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## ABSTRACT

Title of Document: RECEIVE, RESPOND, REPORT: FACULTY EXPERIENCES WITH STUDENTS' DISCLOSURES OF SEXUAL ASSAULT

Jaclyn Stone, Doctor of Philosophy, 2020

Directed By: Dr. Bambi Chapin  
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Sexual violence is a pervasive problem at institutions of higher education, contributing to a hostile environment that impedes institutional missions and individuals' success. Institutions are challenged to comply with regulations and laws, while responding to the needs of their communities. The purpose of this study was to understand the experiences of faculty members as recipients of student disclosures of sexual violence. By applying ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) which situates the complex interplay of individual and institutional relationships and social and cultural values as interdependent, I sought to understand the contexts in which disclosures occurred and how such factors informed faculty responses. I endeavored to understand the ways in which institutional betrayal influenced faculty members' perceptions of responsibilities and the actual enactment of those duties.

In order to understand faculty responses to disclosures of sexual assault, I conducted and analyzed interviews with 16 faculty members from six Maryland universities, contextualized by institutional observations and professional campus

experience. I found that key to understanding faculty experiences of receiving disclosures was their perception of their role as mediators between the institution and students. Faculty members' beliefs about the extent to which they should work in compliance with or in opposition to institutional policies, in combination with their understanding of the purpose of such policies and practices, informed their beliefs and actions with students. Participants demonstrated limited knowledge of policy and a disconnect between what they believed they were required to do as responsible employees and what they actually did when faced with disclosures. Moreover, whether in their instructional or advisory roles, faculty interacted with students based on the extent of their role-based intimacy with a disclosing student, as demonstrated through their pedagogical and relational approaches and their balancing of care for students and obligations to policy.

This work demonstrates that institutions could benefit from understanding faculty experiences through an ecological systems framework as they aim to craft policies and practices that more effectively support survivors while remaining compliant with laws. Increased responsiveness to nuanced circumstances, transparency, and a culture of trust surrounding sexual assault disclosures and responses is critical to institutional-level change.

RECEIVE, RESPOND, REPORT:  
FACULTY EXPERIENCES WITH STUDENTS' DISCLOSURES  
OF SEXUAL ASSAULT

By

Jaclyn Stone

Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of the  
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## Preface

We find ourselves in this troubling and historic moment in the midst of a global pandemic. Many have used the term “unprecedented” for this particular moment in time, which includes a health crisis and also illuminates the lack of infrastructure our nation has to address difficult situations. I want to acknowledge the impact that the pandemic has had on our individual experiences and collective communities, financially and relationally. I want to also acknowledge that even during this extraordinary time, there are students who are experiencing interpersonal and family violence and figuring out how and with whom to share those experiences. The importance of studying student and faculty relationships is highlighted by this national and international crisis.

In addition to this major international public health crisis, the current presidential administration has presented additional challenges to the field of higher education throughout the time that I developed and completed this study with the embroilment in sexual assault scandals and a regulatory landscape that shifted from one academic year to the next. These raised questions for study participants and the nation about behavior change and victimization and continued to make a case for the need for social movements such as Tarana Burke’s #MeToo movement. I conducted interviews in the midst of the hearings for Supreme Court justice Brett Kavanaugh which contributed to many conversations about the credibility of survivors’ experiences, statutes of limitations, and stories of redemption. and an emphasis on campus procedures. During the time of writing this dissertation, the Secretary of Education reversed and nullified a substantial portion of the previous administration’s



changes to higher education's ability to manage campus sexual misconduct; and as a result has created instability and uncertainty for all institutional stakeholders. At the time of the defense of this work, institutions were just days away from complying a new set of processes that were issued amid the pandemic in May of 2020, which included 2033 pages of rules. As institutions scramble to comply, administrators find themselves grappling with interpreting rules, supporting students, and preserving their own reputations, all amidst a pandemic with enormous financial implications.

Challenges to national infrastructure, combined with the instability of the regulatory climate for institutions to respond to sexual assault and relationship violence, present an even more pressing need to understand the ways in which sexual assault and relationship violence are experienced and responded to on college campuses. As part of this, it is imperative to understand and address the experiences of faculty who respond to students' disclosures of such violence. The complex roles of faculty are not disentangled from these challenges, but rather are directly impacted by them. In order for institutions of higher education to support survivors and mitigate risk of violence, research and policies must aim to address all aspects of the university in order to foster campuses that are trauma-informed and endeavor to be communities free of violence. I contribute to this charge by presenting analyses grounded in the experiences of faculty as recipients of students' disclosures.

## **Dedication**

To Liese Lee Berkowitz. You are a survivor, a leader, a caretaker, a changemaker, and the strongest advocate for social justice. You continue to inspire new generations of women and my commitment to change is part of your legacy. I love you.

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In Judaism, the number 18 means life and things that come to us in denominations of 18 are considered a good omen. I am so grateful for the community of cohort 18. To Mary Gallagher, Frank Anderson, Katie Morris, Kyle Goehner, and Drs. Sedrick Smith and Sherella Cupid, it was a privilege to be with you in this

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## **Chapter I: Introduction to the Study**

Sexual violence is a pervasive issue at institutions of higher education. Behaviors such as rape, stalking, sexual harassment, and intimate partner violence contribute to an environment that is hostile and impede institutional missions and individual academic success. Institutions are challenged to comply with federal regulations and laws, while also responding to the needs of their communities through policies and procedures. Evidence-based solutions that enable institutions to satisfy the regulatory climate while providing caring responses to individuals are limited, and thus colleges and universities continue to grapple with how to both prevent and respond to sexual violence.

In order to enact policies which effectively address the hostile climate produced by sexual violence in a legally compliant manner, it is necessary to understand the experiences of students, staff, and faculty who engage in various contexts of the institution. Theories about systemic sexual violence and literature about individual consequences of sexual assault aim to explain how and why sexual assault continues to pervade and shape the context of higher education. Studies have primarily focused on the critically important perspectives of survivors' experiences with violence, disclosures, and support seeking; however, as a result of this focus, there are minimal accounts and analyses of the uniqueness of faculty members' experiences with receiving and responding to disclosures of sexual assault. Utilizing student experiences alone or focusing only on the combined experiences of faculty and staff to understand sexual assault does not give the full picture of the issue nor does it provide the framework for an inclusive institutional response.

Faculty members play critical roles in institutions of higher education. They are responsible for the quality of instruction and mentorship students receive (Astin, 1977, 1993; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991), they build a rich culture of research, and they contribute to shaping the culture of the intellectual and campus communities. As a result, faculty experiences with sexual assault and intimate partner violence disclosures are essential to examine. Along with other university employees, faculty members are designated as “responsible employees”—that is, individuals who are typically required to participate in a compelled disclosure processes (Holland et al., 2018)—which mandates that when they learn of students’ experiences with sexual misconduct they are required to share the information disclosed to them with a staff member such as the university’s Title IX coordinator. These disclosures are situated in the context of faculty-student relationships, emerging from instructional or advising interactions; the closeness or lack of closeness of interactions between students and faculty can shape disclosure experiences, as I describe throughout this dissertation. In short, exploring how faculty experience student disclosures and the contextual framing of sexual violence that surrounds these disclosures is crucial to understanding and disrupting the crisis of campus sexual assault and intimate partner violence.

This dissertation amplifies faculty members’ experiences of receiving and responding to student disclosures as expressed through their own words and stories. By analyzing insights shared by the faculty, informed by intentional theoretical and methodological decisions, I identify policy-informed and person-centered recommendations to advance institutional approaches to managing sexual

misconduct. Through in-depth interviews and contextualizing observations, I used a feminist grounded approach to theorize about the experiences faculty who have received and will receive disclosures of sexual violence from students by grounding their knowledge, awareness, and understanding in their individual and collective experiences. From their narratives, I determined that faculty experience disclosures of sexual assault through their own contextual framing of sexual assault. Through their own interpretation of this contextual framing, faculty respond along a continuum of compliance with or resistance to campus policies, as they grapple with their own relationships to policies and the institution. Faculty interactions with students in instructional and advisory roles inform their understanding of institutional cultures of violence and related policies and processes. By understanding these faculty experiences through the lens of ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), which situates the complex interplay of individual and institutional relationships and social and cultural values as interdependent, I assert that institutions can craft policies and practices that more effectively work to curtail sexual violence on campus and support survivors.

For institutions to address sexual assault effectively at individual, collective, and environmental levels, research must give attention to faculty experiences and beliefs about how they should, could, and do respond to students throughout the institutional and higher education eco-systems. Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory provides a conceptual framework to consider sexual violence in multiple contexts, and also serves as an analytic tool to understand the interplay of individuals, groups, and policies to understand the breadth of any social and cultural

phenomenon. The perspectives and beliefs of faculty members about their duties to respond to student disclosures of sexual violence directly inform their actions with students, administrators, and polices. Those actions position the faculty member as a mediator between the student and the administrative processes of the institution, which can impact how the student experiences the institutional climate, interpersonal relationships with university employees, and their individual well-being.

This introductory chapter describes discursive and legal circumstances that impact how institutions attempt to handle sexual violence because institutional management of sexual violence has a direct impact on the expectations and experiences of faculty. The framing of campus sexual violence in the media informs the regulations universities are accountable for, which circuitously reinforces narratives of institutional mismanagement. As such, I describe several high-profile cases of problematic mismanagement of campus sexual violence to illustrate the need for regulations to protect students. I then present the language and policy frames for sexual assault in higher education to emphasize how the regulations are impacted by contested definitions, further complicating institutions' abilities to help effectively manage violence across ecological contexts. After discussing these more macro-level perspectives, I will narrow in on the specific challenges that faculty face at the institutional level with a discussion that foregrounds the literature, research methodology, and findings of the research. I conclude this chapter with an organizational overview of the remaining five chapters.

## Purpose and Research Question

This study was designed to understand the ways in which university faculty experience student's disclosures of sexual assault and intimate partner violence. It examines attitudes, beliefs, and reflections of university faculty regarding their engagement with students, the institution, and sexual assault discourse. The intended use of these research findings is to apply the ways in which faculty experiences with disclosures are understood to inform and improve institutional policies and practices. An outcome of these improvements would be for faculty to be more educated about the rationale and scope of their duties, which can inform their actions with students. As a result, faculty will be more prepared to anticipate and receive disclosures. They will have increased confidence in the techniques and resources for their response to students who disclose. By doing this work, the institutional environment can shift toward transparency and trust among community members, resulting in the destigmatization of disclosures and support-seeking.

In order to provide institutions with the information to make these policy improvements, I focused on a single research question: *How do faculty experience student disclosures of sexual misconduct?* To answer it, I conducted semi-structured interviews with 16 full-time faculty members at six institutions in the state of Maryland between July 2018 and April 2019. The faculty members each participated in a single interview after confirming, based on self-reports, they had received a student disclosure of intimate partner violence or sexual assault in their role as a faculty member. Interviews ranged between 30 minutes and 114 minutes, with the average interview being 65 minutes in length.

Faculty participants represented a range of positions and identities. The faculty positions included those with various tenured and non-tenured appointments of Associate Professor, Assistant Professor, Lecturer and Professor of Practice. The three Assistant Professors were actively seeking tenure and promotion as the time of the interview. The faculty represented a variety of disciplines in the arts, STEM, humanities, social sciences, human services and interdisciplinary programs. There were four male participants and 12 female participants. I did not ask participants about their sexual orientation, but three of them, two women and one man, identified themselves as lesbian, gay, or queer. All of the participants identified as cisgender. The three participants who identified as Black worked at a Historically Black College or University while the remaining 13 participants who identified as White worked at predominantly White institutions.

The results of this research reveal that faculty experience students' disclosures of sexual assault and intimate partner violence through their existing knowledge, beliefs, and perceptions of social and institutional framing of sexual assault. Faculty tend to see themselves as working as either an agent of the institution or in opposition to problematic narratives of institutional betrayal. Their individualized understandings of institutional management of sexual assault is iteratively informed by their interactions with students in instructional and advisory roles.

Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory provides a useful frame to conceptualize the complex and interdependent nature of individual and institutional relationships as well as social and cultural values. This analysis demonstrates the necessity of interventions that reach across contexts, including policy, training, and



relational dynamics, in order to provide students with a caring response, while maintaining compliance within a challenging regulatory climate. In the next sections, I first apply Bronfenbrenner's theory to sexual assault in higher education broadly and then narrow in to demonstrate the interplay of ecological contexts and the impacts for faculty.

### **Sexual Violence in Higher Education**

Campus sexual violence exists across various ecological contexts. I discuss Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory and its application to sexual assault disclosures in detail in Chapter II, but for the purposes of this discussion, contexts are the intersecting ecological domains (micro-, meso-, exo-, macrosystems) that exist outside of the individual. To situate sexual violence in higher education, I present examples from the exosystem, where individuals engage directly with policies, laws, and language, which are influenced by macro-level cultural values. I first present several cases of sexual violence in higher education to demonstrate the ways in which narratives of college violence extend beyond the campus. After framing the issue through examples of administrative collusion and problematic institutional response, I address the specific terminology that defines the scope of sexual violence, to name the particular behaviors, but also to demonstrate the challenges of assessing the impact of sexual violence. Once the scope of the issue is defined through language and impact, I broaden the lens with which to view violence through laws and regulations that specifically impact higher education. The purpose of this contextual framing is to demonstrate the multiple ways in which campus

sexual violence becomes woven into the college experience through external mechanisms.

### **Campus Narratives of Sexual Violence Discourse**

High profile cases of sexual misconduct on American college campuses have defined the contemporary national discourse on sexual assault. The results of these cases have two characteristics, which can sometimes compete and yet often reinforce one another, serving to further complicate how institutions address sexual assault. The first characteristic is hostility toward survivors. In those cases, the students who have been assaulted, predominantly women, are deemed responsible for their own victimizations, while the future of the perpetrator is prioritized over individual or institutional accountability. The second characteristic is a narrative about additional harm and injustice being caused by the institution's failed management of the circumstances of violence. This narrative can deflect responsibility away from the perpetrator and toward the institution, but it can also serve to center survivor voices. In this section, I address a small sample of high-profile cases that consumed substantial media attention, reinforcing rather than challenging beliefs held by the general public and by institutional community members.

At Duke University in 2006, three White student athletes were charged with assaulting a Black student from another university. Garnering much attention through mainstream television and print media, this case fueled a narrative of women lying to take advantage of men's higher social positioning. The narrative supported common rape myths, which include false accusations by women to obtain status or financial reward, the portrayal of accused men as victims, and a pervasive adversarial

dichotomy of men versus women (Barnett, 2008, 2012). In this case, the charges were dropped against the men, but not without positioning the prestige of the student athletes at Duke against the questionable morality (Northcutt Bohmert et al., 2019) of a student from a less selective institution who was characterized as a “drinking, promiscuous stripper” (Barnett, 2012, p. 19). The Duke University case reinforced the narrative that women’s accounts of assault are unreliable and should not be trusted. Stereotypes of race, class, and gender were also reinforced.

In 2015, the story of Brock Turner became the face of judicial collusion to support sexual violence. Turner, a decorated Stanford swimmer, was given a short prison sentence despite being found guilty for raping an unconscious female student behind a dumpster. The judge for the case stated his concern that this experience would adversely impact Turner’s otherwise successful professional and athletic career (Buncombe, 2016). The incident occurred on campus, but the institution’s involvement was largely excluded from media coverage, though the case is closely associated with Stanford. The clear message from Turner’s sentencing was that men’s social standing supersedes the impact on the victims. Preservation of assailants’ dignity is prioritized over harm to a community member. Fortunately, this case did result in legislative updates in the state of California, which included broadening the scope of behaviors included in the definition of sexual assault and establishing minimum sentencing for assault of an unconscious person.

