janet:** It's... it's not that I'm ashamed about it, it's, it's kind of stuff that people don't talk about. It's not something that comes up in daily conversation. I suppose I would've told her eventually. uhm cos like I said. like we are very close. uhm. Yeah*

According to Janet, had her mother not confronted her about being sexually active, she would not have disclosed when she did. She indicated that she would have delayed disclosure.

Janet: *Uhm, I think only like much later. I think older than I am now even yeah. I'm very grateful for the way it actually came out... But the way it happened like, like I'm glad that it did. [...] Like, my mum finding out I was sexually active; I think made it easier for me to disclose uhm, because it kind of gave a reason or an excuse as to why I was... I wouldn't have had a reason until later.*

During the period of her abuse, Lerato felt as though her environment did not allow for her to be open and to talk to her aunt. This feeling of not having the right moment or opportunity to disclose seems to have stayed with her. What is important to note is that Lerato mentioned not knowing how the person will respond. She shared:

Lerato: *How do you tell someone? How do you even know who to even tell? [...] Sitting down with someone and saying I want to talk to you about something. And actually, how you start, what do you say?... I don't know how you tell someone something like that. And you don't know how they'll react, or if they'll believe you even, that it happened. So...*

Like Janet and Lerato have implied, having the right opportunity to disclose is something that Nandipha had also wished for. Unlike the other two participants, she attempted to get her father's attention by behaving out of character. She shared:

Nandipha: *I don't know why I didn't tell him earlier... Probably, I felt like he shouldn't know. Yeah, I felt like, let me just forget you know? Alcohol is gonna help me forget about it. Partying, everything is gonna...but at one moment I feel like maybe I wanted him to ask me why I'm being like this. I wanted him to ask me what's my problem, then I'll be able to disclose. So. I couldn't just go and knock in his bedroom and say, listen here, I was raped. So probably I wanted an excuse that would make him ask me why are you like this? You have changed, you were not like this, is it South Africa that has changed you or what?...It's difficult just to go and knock. Come in, dad I was raped.*

The common thing amongst the above three is that they insinuated a willingness to disclose but lacked the opportune moment. Literature indicates that a survivor's disclosure needs may change over time, having a direct impact on their need to disclose their abuse (Dworkin & Allen, 2016).

Feeling as though there is a lack of support can also hinder disclosure (Campbell et al., 2015; Lanthier et al., 2016). When disclosing something as traumatic as sexual abuse, particularly when a survivor may experience feelings of self-blame, a strong supportive structure is of utmost importance (Ahrens, 2006). When disclosing, some survivors need to know that they will not be blamed or judged and that their experiences and emotions will be validated (Lanthier et al., 2016). Refilwe expressed her need for such support:

Refilwe: *You know these kind of things, you can't just go around telling people that ah you know, I was raped or I sexually violated or, or. It's not that easy. [...] So I think that's where my problem is. So I also need that support structure to help me you know, open up and actually talk about this*

Due to the lack of a support system, Ntombi felt as though she had to defend herself, and this may have extended to her sexual abuse, which resulted in her not disclosing when it happened. She shared:

Ntombi: *I was just not okay, like my mum wasn't around, I was bullied by this other big bully... I had a very low self-esteem, like I just never thought of myself in a good way. But I always tried to defend myself? And, I used to try and make sure that everybody is pleased with me so I don't know, like, I just, I never had a (clears throat) a voice before. It was like, I used to just keep quiet, I just let everything come in and then just...I don't think I was happy though. I just don't know how to describe it.*

For disclosure to have occurred for some of the participants, it was under pressure which implies that perhaps had there been an opportunity presented to them, they would have disclosed earlier. The difficulty with circumstantial disclosure can be that although survivors had the intention to disclose (eventually), the survivor's sense of agency (over their disclosure) is compromised (Campbell et al., 2015; Dworkin & Allen, 2016; Migdow, 1994). Janet expressed having disclosed because she felt the pressure to disclose. It is therefore important to note that she has never fully disclosed to her mother. She said:

Janet: *Maybe, like if I think back, like the first time I disclosed, I think it was just because I was trying to get my self out of trouble, to be honest. Because I could kind of blame it on something that had happened previously and the consequences to my actions then wouldn't be as severe. I think that's what I mean by reason. I've never said that out loud. [...] Look my mum still tries to bring it up. And I don't really like, I've never actually spoken. Like she knows that it happened and she knows who did it but it's never, I've never actually spoken about like what really happened, uhm. [...] I think I regret that like when I had the opportunity that I didn't disclose the full story.*

