Unacknowledged Rape: How Much Do We Know about the Hidden Rape Victim?

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Research suggests that over half of all women who have experienced forced, unwanted sex do not label this experience as rape. Given this strikingly high prevalence, a better understanding of why victims do not acknowledge rape as well as the implications for the victim of not acknowledging rape seems imperative. The present article reviews what is known about unacknowledged rape and discusses potential theories for understanding the phenomenon, including script theory, which posits that victims do not acknowledge their rape experience because it does not match their event-related ideas about rape. The potential impact of not acknowledging rape on the recovery process and implications of this research for the clinician are also discussed, and directions for future research are proposed.