Blaming the institutions for violence, rather than individual perpetrators is the second characteristic that permeates sexual violence discourse. In 2015, the nation met Emma Sulkowicz, the student and survivor at Columbia University who carried a

mattress around campus, including to the graduation ceremony where both Emma and the accused student participated. Sulkowicz carried the mattress as performance art to demand that others bear witness to the physical and metaphorical weight she carried due to her rapist still attending the school (Izadi, 2015). The alleged perpetrator had not been found responsible for sexual assault through the institutional adjudication process and subsequently filed suit against Columbia University for allowing Sulkowicz's art to shame him and create a hostile environment of gender-based harassment.

There have also been several high-profile cases revealing institutional collusion in which university administrators acted in preservation of institutional reputation or campus "celebrities" at the expense of sexual assault victims and campus safety. In 2009, the football program and key university administrators at The Pennsylvania State University became associated with the failure to report abuse and administrative collusion when it was made public that young boys had been sexually abused by a football coach over a 15-year period, from 1994-2008. While the assaults alone were inexcusable, additional public outrage resulted from reports that several key university administrators were aware of allegations of sexual misconduct and child sexual abuse but failed to appropriately report what they had known about the incidents to police or administrators (Klein & Tolson, 2015), which resulted in continued abuse of children.

In 2016, Michigan State University faced a similar criticism for facilitating abuse, which began in the 1990s, by a medical doctor who served both as a staff physician at the institution and a physician for the national gymnastics team. At

multiple points between initial reports of the abuse in 1996 and 2016, families of victims, local police, and university personnel were notified of the alleged abuse by various university community members, but no consequences, punishments or additional precautions were instituted (Jesse, 2019). It was only when the stories of 18 victims who filed suit against the doctor, the university, and the USA gymnastics team were made public that university personnel began to resign or be removed from their positions. Unfortunately, Penn State and Michigan State University are not alone in employing staff who abused young people, mishandled accusations, or were complicit with circumstances that are permissive of interpersonal violence.

The five cases I have discussed have both shaped and been shaped by the national discourse on sexual assault. Two key narratives of this discourse are: 1) victims are unsupported and often bear the burden of blame, and 2) institutions do additional harm to victims and the community through collusions and overall mismanagement of cases. In the midst of these narratives about rape culture and violence against women at universities, the documentary film “The Hunting Ground” (Ziering & Dick, 2015) was released and immediately raised a new public consciousness about the relationships between students and institutions. Rather than wading through a litany of media stories to ascertain a perspective, this film offered a platform for survivors from some of the most elite institutions in the nation to share their experiences of sexual assault. Together, these stories drew and continue to draw attention to the pervasiveness of sexual violence, the lack of support from their institutions, and the traumatizing impacts of such institutional behavior. Each of these cases, among hundreds of others that go without media sensationalization and the

multitude of incidents which are never reported, highlight the complex interactions that exist between students, faculty and staff and their institutions.

As demonstrated in each of these public cases and elsewhere, sexual violence has garnered significant attention over the past several decades (Moynan, 2016), much of which recently has come by way of mainstream and social media. Shifts in the way technology is used as a mechanism to share information and connect people has undoubtedly impacted the abundance of news stories that regularly inundate news feeds and television screens. Giraldi and Monk-Turner (2017) argued that the “reaches of social media touch nearly every aspect of our lives, which makes it an extremely powerful and influential tool in the dissemination of information, particularly regarding rape culture” (p. 116). Media and texts of all kinds, including research, are informed and influenced by rape culture. Of all crimes, Sloan and Fisher (2014) found that campus sexual violence against women receives more attention from media, policymakers and researchers than other crimes, but also found that social change has not accompanied the increased coverage. “While increased attention to the reality of rape and sexual assault in higher education is a major step in the right direction, institution response to highly publicized incidents of sexual violence remains widely varied” (p. 1). Variance in response to sexual violence is not limited to institutions of higher education, however. Policy, law enforcement, health care, and education represent just some of the social systems that have grappled with culturally-responsive and trauma-informed responses to sexual misconduct. These systems are made up of individuals who both inform and are informed by the cultures

in which they operate. The language used to define and discuss sexual violence is an important aspect of how sexual violence discourse exists in higher education.

### **Language as Critical to Understanding Complexity of Campus Sexual Violence**

A culture, such as that in the United States, that minimizes violence, victim-blames rather than supports, and provides barriers for those who are questioning their experiences of violence is one that normalizes rape (White & Smith, 2004). Cultures that normalize or are permissive of violence do so through language. The ways in which people talk to and about survivors and about perpetrators is just one way to see the extent to which cultures subscribe to rape-supportive culture. One of the biggest barriers to addressing sexual violence is the variation found in how such behavior is defined and thus measured. For example, in their study of how women labeled traumatic experiences of violence that could be considered rape according to the sexual experiences survey (Koss & Oros, 1982), Kahn et al. (2003) found that among the 97 women who identified being victims of violence, 33 used the term rape, 56 did not use the term rape, and eight women lacked certainty about whether they had experienced rape and how to define their experience. Among the 64 participants who did not use the word rape to define their experience, the authors identified four primary factors present in their experiences: alcohol and drugs were present, the women were coerced, force was used for oral or digital sex, or the male perpetrator, typically a boyfriend who was older and physically larger, used force or threats even in the face of resistance. “Only 20% of the women who labeled their experience as rape experienced one of these four situations” (p. 240).

Sasson and Paul (2014) found, through their mixed-methods vignette-based research with nearly 400 participants, that how victims define their experience with violence impacts to whom a victim or survivor chooses to tell. Such labeling and description of the incident by the person victimized “may ultimately affect the recipient’s perceptions of the act, including attributions made about the victim and perpetrator” (p. 36), thus making the claim that it is absolutely critical to attend to the language used to talk about such incidents.

In order to identify and clarify the language that I will be using throughout this dissertation and to situate that variation in the literature, I will review key labels for a range of sexual violence, various ways that sexual violence is measured, and other key terms related to policy regarding responses to sexual violence on campus.

### ***Sexual Assault, Sexual Violence and Intimate Partner Violence on Campus***

In research, policy, and discourse, terminology for sexual violence has proven to be important and contentious. Language plays a key role in establishing responsibility for sexual assault on both individual and environmental levels, which serves as a means to maintain the status quo of subjugated individuals or shift the culture to one of empowerment and equality for all genders. How language is used begins with the words that are selected to describe an incident, which subsequently inform if and how a response ensues. Using a variety of terms and definitions to research and discuss sexual assault makes it difficult to compare data across studies and legislative jurisdictions (Krebs et al., 2016). Beyond consistency, there are several reasons why clarity of terms, definitions, and context are important, including compliance with federal laws and policies, clear accountability and related due



process for students when those policies are violated, and the clarity of the social phenomenon. In order to provide appropriate institutional processes and nuanced resources to students, all of these contextual factors must be attended to.

*Sexual Violence and Intimate Partner Violence.* In my work, there are terms and phrases that I often use and discuss together. Sexual violence and intimate partner violence are both umbrella terms that include a set of offensive and prohibited behaviors (e.g. groping, non-consensual sexual contact) which are addressed in regulatory mandates. Either term may present an uneasy fit with how victims may identify or define their experiences, but my hope is to use the words together to continue to reinforce the breadth of behaviors that are included in sexual misconduct. For instance, the word “sexual” may imply penetration or intercourse to some or may be seen as excluding harassing behaviors such as stalking. Similarly, intimate partner violence requires an interpretation of the word intimate. The Centers of Disease Control (CDC) have not always included stalking as part of sexual assault or intimate partner violence (Saltzman, 2004), despite a prevalence of partner-based stalking in dating and domestic relationships. These variations in definitions illuminate the vast challenges in surveilling, measuring, and monitoring such behaviors across diverse populations.

The manner in which the terms are combined or separated impacts how data is collected and reported. Terms such as sexual assault or rape can be used found synonymously in literature as well as in victim reports. Rape is thought of as a legal issue. As recently as 2013, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) changed their definition of rape. The agency originally defined rape as “the carnal knowledge of a

female forcibly and against her will” (US Department of Justice, ND), but in 2013, the term “forcible” was removed and the definition was changed. Their revised definition of rape is: “Penetration, no matter how slight, of the vagina or anus with any body part or object, or oral penetration by a sex organ of another person, without the consent of the victim” (US Department of Justice, ND). Attempts or assaults to commit rape are also included in their data collection and crime tracking.

It is especially important to note the contexts in which the terms and corresponding data are being discussed. For example, is this being discussed within a microsystem between individuals or at the level of the mesosystem between groups or institutions. As noted, “sexual assault” can be used to encompass a variety of behaviors, including those behaviors which meet a legal definition for rape, non-consensual sexual contact, coerced sex and sexual harassment (Krebs et al., 2016). Not all behaviors classified as sexual assault meet a legal definition for rape, but depending on the environment and the context in which sexual assault is addressed, such behaviors could demand adjudication based on policies or consequence in some way.

***Sexual Misconduct.*** Another umbrella term commonly used, especially in higher education and other institutions is sexual misconduct. In the Question and Answer guide from the Office for Civil Rights, sexual misconduct is referred to as “peer-on-peer sexual harassment and sexual violence” (OCR, 2017). This Q & A guide was limited in its definition, likely because the purpose of the 2017 guidance was to nullify previous governmental guidance rather than shift definitions or make substantial change. The University System of Maryland (USM, 2019) defined sexual

misconduct as “an umbrella term that includes dating violence, domestic violence, sexual exploitation, sexual harassment, sexual intimidation, sexual violence, and stalking” (p. 4). As such, the institutional context is particularly relevant for this study as colleges and universities are accountable to their own policies, state policies, and the regulatory guidance and laws as well. Moreover, the behaviors of faculty are specific to higher education in that they are most often serving legal adults. In circumstances where faculty interact with these adult students in contrast to their duties as “responsible employees,” their behaviors which are overtly not compliant with compelled disclosure procedures are not typically prosecutable by law, although they could potentially impact their employment. My interpretation of sexual misconduct, as compared to sexual violence or sexual assault, is that it includes behaviors which are prohibited and addressed through policy rather than or in addition to law.

### ***Prevalence of Sexual Assault***

The definition of sexual assault deeply influences how data about prevalence is collected. The widely circulated statistic that one in five, or 20 percent, of all women experience sexual violence (Tjaden & Thoennes, 2006; Wolitzky-Taylor et al., 2011; Sinozich & Langston, 2014; Fisher et al., 2000) is controversial. Differences in the level and nature of sexual victimization captured by each survey can be attributed, at least in part, to the different approaches used to measure rape and sexual assault (Krebs et al., 2016). The contention rooted in semantics directly impacts the allocation of resources such as time, money, and concern. Although the nature and definitional ambiguity of rape and sexual assault incidents can make

accurately measuring them challenging for survey researchers, because these crimes can have severe impacts on and consequences for victims, the importance of understanding the prevalence, incidence, and nature of rape and sexual assault is widely recognized (Krebs et al., 2016).

One of the most commonly cited studies on sexual assault prevalence is the Campus Sexual Assault Study (CSA; Krebs et al., 2007), which found that approximately 16% of college women were sexually assaulted prior to college and 19% of college women were assaulted since entering college (n=5,546 women). In a *Time Magazine* article, Krebs & Lindquist (2014) discussed the limitations of any research study about sexual assault, including their own. The authors clarified that their sample was not nationally representative, but they went on to say that their statistics represented many behaviors, which include but are not limited to the legal definition of rape. The authors also clarified that the “one in five” statistic does not include attempted assaults, but rather only completed acts of assault. Political conservatives, such as men’s rights activists, may be fearful to suggest that men perpetrate violence against women with regularity. In fact, they capitalize on incidents where men are falsely accused of assault to further extend rape myth narratives. The Duke Lacrosse case, for example, was an incident which supported a dominant narrative that women falsely accuse men of sexual assault and thus it is the men who are victimized as a result (Barnett, 2012) and women are not to be believed.

Consistent with controversy over defining campus sexual assault, sexual victimization rates among college women compared to the general population vary as well. According to the Bureau of Justice Statistics (2014), female college-aged

students between the ages of 18 and 24 are 20 percent less likely than non-students to be victims of assault. Conversely, White & Smith (2004) found that victimization rates were three times greater in the college population than in the general population. The age range of 18-24 appears to be the common link of elevated risk for women (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2014), which merely highlights the need to develop a consistent method for collecting and reporting data. In a study of men at one university, more than half (63.3%) of them self-reported perpetrating acts that qualify as attempted rape or rape and revealed that they had repeatedly engaged in such behavior (NSVRC, 2015).

When addressing prevalence, the circumstances of when and how sexual assault occurs is just as important to study as the its definition. Studies have found that more than half of college sexual assaults occur in the first four months of the fall semester (Kimble et al., 2008). About one third of rape incidents and 28 percent of incidents of sexual battery involving college students occurred on campus (Krebs et al., 2016). Approximately half of all reported and unreported sexual assaults among students involved alcohol consumption by the one or both parties involved (Abbey, 2011). Wooten & Mitchell (2016) argued that understanding sexual assault in general must be contextualized by attending to “risk factors such as alcohol and drug use as well as party and fraternity culture” (p. 2). Grubb and Turner (2012) noted that women who consumed alcohol prior to being raped had higher rates of victim blaming by both sexes, as compared to women who were assaulted while sober. Such data is consistent with rape myth acceptance (RMA) and “rape prone” cultures discussed further in Chapter II. Thus, alcohol may not only have a presence in the

facilitation of assault, but also more enduring negative consequences for the victim over time. Selective men's groups such as fraternities and athletics also may contribute to rape prone culture (Sanday, 1981).

***Reporting, Responding and Responsible Employees: Defining Roles and Processes***

Variation and contestation in language is not only important in identifying incidents of sexual violence, but in understanding the laws and policies that guide what happens next. It is important to clarify key concepts regarding disclosures, responses, and reporting because specific references in policies and laws that can easily confuse what specifically is being discussed. For example, reporting and responding are important terms to Title IX policies. A reporting party, also referred to as a complainant, is an individual who is bringing an incident of sexual misconduct to the attention of the institution. The term complainant is found across legal proceedings and is value-laden, eliciting the idea of complaining, rather than reporting. A reporting party is a person who discloses that an incident of sexual misconduct occurred. In many policies, reporting parties indirectly refers to the person who experienced the violence, but that is not always the case. A responding party (or respondent) is the person(s) being accused of the violence. Whereas complainant is value-laden, respondent is neutral so as not to imply that the respondent has done the alleged behavior but is merely responding to a complaint or report about them.

The terms victim and survivor are often used interchangeably in the literature to reference to a complainant. These terms are not meaning neutral, however. Recognition of being a survivor has been thought of as moving from the negative

state of victim to a more positive survivor status, typically based on external help-seeking and intervention (Jordan, 2013). Jordan also noted that survivor was a politicized term positioned not only as a “rejection of a word, but resistance to patriarchal thought and language” (p. 49). Throughout the chapters that follow, I typically use language that is person-centered, such as “the student who was victimized” or use the terms together such as “victims and survivors.” I do this purposefully because my research is centered in the experiences of the person receiving the disclosure, rather than the student who experienced the violence. Assigning a label to the students’ experiences without knowledge of their experience or their consent is not appropriate.