Lerato only ended up disclosing to her boyfriend when they began talking about having sexual intercourse. It felt like the right moment to Lerato and she considered him a safe option for her to disclose to because she trusted him, he provided comfort and gave her a sense of safety; he provided the support that she needed for disclosure (Ahrens & Aldana, 2012). She shared:

***Lerato:** He was kind of like my first boyfriend. And, we just spoke about everything... And he was talking about how; if I'm ready we can have sex. And I was. If he's gonna wait for me and all those things. And I was like ok, but I wanna tell you something. And I told him. And, he didn't really say much about it, and he hasn't said much about it ever since. So. Like I just felt like I could talk to him about anything and like any other person. And I knew he wouldn't force me to do anything, or tell anyone about it so. I guess I just felt comfortable with him.*

As seen with Lerato, by virtue of her boyfriend not providing the support that she had thought to receive from him, she stopped disclosing (Collings, 2005).

4.3.3.6 Partial disclosure

In this thesis partial disclosure refers to either only disclosing once and not disclosing further, or disclosing only part of the experience of sexual abuse and deliberately omitting some aspects (Dworkin & Allen, 2016). As already mentioned, none of the participants have fully disclosed their sexual abuse.

In their own ways, each of the participants acknowledged that disclosure was important for healing and other reasons related to advocacy, however they also stated that partial disclosure if at all, was their personal preference. Disclosure has an impact on the way a survivor is seen, and so the decision to disclose is a survivor's way of managing their social world (Campbell et al., 2015; Dworkin & Allen, 2016; Migdow, 1994). For Janet, managing the way she is perceived was linked to feelings of shame and guilt. She shared:

***Janet:** Uhm, like at the beginning of the second one, I mean I've disclosed to very few friends about me, like the younger one. Uhm, but like regarding the second one, I've kind of uhm, I want to make people aware. [...] The first one, like I said. Like I'm very selective about who I tell. [...] I think I suppose the people that I tell are the people that I trust. Because and I used to when I was younger, I used to trust people very easily. Uhm, and now its gotten to a point where I trust, I mean I even got a tattoo that says trust few... That I got after my rape... I just, I suppose its just trusting. About who I disclose to and who I don't. Especially with the younger one. I don't, I feel like it all comes back to like those feelings of, of shame and guilt.*

Lerato shared similar sentiments; her decision to not disclose to her friends appears to be her way of managing the way she is perceived by them. She shared:

***Lerato:** Even to tell a friend, I don't feel like I have a friend that I can tell and it wouldn't backfire in the end when it comes, when your friendship ends and something. Or you get angry at each other.*

Refilwe also shared being concerned about how she would be seen by her friends if she disclosed to them. She in particular was concerned about her friends disclosing

her secret to other people. Her need for partial disclosure extended to her family. She said:

Refilwe: *Well, I had a lot of girlfriends; they disappointed me at the end. So, girls you tell them your problem while you're still happy and things, but when things start you know, shaky, and they start disclosing your secrets and all those things. And that's what I feel like I'm afraid of. That's why I haven't find that person that I can actually share my experiences with. [...] The thing is you know for my family, if you talk to someone, like remote or relative than the ones you live with, it, it brings tension in the family. That ok, you don't trust us, you're this or that. So I might as well, if I don't talk to the ones that are close to me then I might as well not... disclose it to anyone.*

A common factor across all three for their selective disclosure is trust; there is a feeling of wanting to only tell someone who would keep their secret a secret, and not make it known to the world. The element of secrecy, shame and stigma appears again.

Although Lerato's boyfriend had presented the perfect opportunity for her to disclose, his reaction and perceived lack of interest resulted in Lerato not disclosing further. She expressed her need to have had him ask the right questions and create an environment where she could freely express the pent up emotions she had been holding. His reaction may have left Lerato feeling as though if the one person she trusted and had relied on for the comfort and support she required was unable to provide it, then it was not worth putting herself in such a vulnerable position again. She shared:

Lerato: *I expected him to ask questions. Cos I didn't say much. You actually know more than he knows, but I expected him to ask questions, and to try, you know people always try to comfort you and be like it's not your fault, but he didn't do all those things. It was just ok, that's what happened, it's fine. [...] I feel like him and I rushed into having sex because I wanted to get that feeling out that I did it because I was forced to, not because I wanted to. So, I. I don't know if I told him... I don't know why I told him actually... I just wanted someone to hear my story as well. I don't know. But he never asked the right questions, so I never told him.*

A previously negative or non-supportive experience of disclosure is one of the reasons that participants decided to just partially disclose or not disclose again in future. It is however indicated in research that the desire to disclose or the need to disclose may arise again (Dworkin & Allen, 2016).

