

**STUDENT EXPERIENCES WITH SEXUAL HARASSMENT AND SEXUAL
ASSAULT AT A SMALL LIBERAL ARTS COLLEGE: ADMINISTRATION,
TITLE IX, AND COMMUNITY RESPONSES**

A Thesis Presented to
The Faculty of the Department of Sociology
Colorado College
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree
Bachelor of Arts

By
Maya De Jesus
May 2024

On my honor, I have neither given nor received unauthorized aid on this assignment.

Maya De Jesus
December 20, 2023

ABSTRACT

Despite global efforts and institutional regulations, sexual harassment and assault persist on college campuses, with significant implications for students' well-being. This study investigates the normalization of student/student sexual violence on a small liberal arts college campus. It explores the impact of institutional and peer responses on students who have experienced harassment or assault. The study utilizes in-depth semi-structured interviews with five participants, examining their experiences with the college, its administration, and the Title IX reporting process. Findings reveal that students perceive inadequate support from the institution and the Title IX office, citing a lack of resources and emotional drain during the reporting process. Additionally, peer responses significantly affect the experiences of those who have faced harassment or assault, emphasizing the need for a supportive community. Recommendations include improved communication and resources from the administration, enhanced support in the Title IX office, and a collective effort from the student body to foster a safe environment. Overall, the research offers essential insights for informing policies and practices at colleges and universities, aiming to create safer and more supportive environments for all students affected by sexual harassment and assault.

KEYWORDS: sexual harassment, sexual assault, Title IX, college campus

INTRODUCTION

Sexual harassment and assault continue to be pervasive in institutions across the globe despite social movements like #MeToo and institutional nondiscrimination laws like Title IX (O'Connor, Drouin, and Neidermeyer 2021; Zarrugh et al. 2020). Sexual harassment and assault are highly prevalent on college campuses in the United States, and past research suggests that sexual assault accounts for 43% of total on-campus crimes in the United States (NCES 2022). This study aims to learn more about student experiences with sexual harassment/assault on their college campus by exploring the question: How does the normalization of sexual assault and sexual harassment on a small liberal arts college's campus, along with institutional and peer responses to such incidents, impact students who have experienced sexual harassment or assault? This question will be examined by conducting in-depth semi-structured interviews with students at a small liberal arts college in the western United States and analyzing those interviews.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Sexual harassment and gender-based violence are prevalent at the institutional level, whether that be in workplaces, schools, governmental institutions, etc. (Maypole and Skaine 1983; Newman, Jackson, and Baker 2003). Research has been done on the prevalence of sexual harassment and assault in workplaces and even on college campuses (Klein and Martin 2021; Prior and de Heer 2021). In 1972, the federal law Title IX was passed with the Educational Amendments. It was designed to address institutional sex discrimination at all schools, universities, and educational training programs that utilized federal funding (Zarrugh et al., 2020). Since then, many Colleges and Universities have created a Title IX office within the

school and a formal reporting process to comply with the federal Title IX law. Title IX has a reporting process in which students, faculty, and staff at colleges and universities can report discrimination that has happened to them or others at their school/workplace.

Theoretical Framework:

Power and capital are at the heart of sexual violence, harassment, and assault. It is also at the forefront of punishment and reporting for Title IX. Bourdieu's "The Forms of Capital" (1983) explains that "capital is accumulated labor (in its materialized form or its "incorporated," embodied form) which, when appropriated on a private, i.e., exclusive, basis by agents or groups of agents, enables them to appropriate social energy in the form of reified or living labor" (15). With more capital comes more power and opportunities. With less capital comes less power and opportunities. People with less capital or clout in a community or institution are less likely to report sexual harassment/violence (Ibrahim et al. 2023). Moreover, people with less capital in an institution are more likely to experience gendered violence or sexual harassment than people with higher capital (Maypole and Skaine 1983; Ibrahim et al. 2023; Wallace 2001).

Galtung (1990) conceptualizes forms of violence as cultural, structural, and direct violence. Cultural violence funnels to structural violence, which funnels to direct violence and reinforces the cycle. Galtung refers to this as the violence triangle. Cultural violence is a concept that seeps into any aspect of culture that can be used to legitimize violence. For example, the idea that women are lesser than men is an example of cultural violence. Structural violence is when a power structure or institution of any kind (i.e., a workplace, government, or school) institutes harm, preventing people from meeting their needs—for example, the pay gap in workplaces between men and women. Structural violence is arguably the most harmful form of violence, causing many deaths and reinforcing dangerous and inequitable societal norms. Direct

violence is what it sounds like: violence between people that intend to threaten life itself or cause direct damage to a person (i.e., sexual assault, murder, bullying). Many aspects of violence in culture lead to sexual harassment; however, the ways of an institution can drastically shape the culture around sexual harassment and assault. How the violence is discussed and dealt with, how often it occurs, and how the affected parties are treated after the incident. Cultural violence is reinforced by people in institutions or communities that create the culture of that institution/community, which is why it is essential to look at the culture and social norms of a community when analyzing the violence that happens within that community (Esala 2013).