Disclosures and reports are terms that I use differently from each other in this work but can easily be confused or conflated with one another. A disclosure of sexual assault is when an individual tells (discloses to) another person that they have experienced assault or violence. Tillman et al. (2010) define disclosure as “seeking help from either informal (e.g., family and friends) or formal support systems (e.g., police and counselors)” (p. 61). Campbell et al. (2015) argued, however, that disclosure and help-seeking are different and define disclosure as “the act of informing someone about an assault, most typically an informal support provider (e.g. friend, partner, family)” (p. 825). In Chapter IV, I give substantial attention to and robust analysis of how reports and reporting are represented in the context meso- and exosystem, specifically related to policy and discourse, but for the purposes of distinguishing between disclosures and reports, clarification here is important.

Reports and reporting are prevalent throughout policy (see Appendix E) in the institutions where the faculty participants for this study were employed. Additionally, reporting was an important part of discourse, because it was often used by the participants as a substitute for the word disclosure. The term “report” was also used in reference to the required steps of a responsible employee. As defined earlier in this chapter, a Responsible Employee, as designated by OCR (2014) is

An employee who has the authority to take action to address sexual violence, who has been given the duty of reporting incidents of sexual violence of any other misconduct by student to the Title IX coordinator or other appropriate school designee; or whom a student could reasonably believe has this authority or duty (OCR, 2014, p. 15).

In other words, a “responsible employee” is someone who must report. Participants also saw reporting as an action taken by a student to bring their concerns to the Title IX coordinator or designated staff member. For example, they would ask a student who just disclosed to them if they had reported the incident. However, according to the policies, reporting was a step in the process of being a responsible employee, either complying with or working in opposition to established policies.

### **The Legal and Regulatory Context of Addressing College Sexual Assault**

Higher education has been inundated with laws and directives, both federal and local, which dictate how institutions identify behaviors related to sexual misconduct, how institutions respond to reports of prohibited sexual conduct, and how such behaviors are prevented altogether. As Kiss and Feeney White (2016) point out,



The higher education community and its response to sexual violence has been under added scrutiny since the issuance of the 2011 Dear Colleague Letter addressing Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 (Title IX), the passage of the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) amendments to the Clery Act, and a network of student survivors deemed the Know Your IX mobilized to file complaints against colleges and universities for violating the Clery Act and Title IX (p. 95).

These acts are important to understand as they undergird the institutional policy and practice in which the faculty who are the focus of this study are operating.

### ***Title IX***

Title IX refers to the education amendments of 1972 which “protects students, employees, applicants for admission and employment, and other persons from all forms of sex discrimination, including discrimination based on gender identity or failure to conform to stereotypical notions of masculinity or femininity” (OCR, 2015, p.1). Title IX included a range of sex and gender-based discrimination; however, attention during the twenty-first century has focused more significantly on sex discrimination associated with sexual violence and harassment, rather than mere inclusion. If any part of an institution or school district receives federal funds for operation, which includes federal financial aid for students, the school is covered by Title IX. The mandates associated with the Title IX amendment, which will be discussed further in the following sections, address a wide range of persons, including but not limited to students, employees, applicants for admission and employment,

visitors to campus, and those who are contracted to work with an institution such as construction workers, contract food services, and sanitation workers.

Though Title IX had been in place since the 1970's, attention was reinvigorated by the United States Department of Education under President Obama. The presidential administration provided new guidance and required commitments from federally funded colleges and universities through a series of communications (e.g. Dear Colleague Letter, White House Task Force Report) and in response, other legislative and regulatory directives (VAWA, Clery) were renewed and elaborated on.

### ***The Dear Colleague Letter***

In 2011, the US Department of Education issued a Dear Colleague Letter to give further guidance about compliance with policy of Title IX (DCL, Ali, 2011). The issuance of this letter reinvigorated a national conversation about institutional responsibility in providing equal access to education, regardless of gender and paved the way for new sexual assault discourse in post-secondary education.

The DCL addressed institutional responsibility to publicly disseminate a non-discrimination policy, a process for investigating misconduct, and the identification of a Title IX Coordinator to ensure compliance and oversee the process, which also includes prevention (Marshall, 2014). Specific guidance in the letter addressed the distinction between and independence of criminal investigations and a school's independent (criminal) investigations, requirements to publish and disseminate a campus policy about sexual misconduct, designation of Title IX Coordinator, requirements to have prevention programs, and the interplay of Title IX, the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), and the Clery Act (Office for Civil

Rights, 2011). “The issuance of the Letter on Title IX was a clear indication that sexual assault on colleges needed not just additional guidance, but also a legislative solution” (Marshall, 2014, p. 279). More documents and specific guidance followed such as a resource guide issued by the OCR (2015) and the OCR question and answer guide (2014).

The issuance of the DCL was the moment when sexual harassment was defined to include sexual violence. Rape, sexual assault, sexual battery and sexual coercion were all named as behaviors covered by the policy. In fact, any behavior that “interfered with students’ rights to receive an education free from discrimination” (Ali, 2011, p. 1) is problematic and potentially criminal. The letter also addressed consent as a critical element of sexual assault and harassment, saying that “sexual violence, as the term is used in this letter, refers to physical sexual acts perpetrated against a person’s will or where a person is incapable of giving consent due to an intellectual or other disability” (p. 1). In addition to expanding specific behaviors of sexual violence, the letter requires educational training for employees and the implementation of preventative education programs, and provisions of comprehensive resources for survivors (Pappas, 2016).

Finally, the Dear Colleague Letter (Ali, 2011) established obligations for institutional response. The letter noted that a hostile environment, interference with or limitation on a student’s ability to engage in an institution, including academic and co-curricular programs on and off campus are grounds for a required response. While specific response procedures are not outlined, the letter states that in addition to publishing the policy, an institution must also publish grievance procedures. Colleges

and universities must ensure that their employees are properly trained to report behavior covered under Title IX so that it can be addressed appropriately. The letter did state that investigations into prohibited behavior are required, but no specific procedural requirements were noted. The only specifics of the letter were that investigations be “prompt, thorough and impartial” (Ali, 2011, p. 5). This reference to proceedings requires due process for all parties, both those who have allegedly been harmed and those who have allegedly harmed. How due process is managed continues to raise challenges for how those different parties experience adjudication from their institution and for the institution itself.

In 2017, OCR withdrew the 2011 DCL and a 2014 question and answer guide for addressing Title IX and sexual assault. The 2014 guide was developed to address specific questions that were raised since the issuance of the DCL and to respond to updates from VAWA and Clery Act discussed further in the next two sections. When withdrawing the previous guidance, the presidential administration issued a new DCL (Jackson, 2017). This new letter advocated for more support for those accused (often known as responding parties), such as allowing for alternative mediation options, broadening the scope of appeals to board of review decisions, and opening up possibilities for the burden of proof in a university hearing, but did not make modifications to Title IX itself.

The 2011 DCL was a reminder to institutions about the expectations of the pre-existing laws of Title IX. The letter added uncertainty, confusion, and tensions as institutions rushed to comply, and as such their actions to respond to the DCL were not always purposeful. If nothing else, the issuance of the 2011 letter ignited a 21st

century conversation about sexual assault in higher education that had grown stagnant. As a result, additional layers of accountability were added through VAWA and Clery, which work in concert with Title IX.

### ***Violence Against Women & Campus SaVE Act***

Whereas Title IX and the DCL addressed institutional responsibilities, VAWA and Clery were focused on the explicit protection of students as survivors and consumers. One of the aims of Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) was to establish shared language and accountability for all colleges and universities to follow when responding to allegations of sexual misconduct. The definition of rape, sex offenses, fondling, incest, and statutory rape in VAWA mirror those of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, but there is a vast breadth of misconduct that occurs on campuses such as “gender harassment, sexting, hidden videotaping, uploading private explicit photos to the internet, and various coerced sexual acts that involve threat, but do not rise to legal standards of bodily harm” (Koss & Lopez, 2014, p. 6). VAWA created space to include those behaviors in institutional accountability for preventing a hostile environment.

The passing of the Campus Sexual Violence Elimination Act (Campus SaVE Act) (2013) was an added provision to VAWA as part of the reauthorization. Campus SaVE specifically addressed the need for colleges and universities to provide prevention and response education to students, which had not been given attention previously. The Campus SaVE Act was the binding component between VAWA and the Clery Act (discussed further in the next section). Campus SaVE directed that alleged victims would be guaranteed counseling, legal assistance and medical care.

Napolitano (2015), chancellor of the University of California system summarized the interconnection between VAWA and Clery by stating:

The Campus SaVE Act added more requirements for campuses to publish specific policy statements in their Annual Security Report about how they train incoming students and employees, as well as how they conduct administrative investigations and address complaints of sexual violence” (Napolitano, 2015, p. 398).

In the next section, I describe the Clery in more depth, which continued to provide more protections for students.

### *Clery Act*

The Clery Act self-identified as a consumer-protection law that “aims to provide transparency around campus crime and policy statistics” (Clery Center Website). Following the rape and murder of a young woman at Lehigh University, the victim's parents advocated for campus crime reporting requirements so that families could make fully informed decisions about where their students attended college, claiming that if they had known about some of the violent crimes at Lehigh University, they likely would have made other decisions in selecting a school.

In 2012, shortly after the issuance of the Dear Colleague Letter (Ali, 2011), two significant revisions to campus crime reporting of the Clery Act took place which centered on sexual assault: the bill of rights for victims and the VAWA amendments. The Victim Bill of Rights “articulates policies, procedures, and services for all victims of sexual assault at post-secondary educational institutions (that participate in federal student aid programs). It is designed to ensure that victims and offenders are

afforded the same rights throughout the reporting and disciplinary process” (Kiss & Feeney White, 2016, p. 97). It specifies that the reporting and responding parties have the option for a support person to be present during the proceedings and to both be informed of any disciplinary outcomes. The bill of rights also outlines that students must be notified of their right to notify law enforcement and obtain assistance from campus authorities if requested. They are to be informed of mental health and student resources available to them, including specific contact information for such services, and also the option to change academic and living accommodations within reason.

### ***Convergence of Laws and Regulations***

While the interdependence and causal relationship of each of these documents the victim bill of rights, VAWA, and the Clery act may appear coordinated and intentional at first glance, Koss and Lopez (2014) argued that these documents, when taken together “(1) blur the distinctions between campus misconduct resolution and criminal justice process, (2) lack scholarly analysis of sexual assault justice on campus and (3) clash with contemporary values and practice standards of student affairs professionals” (pp. 4-5). Moreover, there are contradictory and confusing directives. As Janet Napolitano (2015) points out,

The 2011 Dear Colleague Letter and the 2014 Questions and Answers document place strong emphasis on a victim’s ability to control the process by requesting confidentiality or requesting that an investigation not be pursued. Yet paradoxically, OCR also states that campuses must still investigate a complaint even when a complainant does not want an investigation (p. 399).

Such incongruencies are just some of the many factors which may complicate disclosures and reporting, which results in the lack of resources or accommodation to students--the very thing this legislation aims to provide. It is no wonder that administrators and employees, especially faculty, are confused and resistant to policies when their purpose is contradicted from the onset of their enactment.

In an enormous undertaking, Karjane et al. (2002) conducted extensive analyses of institutions' policies, administrator surveys, focus groups, and field research. In their executive summary, the authors perfectly encapsulated the challenge of the regulatory climate with the following statement:

In defining and responding to the problem of campus sexual assault, college and university administrators must balance a number of perspectives: federal and state mandates, the demand for increased campus safety by students and their parents, and their own educational missions (p. 2).

Variation in the scope of behavior as reflected in research complicates the prevalence conversation (Krebs et al., 2016), and thus challenges the ways that institutions of higher education can be consistently responsive and compliant with local and federal mandates.

Responses to sexual violence are driven by two interrelated factors; an ethic of care and legislative mandates. The ethic of care is conflated, confounded, and complicated as it is driven by legislation, thus becoming a regulated and perhaps forced or false compassion on an institutional level. There can be significant, exacerbated, and enduring consequences for those victims who are met by an



inadequate response, also known as institutional betrayal (Smith & Freyd, 2013), discussed in more depth throughout this work.

To date, no schools have faced the termination of federal student aid. Both students and institutions benefit from the aid structure, but institutions are only being held accountable through negative public relations and potential declines in enrollment or annual giving. Still, sexual assault poses a threat to higher education. A United States Department of Justice Report (Sinozich & Langton, 2014) found that adult women ages 18-24 have the highest rate of sexual assault victimization compared to other age groups. The impact on those have been victimized is vastly problematic on both individual and environmental levels, thus situating sexual assault as a costly public health issue. Individual negative outcomes include impacts on mental and physical health (Chuang et al., 2012; Campbell, 2006, Smith and Freyd, 2013), academic success as reflected in grade point average and progress toward graduation (Baker et al., 2016), and financial prosperity (Jordan et al., 2014). At the institutional level, universities also face consequences. The collective burdens carried by victims and survivors have the potential to be expensive for an institution, with the associated demands for resources personnel (counseling, health services, crisis response, police), training (reporting and referrals), and costs associated with academic enrollment and retention (academic advising, communications, etc.).

### **The Case for Studying Responsible Employees**

So far in this chapter I have presented a high-level, macrosystem perspective of the challenges that sexual violence poses to institutions of higher education. In this section I apply those perspectives to institutional-level systems of the exo-, meso-,

and micro-systems to demonstrate that research to understand faculty experiences with students' sexual assault disclosures is necessary and also context specific. Similar to the contextual framing that I used to describe sexual violence in higher education, I present very specific aspects of language, policy, discourse to narrow in on faculty experiences to make the case that studying responsible employees is a critical component to understanding sexual assault in higher education.

### **Defining Sexual Misconduct Impacts Disclosure Experiences**

Sexual misconduct, intimate partner violence, sexual violence are just three different ways to describe behaviors that generally fall into a distinct category of interpersonal violence. The variations in labels used to address a series of harmful behaviors carry with them not just differences in terms, as discussed in the previous section, but also variation in the values and impact related to such behaviors. For those who are victimized by sexual violence, the language used to categorize the behaviors in addition to the factors surrounding the violence (e.g. level of alcohol intoxication, previous sexual contact, physical harm) impact the individuals labeling of the behavior and subsequent reporting (Campbell & Townsend, 2011). The complicated nature of classifying behaviors as assault, in combination with a culture that generally questions victims' credibility, results in low rates of reporting (Ullman, 2000). Because reporting is already low in comparison to the prevalence of assaults, it is critically important to understand disclosure experiences.

Studies have shown that the experience of disclosure, especially first disclosures (DeCou et al., 2017) have a profound impact on the short and long-term resilience of a victimized individual (Bonnan-White et al., 2015). The characteristics

of the recipient, the relationship between the individual making the disclosure and the individual responding, and the approaches that the disclosure recipient subscribes to personally and institutionally will likely have profound impacts on the nature of the disclosure experience. In Chapter II I elaborate on the factors that enable disclosures or serve as barriers to them, but I want to make clear that disclosures present the *opportunity* for a response. Responsible employees, especially faculty, should connect the obligations of their role with the victim’s difficult decision to make a disclosure.

### **Responsible Employees and Compelled Disclosure Policies**

One of the key provisions in Title IX of the 1972 Education Amendment mandated that educational institutions identify “designated” faculty and staff deemed “responsible employees.” According to the United States government’s Office for Civil Rights (OCR), who is responsible for holding institutions accountable to Title IX, a responsible employee is:

An employee who has the authority to take action to address sexual violence, who has been given the duty of reporting incidents of sexual violence or any other misconduct by student to the Title IX coordinator or other appropriate school designee; or whom a student could reasonably believe has this authority or duty (OCR, 2014, p. 15).

OCR does not dictate who the responsible employees must be by name, so it is up to the institutions to interpret the definition of the responsible employee and apply accordingly.