4.3.4 Researchers reflections on being on the receiving end of participants' disclosures

Having had the privilege of being on the receiving end of the participants' disclosure, the researcher gained some insight into how the process of disclosure can be experienced by both the survivor and the listener. This experience is not just limited to the survivor and their telling, but it is also greatly influenced by the listener as well. From the findings of this research, it is seen that if a survivor has a negative experience of disclosure, such as not being believed, not being listened to attentively, not being understood and not being shown care and sympathy may deter the survivor in disclosing further. Perhaps then what would be important to research further is how the listener's experience of **and** reaction to disclosure can influence a survivor. Although some of the participants in this research indicated that following their negative experiences of disclosure they were not keen on disclosing further, it is not lost on the researcher that by virtue of agreeing to be participants in this study they essentially did disclose further. It is then imperative in understanding what factors may have played a role in their decision to partake in the study, but more importantly understanding how to encourage further disclosure following a negative experience.

Having experienced the different participants and heard their different narratives, it occurred to the researcher that the manner in which the disclosure happens influences the reaction the survivor gets. Nandipha seemed to be aware of this as she shared one of her experiences of disclosure:

***Nandipha:** I tried to tell this other guy that you know...cos ok, the guy wanted...I Just told him I was raped. That's it. And then he laughed. So the guy wants me and you know? "You know girl, I'm not getting the benefits of being your boyfriend you know? What's happening? You don't want me to touch you, you don't want me to do anything to you what". And then I snapped and said some of us were raped. Then he didn't believe me. I tried to disclose, I couldn't. So the guy thought ok maybe she's just being funny, you know Nandipha, you know she likes jokes.*

Ntombi shared how she had disclosed and in these instances she did not receive a positive response:

Ntombi: It affects a lot of people. It affects everyone and as much as you want to talk it seems like you're attacking or whatsoever. And there's no good way to say that you guys violated me all my life. There's no good way to say it you know, but it's like ah, why won't you let go, why won't you move on, when I tell my cousins in small groups you know. And I'm like I wanna speak about this, this will never end cos you, you are the daughter, I was telling my cousin, you are the daughter. And this thing started for me when I was like four. It's gonna happen. [...] I told the best friend, the one he dated [...] I told her because it had gotten too far it was something I wanted to tell her for a long a time cos this guy did it and knew not to tell her when he was dating her. Uhm, mmm, so now he, because he knew I'm silent he's manipulated me enough, you know? He used my name, also he'd be like the reason it's like this, Ntombi. Like, I'm done. So I told her because it was like I don't wanna live this lie anymore so here this is what it is. And funny story, my friend actually blamed me for having sexual experiences with this, with my neighbour instead of actually realising what this person has been doing to me all my life. Instead she was like 'oh my gosh, you did this with my ex!!'

Both Nandipha and Ntombi were nonchalant and somewhat flippant in the way they told their stories. This had the researcher wondering if other people were to be privy to their stories, how they would react to Ntombi and Nandipha but more importantly, if they would believe everything they said. Taking into consideration that this research is about disclosure of sexual abuse, particularly helping survivors, the researcher found it difficult to sit with these thoughts and emotions, however it may be imperative in understanding the different reactions to disclosure that survivors get. As seen with Nandipha and her experience of disclosing to her father, a negative reaction to disclosure results in non-disclosure (Ahrens, 2006; Campbell et al., 2015; Ullman et al., 2008) and therefore it may be of importance to understand this and to communicate and educate communities and society about this. As shocking as it may be to be on the receiving end of such news, and as hard as it may be for the listener to look past their stigma and previous stereotypes about sexual abuse, it appears that society and chosen listeners play a significant and important role in the facilitation of disclosure.

Having said this, the researcher was very aware of her role as researcher as well as participant observer and how each participant's story impacted her. It was notably easier to emotionally connect with the participants that were less detached to their experiences and more in touch with their emotions. The felt and expressed emotion allowed for the researcher to be able to empathise and to a certain extent sympathise with these participants, which made it easier to hear their stories and respond with empathy. Again, it is important to reiterate that by virtue of being a listener of each

participant's full disclosure, the researcher was able to gain more insight into each narrative, but more importantly this allowed for a certain environment for disclosure to be created.