Populations:

Cultural factors influence the perception and prevalence of sexual harassment and assault (O'Connor et al. 2021; Dihn et al. 2022). A person's positionality within an institution shapes the way in which they view sexual harassment and assault and how they assign blame. Prior research has found that personal characteristics affect individuals' negative judgments of alleged sexual assault perpetrators (O'Connor et al. 2021). Given that sexual harassment and assault are so tied to personal traits and cultures, they must be studied and analyzed from an intersectional standpoint (Armstrong, Gleckman-Krut, and Johnson 2018). "Attempts to remedy violence against women of color fail when they focus solely on womanhood or race/ethnicity and erase intersectional experiences of violence and discrimination" (Armstrong et al. 2018). People have multiple identities that intersect with one another and shape how they act and how they are perceived. Intersectional identities must be taken into account when studying (sexual) harassment and violence, or else the whole picture will not be understood. Intersectional identities need to be taken into account from all parties, including the harasser, victim/survivor of the assault, the person/people in charge of reporting, and the makeup of the institution where the

offense happened. Different populations respond differently in cases of sexual harassment and assault at schools and universities (Brubaker et al. 2018; Klein et al. 2023; Klein and Martin 2021; Ibrahim et al. 2023).

Past research has found that specific populations are more likely to face sexual harassment and assault than others. A content analysis study that researched sexual and relationship violence in LGBTQ+ college students found that students in a sexual minority experienced higher rates of sexual and relationship violence than heterosexual students (Klein et al. 2023). An interview study at a large midwestern university found similar results and stated, “Sexual assault is a pervasive issue within higher education. Research consistently finds that women and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) undergraduate students face the greatest risk of sexual victimization while attending college” (Holland and Cipriano 2021).

Institutional Response:

Reporting sexual assault and harassment at colleges and universities happens through the Title IX reporting process at the school’s Title IX office. The Title IX process often takes months and does not guarantee punishment for the ‘respondent’ (or offender) (Webermann and Holland 2022; Holland and Cipriano 2021). An interview study of college students that took place at four public universities in Maryland found that reporting sexual misconduct is an emotionally draining and often triggering experience for the survivor, and many survivors have to deal with negations and discrediting of emotions from the Title IX staff (Webermann and Holland 2022). As stated above, positionality shapes people’s perceptions, and Title IX staff may not have the same outlook as students reporting sexual misconduct, which makes reporting uncomfortable and sometimes a painful experience (Webermann and Holland 2022). An interview study of college students at a large midwestern university stated, “Recent research has found that the majority of

sexual assault reports to Title IX Offices do not result in formal investigations and, of those that are investigated, there is rarely a finding of ‘responsibility’” (Holland and Cipriano 2021).

People who are sexually harassed give multiple reasons for not reporting sexual harassment to Title IX offices. Many cases of sexual misconduct go unreported in colleges and universities because students are rarely familiar with Title IX policies at their schools, and if they are, they have heard from classmates that the offices are ineffective (Holland and Cipriano 2021; Webermann and Holland 2022; Zarrugh et al. 2020).

Current Study:

The college studied is an elite, small liberal arts college in the Western United States with a student population of about 2,300. The college is a primarily white institution, and most students who attend the institution are upper-middle class and upper-class. This study hopes to fill gaps in the literature, as there has not been much research conducted about sexual harassment/assault at small private liberal arts colleges. This study also focuses both on student experiences with reporting to the Title IX office on their campus and interacting with Title IX resources, as well as student experiences with their peers after they experience sexual harassment/assault. This study aims to better understand student experiences with Title IX and sexual harassment/assault on college campuses so that future students can have better experiences and colleges/universities may improve their administration and Title IX office.

METHODS

To answer the research question, “How are sexual assault and sexual harassment normalized on a small liberal arts college’s campus, and how do institutional and peer responses to sexual harassment/assault affect students who have experienced sexual harassment/assault on the college’s campus,” a study of in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted to understand the social dynamics of the college and explore how students think, talk, and interact with each other, how students think of, talk about, and interact with the institution, and how the institution’s administration and Title IX office presents itself on their public website used by students, faculty, staff, and parents of students.