The responsible employee designation emerged initially as a response to K-12 concerns. Children were reporting abuse that occurred at school or in their homes to

school employees with whom they felt safe. Often the school custodians and cafeteria workers, were the recipients of these children’s disclosures, but did not always perceive themselves as responsible for elevating the disclosure because they were not teachers. In theory, by not elevating student concerns about sexual abuse and safety to higher authorities who could act on them, such behaviors are enabled to continue. As a result of the high individual and legal (Title IX) stakes of reporting (or not reporting) sexual assault, institutions responded by making all employees responsible.

Higher education, with its high prevalence of sexual misconduct and vastly varied interpretation of regulatory mandates, has followed the patterns of K-12 mandatory reporting laws and made sweeping designations of responsible employees. In their study of institutional “reporting” policies, Holland et al. (2018) found that among sexual misconduct policies across 150 four-year, non-profit institutions, 146 of them institutions had a “compelled disclosure” policy, which required university employees to share some amount of information after receiving a disclosure of sexual misconduct or becoming aware of it. Among those 146 institutions with a compelled disclosure policy, 69% of those institutions with any policy designated all staff to participate in compelled disclosures, reporting to institutional agents or police as designated by the policy. Newins et al. (2018) found that students and employees were generally knowledgeable about such policies on their campuses and generally supportive, but data about the efficacy of policies is non-existent.

Moreover, disclosure experiences of faculty, who are unique and integral community members, is limited. Research on faculty attitudes toward their duties as a responsible employee has been limited to quantitative approaches (e.g. Newins et al.,

2018) which used case-study examples rather than real situations. In addition, such studies have not looked exclusively at faculty, but rather at university employees in general. What qualitative research there is (e.g. Richards et al., 2013) has focused on crime disclosures, rather than focusing on gender-based violence specifically. In order to address sexual misconduct and sexual violence in higher education, the thoughts, opinions, and experiences of faculty receiving and responding to disclosures by students is essential and the methods by which to collect such data should be personal and rooted in actual experiences.

The use of mandated reporter policies and broad application of responsible employee designations are contested from both student and faculty perspectives. A sweeping designation of responsible employee status that requires all faculty and staff at educational institutions receiving federal funds to elevate concerns to designated campus authority may not make the most sense. While many institutions across the nation do broadly designate all faculty and staff as responsible employees, the extent to which such broad designations are effective in supporting students and creating a safe climate is unknown. Holland et al. (2018) conducted analyzed responsible employee designations and responsibilities at 150 colleges and universities across the United States. They assert that the original intent of mandated reporting policies and laws are in place at the K-12 level because children have less agency and access to change their environment. They argued that because college students are adults “they have the capacity to make significant decisions in their lives” (p. 2) and thus are not dependent on policies to garner help or support. Holland et al. (2018) also argued that when faculty and staff report against the knowledge or wishes of a student, they are

violating the students wishes and may enact further harm. Addressing the sovereignty of an individual adult student begs an even more basic question: to what extent are faculty adequately prepared to fulfill the obligations of responsible employees and what are the standards in which that can be determined?

There are data collection instruments that can help stakeholders understand the extent to which faculty are adequately prepared to effectively serve as responsible employees. The Faculty Survey of Student Engagement (FSSE) and climate surveys, can measure faculty knowledge, effectiveness of responsible employee designations, and other climate-based attributes. Those data are not without limitations, and they prompt even more questions. In 2017, 24,418 faculty from more than 150 higher education institutions in the United States participated in the FSSE. According to the findings, two-thirds of faculty members reported that they understood their institution's sexual assault policies and procedures; however, less than half of respondents reported receiving training and half identified inadequate support for students who have experienced sexual assault. Mandates in states such as Maryland require schools to collect and report data on the campus climate related to sexual violence (Maryland House Bill 571, 2015), but climate is left undefined and is only required to be assessed based on student feedback. The lack of faculty knowledge, training and confidence related to their roles as responsible employees combined with an institutionalized culture of assessment that fails to include faculty perspectives demonstrates both the lack of understanding of sexual assault as an institutional issue and also the lack of resources for additional understanding. Unfortunately, the lack of

resources for addressing campus sexual violence potentially has high stakes consequences when institutions fail to have proper processes in place.

To comprehend the nature of sexual assault in higher education, it is critical to understand the contextual factors of such violence at the institutional and interpersonal levels. Starting with macro-level perspectives related to discourse, terminology and federal policies, opens the door to look more deeply at the impacts of practices at the institutional level. Practices such as compelled disclosures and broad application of responsible employee designations need to be studied. Furthermore, faculty perspectives, which are largely missing from the literature, need to be studied in order to address issues across the institution. Gaining insight into faculty experiences will provide a more comprehensive understanding to the mechanisms which enable to halt sexual assault at colleges and universities. Findings from such understanding of faculty experiences can then better inform campus-based training, serve as a catalyst for research on effective institutional policies, and contribute to a renewed campus discourse that supports survivors, holds perpetrators accountable, and creates an opportunity for faculty to take ownership in stopping sexual assault in the community. In the next and final section, I present the organization of this dissertation, which seeks to answer the aforementioned questions, and understand faculty experiences with students' disclosures of sexual assault.

### **Dissertation Organization**

I have organized this dissertation into five additional chapters. In Chapter II, I situate intimate partner violence and sexual assault through a social ecological lens drawn from Bronfenbrenner's broad and widely used model (1979). Bronfenbrenner's

ecological systems theory model posits that the interplay of individual, relational, and structural dimensions of the social world is critical to understanding both behavior and the world in which those behaviors occur. I present this social ecological model as a theoretical tool for integrating multiple perspectives by which to examine sexual misconduct and violence in general. In the chapter, I use the nested structures of the social ecological domains to examine disclosures of violence. After using the individual level to present the negative sequelae of sexual violence, I situate the challenges with reporting and disclosures in the microsystem, a reflection of relationships that can either facilitate or prevent survivors from reporting. The mesosystem, multiple interrelated microsystems, is where I situated institutional betrayal, a concept developed by Smith and Freyd (2013), which addresses the extent to which institutions, including those in higher education, fail to prevent harm or even cause additional harm. The general discourses around reporting and questioning of institutional duty to prevent and respond to sexual violence are situated in the exosystem. I conclude the chapter by examining the macrosystem which includes concepts of rape culture such as rape myth acceptance.

In Chapter III I describe the specific research design and methodology I selected for this study. Using a constructivist epistemology, I describe aspects of an emergent approach, specifically drawing from grounded and feminist grounded theory to conduct the study. I discuss why qualitative approaches are necessary to answer the research questions, how I used a constructivist qualitative approach to develop and redevelop my research questions, and the ways I applied a systematic and iterative approach to data analysis. I present my approach to interviewing faculty



members about their experiences receiving and responding to disclosures of sexual misconduct by students, including participant recruitment and selection. I detail my processes for data analysis from both interviews and my researchers journal, including discussions of a reflexive perspective, ethical considerations, trustworthiness, and the limitations of the study.

Due to the breadth and depth of data collected, I present the results in two chapters, the first focused on faculty members' institutional role and the second focused on the relationships between students and faculty. In Chapter IV, I delve deeply into the reflective experiences of the faculty members and their confounding relationships to their specific roles and the institution, which impact their responses to students. Faculty experiences receiving and responding to disclosures were infused with uncertainty and role confusion. This yielded variance in their responses, not just between faculty members, but even within individuals responding to various disclosures. I present the discrepancies faculty shared between what they believe they are required to do as responsible employees and what they say they actually did, and I show how these are situated in varied philosophies about the tension between policies to address sexual assault, institutional responsibilities, and expressions of care.

In Chapter V, I address the relational factors that deeply influence how faculty experience and respond to student disclosures of sexual assault. I attended to the myriad relationships between the student and faculty members and as determined by their primary roles of instructor and advisor. Through that relational dynamic of the microsystem, I used data from faculty experiences and reflections to categorize faculty perceptions of the students' driving factors for disclosing into a search for

instructional support, accommodations, or emotional support. In both the relational dynamic and corresponding driving factors, I present the mechanisms by which students disclose (in-person, email) and the environmental factors that surround their disclosure (in class, privately). As learned from these findings, faculty must be prepared to receive and respond to disclosures in the many roles in which they serve. The increased ability to anticipate a disclosure will provide increased support for students, but may also provide the opportunity for faculty to create networks of support for each other as well.

In the final chapter, Chapter VI, I summarize the findings, noting the variance in which faculty experience and respond to disclosures of sexual violence. I propose several implications for practice and policy, whereby I make specific recommendations for a close examination and intentional application of the responsible employee responsibilities. Additionally, I recommend that institutions make an effort to develop a shared language, including shifting away from the punitive aspects of “reports” and toward a supportive model of referrals. I also discuss implications for additional research, calling for a closer examination of faculty identities, further explorations of institutional duty and care, and the utility of rape myth acceptance as an emergent component of faculty discourse.

## **Chapter II: An Ecological Systems Approach to Situating Sexual Assault and Intimate Partner Violence**

Since the 1950s college sexual assault has been a focal point of research in multiple disciplines such as public health, nursing, policy, counseling psychology and sociology, resulting in over 2,000 peer-reviewed studies, books, chapters and reviews (McDermott et al., 2015). While there has been a litany of scholarship on campus sexual violence, key perspectives that have been left out of the conversation, namely those of college and university faculty. The highly political, regulatory, and litigious environment that faculty operate in, coupled with constructs of academic freedom and emerging student issues, confuse roles and responsibilities. The purpose of this chapter is to situate the complex and intersecting social ecological domains of sexual violence as critical to understanding how the dynamics of sexual violence are maintained within institutions of higher education and to demonstrate the central impact that disclosure responses have on either supporting survivors in healing or perpetuating a rape culture.

I use Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems approach as the theoretical frame with which to situate various domains of sexual violence. This model, described more thoroughly in the chapter, is a nested model that situates the interplay of individual, relational, societal structures as interdependent. Following a brief introduction of Bronfenbrenner's approach, I apply the model to describe the various ways that intimate partner violence and sexual assault impact and are impacted by the environment where they occur just as the interconnected nature of the domains inform and are informed by one another. I begin with the individual impacts of violence and

subsequently situate sexual and intimate partner violence in a microsystem through a discussion of reporting and help-seeking. Institutional betrayal is explained as a dimension of the mesosystem. I briefly address some of the unique dynamics of higher education in the exosystem and then conclude with a discussion of culture that is permissive of rape as the macrosystem in which intimate partner violence and sexual assault exist and can be perpetuated.

### **Ecological Systems Model**

Institutions of higher education are complex organizations. Both public and private colleges and universities have elaborate internal hierarchies, but also exist in relation to the communities and states in which they are located, and also in relation to the federal government. In other words, colleges and universities are comprised of and exist in relation to individuals, communities, industries, governmental bodies and cultural conditions. This organizational complexity can be examined and explained through the lens of a social-ecological model.

### **Overview of Ecological Systems Theory**

Ecological systems theory, developed by Bronfenbrenner (1979), presents a series of nested structures to conceptualize the interconnected relationship of the social spheres that both impact and are impacted by individuals. In this model, Bronfenbrenner situates layers of context as crucial for understanding the development of an individual. Initially, Bronfenbrenner studied child development and argued that to draw conclusions about a particular developmental trajectory, one must consider the culture, resources, and policies that frame the particular environment in which the growth occurred. Moen (1995) captured the interconnected

nature of Bronfenbrenner's ecological model in the statement that ecological systems theory "requires behavior and development to be examined as a joint function of the characteristics of the person and of the environment" (p. 1). Moen's summary highlights the interdependent nature of individuals and their environment as represented in ecological systems theory, and also connects back to Kurt Lewin, a key scholarly influence on Bronfenbrenner. Lewin (1935) argued that human behavior is a product of the person and environment, which is presented by the following model:  $B = f(PE)$  (p. 73). Bronfenbrenner (1979) used Lewin's theory to critique conceptions of human development that were limited to individual factors or focused artificially on the environment through studies in laboratories, arguing instead that the real-life environments in which they operated were necessary components of study.

Both in the definition of ecology and his writing in general, Bronfenbrenner emphasized the concept of mutual accommodation as reciprocal in nature, such that both the individual and environment are actively impacting one another. While his theory is most widely known for the nested structures, they are actually integrated into a larger framework. The larger theory is known as the process-person-context-time model (PPCT) (Bronfenbrenner & Evans, 2000). Bronfenbrenner developed the PPCT in the third phase of his work transitioning from the ecological systems theory to a bioecological model (Rosa & Tudge, 2013), focusing substantially on the individual.

Proximal or process development has two parts; the first is that the reciprocity across social ecological domains becomes increasingly more complex and the second is that the nature of the complexity is a product of both the individual and social

domains (Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1993). The second dimension of the PPCT model are person characteristics. Person characteristics include qualities of an individual that impacts their relationships and responses to environments (Bronfenbrenner, 1995). Examples might include how one responds to an emotional situation such as trauma or also how approachable one might be--two distinct factors in the disclosure and response process discussed in more detail in this chapter. In this model, it is easy to see that such personal characteristics will impact how one develops proximally.

The third dimension of the PPCT model is context, which includes the social ecological domains of the micro-, meso-, exo- and macrosystem. Bronfenbrenner (1979) situated the interplay of such contexts in his definition of the ecology of human development:

The scientific study of the progressive, mutual accommodation between an active, growing human being and the changing properties of the immediate settings in which the developing person lives, as this process is affected by relations between these settings, and by the larger contexts in which the settings are embedded (p. 21).

A microsystem is a pattern of activities, roles, and interpersonal relations experienced by the developing person in a given setting with particular physical and material characteristics. This system can be summarized as any interaction that involves more than one person, which can include observation or interactions. A mesosystem reflects multiple microsystems, such that two or more settings in which the developing person actively participates. To illustrate how mesosystems operate, one can look to college and university faculty. Professors navigate their roles at work as

instructors in classrooms, members of various committees, affiliates of academic departments, and also interpersonal roles as parents, partners, and community activists.

The exosystem context of higher education is reflective of experiences with hierarchy. For example, if faculty members have had negative interactions with police, they may not automatically think to suggest police or the legal system as a resource to a student who is disclosing an experience with crimes such as sexual assault, and the faculty member may even attempt to dissuade the harmed student from reporting. The exosystem is where practice and policy both converge, but also contradict. The macrosystem, as defined by Bronfenbrenner (1979), are one or more settings which do not involve the direct interaction between an individual and a system; rather, those systems are influential on the individuals and influenced by the individuals. Macrosystems are reflective of attitudes and ideologies that exist within a culture. In his conceptualization of the macrosystem, Bronfenbrenner (1979) discussed the consistencies that exist, or might possibly exist, in the culture. The macrosystem is demonstrated in an institutional system through rigid gender roles or passive acceptance of violence.

The final aspect of the PPCT Model is time. In earlier work, Bronfenbrenner (1988) referred to time as the chronosystem, which had three levels, micro-time, meso-time, and macro-time. Rosa and Tudge (2013) cited and summarize Bronfenbrenner's work on the chronosystem:

Microtime refers to “continuity versus discontinuity in ongoing episodes of proximal process,” mesotime has to do with how often these episodes occur

over days and weeks, and macrotime “focuses on the changing expectations and events in the larger society, both within and across generations” (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998, 2006, p. 796 as cited by Rosa and Tudge, 2013).

As is demonstrated throughout this chapter, time is deeply relevant, not just to the individual as it relates to a disclosure; the responsiveness of the disclosure recipient and the institution is connected to the ways in which negative sequelae is facilitated or addressed.