At the end of all five interviews, once the recorder was switched off, each participant expressed their relief and gratitude at having been provided a safe space to disclose. Because this was not recorded and in keeping with the ethical considerations, the identity of each participant will be kept anonymous, however what they said will be shared because it was in keeping with the aspect of disclosure and feelings about it.

Participant 1 – At the end of her interview this participant thanked the researcher and said that she was glad she had participated because she now knew that disclosure did not have to be a traumatic experience and it had helped her immensely. She further requested to be sent information about sexual abuse and psychological services. She felt that she was ready to speak about her experience, but it was still limited to speaking to a stranger (therapy) before she could disclose in her personal circles.

Participant 2 – This participant expressed being glad that she had finally fully disclosed and said that the experience of the interview has made her think about disclosing to some of her friends and possibly her family. Two days after the interview, she sent a text message to the researcher thanking her again and letting her know that she had not experienced any traumatic flashbacks but she felt more at peace.

Participant 3 – This participant also thanked the researcher for being so “warm and understanding”. She added that the researcher was very easy to talk to and wanted to know if the researcher could be her therapist going forward. The researcher explained that she could not be her therapist but she could refer her to the Emthonjeni Clinic and the participant agreed. She expressed being ready to deal with her experience and begin the healing process.

Participant 4 – This participant thanked the researcher for not judging her and wanted to know what services were available on campus regarding sexual abuse. She expressed the interview as having had a positive impact on her and left her feeling as though she wants to engage with other survivors and support each other in their healing journey.

Participant 5 – This participant cried at the end of her interview and explained that she had never thought that she would be able to fully disclose her experience. She reported that although it had been difficult at times to speak about her experience, the researcher had provided a sense of safety that allowed her to process her emotions and speak about them. She also indicated wanting to begin therapy.

Research from other studies including this one indicate that survivors are more likely to disclose when the environment is supportive and receptive of their disclosure (Starzynski et al., 2005), however, as shown, in reality the environments in which survivors find themselves may not be as supportive or receptive as a research or therapeutic environment. A lot of advocacy has gone into the eradication of violence against women and children, but it appears that there may be a significant gap in the education of societies and communities in which these survivors come from. So far one of the important conclusions from this research is that one of the main factors that disclosure does not happen is fear of what society will say, being judged, being blamed, not being believed, being shamed, being silenced and basically all external factors that live up to the stigma and secrecy that has been created around sexual abuse. A perfect illustration of this is shared by Refilwe:

Refilwe: I think everyone, uhm, we should, we should just gather together as a society, as the community, not only women. Men, female, parents, like everyone so that we are all informed, we all, we all know about these things. We are able to talk to church members or family or whoever about this thing. I think that's the only way. Cos if we only do it, but then, cos the thing is, you can't, you can't sexually violate yourself. Someone does it. You see. So everyone must be part of this.

5 Conclusion

This research project sought to distinguish the elements that helped sexual abuse survivors disclose their experiences as well as elements that were perceived to make disclosure less likely. From the literature and findings of the study, it appears that disclosure is often perceived to be a narrative on the part of the survivor, however it is more complex than just narrating the actual account of the experience. Disclosure is layered with emotional and psychological processes. The findings show that survivors' coping mechanisms, feeling powerless and attempting to exercise control and agency by deciding to not disclose keeps them silent. The decision to disclose or to remain silent is not informed by one factor but by various and in some cases intertwined factors. It is not as straightforward as having one reason for remaining silent as there are numerous consequences, both positive and negative, to disclosing.

In the case of the participants, all of their experiences of sexual abuse were enacted by people that they knew and to a certain extent trusted. It is known that when the perpetrator is a family member disclosure becomes more difficult, however it goes beyond just being 'difficult'. The internal processes that are experienced by the survivors are often not taken into consideration. This consideration however does not seem to be isolated to the listener, but it appears that even some survivors are not aware of their internal processes that result in them remaining silent. Two of the participants indicated that they had been sexually violated, however there are incidents that never occurred to them as rape but when thinking about it now, they realise that it was in fact rape. This is not to be confused with having been sexually abused as a child because a child would have not reached appropriate sexual development and would not know about sex or what it is. In these occurrences where participants realise that they were actually raped, they had conceptualised it as something more intimate than a violation. This then implies that any shame and guilt experienced may be out of embarrassment of having made their violation something it was not. Such unconscious processes are prime examples of how disclosure can be important and beneficial. Had it not been for the interview process but more importantly the participants telling their full stories, they may have not come to this realisation.