Five in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted, and each took about forty-five minutes to complete. Convenience sampling was used to find interviewees. However, the sampling was also purposive because it was essential to include people who have experienced sexual harassment or sexual assault and/or interacted with the Title IX office at the college. To find the participants, a message was sent in a group chat for college seniors and a group chat for a sorority on campus. These messages did not receive many responses, so people and groups were asked individually in person. Some participants also asked friends if they would be interested in the study, so snowball sampling was also used. Participants were told that the interview was about students' experiences with Title IX and sexual harassment on campus. No deception was used. Of the five participants, three were women, one was a man, and one was nonbinary. Four out of the five participants were seniors, and one was a sophomore. Three participants went through the formal Title IX process for themselves, and two interacted with the Title IX office in other capacities. All of the participants experienced sexual harassment or

assault during their time at the college. Table 1 shows the demographic information of the study participants. All names are pseudonyms.

Table 1:

PSEUDONYM	GENDER	SEXUAL ORIENTATION	CLASS YEAR	REPORTED TO TITLE IX? Y/N
Birch	Nonbinary	Lesbian	Senior	Y
Walter	Cisgender male	Bisexual	Sophomore	N
Laura	Cisgender woman	Straight	Senior	N
Samantha	Cisgender woman	Straight	Senior	Y
Alexis	Cisgender woman	Pansexual	Senior	Y

The interviews took place on the college's campus in dormitories and in participants' homes off campus. They were given the choice of where they would feel most comfortable. Participants were asked about their experience at the college. Included were questions about party culture at the college, including the effect of drugs and alcohol on the sexual character of a space, as well as questions about their view on the college's administration, students, and faculty, and they were asked to share stories about times where they felt uncomfortable due to sexual banter, touching, or flirting. The interviews were transcribed using otter.ai and cleaned manually. The data was reviewed and codes were then drawn directly from the data (i.e. inductive coding). Codes came from themes in participants' experiences and answers to interview questions (Weiss 1994). Recurrent themes and preliminary codes included: institutional neglect/silence, Title IX lack of resources, Title IX ineffectivity, positive and negative community responses, and positive and negative participant responses to sexual behavior. The data was coded using NVivo 12.

RESULTS

Institutional Neglect:

Many participants felt as though the college as an institution is not doing enough to support victims of sexual harassment and assault and minimize sexual harassment and assault on campus. Though all participants expressed that mitigating sexual harassment and assault is a hard job, they all communicated explicit or implied criticism of the way the institution handles (or does not handle) sexual harassment and assault on campus. Many participants mentioned watching an online information session during their freshman orientation as a positive from the college's administration. Still, most said that they had already learned the information before attending the information session, so it felt redundant. Three findings were drawn from the interviews relating to the code 'institutional neglect.' First, numerous participants mentioned the silence from the administration surrounding the topic of sexual harassment and assault. Second, participants cited a lack of resources for victims of sexual assault and a lack of repercussions for those accused of sexual assault. Third, many students do not know about the steps they can take if they have been sexually harassed or assaulted.

Silent Administration

All participants of the study expressed that the administration was not doing much to support their students who have experienced sexual harassment and/or assault. Numerous participants conveyed their concern about the administration's silence around topics of sexual harassment and assault. Laura, a senior at the college, was asked how she thought the college's administration was doing in terms of handling and mitigating sexual harassment and sexual

assault on campus and what she thinks they could/should do differently. She expressed that she felt the college's administration should be doing more and should take sexual assault/harassment more seriously.

Laura: think when someone assaults somebody, it needs to be taken more seriously...I feel like it's dismissed and like brushed under the rug, and it's like, Oh, that happened again? And like, I feel like, there needs to be a more serious tone about assaults at the school, because it happens here, obviously, as it does in other places, but like, I don't know, I think it's hard because it's like a very sensitive subject. So I feel like it's not like President X could like send an email and be like, "Don't assault people", like, I don't really know, actually tangibly what they could do. And I think it's good that they communicate resources to students, but I think that somehow there needs to be, like some sort of punishment system for people who assaulted people. Like it can't just be taken as like, "Oh, you did that, so slap on the wrist."

Interviewer: So you think the administration should take it more seriously?

Laura: Yeah. Like, I feel like I feel like assaulting someone is like, cause for expulsion. I've never heard of that happening.

In this example, Laura tells the interviewer that she feels the administration is not doing or saying enough about sexual harassment and assault and that sexual harassment and assault is an important topic that should be talked about more on campus. She conveys her concern for the lack of repercussions for perpetrators of sexual harassment/assault at the school while acknowledging that it is a complicated issue for the administration to navigate.