### **Rationale for the Use of Bronfenbrenner’s Work**

As demonstrated in the preceding paragraphs, while originally developed in 1979, Bronfenbrenner’s theory evolved throughout his work and life (Tudge et al., 2009) and so has the broad the application of the theory to multiple disciplines. The social ecological model and ecological systems theory have been applied to a variety of contexts. McLaren & Hawe (2005) highlight the ways in which the social-ecological model has been critical to public health, but also note the century-long, interdisciplinary utilization of the model:

An ecological perspective encompasses context in the broadest sense of the word, to include physical, social, cultural, and historical aspects of context (including trends at the local and global level such as globalisation, urbanisation, and large-scale environmental change) as well as attributes and behaviours of persons within (p. 6).

In their study of the impact of sexual violence on mental health outcomes, Campbell et al. (2009) explicitly noted the utility of an ecological framework for epidemics



such as sexual violence in the development of prevention and response strategies with aims of mitigating harm. Using such a model situates the various ecological factors and the interactional nature in which they exist. Applying ecological systems theory to sexual violence allows scholars to understand the environmental mechanisms which enable and perpetuate the violence.

Applying Bronfenbrenner's (1979) concept of context is fitting for higher education as institutions are complex organizational entities which can be understood through the ecological systems theory. The development of students and faculty occurs at the individual level. Their characteristics, learning and personal development are both impacted and influenced by the contexts of the micro-, meso-, exo-, and macrosystems. The microsystem encompasses where faculty and students engage with one another, both in the identities of faculty and student and between one another and the mesosystem is where multiple relationships converge and overlap. A disclosure of sexual violence, for example, reflects interactions between the student who has been victimized by another person, but also between faculty and student as the student shares their experience with another person (the faculty member) who may choose to engage with others based on institutional requirements. How that faculty member responds to the student or takes actions such as "reporting" the incident or consulting with the Title IX coordinator is influenced by the exosystem. The exosystem is the context in which faculty understand their duties as responsible employees and choose to act accordingly, hence the simultaneity of the micro-, meso- and exosystems. The macrosystem, while not engaged with directly by the individual, are the ways that culture informs how the other contexts operate. Specifically, this is

the context where rape culture, racism, and sexism exist and also pervade the sub-contexts.

Citing Stokols (1996) in their study of the application of Bronfenbrenner's work to public mental health, Eriksson et al. (2018) stated that "an ecological perspective offers a way to simultaneously emphasize both individual and contextual systems and the interdependent relations between these two systems, and thus offers a variety of conceptual and methodological tools for organizing and evaluating health-promotion interventions" (p. 416). In the remaining sections of this chapter, I apply the ecological model to narrow in and more deeply examine sexual violence in higher education and the ways that disclosures of violence occur and can be understood and in Chapter III describe the use of the model as an analytical tool, alongside critical discourse analysis and systematic coding frames.

The examples at institutions such as Columbia, Penn State, Michigan State, Duke and Stanford highlighted in Chapter I reveal that the issues of violence and problematic discourse do not live exclusively between the perpetrators and victims. Sexual misconduct is harmful and the consequences for those who have been victimized can be enduring, especially if adequate support has not been received. Because the epidemic of sexual violence extends beyond solely the relationships between perpetrator and victim, one must look at the other relational and systemic spheres to fully actualize the problems and seek realistic and evidence-based solutions. While the remainder of this chapter is organized by contextual domain, the summary of ecological and bioecological systems clearly reflects integrated, multi-dimensional relationships between process, person, context and time. It is difficult to

consider one dimension in isolation; however, it is my aim to illustrate the complex, scaffolded and interrelated ways that sexual violence impacts the environment and is then enabled by the environment.

### **Individual Impacts of Sexual Violence**

To situate sexual violence in the ecological systems model, one must start with the individual. Individuals hold several identities, such as age, gender, sex, and health status, among others, all of which exist in the nested contexts of the micro-, meso-, exo-, and macrosystems. While sexual violence happens in a relational context of power and control, there are significant and enduring consequences for individuals. I discuss the consequences of physical force and injury, mental health challenges, academic consequences, and financial consequences of sexual violence. Each of these individual consequences can and have had a reciprocal impact on the environment, including the academic institution where a harmed student is enrolled.

### **Consequences of Physical Force and Injury**

Physically forced survivors were also nearly twice as likely to report having sustained injuries as a result of the incident, with the most common injuries being emotional injury (reported by 90% of the physically forced sexual assault survivors who reported sustaining an injury), injury as a result of the sexual contact (e.g., vaginal or anal tearing or bleeding, which was reported by 25%), and bruises/black-eyes (reported by 22%) (Lindquist et al., 2013, p. 2451). Those who sustained injury were found to be more likely to report symptoms consistent with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and depression even when controlling for other factors such as

previous victimization, the presence of alcohol, and other demographic factors such as age, race and marital status.

Through a trauma informed lens and neuro-psychological study (SAHMSA, 2014), it is known that there are many peri-traumatic responses, which include physical resistance, commonly known as fighting, but they might also include fleeing and freezing or tonic immobility, which could resemble passing out or sleeping. Kalaf et al. (2017) found that such tonic immobility is most strongly associated with sexual trauma, more than any other type of trauma. Resistance is a complex concept in sexual assault; there has historically been a problematic burden of proof of resistance in order to achieve accountability for those who assault. The intricacies of human behavior in response to traumatic circumstances may serve as preventive or may induce even more egregious violent behaviors.

One of the many aspects of cultures that are permissive of sexual violence involves the construct that women can only demonstrate opposition to sexual contact by physically resisting (Lonsway & Fitzgerald, 1994, p. 134; Payne et al., 1994). One example of such problematic discourse of resistance can be found in the state of Maryland. Until the spring of 2017, Maryland State Law SB217/HB429 contained ambiguous language that left the lack of physical resistance open to judicial interpretation, specifically that physical resistance had to be present to demonstrate lack of consent for sexual contact. Findings suggest that those who resist are more likely than those who do not resist to sustain a physical injury above and beyond the sexual assault or rape; this finding holds true for physical resistance, verbal resistance, or resistance of any kind (Wong & Belemba, 2016).

## **Mental Health Consequences**

Victimization of a sexual nature can have significant impacts in the immediate aftermath of an incident, but also across the lifespan. Individual impacts of sexual violence and gender discrimination span both physical and mental health domains and can include visible injuries, fear, anger, anxiety disorders, self-blame, depression, substance abuse, and other maladaptive social behaviors including isolation and withdrawal (Campbell & Townsend, 2011; Kilpatrick et al., 1985; Miller et al., 2007; Moor, 2007; Resick, 1993; Thompson & Kingree, 2010; Tjaden & Thoennes, 2006; Zinzow et al., 2010). In academic and professional settings, such consequences can have enduring effects which negatively impact, and even re-victimize, the survivor in the long-term. Data demonstrate that women with histories of sexual assault in both childhood and adulthood reported significantly greater odds of lifetime suicide attempts (Campbell et al., 2009). Suicidal ideation and suicide attempts, along with depression, PTSD, and drug and alcohol dependence were shown to be associated with victimization (Chuang et. al, 2012; Smith & Freyd, 2013; Ullman & Brecklin, 2002). These impairments and disorders have impacts on an individual's ability to be successful in college as well as the workforce given the aforementioned mental health implications.

## **Academic Consequences of Sexual Violence**

If the objective of documents and directives handed down by the Dear Colleague Letter and the Campus SaVE Act are intended to reduce hostile educational environments, it would be short-sighted to discuss campus sexual assault without directly addressing the academic consequences.

A woman suffering sequelae in the aftermath of a rape may experience cognitive impairment such that she is less able to concentrate, organize a set of facts, or remember details in the course of her studies. Depression or anxiety may diminish the energy a woman has to commit to academic work or decrease her ability to engage with other students due to social anxiety, shame, or embarrassment (Jordan et al., 2014, p. 197).

Despite 20-30 percent of women having had a lifetime experience of sexual assault or childhood sexual abuse (Breiding et al., 2014; Pereda et al., 2009), and despite the abundance of research focusing on college sexual misconduct prevention, response, and consequences, minimal attention has been paid to the academic success and persistence of those women who are survivors (Baker et al., 2016). Furthermore, those studies which have been conducted and published have differing and contradictory results (e.g. Mengo & Black, 2015; Elliott et al., 2009; Griffin & Read, 2012). Baker et al. (2016) controlled for other predictors of academic success such as high school grade-point average, standardized test scores and personality traits and found that increased incidents of violence resulted in lower grade point averages and academic persistence. The more severe the victimization (completed rape vs. non-consensual sexual contact), the higher the negative level of academic impact (Jordan, et al., 2014).

### **Sexual Misconduct as an Economic Crime**

As noted, academic success and college persistence can be impacted by attempted or completed victimization of sexual assault (Baker et al., 2016; Jordan et al., 2014). As progress toward and completion of a degree program can be hindered

by victimization, especially as the rate of severity increases, it can be argued that sexual assault victimization interferes with one's ability to obtain and sustain employment. Intimate partner violence, which is typically cyclical and ongoing in nature, is strongly correlated with negative employment and economic well-being (Adams et al., 2012; Swanberg et al., 2005). However, Loya (2015) also identified that victimization and its associated consequences are disruptive to employment including for those who were victimized in a singular incident. Consequences of singular incidents include added "time off, diminished performance, job loss, and inability to work" (p. 2793). The short-term employment consequences have enduring impacts on the economic well-being of the survivor for months and years to come.

### **Microsystem of Sexual Violence: Disclosures and Responses**

Microsystems are the dimension of Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological system's approach that focuses on interpersonal relationships, the engagement between two or more individuals. A microsystem that is important to consider for the study of sexual assault disclosures is the dynamic that exists between a person who has been victimized and the person or persons to whom they choose to disclose. For the purposes of this study, a sexual assault disclosure encompasses notification to another person. Disclosures may happen formally or informally and are typically embedded in the desire to seek help, resources, accommodations, accountability, or justice. In the following section I address the underreporting of sexual assault, the consequences and outcomes of reporting, barriers to reporting, and experiences of making and receiving disclosures.

## **Underreported Sexual Victimization and Intimate Partner Violence**

As demonstrated by the sexual violence prevalence data in Chapter I, the ways that sexual assault is defined, measured, and reported nationally are contested. In addition to the variations in accounting for prevalence, sexual assault is vastly underreported (Campbell & Townsend, 2011). Sexual assault (i.e., any non-consensual sexual contact) and rape (i.e., non-consensual intercourse) is estimated at anywhere between three times (White & Smith, 2004) and five times (NSVRC, 2015) higher in college women, as compared to their non-college peers; within that population, incapacitated rape happens significantly more frequently than forcible rape (Carey et al., 2015).

Because 75 to 80% of sexual assaults happen between people who have been acquainted with one another (Krebs et al., 2007), rather than following the predominant stranger rape narrative, victims are less likely to characterize their experience as rape and even less likely to report it. In a study by Kahn et al. (2003), women were mostly likely to acknowledge their experience as rape when the assailant was not their boyfriend and when they woke up with a man penetrating them or when the assailant used force and dominated them to obtain intercourse. They also found that women were less likely to label their experiences as rape if they have a strong familiarity with their assailant, identified as being in love with the assailant, and/or had had previous consensual sexual relations with the assailant compared to a stranger assailant or someone they had just met. Thus, “victims’ correct recognition of an incident as a form of sexual violence—and their personal acknowledgement of



the incident as such—undoubtedly influences the manner in which they describe the incident when they disclose their experience to others” (Sasson & Paul, 2014, p. 36).

The nature of the assault is relevant to disclosure research because it impacts how an individual characterizes their assault, which consequently dictates whether or not they disclose and to whom. In the Campus Sexual Assault (CSA) study Krebs et al. (2007) found that in a sample of 6,800 undergraduate students at two large public universities (80.4% female respondents), 28.5% of the women identified as having an experience of attempted or completed sexual misconduct of varying forms, but the nature of the assault was related to whether the women reported to formal supports (e.g. healthcare, police) versus informal supports (e.g. friends, family).

Approximately 70% of physically forced victims and 64% of incapacitated victims disclosed to an informal support. In stark contrast, 16% of those physically forced and 8% of those who were incapacitated during the assault reported to a crisis or healthcare center. Reporting to police occurred at an even lower rate, namely two percent for those who were physically incapacitated and 13% for those who were forced. In a study of approximately 1200 undergraduate students, Walsh et al. (2010) found that 16% reported being victimized by sexual violence during the current academic year. Of the respondents, 97% of those who experienced unwanted sexual contact and 94% of those who experienced unwanted sexual intercourse did not utilize any campus services. Seventy percent of those victimized reported not using services because they did not feel their experience was serious enough to warrant such services.

The National College Women Sexual Victimization study (Fisher et al., 2000), completed 3,805 telephone surveys with college women who attended institutions of higher education with populations over 1,000 students. Participants were presented with a list of 10 different behaviors associated with sexual assault such as various forms of coerced sexual contact, forced sexual contact, and threats of force. Of those who participated in the phone survey, nearly 15% of participants experienced some type of sexual victimization and several with multiple incidents totaling 1,161 incidents. Among those participants who reported an experience of victimization, fewer than five percent of completed or attempted rapes against college-age women were reported to law enforcement. Consistent with other studies, a majority of victims (66%) reported that they told their friends but not family or school officials. Ogletree (1993) conducted a study with 656 college women at three midwestern institutions and found that 42% of participants identified as survivors or victims of sexual assault, but only 28% of those respondents who identified as victims or survivors sought assistance. Among those who did seek help, more than three-quarters did so from friends, rather than professionals of any kind (Ogletree, 1993; Ullman, 1999). It is important to note a sharp difference in reporting by male victims: only approximately 20% of men who have been assaulted report at all, typically not to police, and the average lapse in time from incident to help-seeking or reports is seven years (King & Woollett, 1997).

### **The Impacts of Disclosure Experiences and Mechanisms that Stop Them**

Campus sexual assault disclosures are marked by two consequential actions-- first, making the decision to disclose the assault and second, the response to the

disclosure. In this section I discuss the survivor's decision to disclose and in the next section I will discuss experiences of disclosure recipients. The decision to make the disclosure is an emotional choice, embedded in the individual characterization of the assault, specifically based on the nature of the behaviors, the relationship to the assailant and other situational factors. For those who determine that their victimization did not warrant a disclosure to obtain resources, accommodations, or justice, they may not report to anyone. Feelings of shame, guilt, doubt and concerns for confidentiality, among other reasons may inform this decision. Additionally, the victimized person may believe that if they do disclose, the response will be negative, only exacerbating such negative emotions, thoughts, and experiences. The disclosure experience can have profound impacts, both positive and negative, on the person who has been victimized. In this section, I present the positive and negative outcomes associated with disclosures and then address some of the perceived relational and social barriers for reporting. Additional discussion for barriers rooted in concepts such as rape culture are be more fully explored in the section on macrosystems. Consequences of Sexual Assault Disclosures

It is difficult to address the positive outcomes of sexual assault disclosure, mighty as they may be, without addressing the possible consequences of negative disclosure experiences. Unfortunately, negative disclosure experiences have sequelae that are so consequential, they can outweigh the benefits of positive disclosure experiences. On the positive side, individuals who seek and receive support following a disclosure of sexual assault or rape have better long-term outcomes, compared to their non-help seeking counterparts. Such outcomes include less distress, more

resilience in relationships, and more positive mental health than those who do not disclose (Campbell, 2008; Orchowski et al., 2013; Ullman, 1999). At the same time, as described previously in this chapter, individual experiences with sexual violence frequently yield negative physical and mental health consequences (Campbell, 2000; Chuang et al., 2012; Smith & Freyd, 2013), declines in academic success as reflected in grade point average and progression toward graduation (Baker et al., 2016), and diminished financial prosperity (Jordan et al., 2014). Thus it is understandable that one might avoid disclosing so as not to exacerbate such symptoms or compound them further as a result of a negative disclosure experience.

