

ABSTRACT

DISSERTATION: “It Was Time to Put the Trauma Aside”: How Cuban-American Women Cope with Sexual Assault

STUDENT: Wendy Gonzalez-Canal, M.A.

DEGREE: Doctor of Philosophy

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The existent research regarding sexual assault experiences within the Latinx population fails to distinguish between the various ethnic groups that make up this category, which homogenizes a very diverse population, whose cultural beliefs and experiences vary greatly. Thus, the current study used a constructivist paradigm to understand the lived experiences of Cuban-American women survivors of sexual assault from their perspectives by using an Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis approach. Participants were 5 Cuban-American women who self-identified as survivors of sexual assault, spoke Spanish fluently, and lived in Cuban enclaves in the U.S. From the semi-structured interviews conducted, 5 themes emerged: 1) Violent nature of experiences and emotional impact on the participants; 2) Perceptions of rape through cultural and personal lenses; 3) Importance of family support and its utilization in times of crisis; 4) Factors impacting their decision to share, such as the impact or purpose of their disclosure on others; and 5) Use of active and passive coping strategies in tandem as a way to exert control over healing process. The findings provided new insights with regards to the impact of culture on posttraumatic growth. Additionally, areas in which Cuban-American women differ

from other Latinx subgroups with regards to disclosure of sexual assault experiences were also identified. Implications for clinical practice and further research were discussed.