When asked the same question, Samantha shared Laura's concern about the lack of communication and resources coming from the school's administration. She talked explicitly about Title IX and student-led reform actions.

"I guess I don't see that much coming from the administration about Title Nine in general, considering that, like, I do know so many women, especially on this campus that have been sexually assaulted during their time here. One would think that it would be a bigger area of concern for the administration. But I think that also depends on like, what gets brought to them. And if a lot of people don't go forward with the Title Nine process, I don't know if it's like, a big concern with the administration. Like, if they don't see this

happening on the administration level, then maybe they're not like aware that it's it is a big problem. But I also know that there was a group, I think, my sophomore year or last year, that was working on submitting a huge Title Nine reform document. And I have no idea where that ended up. Like it was never brought up. Never saw an announcement from the administration on that level. And I know a lot of people worked really hard on that. And that was a bit disappointing. As far as like what they could be doing, I don't totally know. Like, how do you solve sexual assault it's like a hard issue, I think, generally, like, more information, especially to like, male identifying students, I don't want to like over-generalize, but like, they are the main perpetrators of sexual assault. More like mandatory education programs for the whole student body, I think would be helpful... But I don't know, I would like to see more concern from the administration about Title Nine.” -Samantha

Samantha explained that sexual assault is a prevalent issue on campus and is not talked about enough by the administration, although student-led Title IX reform actions have been presented to them. She expressed frustration with the administration and recommended more training and information spread to students.

Lack of Support and Repercussions

Per the silence from the school's administration, several participants also mentioned that the institution does not have many systems in place to help victims of sexual harassment and assault feel safe and supported on campus. Some participants voiced that the school has a few plans in place to help support their students, but they did not give any examples of those support systems or share any experiences using them. This demonstrates that the systems in place are ineffective or difficult to access. Walter talked about how he did not know of many actions the administration is taking to prevent sexual harassment or assault.

Walter: I honestly have not heard too much in terms of the administration making any strides to prevent sexual assault other than like training through different groups. But I don't really know much outside of that about what they like have done or are trying to do

Interviewer: How do you feel about that that you haven't heard really a lot of things about it?

Walter: Yeah, it's it's definitely not good. I feel like there's more that can be done I think in terms of prevention. I think they do do a good job though. But there's always room to improve.

Walter did not provide explicit examples of what the college does to handle sexual harassment and assault. He expressed that he thinks the administration is doing a good job but did not explain why he felt that way. Walter had a lot of mixed opinions about what the administration does in terms of mitigating sexual harassment and assault. Birch talked about how the only student support group they knew of on campus was hard to find and not affiliated with the college:

“They got a poster up like a year before, but like their information wasn't easy to find. There was no like direct way to contact them. And they can't be a ‘college’-affiliated group for like a couple of them. So there is actually no ‘college’ affiliated group as a support group. Like they are a group of ‘college’ students, and they are a support group, but they aren't affiliated with [the college]. I can't remember the reason why. But I think- Oh, because [the college] wouldn't let them be anonymous.” -Birch

All participants of the study had mixed opinions on how the institution handles the topic of sexual harassment and assault. This confusion lends itself to a broader confusion about what resources are available to them and what resources are effective in supporting students who have experienced sexual harassment and assault.

Uncertainty About Resources

Participants expressed that they learned about the school's Title IX resources during their freshman orientation and had not received any information from the school since then. Most of what students know about resources for sexual assault and harassment comes from other students who have interacted with those resources rather than outreach from those resources themselves. Samantha demonstrates this in this excerpt from her interview when she was asked what she knows about the Title IX resources on campus and where she got the information.

“So I had a friend who was also sexually assaulted by the same guy. And she finally told me about it. And then I was like, Oh, my gosh, me too. And she told me she had been talking to the confidential Title Nine resource. Um, about the process and what her options were. And that's kind of how I learned a bit about it. And then also, like, I had been through like freshman orientation, where they tell you about Title Nine, and also had a lot of like job trainings to do with Title Nine, through different like student employment positions that I had on campus. So I knew a bit about it. But I wasn't totally committed to going through with it until I heard about other people.” -Samantha

Samantha voiced that she learned about the Title IX process after a friend was assaulted by the same man who assaulted her, and she shared in-depth information about the Title IX process and their options. Samantha mentions job training on campus as more of an afterthought, which signifies that the most valuable information she received was from a fellow student.