Bonnan-White et al.'s (2015) mixed methods study utilized two reliable, valid online instruments to assess prevalence of trauma and the reactions of disclosing trauma. First, the Traumatic Life Event Questionnaire (TLEQ) (Kubany et al., 2000) was used to determine if a traumatic event had occurred and if it had been disclosed. After categorizing the first recipients of the first disclosure (family, friends, health care providers, legal officials, authority figures, others), the Social Reactions Questionnaire (SRQ) (Ullman, 2000) was then used to assess social reactions to the disclosure. Sixty-three of the 109 participants (57.8%) reported telling at least one person, and these participants were included in the analyses. The SRQ assessed for domains of emotional support, being treated differently, distraction, taking control, tangible aid and instrumental support, victim blaming and egocentric reactions. Kubany et al. (2000) found that the first person the survivor disclosed to gave the most positive responses compared to subsequent disclosure experiences. When victims received negative reactions from those first-disclosure individuals, however,

it resulted in increased negative symptoms such as those related to post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and self-blame.

DeCou et al. (2017) studied “assault-related shame” (p. 167) as a mediator of mental health consequences such as PTSD and other trauma related symptoms, specifically hypothesizing that such symptoms and disordered behavior would be exacerbated by negative social reactions, when survivors reported feelings of shame. Participants in the survey were 207 undergraduate students enrolled in psychology courses who had reported a history of attempted or completed sexual assault and had reported that they had disclosed their experience to at least one other person. Their sample represented a rate of victimization and disclosure of about 50%, which is a substantially higher rate of both victimization and disclosure than in other studies. Participants were recruited through a participant pool for psychology students. The researchers used the SES (Koss et al., 2007), SRQ (Ullman, 2000), the Abuse Specific Shame Questionnaire (ASSQ) (Feiring, & Taska, 2005) and the Center for Epidemiological Studies—Depression Scale (CES–D) (Radloff, 1977) to triangulate the participants’ assault, disclosure and distress experiences. Findings demonstrated strong evidence of shame as a mediator between negative reactions and increased distress. Self-report and retrospection were among the primary limitations identified by the authors, although self-report data in rape research is statistically valid (Koss, 1993; Koss & Gidycz, 1985).

From interviews with 102 female survivors of rape and sexual assault from a non-collegiate sample in the community, Campbell, Ahrens, Sefl et al. (2001) found that positive social reactions to disclosures such as support, listening and believing

had a negligible impact on recovery, while negative social reactions, such as blaming, hinder recovery. The mean age of participants was 34 and two-thirds identified as women of color. In this study, positive social reactions were uniformly identified by the participants, but other responses, categorized by the researchers as dismissive or controlling, were identified as both positive and negative by the participants. These findings suggest that while positive reactions were correlated with recovery, negative actions by support providers should be avoided. Campbell, Ahrens, Sefl et al. (2001) also found that positive responses by service providers were better than no response at all, but no response was better for survivor outcomes than a non-supportive or negative reaction.

Filipas & Ullman (2001) studied the relationships between the survivor and the recipient of the disclosure as well as the impact of the disclosure responses. Their sample was comprised of both college and community women who self-disclosed on a modified version of the Sexual Experiences Survey (SES) (Koss & Oros, 1982) that they had been forced to engage in sexual acts or threatened with force at some point since the age of 14. Participants were asked to answer the questions on the SES based on their most-remembered assault and associated disclosure. Participants were asked to select the social reactions they received from their identified disclosure from a list of 48 potential reactions. Filipas and Ullman (2001) indicated that both positive and negative reactions are commonly received by victims who share their assault experiences with others. They also found that “victims seeking help from formal support sources are more commonly faced with negative reactions of victim blame, stigmatizing responses and controlling reactions from others” (p. 673). While the

women in the study received more varied types of positive reactions, they received negative reactions more frequently. Open-ended questions on the modified SES asked participants to describe the most helpful responses received after disclosing the assault, the most unhelpful responses, and the most uniquely helpful response. Uniquely helpful was operationalized as “a response that was helpful in a way that other responses were not, and that may only be helpful if provided by a certain person/source” (p. 678). Finally, participants were asked to reflect on what they had hoped for in the disclosure experience. Stigmatization was the most unhelpful response, whereas listening was identified as the most helpful. Emotional support was identified as the most uniquely helpful response (26%) and also the response survivors wished they had received (30%). The relationship between the individual making the disclosure and the recipient of the disclosure was significant. Negative reactions from formal support providers had a negative impact on victims, whereas positive reactions from formal support providers did not impact adjustment. Positive and negative responses from people close to the survivor highly influenced survivor adjustment.

### **Barriers to Reporting**

With harm occurring regularly from disclosures, it is imperative to examine disclosure and response experiences from multiple perspectives. Given the complex history of oppression and the far-reaching span of rape myth acceptance, survivors might also be met with racism, sexism, victim blaming, and changes in relationships, in addition to exacerbated symptoms of mental health disorders (Smith & Freyd, 2013; Ullman, 1996a). Survivors of sexual assault identified several barriers to

disclosing their assaults, which include reactions of victim blaming, stigmatizing responses, and attempts to take additional autonomy of the survivor (Ullman, 2010). In their reasoning for not reporting assault, survivors offered varied explanations: they felt as though it was a private matter, they feared retaliation from an offender or other, they were concerned that the offender would get in trouble, they worried the matter would not get proper attention from authorities (seriousness, bias), or they did not believe it was serious enough to warrant attention (Bachman, 1998; Sable et al., 2006).

In a survey study of 1,230 students, Walsh et al. (2010) found that those who had been victimized and who were reluctant to utilize campus services did so because they were concerned about not being believed or even that they would be blamed for the sexual assault. Other survivors reported experiences of secondary coercion as service providers provided prescriptive advice or direction as to what the victim should be doing (Spangaro et al., 2011). Sable et al. (2006) conducted a survey of 215 students (54% female). Both women and men reported shame, guilt and embarrassment as the key barriers to reporting rape and sexual assault. Men and women reported different key influences on their disclosure decisions, however: men were highly concerned with being judged as gay, whereas women reported fear of retaliation. Both men and women shared concerns around confidentiality, however. Because they did not want their family to know, 44% percent of female students did not report a completed rape to police or the school (Fisher et al., 2000; Fisher et al., 2003). Sable et al. (2006) found that confidentiality was the third highest identified



barrier for women; it was also ranked third for men, along with fear of not being believed.

Washington (2001) asserts that even though Black and White women experience sexual victimization at the same rates and even suffer from physical injuries at the same rates, Black women sustain longer recovery periods that are also qualitatively different. A key factor in this recovery is access to adequate support networks. Washington (2001) conducted in-depth interviews with 12 Black women to discuss the impact of age, race, gender and sexual orientation on the quality of services they received following sexual victimization. Washington situated sexual assault and recovery of Black women in a historical context where women were objectified and commodified by White men and coerced by additional threats of violence and family separation:

Although Black women's experiences of sexual violence intersect with those of White women in many ways, the historical and contemporary realities of Black life in the United States lead to fundamental differences in the nature and quality of resource available to Black survivors, their willingness to access those resources, and the treatment they receive when they do seek help (p. 1254).

Washington (2001) thus argues that while many of the reasons for not reporting sexual assault are similar among Black and White women, intersectional perspectives are necessary to fully comprehend the circumstances of reporting for Black women. Specifically she names sexual orientation, economic status, the circumstances surrounding or the nature of the assault, availability of services, fear of White racism,

degree of adherence to a Black culture mandate to protect male offenders from criminal prosecution (or negative public perception in general), connection to a spiritual source, the dampening effect of unsuccessful disclosures by others, prior negative interactions with social service agencies and prior sexual relations with the assailant. Washington also found that women of color were unlikely to seek assistance from predominantly White agencies such as shelters and rape crisis centers.

Sexual assault disclosures are complex. As explained in this section thus far, while seeking support from mental and emotional health providers can result in long-term benefits, the circumstances of the disclosure response greatly impact those outcomes in ways that may mitigate or counteract potential benefits. The studies presented in this section have focused on the survivors' perspectives, including their experiences, perceptions of the disclosure experiences, and service provision. Yet in order to fully understand the disclosure experience, it is essential to understand disclosure recipient experiences as well.

### **Experiences of Disclosure Recipients**

Research into survivor decision making processes, post-disclosure impacts, and systematic perspectives on why survivors disclose dominate the survivor discourse (e.g., Campbell, 2006; Campbell, 2008; Ullman, 1996a; Ullman 1996b; Ullman, 1999). In order to improve the disclosure experience for survivors, it is necessary to study the experiences of the recipients themselves. While sexual assault remains vastly underreported, for those who do report, it is mostly likely to an informal person, such as a friend, family member or romantic partner--especially for their first disclosure (Ullman, 1996b). Occasionally formal supports such as police,

medical providers and in the environment of higher education, faculty or staff, may also be recipients of a first disclosure and disclosures in general. In this section, I review the small but important literature on the experiences of recipients of disclosures of sexual misconduct in higher education. I begin with the experiences of student staff who are responsible employees and conclude with research on faculty as recipients, which represents three studies conducted by the same scholars.

There has yet to be any published research on the experiences of university staff members as recipients of student disclosures of sexual assault. Holland and Cortina (2017) conducted a study with student staff members who are also identified as responsible employees. This study is not an exact proxy for full-time staff due to the complicated peer status that student employees may hold, but it is a starting point for considering the experiences and conceptualizations of staff. Student staff members at universities may be given many of the same responsibilities as full-time faculty and staff to aid in federal compliance standards such as Clery reporting, to assist students in crisis, and to mitigate risk to the campus. Title IX guidance dictates that a responsible employee is any employee who has the authority, or perceived authority, to address sexual violence or gender discrimination. While the federal policies do not lay out the specific positions, they do note that those staff members who are reasonably believed to have an authority or duty are required to report to the Title IX coordinator and assist the student in obtaining appropriate resources (Lhamon, 2014).

Holland et al. (2018) identified four hypotheses related to mandatory reporting roles, focused specifically on student paraprofessionals: 1) there would be a positive

correlation of knowledge of procedures and resources and likelihood of referrals; 2) employees' trust in the institution's process would have a positive correlations with referrals to the process; 3) favorable perceptions of the process would have a positive correlation with the likelihood of staff reports and referrals; and 4) the interaction of knowledge, trust and perceptions combined would have a positive correlation with reporting and referrals. Based on survey data from 305 student staff members at a large Midwestern university, measured attitudes about hypothetical vignettes and also measured attitudes and behaviors related to the campus climate, Holland and Cortina (2017) found that staff members had higher levels of trust in campus resource centers than in the process and the requirements of reporting. Additionally, despite having received training, they reported low levels of knowledge of the process itself, demonstrating either a lack of understanding, poor training or both. The authors suggested that staff believed that institutional betrayal (that is, when the institution fails to prevent or respond appropriately to sexual assault, discussed in more detail in the next section) existed on their campus, which engendered mistrust for such processes. The implication of the findings is that the ability to anticipate, rather than predict, the behavior of disclosure recipients can change the climate for survivors. In other words, if students know what responses they can expect from faculty and staff in advance of disclosures, the student's disclosure experience will be met with fewer unknowns and more consistent expectations. As a result, students can focus on obtaining resources, rather than the unexpected response to their disclosure. Consistent with the data on the positive and negative consequences of disclosures, Holland and Cortina (2017) asserted that both policies and practices should be

examined as a result of such findings and subsequently informed by the realistic attitudes and actions of staff.

Richards et al. (2013) studied the experiences of faculty as recipients of student disclosures of crime with 261 full-time faculty at two institutions. Utilizing an online survey, professors were asked if they had ever received a disclosure of crime from a student, the nature of the disclosure, and their own identity-based information such as gender, age, race, and discipline. Of those who identified their gender, faculty were equally represented. Racial diversity of the sample was limited, with 82% of the participants who were White. The mean age of the sample was 48 years. Among those who had received a disclosure (n=110), age and gender of the recipients matched the overall sample size, but 98% of those who had received a disclosure were White. Unfortunately, the authors did not present analyses as to the relationship between disclosures and race, although they did identify a statistically significant increased likelihood of being a recipient of a disclosure for younger faculty and those who teach “sensitive topics.” When asked about their most recent disclosure experiences, Richards et al. (2013) found that two-thirds of the participants identified a disclosure of interpersonal violence. The location of 73% of disclosures was in the faculty member’s office, whereas the remaining disclosures were made in class, through assignments or other non-specified means. More than half of participants believed that the disclosure was a result of the content being discussed in class. Of those faculty who had received a disclosure, 89% reported knowledge of the university’s sexual misconduct policy, but 63% reported “no” or “I don’t know” when asked about adequate university resources for survivors of sexual assault.

Branch et al. (2011) conducted qualitative telephone interviews with 30 faculty members who had received a disclosure of sexual misconduct during their career. Among the participants, 27 faculty members self-identified as women, while all 30 of the participants self-identified racially as White. Ninety-three percent of the faculty members had received more than one report of sexual assault or PARTNER VIOLENCE. The faculty members reported that students who disclosed to them were predominantly female and enrolled in the faculty member's course(s). The only disclosure that had come from a male was one where he was reporting not as a primary victim, but rather as a secondary or vicarious survivor. Disclosures were made to the faculty members primarily in-person or through email correspondence and were either initiated when the faculty members noticed that the students had course performance issues or when the student-initiated contact (the most common disclosure context). Branch et al. (2011) found that those courses that addressed issues of gender or violence were more likely to elicit disclosures, consistent with Richards et al. (2013), who had also found sensitive course content to be significantly associated with the likelihood of a disclosure experience. Finally, Branch et al. (2011) asked participants to recommend resources for responding to student disclosures and to recommend strategies for other faculty to have more positive experiences with disclosures. The faculty participants' recommendations included the following:

- (a) to familiarize oneself with campus and community resources, (b) to listen,
- (c) to invite guest speakers to classes, (d) to have more resources to support faculty members and to have easy access to those provided, (e) to have training for responding to victims, and (f) to have the opportunity to debrief

after receiving a disclosure—similar to advocates [*sic*] opportunity for “self-care” (Branch et al., 2011, p. 65).

Hayes-Smith et al. (2010) interviewed female faculty to understand the impact and role strain that results from student sexual assault disclosures. Criminal justice professors were electronically invited to participate in the study. All of the respondents were White, ranged in age from 27-68 years, and had an average of 11 years of teaching experience. Approximately half of the participants were tenured faculty. Semi-structured interviews averaged approximately 30 minutes in length and consisted of 39 questions that explored the dimensions of the sexual assault disclosure. Questions covered how the disclosure occurred, feelings and reactions, and how the experience might have impacted the survivor. Faculty reported role strain derived from two aspects of the disclosure experience: degree of training and feeling isolated. Consequently, faculty reported emotional burden, role negotiation issues, and impacts on teaching and grading. As a result of their findings, Hayes-Smith et al. (2010) suggested that institutions increase attention to the possibility of faculty receiving disclosures of sexual assault, especially when teaching sensitive issues. The authors noted that the result of faculty members who are better able to anticipate disclosures would be decreased isolation. They argued that because disclosures would be considered more acceptable to discuss with colleagues, the faculty would have improved support networks.