Although the importance of disclosure cannot be emphasised enough, it is recognised that the process that leads to disclosure is tentative and there are multiple factors that play a role in determining whether or not a survivor discloses or not. There is not one clear factor, but a combination of factors and the variety will differ with each survivor. Although each participant suffered a similar traumatic experience, each individual would have processed and internalised it differently (Lemma & Levy, 2004). Some participants had forgotten about their experiences until a later time, and their cases can be thought of as disavowal of their experiences, with disavowal being defined as “a defence against the dangers of external reality and extreme trauma” (Stubley, 2004, pg 104). With some survivors the process of forgetting becomes a protective defence because in some instances, facing their reality may actually send them into a mental breakdown (Stubley, 2004). This process of forgetting is more often than not an unconscious one, and in this research the participants that had forgotten about their experiences were those who are survivors of child sexual abuse. This alone highlights the importance of providing a safe environment for a child to be able to disclose as research shows that survivors of child sexual abuse are more likely to re-experience sexual abuse at a later stage in their lives (Long & Ullman, 2013) in addition to the other mentioned psychological difficulties.

What does appear to be a common factor, one that seems to be present in all decisions to disclose or not, remains the stigma that society has placed on sexual abuse. In some cases, rape is not just committed against the individual but against their social status, their beliefs, their family, their gender and their communities. It is a crime that is loaded with stigma and in most cases a survivor would rather physically die than risk the social ramifications and shame of admitting to being a survivor (United Nations, 2017). Shame is a theme that appeared across all the participants’ stories and therefore it can be assumed that it is the one consistent factor that influences non-disclosure. The difficulty with this is that shame increases with disclosure, and then all other factors that manage this shame will then come into play. The ideal situation is for survivors to have a strong support system and to experience an initial positive disclosure (Neville et al., 2004).

In addition to society being one of the main deterring factors for disclosure, the privation of supportive social, legal, medical, and emotional structures appears to play a significant role in whether or not survivors disclose. In South Africa a minor cannot receive medical care without parental consent, however The Choice of Termination of Pregnancy Act 1996 (Act No. 92 of 1996) states that any individual under the age of 18 wishing to have an abortion is advised to inform their parents or guardians, however they may still have a termination of pregnancy done without discussing it with their parents or guardian (Althaus, 2000). One of the reasons abortion was legalised in South Africa was in the event of a child being conceived from rape, however the silence and the secrecy around sexual abuse and rape is perpetuated by the Act in that even when a minor happens to fall pregnant as a result of rape, they are still given the necessary cloak to be able to hide under the shame and secrecy that comes with being a survivor. In Uruguay should a child be born from rape, they are stigmatised from the moment they are born with rules and legislations in place that make it difficult for the child to be named (United Nations, 2017). These pockets of hypocrisy in the legal and social systems can be and in most cases are conduits for the shame, stigma, secrecy and silence around sexual abuse.

One of the factors that the researcher had not anticipated on finding, and also one that appears to be scarcely researched is the concept of silence as agency. It is quickly assumed that disclosure after an incidence of sexual abuse is beneficial, however the findings in this research imply that the period in which survivors choose to remain silent may also be somewhat beneficial. This is not to discount the importance of disclosure, however it does appear that more research needs to go into how survivors use silence as part of their healing process, presumably before they disclose. Like all other findings, silence as agency will not be applicable to all survivors of sexual abuse, in the same way that not all survivors will think of themselves as survivors, but as victims. Having said this, there is a possibility that how a person views themselves may also contribute to whether they disclose or not. The connotations of being a victim are negative; they imply a lack of agency and lack of strength. There could be a possibility that until someone feels like a survivor, they are not ready to disclose what happened to them. Although presumptuous, this infers that exploring how a

survivor thinks of themselves and how they use their silence puts clinicians, activists and support structures in a better place to assist all people that have experienced sexual abuse.

5.1 Disclosure (big ‘D’) vs. disclosure (little ‘d’)

Disclosure is typically thought of as a narrative that a survivor of sexual abuse tells. It is assumed that in the telling of this story, the emotions and psychological processes that the survivor may feel are easy to talk around or about. This is a common fallacy that is made and it is perhaps one that is missed in providing a supportive receptor for the survivor. To an individual that is not clinically trained, these emotional and psychological intricacies can be easily missed and the listener can get caught in the detail of the story. This may be one of the reasons why to someone who has never experienced sexual abuse, they cannot see why it is so difficult for the survivor to just speak about what happened to them. It may very well also be one of the reasons why even us as clinicians may not understand why it becomes difficult for a survivor to tell their story in a public setting or to a stranger when they have already disclosed or vice versa. When we think about disclosure the picture that may come to mind is one where the survivor discloses to a family member or friend, to the police, to a healthcare provider and while they are at it, they might as well as disclose at an anti-rape protest or campaign. Again, it is easy to revert back to the fallacy that once you have told someone, you might as well as tell all.