Birch had a similar experience in which they learned most of the information they know about the Title IX resources on campus from friends, and also learned a bit from the school as they worked as a First Year Mentor. When asked about where they got their knowledge about the Title IX office they responded:

“I got that information through, like my friend group, there are some people that have already like, done stuff with them. And one of my like, friends, boyfriend works with them, and that kind of stuff. And I'm, I'm a [Freshman] mentor and they came in during like the training week and talk to us and stuff. So I already knew one of them. And then later in the year, one of my friends had to go deal with a similar situation to me, actually. But that's probably the extent of my relationship with them.” -Birch

As demonstrated in these examples, students learn more about Title IX resources from other students/word of mouth rather than outreach from the Title IX office and college administration themselves.

Title IX Lack of Support

Every participant conveyed serious criticisms they had of the college's Title IX office. All students mentioned that the Title IX office lacked resources and that going through the Title IX

process was emotionally draining and not necessarily effective in making the people who reported feel safe and supported on campus. Title IX is a different section than the college's administration because although the college has a Title IX office and hires its staff, it has to operate under its own set of rules put forth by the federal government, as Title IX is a federal policy. That being said, the office still has the capacity to do outreach to students and organizations on campus and treat students reporting sexual harassment and assault with respect, grace, and kindness.

Most of the participants mentioned that the Title IX office at the college is understaffed, and that is negatively affecting the participants' experience going through the Title IX process. When discussing the formal Title IX process, Alexis said, "I don't think it's very effective, mostly because I think they're understaffed." Participants also had criticisms about the Title IX coordinator who hears the cases brought forth by students at the college. This is significant because only one person who works for the college hears Title IX cases and interacts with students going through the reporting process. Alexis continued after the previous quote, "I don't think it helps that they only have a man working there. So I know a lot of women feel uncomfortable talking to men about things like that." Samantha shared similar sentiments and critiqued the Title IX coordinator.

"There were some people in the office that were not as great to deal with. And like looking back, or like knowing more about the timeline department. Now, I know that they're incredibly short-staffed and all of that." -Samantha

As shown, participants blame the fact that the Title IX office is understaffed for many of their complaints with the office and the staff. When asked if she would recommend Title IX resources to someone who has experienced sexual violence, Alexis also voiced that the formal Title IX process is not always enough on its own.

“You have to be really prepared on your own to go to them. I think that like they're not enough on their own. I also think that like, especially with the fact that I got a lawyer for it, the fact that you can have a lawyer of your representative means that it's really like, difficult if you don't have the money to pay for a lawyer to feel like you're being adequately represented in the Title Nine process, I think would have been really scary if I didn't have a lawyer. So that's definitely something that I would tell someone I would also say like, for me, personally, I used the Title Nine process as using it just for the investigation, not for the resolution process. Because what I cared about knowing the truth not not having it put on their transcript or something like that, holding them I didn't feel the need to hold them accountable under [the college] as an institution. And I don't know what that you know, I don't know what that process looks like when you actually do do the hearing and get the formal resolution. Yeah, it's also really time consuming, it takes forever so that's another consideration. I think it's like kind of like a scale you have to weigh it whether or not you have the emotional capacity and the time and the ability like the frankly the money to deal with it through [the college] which sucks that's not really equitable.” -Alexis

Many participants also pointed out that the Title IX process can be long and drawn out, which causes more emotional harm to the person reporting the incident of sexual harassment/assault.

Alexis points out that the process interfered with her school work and left her so frustrated that she did not finish the entire resolution process through the Title IX office.

Interviewer: was the process. I know that you said that the process was time-consuming and draining. Would you say that it was excessively so? Were you excessively emotionally drained? Or did you have enough time to do your schoolwork, etc.?

Alexis: Sometimes I felt really drained. When it was like a busy week when I had like an interview or something like that. It took six months. And I didn't even finish the process, which is appalling. Like, literally I know that they had to interview a lot of people, but at what point like, like, there's no way it took six months to interview people. And I know they're understaffed, but I still like it was so like, I did not need to see it that long. Now it was part of the reason why I was also like, I just need to be done with this. Like, I don't want to have to f*ing sit here because there was a very real possibility that like this would keep going on all the way through [the end of the school year]. And it wouldn't have even been resolved until the end of [the school year] which would have just been ridiculous because the student would have already left [the college] and graduated. So that was just like really frustrating. I think like, maybe like on average, like three days out of every block, I was kind of like really set back by the whole process and had to take like, like mental health afternoons or days and stuff like that, which really adds up because it was like the equivalent of like five blocks, which would be 15 days right.

Other students also shared Alexis's frustrations with the Title IX office. Laura recalled a story about a friend who underwent the formal Title IX process and felt the office did not support her.