There are several types of institutional stakeholders and community members who are involved with sexual assault prevention and response at a higher education institution. The responsible employee designation applies not just faculty, but also

professional staff and key student staff roles. While faculty roles differ substantially from both types of staff roles in several ways, staff conceptualizations and enactments of the responsible employee duties can be useful in considering faculty experiences. Moylan (2016) focused on campus-based sexual assault advocates since advocates spend the majority of their time on issues related to sexual assault. Advocates serve as a primary resource for victims and therefore are likely to be aware of the impact of campus responses on victims. Advocates are likely to be informed about and involved in the implementation of policy relevant to sexual assault on campus. Of the 14 participants in Moylan's (2016) study, 85% of the participants described that inadequate campus responses to sexual assault could result in consequences for the institutions. Moylan found that advocates discussed compliance with policy, specifically addressing the lack of policy clarity and the lack of best practices for responding to students who have been victimized. The findings from interviews with campus advocates demonstrate that there is a need to consult the campus community members who are directly engaged in violence prevention and response. While best practices for addressing campus sexual violence have not yet been identified, the development of policy and the implementation of practices should include the voices of those with experiences. In addition to advocates, institutions should look to faculty and staff who have experiences with sexual assault disclosures to help guide institutional response protocols and training.

In the context of the microsystem, I have described how relationships between individuals influence disclosures of sexual assault and the response to the disclosures. Faculty have unique roles that include instruction and advising and as part of those



roles they are responsible for teaching, evaluation of student performance, intimate student relationships and oversight of classroom management. As demonstrated by the literature on disclosures, the duties of faculty as responsible employees, mandated to elevate reports of sexual violence, cannot be ignored. Faculty should be trained to anticipate a disclosure based on the subjects they teach (Branch et al., 2011; Richards et al., 2013) and the modalities in which they communicate with students (Richards et al., 2013). Students are not the only individuals impacted by disclosures. Faculty report role-strain and emotional distress, in particular when they are isolated from discussing disclosure experiences with other faculty members (Hayes-Smith, 2010).

The intersection of multiple microsystems is known as the mesosystem. The mesosystem reflects the challenges of institutional betrayal and faculty members' willingness to comply with compelled disclosure policies. These systems inform and are informed by the other ecological contexts discussed thus far. In the next section, I discuss impacts of institutional betrayal and faculty beliefs about policy that position faculty as mediators between the institution and students.

### **The Mesosystem of Sexual Assault: Students, Faculty and the Institution**

The mesosystem is the dimension of ecological systems theory where multiple microsystems are simultaneously in relation with one another. For the purposes of this study, one can look to how faculty are situated within and in relation to the institution. Because of the potential of receiving sexual assault disclosures, and how Title IX and Clery rules are interpreted, faculty may be considered "responsible employees", requiring them to share details of the disclosure they have received with designated campus administrators such as the Title IX coordinator or campus police.

That required process was classified by Holland et al. (2018) as compelled disclosures.

In their study of sexual misconduct policies at 150 four-year, non-profit institutions of varying size, Holland et al. (2018) found that 146 had compelled disclosure policies. Of those 146 institutions, 69% named all employees as “responsible” or mandatory reporters. The remaining 31% of institutions used more ambiguous language such as “most employees” or used completely non-specific language to determine which positions were considered responsible. There is no evidence to support how designations of responsible employees should be applied. It is unknown if the number of responsible employees or the strategy behind designating employees as responsible are effective in supporting students or improving rates of institutional compliance. Despite lacking evidence in effectiveness, institutions apply the responsible employee to all faculty and staff at a high rate (Holland et al., 2018).

Designations of responsible employees are not the only challenge with institutional practices. Faculty need to be properly trained to fulfill their obligations in a way that is both compliant with institutional policy, but also supports the needs of the person making the disclosure. As demonstrated in the microsystem literature on disclosure impacts and disclosure reactions, disclosures to faculty do have the potential to contribute to positive or negative outcomes. Specifically, if those who are designated as helpers or perceived to be capable of providing support respond in a way that is dismissive or blaming, the victimized person may suffer exacerbated symptoms as a result of violence. Responsible employees are those who have or are perceived to have the ability to address the situation. If students disclose to a

responsible employee and are subsequently met with inaction or blame, there exists a disconnect between what the student believes they should receive and what is provided. This disconnect is further defined as institutional betrayal, discussed in the next section.

### **Institutional Betrayal**

The concept of “institutional betrayal” (Smith & Freyd, 2013) refers to when a college or university either fails to adequately protect students from assault or responds to the report of the assault or the associated disclosures in a way that elicits increased levels of anxiety and trauma symptoms for the victimized individual. Institutional betrayal extends well beyond feelings of mistrust and has significant mental health consequences for victims, including increased levels of anxiety, trauma symptoms, dissociation and sexual functioning (Smith & Freyd, 2013), all which have enduring negative impacts in long-term well-being (Chuang et. al, 2012). Smith and Freyd (2013) considered a variety of institutional environments, such as the military and higher education, in their work on institutional betrayal. They found that “abuse experienced within institutional environments seem to carry the same ill effects as interpersonal abuse” (p. 120). They argued that the typically individual consequences (physical, mental, financial and academic, etc.) can be exacerbated by institutional betrayal, in ways that go beyond the effects that can be explained by the initial traumatic event itself.

Betrayal behaviors exist among micro- and mesosystems and are sustained through the exo- and macrosystem. Institutional betrayal reflects individual complicity in an institutional culture where the institution could and should have

taken action to intervene proactively but failed or actively chose not to do so (Smith & Freyd, 2013). Betrayal trauma theory emphasizes the importance of human relationships in both the harm caused by trauma and the potential for healing (Freyd, 2013; Freyd & Birrell, 2013). The examples of institution betrayal described thus far addressed multiple relationships that exist at an institution, specifically student to student in a violent interaction, and student to faculty as part of the disclosure experience. Betrayal increases negative sequelae of a victimized student. Freyd (1994, 1996) also argued that there is a “social utility” in maintaining a denial or lack of awareness of the betrayal that occurred. In the next section, I describe the institutional dimensions of the mesosystem, specifically the relationships between the student and institution and the institutional obligations of faculty in relation to sexual assault.

Freyd (1994, 1996) used the term “betrayal blindness” to describe the behaviors of denial or avoiding acceptance of a betrayal. Her initial research was on the abuse of children in familiar, care-based settings and the utility of forgetting trauma so as to maintain safety and preserve the positive benefits of engaging in a trusting relationship. Freyd (2020) discussed the ways in which institutions develop a sense of trust, cohesion, and a familial connection with students in their recruitment and retention efforts. As students feel that they belong in the university community, they may feel reluctant to move forward with a report of harm caused by an individual at the institution. If the student chooses to report, but the institution does not act on the report, the student's sense of allegiance and trust in the institution may cause the student to further dismiss their experience.

## **Obligations, Awareness, and Attitudes: Faculty Willingness to Comply with Compelled Disclosures in the Context of Betrayal**

Faculty engagement in compelled disclosures of sexual assault, may be one way that institutions can support their students. As demonstrated, however; the literature on compelled disclosure policies does not yield increased favorable outcomes for students. The general narrative in the higher education news outlets geared toward faculty and staff (e.g. Brown, 2018; Flaherty, 2015) support faculty beliefs that students do not know about the bounds of confidentiality of responsible employees. Newins et al. (2018) found that students reported high levels of knowledge of faculty reporting requirements and also high levels of agreement with those mandated responsibilities. In the same study, Newins et al. (2018) found that university employees were both knowledgeable and, when presented with a case-study, were likely to follow university policy. Mancini et al. (2016) examined employee attitudes toward compelled disclosures and found that a majority of participants had knowledge of reporting policies and said they would comply with such policies. However, when it came to acting on the disclosure, less than half of those who stated they would report actually did so. While Newins et al. (2018) also found that employees and students had positive feelings about the reporting requirements, participants in their study did not have favorable attitudes about their own reporting obligations and also believed that students had unfavorable attitudes. In summary, there are several discrepancies between what university community members believe are the duties of the institution to respond to disclosures and the actual competence (knowledge, skills and awareness) to follow through with those

disclosure-based duties. Such confusion about roles and required action can lead to faculty and institutional inaction, thereby students feel betrayed by their institution.

Whereas Newins et al. (2018) and Mancini et al. (2016) drew attention to the discrepancies between knowledge and action related to compelled disclosures, Holland et al. (2018) established that the effectiveness of compelled disclosure policies is unknown. The intention of compelled disclosure policies is also contested among scholars and practitioners. The Clery Act requires institutions to report any disclosures so that students and families can make informed decisions on crime as a consumer protection. Title IX directives are intended to eliminate a hostile learning environment and provide equal access regardless of gender, which includes contact with a staff Title IX coordinator and likely referral to campus and community resources (OCR, 2014; Kiss & Feeny White, 2016).

Institutional compelled disclosure policies have the potential to simultaneously serve multiple constituents. The institutions can manage risk and fulfill obligations of federal compliance, while students are theoretically provided with a standard set of resources. I have demonstrated that the current implementation of such policies is not based on research. As a result of applying an unfounded practice at institutions all across the nation, there is variation in how faculty talk about to these obligations (e.g. Brown, 2018; Flaherty, 2015; Mancini et al., 2016; Newins et al., 2018), and thus how they enact them. Resistance to reporting obligations combined with poor training on the responsible employee role results in variation in responses to disclosure; combinations which can include unsupportive responses, non-compliant responses, or no response at all. As with the microsystem

implications, institutions would benefit from incorporating faculty voices into their processes.

### **Disclosures in the Exosystem of Higher Education**

The exosystem in which assault, disclosures, and betrayal exist is higher education. In Chapter I, the regulatory context for addressing sexual violence at institutions of higher education set the stage for the myriad challenges associated with sexual assault and reporting. In situating the industry of education, and specifically how higher education operates, I present multiple perspectives represented in the literature, including national organizations, discourse through publications for the general faculty and staff populations, and a brief political framing from the presidential administrations.

The Association of Title IX Administrators (ATIXA) argued that inclusive responsible employee policies remove ambiguity for university employees (2015). In a survey of over 300 student employees, Holland and Cortina (2017) found that responsible employees complied because they felt it was their duty, but such reporting complicated their roles. Flaherty (2015) presented competing perspectives about mandated reporting for faculty. Flaherty cited the same guidance from ATIXA about mitigating role confusion but situated it as the counter-argument from faculty around the nation who engaged directly with students and their concerns about academic freedom. Holland et al. (2018) refer to the process of required reporting disclosures as “compelled disclosures.” In general, faculty are concerned that compelled reporting and responsible employee mandates result in students not coming forward to seek the help they would have otherwise received because of that

fear of retaliation by the institution or the perpetrator, and concern for privacy (White House Task Force, 2014). For those students who do disclose an assault, Flaherty (2015) stated that faculty do not know how to respond and have concerns that it will affect objective course evaluations as well. Posick et al. (2016) conducted a study on characteristics of students who demonstrate help-seeking behaviors on campus related to sexual assault. Nearly 800 students at a large institution in the rural south completed the survey, representative of the institutional demographics. From the data, Posick et al. (2016) argued that legal mandates may prohibit students from non-therapeutic help-seeking because of duties to report. In contrast, Mancini et al. (2016) found in a study of approximately 400 students at a research university in the northeast, over 65% of students surveyed said they were in support of mandatory reporting and 86.1% said they thought faculty were likely or very likely to comply. They reported a reduced likelihood of student autonomy, but also reported a higher likelihood of better support offerings.

Campus policies, such as sweeping designations about faculty as responsible employees, have emerged in response to federal legislation (Iverson, 2016). “Lawmakers, administrators, and researchers should think critically about how mandatory reporting policies affect the campus community-including those members who are obligated to enforce them” (Holland & Cortina, 2017, p. 7). Regular training of faculty and staff is required by policy; however, this is likely not occurring in a widespread way. If training is happening, it is typically delivered in a convenient, single-dose, online learning module, rather than thoughtful institution-specific learning based on faculty feedback. Without evidence to support modalities of



teaching and learning disclosure response procedures and practices, institutions will continue to foster a campus culture that is indirectly permissive of sexual violence, and thus faculty who do not understand the full scope of their obligations to respond and report.

Flaherty (2015) argued mandatory reporting will hurt students and the campus culture more than help them. Faculty are concerned that such mandates ensure that students will not come forward and seek the help they would have otherwise received because of that fear of retaliation by the institution or the perpetrator, and out of concern for privacy (White House Task Force, 2014). For those students who do disclose an assault, Flaherty (2015) stated that faculty do not know how to respond and have concerns that it will affect objective course evaluations as well. These concerns are both valid but may not be connected or of value in the argument about whether to eliminate compelled disclosure roles and policies. A case to do so would likely to have to address the contextual components of the meso- and exosystem that contributed to the culture at the individual institutions, but also the macrosystems reflective of rape culture, discussed further in the next section.

### **Macrosystems: College in a Rape Culture**

According to the basic tenets of the social ecological model, colleges and universities do not exist in isolation. The regulatory climate that produced laws and directives such as Title IX, VAWA and the Clery Act described in Chapter I, and the environments in which they operate, are reflective of history and social conditions. As demonstrated thus far, the ecological systems theory can be applied broadly to sexual

assault to understand the multiple domains in which sexual assault discourse impacts and is impacted by the culture.

Narratives of college sexual violence are demonstrative of a culture that is rooted in violence and perpetuates violence, resulting in the constant reproduction of physically and psychologically harmful ideologies and actions. Both implicitly and explicitly, college sexual violence is omnipresent on American campuses. As a result, regulations and laws have given rise to mandates of responsible employees.

Responsibility has shifted to the institutions, charging them with a duty to prevent and respond to sexual violence across social-ecological domains. Simultaneously, networks of student activities have also emerged to counteract policy while also attempting to hold institutions accountable. As explained by Kiss & Feeney White (2016):

The higher education community and its response to sexual violence has been under added scrutiny since the issuance of the 2011 Dear Colleague Letter addressing Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 (Title IX), the passage of the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) amendments to the Clery Act, and a network of student survivors deemed the Know Your IX mobilized to file complaints against colleges and universities for violating the Clery Act and Title IX (p. 95).

Despite this highly regulatory context spanning the exo- and macrosystems, there still exists a disconnect between institutional safety and a culture that is rape-prone-- which is also known as “rape culture.” In this section, I define rape culture and

present examples of the macrosystem context by addressing rape discourse and language mechanisms such as rape myth acceptance (RMA).

### **Rape Culture**

Rape culture “refers to multiple pervasive issues that allow rape and sexual assault to be excused, legitimized and viewed as inevitable” (White & Smith, 2004, p. 174). Rape culture contributes to the human behavior that exists in perpetration, victimization and response. Martha Burt, who proposed the Rape Myth Acceptance (RMA) Scale (1980), highlighted problematic legal reforms as indicators of a rape supportive culture, such as lowering the age for sexual consent, minimizing penalties for convictions of sexual crimes, and allowing specific elements of victim’s character to be used as evidence to dismiss sexual assault charges. In Burt’s congressional report (1978), which predated the RMA scale (1978), she identified sex-role stereotyping, sexual conservatism, acceptance of interpersonal violence as ideologies that contribute to the support of rapists.

In rape culture, women and men assume sexual violence is a fact of life (Buchwald et al. 2005). Likewise, Wilhelm (2015) argued that rape culture normalizes, trivializes, and condones sexual assault against women. Sanday (1981) studied what became known as rape-prone cultures, which are those cultures where “incidence of rape is high, rape is a ceremonial act, or rape is an act by which men punish or threaten women” (p. 9), which spans several different populations and cultures. Rape-prone societies are those where the assault of women by men is allowable or overlooked. Barnett (2012) characterized a rape culture as one where the threat of assault is so pervasive that it impacts daily lives to the extent that regular

decisions, both active and passive, are influenced deeply by the presence and threat of rape. As the threat and influence of rape become ubiquitous, it is then entrenched and normalized in society.