What then constitutes disclosure and when is it deemed to be beneficial to disclose? As stated in literature as well as in this thesis, disclosure of a traumatic experience is beneficial, but what is perhaps less spoken or written about is to what extent is it beneficial if disclosure has been to only one person. Within this research Disclosure with a capital ‘D’ is then considered to be Disclosure to more than three people that are not in the survivor’s familial or friendship circles, and when Disclosure is for the purpose of advocacy, such as wearing the Survivor t-shirt. Disclosure with a small ‘d’ is then considered to be disclosure to up to three people that may be in the survivor’s family, circle of friends, therapist or trusted confidante.

During the interviews with the participants, the researcher wondered if perhaps some of the participants also equated disclosure to Disclosure, where if they did not wear a Survivor t-shirt then their disclosure was not important or even considered. It was suggested by one psychologist that child sexual abuse is relatively harmless as the survivors often continue to live their lives unaffected by their experience and as a result they opt to not participate in studies about sexual abuse (Levett, 1990; Russell, 1991). The conclusion that by opting to not participate in a study about sexual abuse implies that a survivor is unaffected by their experience can be a way of silencing survivors. The message sent is that if a survivor is not ready to stand on the podium and announce their disclosure, their experience of sexual abuse is then invalidated.

Disclosure with a capital 'D' versus disclosure with a small 'd' is an area that may require further research. Most literature on sexual abuse and most advocacy campaigns imply that disclosure must be to more than one individual, ideally inclusive of medical and therapeutic service providers in order to be beneficial to the survivor. This is the case in most instances where a survivor does require such services, however it also seems that it is an assumption that cannot be applied to all survivors of sexual abuse. As seen in the research, some survivors require an environment that is supportive and validating in order for their disclosure to be beneficial, while others feel that they need to be ready to disclose in order to benefit from the disclosure. This is not to say that none of them would not benefit from psychological services, however, their agency in choosing how to deal with their experience must also be taken into consideration. It seems that more often than not, survivors choose to not disclose out of fear that they will be made to report their incident to the police, or to seek legal advice, which opens them up to the fear of being shamed and stigmatised. In line with society, communities and direct family and friends needing to provide an adequate environment for disclosure, us as clinicians and advocates may also need to bear in mind that until a survivor is ready to use their own voice, the responsibility lies on us to be a voice for the voiceless. What may be important to keep in mind is to not send the message that unless disclosure is a public affair it becomes invalid.

5.2 Limitations

Like with most research studies, there were some limitations in this research project. All the participants had not fully disclosed prior to the interview, and so they did not have any previous experience of a full disclosure process. The minimal reasons for disclosure (in comparison to non-disclosure) are therefore a result of this. It may have been more beneficial to have more participants that had prior experiences of full disclosure to understand and possibly identify more factors that influence disclosure.

All participants with the exception of one were child sexual abuse survivors. There is a difference in the patterns of disclosure and perhaps their current reasons for and patterns of disclosure may have been influenced by their childhood experience (Washington, 2001). Having more participants that were adult survivors may have given a richer picture of this difference. It may have also assisted in understanding the period in which the survivors had chosen to remain silent, allowing for a better understanding of silence as agency.

Although the study was not looking specifically at race, it emerged during the research process that there is an assumption about rape and the perception that it is a Black crime that predominantly affects Black women who were raped by Black men (Shefer, 2010). The question raised in the researcher's mind was to what extent this plays a role in the disclosure of both genders and both races. A study looking specifically at Black female survivors' disclosure patterns, Washington (2001) found that one of the factors of non disclosure is that Black people fear that their disclosure will reinforce the stereotype that Black families and societies are characterised by crime, violence and pathologies. There is also the notion that the race of the perpetrator and the survivor may influence the response survivors receive to their disclosure, particularly to legal authorities and healthcare providers. There is a belief that a White female survivor is more likely to be believed if her assailant was a Black male, as opposed to a Black female who was assaulted by a Black/White man (Washington, 2001) and that in general, a female of any race is more likely to be believed if her assailant was a Black male as opposed to any other race (Russell, 1975). It has also been found that men who rape White women are given longer and

harsher sentences than men who rape Black women (Tillman et al., 2010), which indicates that the legitimacy of the crime against a Black woman is questioned and may influence non-disclosure. The lack of racial diversity in this research is a limitation to exploring and understanding what appears to be a potentially important aspect in factors that may influence disclosure, especially within the context of South Africa and its rich racial history. The lack of racial diversity in the research itself may in fact be telling of the racial dynamics in the disclosure of sexual abuse.