“One of my friends had a pretty unfortunate experience with them. She was assaulted. And the Title Nine office like basically met with her like, heard her out, told her that there wasn't really much that they could do. And the guy faced no punishment, she went to [city] authorities there was like a court hearing. She was really frustrated with the Title Nine department. And like, felt, she felt really dismissed felt like they weren't listening to her felt like they sided with the guy kind of automatically, and was really frustrated that like, this guy is just walking around campus, and I have friends who have that same exact feeling of like, something has happened between them. And someone that was really uncomfortable. And whether Title Nine knows about it or not, like, it's really frustrating, disheartening, that, like, people can, you know, assault people and then just like walk around on campus with no punishments.” -Laura

Overall, participants had overwhelming criticisms about the Title IX office and the lack of support and comfort they give to students at the college.

Community and Peer Responses:

Participants all mentioned that they feel as though the way a person accused of assault is treated by members of the school community (especially other students) has a significant effect on the person who accused them of sexual harassment/assault. Participants described both positive and negative responses and attitudes that community members had after hearing that someone had been accused of sexual harassment and assault.

It is important to note that all students voiced that student-to-student sexual harassment/assault is the most common type of sexual harassment/assault on campus and student-to-staff and/or student-to-faculty sexual misconduct rarely occurs at the school.

Positive Responses

Several participants gave overwhelming positive examples of how the college's students support each other and support victims of sexual harassment and assault. Specifically, participants talked about student attitudes and actions towards people who have been accused

of/committed sexual harassment/assault. Multiple participants described that students on campus do not tolerate sexual harassment or sexual assault, and students accused of such things are not welcome in community spaces like parties and mixers. When asked how people who are accused of sexual harassment/assault are treated on campus, Laura said:

“I know that, like someone who assaulted my friend, like, obviously, I'm not going to talk to that person. Yeah, like, just knowing that someone did that to my friend, like, makes me very uncomfortable with that person. Like, basically, if I've heard that someone has done that, like, that's an immediate, like, I won't interact with you type of thing to me... Like, generally, if someone is accused of assault they either like gather a reputation, or like people just kind of steer clear.”

Samantha talked more about the community as a whole and the overall attitude around sexual assault and harassment on campus when she was asked how people accused of sexual assault are treated by other students on campus and how she thinks that affects the person who accused them of sexual assault.

“I think, especially at [the college] because we're such a tight knit and small community, you hear about a lot of that stuff, even if they haven't been accused at all. And I think especially like, female identifying students band together and try to not engage with those people at all. Like, I can recount, like, countless times where I've like, mentioned, like, Oh, I'm like, in a group project with this person. And then other people in the room are like, ‘Oh, my gosh, do you know what he did? Or like, like, going to this party? And there's somebody there that everybody's like, Oh, maybe we should go.’ Like stuff like that. I think when people have gone through the formal Title Nine process, I think it's a very similar, kind of like, lots of people hear about it, especially if they are, you know, convicted of one thing either way.”- Samantha

Banding together and listening to those who have experienced sexual harassment and assault is favorable for those members of the community. It makes the person who experience sexual harassment/assault feel validated, which is incredibly important for someone who has experienced a traumatic event like sexual harassment/assault. Although word travels fast on campus, not everyone shares the same sentiments about how people accused of sexual harassment/assault or people who committed sexual harassment/assault should be treated.

Negative Responses

Students who participated in the study shared a host of negative examples when talking about how people accused of sexual harassment and assault are treated on campus. All students shared at least one example of a student who was accused of sexual harassment and assault, not facing appropriate social repercussions. Walter talked about his own surprise at how students he knows treated a respondent of a Title IX case who was found responsible for committing sexual harassment. He also explained how the treatment of respondents/those accused of sexual harassment/assault affects victims of sexual harassment/assault very significantly.

Walter: I remember in my case, I remember seeing the kid or around like talking to people, and I was just shocked that like he still had friends after, like having a Title Nine case against him. I think people might be a bit too lenient and naive about it. Don't know about other campuses, though.

Interviewer: How do you think that the treatment of the people who are you know, accused of sexual assault? Um, you said that you think that some people might be too lenient. Do you think that there's, this affects the person who accused them of sexual assault? And, like, in what ways?

Walter: Yeah, I think it can definitely affect the person. It can, I feel like it somewhat disregards their feelings. And like, what happened to them? And then it also diminishes the severity of it. And yeah, I'd say just it's a total disregard for like the other person.

Through the interviews, it was found that there were mixed attitudes and responses from the college's student population about how those accused of sexual harassment/assault should be treated and are treated on campus. This dissonance affects those who have experienced sexual harassment/assault because they can feel like they aren't being heard, they may still have to experience the person who harassed them at social gatherings (especially since it is a small campus), and they can feel a general lack of support for students who have experienced sexual harassment/assault.

DISCUSSION

This study has three main findings. Through the interview process, it was found that students feel the institution and college administration are not doing enough to support students who have experienced sexual harassment/assault and/or mitigate sexual harassment/assault on campus. It was also found that the Title IX office on campus lacks crucial resources to be able to safely and effectively handle reports of sexual harassment/assault, and overall, the process makes students feel unsafe and emotionally drained. Lastly, this study found that students who have experienced sexual harassment/assault at the college are highly affected by their peers' responses and attitudes towards students who have been accused of sexual harassment/assault.

Past research has found that institutional betrayal and ineffective Title IX policies are more prevalent than not, and the lack of support contributes to emotional distress and institutional distrust from students who have experienced sexual harassment/assault (Holland and Cipriano 2021; Weberman and Holland 2022). In this study, students felt that the administration and Title IX office did not provide adequate punishments for students accused of sexual harassment/assault, which contributed to students feeling uncomfortable on campus during their Title IX case. For students to feel safe and comfortable on campus, there needs to be an improvement from the administration in terms of communication and resources for sexual harassment and assault, more resources and supportive staff members in the Title IX office, and an overall consensus from the student body to support survivors of sexual harassment and assault and hold perpetrators to an appropriate degree of social repercussions. Responses to sexual harassment/assault by peers affect the community's attitudes and, in turn, affect people who have experienced sexual harassment/assault in that community (Dinh et al. 2022; O'Connor et al.

2021). All of the improvements mentioned must take place for students to have a more supportive experience after encountering sexual violence on campus.

This research expands on research done in the past because it provides insight into the workings of a small liberal arts college rather than a large university. It also focuses heavily on student experiences both with the college and systems it has in place and with community attitudes and peer responses to sexual harassment/assault. This study provides insight into the contributing aspects of the normalization of sexual harassment/assault on a small college campus and a broad scope of factors that contribute to students' positive and negative experiences on campus after experiencing sexual harassment/assault. This research is essential for policies and practices at colleges and universities. By understanding the contributing factors to students' negative experiences with on-campus sexual harassment/assault, school administrations should be able to make meaningful and effective changes to better aid their students and foster a safe and supportive community for all students who have experienced sexual harassment/assault.

This study is limited due to its small sample size. With more participants, there may have been more extensive insight and a more comprehensive range of experiences. Future research may look deeper into the relationship between community attitudes and peer responses to sexual harassment and assault and students' positive and negative experiences after their exposure to sexual harassment/assault on campus.

CONCLUSION

This study sheds light on the effects of institutional and community responses to sexual harassment and sexual assault within the context of a small liberal arts college. Despite global awareness campaigns and institutional regulations, sexual violence remains a deeply rooted

problem on college campuses. The research examined how sexual violence is normalized within the college's culture and investigated the impact of institutional and peer responses on students who have experienced harassment or assault.

The literature cited highlights the broader context of sexual harassment and gender-based violence, emphasizing the role of power, capital, and cultural factors. Theoretical frameworks, such as Bourdieu's concept of capital and Galtung's violence triangle, provided a lens through which to understand the intricate dynamics contributing to the normalization of sexual violence.

This study employed in-depth semi-structured interviews to explore the social dynamics of the college, revealing three key findings. Firstly, students perceived insufficient support from the institution and administration regarding sexual harassment/assault, expressing dissatisfaction with the handling of cases. Secondly, the Title IX office lacked crucial resources, making students feel unsafe and emotionally drained during the reporting process. Lastly, the study identified the significant impact of peer responses on students who experienced harassment/assault, emphasizing the need for a supportive community.

The discussion emphasized the prevalence of institutional betrayal and ineffective Title IX policies, contributing to emotional distress and institutional distrust among survivors. The study recommended improvements in communication and resources from the administration, enhanced support in the Title IX office, and a collective effort from the student body to foster a safe environment. Acknowledging the influence of peer responses, the study underscored the importance of creating a community that supports survivors and holds perpetrators accountable.

By focusing on a small liberal arts college, this research contributes valuable insights distinct from previous studies conducted in larger university settings. The study's emphasis on both institutional systems and community attitudes provides a comprehensive understanding of

the factors contributing to students' experiences after encountering sexual harassment/assault. This understanding is crucial for informing effective policies and practices at colleges and universities, promoting a safer and more supportive environment for all students.