The lack of male participants in the research is a limitation in understanding the factors that influence men to disclose or to remain silent. Some studies have been done regarding male disclosure, however very few were conducted in South Africa. As already mentioned, there was a male student that had indicated an interest in participating in the study, but he later changed his mind. It would have been incredibly beneficial to have interviewed him to get a better understanding of the forces at play in male disclosure of sexual abuse in order to aid in giving a voice and visibility to the silenced men. Of particular interest would be how the traditional and cultural African male hegemony influences disclosure.

5.3 Recommendations

This was a small qualitative study, and is only reflective of a small university population so further research needs to be done. As seen in the literature and results of this study, the effects of sexual abuse can be psychologically and physically harmful, and therefore it is imperative that research should not come before intervention. From the research as well as the literature review, it appears that the following recommendations could assist in empowering sexual abuse survivors to come forward and disclose their experiences.

5.3.1 Effective support structures

It is evident from the research that the role of support structures, both formal and informal is important in the facilitation of disclosure. It is therefore recommended that formal support structures are designed to be more empathetic to survivors of sexual abuse. The development of these structures should take into consideration factors such as female survivors being more comfortable seeking help from another

female. On a practical level this could translate into perhaps more female officers at police stations and trauma units.

With regards to informal support structures such as family and friends, it is recommended that the education of sexual abuse and disclosure be continued in society.

5.3.2 Awareness campaigns

Subsequent to the completion of this study, further incidences of sexual abuse have come to light with celebrities coming forward about their own experiences of sexual abuse resulting in more campaigns such as the #MeToo campaign. The irony behind the #MeToo campaign, which aims to encourage survivors to disclose, is that it is in fact a campaign that was started 10 years ago (2007), was shrouded in silence, and only gained awareness in October 2017 when a Hollywood actress publically disclosed her sexual abuse at the hands of a Hollywood producer (Thamm, 2017). Her disclosure then resulted in more women coming forward about their own experiences of sexual abuse. As also seen from this study, participation in such campaigns and exposure to other survivors serves as a means of empowerment and encouragement for silent survivors to break their silence. The more social media and news coverage there is of such campaigns and movements, the more the notion of disclosure can be normalised and ways of eradicating the silence and stigma around sexual violence can be found.

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Appendix 1 – Open Ended Interview Questions

1. Can you tell me about how the experience of Silent Protest was for you?
2. Silent Protest is about protesting against the silence and secrecy surrounding sexual abuse, what are your feelings on disclosure about sexual abuse?
3. If they answer generally
 - a. In your life have you ever disclosed any sexual abuse or violation that happened to you? If so, what are your personal feelings about the disclosure?
4. Can you tell me about factors that made it easier to disclose and factors that made it difficult and/or prevented you from disclosing (on Silent Protest day)?
5. On Silent Protest day, did you want to disclose or choose to disclose any sexual abuse that may have happened to you?
 - a. Follow up with:
 - i. Why you did or did not
 - ii. Why you did not, if you got the opportunity
 - iii. If given the opportunity again, would you disclose?
 - iv. How it felt, was it a positive or negative experience?
 - v. Do you have any regrets?
6. What is it about Silent Protest day that made you want to share your story?
7. What feelings did sharing your story at Silent Protest evoke?
8. Moving away from Silent Protest day, I would like to know more about disclosure in your personal life that you may have experienced. How long after the experience of sexual abuse or violation that happened to you did you disclose?
9. Depending on above answer –
 - a. What made you keep the silence for that period of time?
 - b. What factors made you reluctant to disclose?
 - c. What eventually led to you deciding to disclose?
 - d. Can you tell me about your experience of the period in which you did not disclose? Thoughts? Feelings?
10. How did you decide whom to disclose to?
11. What made it particularly difficult to disclose?

12. What made it feel more possible to disclose?
13. What were the expected reactions you thought you would get from family, friends and people close to you?
14. How did these expectations influence your decision to disclose?
15. Were the abovementioned expectations met? How did the person/people you decided to disclose to react?
 - a. How did this make you feel?
 - b. Was it a negative or a positive experience for you?
 - c. Do you have any feelings of regret regarding your disclosure?
16. Have you ever wanted to report your experience to the legal authorities and can you tell me about your reasons for this?
17. Do you think that disclosure can ever be a negative thing, especially in relation to you?
18. How can Silent Protest day be made more meaningful and supportive in regards to disclosure?
19. Is there anything else you would like to add?