REFERENCES

- Armstrong, Elizabeth A., Miriam Gleckman-Krut, and Lanora Johnson. 2018. "Silence, Power, and Inequality: An Intersectional Approach to Sexual Violence." *Annual Review of Sociology* 44(1):99–122.
- Barker, K. and T. R. Galardi. 2015. "Diagnostic Domain Defense: Autism Spectrum Disorder and the DSM-5." *Social Problems* 62(1):120–40.
- Bourdieu, Pierre. 1983. "The Forms of Capital." In *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education*, edited by J. G. Richardson, 241-258. New York: Greenwood Press.
- Brubaker, Sarah Jane, Bre'Auna Beasley, Brittany Keegan, and Tammi Slovinsky. 2017. "Teaching and Learning Guide for: Measuring and Reporting Campus Sexual Assault: Privilege and Exclusion in What We Know and What We Do." *Sociology Compass* 12(2).
- Dinh, Tuyen, Laurel Mikalowski, and Margaret Stockdale. 2021. *When Good People Sexually Harass: The Role of Power and Moral Licensing on Sexual Harassment Perceptions and Intentions*.

- Dunn, Deborah and Michael J. Cody. 2000. "Account Credibility and Public Image: Excuses, Justifications, Denials, and Sexual Harassment." *Communication Monographs* 67(4):372–91.
- Esala, Jennifer J. 2013. "Communities of Denial: The Co-Construction of Gendered Adolescent Violence." *Deviant Behavior* 34(2):97–114.
- Galtung, Johan. 1990. "Cultural Violence." *Journal of Peace Research* 27(3):291–305.
- Griswold, Wendy. 2013. "Culture and the Cultural Diamond." *Cultures and Societies in a Changing World* 1–18.
- Holland, Kathryn J. and Allison E. Cipriano. 2021. "Does a Report = Support? A Qualitative Analysis of College Sexual Assault Survivors' Title IX Office Knowledge, Perceptions, and Experiences." *Analyses of Social Issues and Public Policy* 21(1):1054–81.
- Ibrahim, Sara F., Enas M. Mostafa, Sanaa M. Aly, and Abeer M. Hagra. 2023. "Sexual Harassment: Knowledge, Prevalence, Pattern, and Impacts among Egyptian Female College Students." *Violence and Victims* 38(3):345–57.
- Jackman, Mary R. n.d. "Gender, Violence, and Harassment." *Handbook of the Sociology of Gender* 275–317.
- Klein, L. B. and Sandra L. Martin. 2021. "Sexual Harassment of College and University Students: A Systematic Review." *Trauma, Violence, & Abuse* 22(4):777–92.

Klein, L. B. et al. 2022. "Sexual and Relationship Violence among LGBTQ+ College Students: A Scoping Review." *Trauma, Violence, & Abuse* 24(4):2196–2209.

Maypole, Donald E. and Rosemarie Skaine. 1983. "Sexual Harassment in the Workplace." *Social Work* 28(5):385–90.

National Center for Education Statistics. (2023). "Criminal Incidents at Postsecondary Institutions." Condition of Education. U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences. Retrieved [date], from <https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator/a21>.

Newman, Meredith A., Robert A. Jackson, and Douglas D. Baker. 2003. "Sexual Harassment in the Federal Workplace." *Public Administration Review* 63(4):472–83.

O'Connor, Kimberly W., Michelle Drouin, and Tyler Niedermeyer. 2021. "How Do Age, Sex, Political Orientation, Religiosity, and Sexism Affect Perceptions of Sex Assault/Harassment Allegations?" *Sexuality & Culture* 25(5):1605–19.

Prior, Sarah and Brooke de Heer. 2021. "Everyday Terrorism: Campus Sexual Violence and the Neoliberal University." *Sociology Compass* 15(9).

Wallace, Michelle. 2000. "Workplace Training Initiatives: Implications for Women in the Australian Workforce." *Journal of European Industrial Training* 24(5):268–74.

- Webermann, Aliya R. and Kathryn J. Holland. 2022. "Inconsistency Is the Consistency: The Title IX Reporting Process for Sexual and Gender-Based Misconduct within Maryland Public Universities." *Psychology of Women Quarterly* 46(4):468–83.
- Weiss, Robert Stuart. 1994. "Chapter 6: Analysis of Data." Pp. 151–82 in *Learning from strangers: The art and method of qualitative interview studies*. New York, NY: Free Press.
- Zarrugh, Amina, Erin Carpenter, Jason Ginnings, Devin Kaiser, and Suzanne Yost. 2020. "What Is Title IX? Toward a Campus-Based Pedagogy to Study Inequality." *Teaching Sociology* 48(3):196–210.