Appendix 2 – Face to Face Interview Participant Information Sheet



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School of Human and Community Development

*Private Bag 3, Wits 2050, Johannesburg, South Africa
Tel: (011) 717-4500 Fax: (011) 717-4559 Email:
018lucy@muse.wits.ac.za*

Good day,

My name is Lungile Lechesa and I am conducting research for the purposes of obtaining a Masters degree in Clinical Psychology at the University of the Witwatersrand. The area of research focus is on participants' experience of the Silent Protest Day, and also of their personal experience of disclosure sexual abuse or molestation. Hence this study seeks your view, and I would like to formally invite you to participate.

Participation in this research will entail being interviewed by myself, at a time and a safe, quiet place that is convenient for you. The interview will be approximately one to two hours long. With your permission this interview will be audio recorded in order to ensure accuracy. Participation is completely voluntary, and you will not be advantaged or disadvantaged in any way for choosing to participate or not participate in the study.

Given the qualitative nature of the study, complete anonymity cannot be guaranteed as your interview forms part of the data for the study. However, confidentiality will be guaranteed as your name and identifying details will never be disclosed in any report or publication that arises from your participation in this research project. In the handling of data, you will be represented by a pseudonym. No information that could identify you will be included in the research report. The interview material (tapes and transcripts) will not be seen or heard by any person other than myself and my research supervisor, and will only be processed by myself and my supervisor. Audio recordings and transcripts will also be kept in a password-encrypted folder on my laptop.

You may refuse to answer questions that you would prefer not to, and you may choose to withdraw from the study at any point during the research study. The findings of this study will be reported in a research report, which will be submitted to the Psychology department of the University of the Witwatersrand, and will then be made electronically available over the university's library database. The findings of this study may also be published in a research journal. A summary of the research findings will be made available to you on request – please email the researcher with your request for the findings to be sent to you.

Due to the sensitive nature of the subject, you may or may not experience distress in the interview. If you have experienced any distress as a result of your participation in the study, contact details for relevant and free counselling services have been provided on this form. Assistance will also be provided in contacting these services and you will be given a referral letter.

If you choose to participate in the study please complete the Interview Consent Form, attached. I will contact you within two weeks in order to discuss your participation. Alternatively I can be contacted telephonically on 0839433460 or via e-mail at 1112534@students.wits.ac.za. If you require further information you may contact my supervisor Dr Yael Kadish, via e-mail at yael.kadish@wits.ac.za.

Your participation in this study will be greatly appreciated. Whilst there are no direct benefits to participating in this study, this research will contribute to knowledge and interventions development for those affected by sexual abuse/sexual molestation/sexual violation.

Kind Regards, _____

For a referral for free counselling services Please contact:

Dr Esther Price – Esther.Price@wits.ac.za

CCDU (Lauren Gmeiner)– 011 717 9999

Lifeline – 0861 322 322

Appendix 3 – Face To Face Interview Informed Consent to Participate and be Audio Recorded



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I hereby confirm that I have read the participant information sheet and am fully aware of what participation in this study entails, and that it is voluntary. I acknowledge that I have been provided with the contact details of the researcher, the research supervisor as well as counselling services. I hereby give my consent to participate in this research project. Furthermore, I am aware that I will be interviewed, and that this interview will be audio recorded for future use.

Additionally, I understand that

- I may refuse to answer any questions I am not comfortable with
- I may stop the interview process at any time
- I may withdraw at any time during the research process
- I will be required to verbally answer a number of questions
- This interview may take up to an hour to two hours
- The researcher may use direct quotes of my words spoken
- I will receive an information sheet reporting the research results if I request them
- I will be debriefed after the interview if I wish to be
- I will be put in contact with necessary counselling help if the research has caused me distress. The contact details of free services have been provided for me in any case
- The tapes and transcripts will only be heard by the researcher and her research supervisor, and will only be processed by the researcher

- All tape recordings and transcripts will be kept in a password-encrypted folder on the researcher's laptop/computer, which only the researcher and her supervisor will have access to
- All recordings will be destroyed after the research is complete.
- No identifying information will be used in the transcripts or the research report.

By signing this form I am giving my consent participate and to have my words and interview audiotaped.

Signed by _____ on (date)_____ at
(place)_____

Participant signature_____