Rape cultures are also enabled by the poor treatment of those who have been victimized. Because blame or shame is quickly associated with a victim's experience in rape supportive or rape prone communities, sexual assault is vastly underreported (Ullman, 1999; Campbell & Townsend, 2011). Research on institutional betrayal (Smith & Freyd, 2013) provides clear evidence that when disclosures of sexual assault are made to formal resources, the disclosures are frequently met with resistance and victim blaming. As discussed earlier in this chapter, such negative responses have enduring impacts on survivors' abilities to achieve positive outcomes in a variety of domains in their lives, such as mental and physical health (Chuang et al., 2012; Smith and Freyd, 2013; Campbell, 2006), academic success (Baker et al., 2016), and financial prosperity (Jordan et al., 2014). Despite scholarly work and attention given to such an epidemic, the research exists in and is often conducted against the backdrop of spaces and institutions that may be complicit with, and perhaps even perpetuate rape-prone and rape supportive cultures in ways that serve to maintain patriarchy and justify violence against women (Lonsway & Fitzgerald, 1994; Payne et al., 1994).

While rape-prone cultures are certainly not exclusive to higher education or to the United States, there are some specific elements of American college and university culture which enable and may even promote such violent behaviors. The presence and role of alcohol, social fraternities, rape myth acceptance, and

institutional prioritization of positive public relations all play a role. A key construct of rape culture in which higher education and sexual assault disclosures are situated is language. In the next section I discuss language as a mechanism that transcends multiple social ecological domains before focusing on RMA as a particularly problematic yet constant element of rape supportive culture.

### **Language**

In her chapter on language and activism, Mallinson (2017) stated that “in social theory, language is viewed as being a fundamental interactional mechanism that operates on micro-, meso-, and macro levels” (p. 420). Thus, if language is a fundamental, the study of a social phenomenon such as sexual assault, which also crosses social-ecological contexts, would not be complete without looking at the linguistic components of how such violence is enacted and maintained. Mallinson also stated that language is not “inherently ideological” (pp. 419-420), but rather the ways in which the language is used, and its byproducts, are what give power to both words and messages. Such a statement reiterates that multiple conditions in which language is used, including the intentions of language, are powerful tools in shaping experiences of individuals, groups and culture.

Language impacts all dimensions of sexual assault discourse across social-ecological contexts. The ways in which assault is referenced exists in relation to personal, community, and organizational ideologies and conceptualizations of sexual assault, such that discourse is recursive. Krebs et al. (2016) identified research challenges associated with defining sexual assault, while Kahn et al. (2003) found

that behaviors were labeled by victims in accordance to their relationship with the assailant.

Conceptualizations of sexual behavior, decisions to report, and responses to such behavior all exist in relation to what is happening in the social world. Rape culture heavily influences and is influenced by language, which in turn impacts sexual assault discourse. Just as Bronfenbrenner situated context as crucial for understanding behavior, Fairclough (1989) proposed three key elements in support of the notion that language is also contextual. The first is that language is part of society, rather than an external factor; second, the language process is one that is social; and third that language, as part of a social process, is conditioned by other linguistic and non-linguistic social factors. Communities reflect a rape-supportive culture, through language practices and behavior. Rape myth acceptance, discussed in the next section, is an example of how rape-prone ideologies are reflected in language and potentially enacted through responses to sexual assault disclosures.

### **Rape Myth Acceptance**

One dimension of rape-prone cultures is the acceptance and use of “rape myths” in individual conceptions of sexual assault and as demonstrated through language and actions. Rape myths have been defined by Lonsway & Fitzgerald (1994) as “attitudes and beliefs that are generally false but are widely and persistently held, and that serve to deny and justify male sexual aggression against women” (p. 134). Rape myth acceptance perpetuates rape supportive cultures in a variety of ways. Bedera and Nordmeyer (2015) conducted a content analysis of college and university websites, finding that tips for safety were predominantly targeted to women, rather

than men, displacing the responsibility for safety on potential victims. The majority of the tips emphasized women's risk-reduction, rather than prevention. Such tips referenced women's occupation of dark or isolated spaces as high risk while other tips referenced the need for women to stay in groups, locking their car and room doors, and never answering the door if a stranger is present. Bedera and Nordmeyer (2015) suggested that women's roles in prevention can be empowering, rather than constantly being fearful, but the authors also suggested that fixating on women's empowerment to stop assault, rather than men's responsibility, perpetuates the normative idea that women will be raped. Bedera and Nordmeyer (2015) argued that educational landscapes are cluttered with messages around prevention, typically targeted to women; thus, "sexual assault prevention tips present a paradox for women in which they are always vulnerable to attack yet expected to prevent their own sexual assaults" (p. 540). Behaviors, coupled with social norms and expectations, are intertwined in ways that produce rape as a normative part of the college experience.

The college experience juxtaposes the powerful motives of sex and aggression in a population that is still forming a stable identity within an environment that includes strong peer pressures for sexual activity, the ritualistic abuse of alcohol, a culture that objectifies women, and a culture that frequently views sexual intercourse as an act of masculine conquest.

(Adams-Curtis & Forbes, 2004, pp. 91-92)

A rape-supportive culture, inclusive of rape myths, confuses consent and coercive practices in both language and behavior. Adams-Curtis and Forbes (2004) argued that in order to more optimally serve students, there is a need for increased

emphasis on operationalizing definitions so as to better assess actual behavior rather than relying on assumptions. Consistent with most other literature addressing campus sexual assault, it is essential to focus on educational and behavioral changes with perpetrators, rather than emphasizing education on avoidance for victims. Sanday (1996) identified several characteristics of a rape-free campus culture, which refers to the dynamics of the institution rather than the true non-existence of rape as the label might suggest. A rape-free campus is one where community and relationships transcend power and position dynamics. Those who violate norms of respect face steep consequences such as removal from the community. In such an environment, language that reflects homophobia, racism, and sexism is non-existent. At the time of her publication, Sanday (1996) was unable to identify a specific college or university free of RMA. Although Sandy's research occurred more than twenty years ago, there is no evidence to support that those findings would be different today.

Perpetuation of rape myths by individuals and through programs is a mechanism by which colleges and universities promulgate institutional hegemony, such that colleges and universities operate in a fashion that lacks accountability and consequences for those who assault, while simultaneously silencing those who have been victimized. "Rape myths function as hierarchy legitimizing myths—in other words, rape myths may represent explanations for rape that promote or maintain consensual or normalized group-based inequality and legitimize discrimination, thereby stabilizing oppression" (Hockett & Saucier, 2015, p. 4; Pratto et al., 1994). Programs and services are reflective of RMA, such that program content and the manner in which content is delivered may be embedded in a culture that reflects



social norms and beliefs of RMA. For example, Bachar and Koss (2001) found that women in mixed-sex groups reported that men downplayed women's feelings and experiences and mitigated threat or fear, rather than engage in discourse about ending rape. In single-sex groups, women spoke to systemic social issues, reflective of RMA, including power and control and sexist attitudes as contributing to sexual assault. Men, however, spoke more to biological needs and misinterpretation of women's intentions as a cause for sexual assault (Romero-Sanchez & Megías, 2015). This ideology is consistent with RMA's attribution to the fulfillment of men's sexual needs as priority over women's consent (Adams-Curtis & Forbes, 2004). With pressure from the Office for Civil Rights, the field is primed to evaluate program efficacy, and implement evidence-based strategies. Unfortunately, professional networks in student affairs and higher education acknowledge that colleges and universities are often scrambling to implement programs for compliance purposes, rather than effectiveness or outcome-drive results, further supporting the perpetuation of RMA.

It is important to situate institutions of higher education as powerful entities, not autonomous of governmental authority and hegemony. It is also essential, however, to acknowledge that colleges and universities are made up of individual people, such as faculty and staff, who operate as an extension of such institutions and for a number of reasons may be ill equipped to respond in ways that serve survivors of campus sexual assault. Stotzer & McCartney (2015) argued that it is not the organizations themselves that are rape-prone, but rather the characteristics of the individuals in them. It is also arguable that the social agency of those individuals and subgroups involved, especially financial capital associated with fraternity

membership, might also attract those same characteristics such as risk taking under the conditions of elite membership. Campus policies, such as sweeping designations about faculty as responsible employees have emerged in response to federal legislation (Iverson, 2016).

### **Chapter Summary**

Understanding the intricacies of campus sexual violence has to be done systematically and with a strong evidence base. In this chapter I used a social ecological approach developed by Urie Bronfenbrenner to situate the complex and intricate ways in which sexual violence is maintained in higher education, just as it is beyond the ivory towers. By examining dimensions of rape culture, sexual assault as a pervasive public problem both in quantity and impact, multiple discourses related to the role of institutions in addressing sexual assault, and the intricacies of disclosure, the foundations for understanding the complexities of sexual violence have been laid. Applying the comprehensive bioecological model, including all aspects of the process-person-context-time model (PPCT, Bronfenbrenner & Evans, 2000), rather than only focusing on the context, reveals distinct gaps in the literature. At the individual level, measures of resilience and past experiences of trauma inform how personal characteristics present. Necessary for understanding how faculty understand and respond to disclosures are the characteristics of the disclosure recipient as well. Interpersonal violence and the dynamic interaction between social ecological contexts for those who have been victimized by gender-based violence are represented in research, but there is much less research on how faculty, and specifically faculty who have been recipients of sexual assault disclosures, navigate those conditions and

contexts. Time of responsiveness and the time consumed by the mandated processes, both of which can reflect either institutional betrayal or a survivor-supportive response, must also be attended to. In the next chapter, I build on the existing body of literature that addressed sexual assault reporting and response to further demonstrate a need for a qualitative study with faculty respondents to disclosures of sexual violence to fill such gaps.

### **Chapter III: Research Design and Methodology**

How institutions colleges and universities respond to sexual violence can only be understood by capturing the experiences of multiple constituents across the institution. Whereas the literature has focused primarily on student experiences, faculty members, as respondents to sexual violence, have largely been omitted from the research. What we do know about faculty members as respondents, though, indicates that faculty play a significant role in the disclosure process for at least a third of students.

While a majority of students disclose and seek assistance from their peers (Ogletree, 1993; Ullman, 1999), many students seek support within the institution as well. In their study of 3,800 college women, Fisher et al. (2000) identified that approximately one-third of college students would be willing to disclose to a school official. In a more recent study, however, Newins, et al. (2018) found that 40.2% of students who had experienced an incident of sexual misconduct by another student indicated that they would be willing to disclose to a faculty member. The authors attributed the of increased willingness of students to disclose to faculty to reporting to regulations such as the Campus Sexual Violence Elimination (SaVE) Act and increased discourse about institutional responsibility to address sexual violence. Faculty do not receive the majority of student disclosures of sexual violence, but they do represent between 30 and 40 percent of disclosure recipients and thus are responders.

In order to develop comprehensive recommendations for institutional change, the experiences of students, staff and faculty in all aspects of sexual misconduct must

be collected and analyzed. While studies have captured quantitative data about faculty and staff knowledge and general application of reporting requirements (see, e.g., Mancini et al., 2016; Newins et al., 2018; Newins & White, 2016), there is a distinct gap in understanding faculty experiences from an in-depth qualitative perspective.

I became interested in the study of faculty as recipients and respondents to student disclosures of sexual assault because my perspective was limited to my own experiences as a staff member in higher education. As staff, I had a regulatory understanding for how responsible employees are obligated to respond, but no understanding beyond myself and my colleagues. Faculty experiences with disclosures was one dimension that emerged from my work in behavior risk assessment and my positional role in my institution's Title IX process. Based on my research on college sexual assault as a student, explanatory concepts such as institutional betrayal or acceptance of rape myths might be present in faculty experiences with disclosures, but I had no evidence or developed hypotheses about faculty experiences. As I began considering the research, I realized I had limited knowledge about faculty experiences on campus in general. I was unaware of the scope of their positions, attitudes toward the administration, or relationships with students, the institution, and each other.

In their book on navigating the complexities of higher education research in higher education, Jones et al. (2014) challenged researchers to let the research question guide the methodological approach. The evolution of my research question, and thus the dynamic approach to the interviews, was shaped by this principal and in turn my methodological approach refined by my research question. To situate the

approaches I describe further in this chapter, I begin by describing the ways in which my research question was informed by literature, interviews, and observations.

When I began this project, I originally wrote my research questions in ways that turned out to be incongruent with faculty's actual experience with student disclosures of violence. As I began to talk with faculty during the early interview process, I was able to respond to faculty reflections of their knowledge, beliefs, and experiences with disclosures by adapting the research question, and shifting my focus.

Prior to collecting data from participants or observations, I formed my initial research questions based on multiple false ideas about how faculty operate. The first misconception concerned the ways that faculty see (or don't see) themselves as part of the Title IX policies. In asking faculty to share their understanding of their obligations as responsible employees, I quickly learned that the role of responsible employee was not part of their identity nor did that obligation serve as a primary contributor to the ways they perceived and enacted their roles, something about which I talk at length in Chapter IV. As I began to listen to the ways in which faculty talked about their relationships to students and the institution, sometimes in concert with one another and often quite separately, I quickly saw that I needed to ask more about their roles and beliefs and less about compliance.

The second misconception I had before I began interviewing was that receiving and responding to disclosures were somehow distinguishable from one another. However, they are inextricably connected, even though individual participants demonstrated variance in their experiences receiving and responding to

multiple disclosures. Faculty described their experiences receiving and responding to students as integrated narratives, which they situated in relation to their roles as instructors and advisors as described in-depth in Chapter V. Specifically, the participants connected aspects of their disclosure experiences to course content or discipline, the development of professionally intimate relationships, and the environment they fostered in their pedagogical and relational approaches. Unsurprisingly to me, there were both consistencies and inconsistencies in their beliefs about approaches and their actions, but participants both rationalized and questioned their response in relation to their roles with students and their institution and fluidly from receipt to response. The inextricable nature of receiving and responding to student disclosures, emergent from participant interview data, encapsulated the notion that the faculty members were discussing how they experience disclosures, rather than how they understand them.

Therefore, the purpose of this study is to understand the experiences of college and university faculty members as recipients of student disclosures of sexual assault. Through the use of interviews, I sought to understand the institutional and relational contexts in which disclosures of sexual violence occurred and how such contextual implications informed the faculty members' responses. I also endeavored to understand the ways in which popularized discourses, such as institutional betrayal and rape myth acceptance, influenced faculty perceptions of themselves, their institution, and their responses to students. The following singular, yet comprehensive, research question was the guide for this project: *How do faculty experience student disclosures of sexual misconduct?*

I have described an iterative process for developing my research question, as informed by the emergent data collected through interviews, observations, and deep engagement with existing literature. My experience with the research question is a brief snapshot into the methodological approach that I applied to the entire research project. In this chapter I describe the choices and rationale for how I designed the research to understand faculty experiences with student sexual assault disclosures. I elaborate on the use of qualitative inquiry, specifically addressing aspects of a grounded theory and a feminist grounded approach. I present a detailed justification for the use of interviews, the evolution of participant selection, and methodology for data analysis. I conclude with a critical perspective of the study through reflexivity, ethical considerations and limitations.

### **Methodological Approach**

Qualitative inquiry in sexual assault response research, especially those including faculty, is noticeably scarce; however, this approach is well suited for understanding how faculty experience disclosures of sexual violence from students. Interaction and subjectivity are key to understanding how faculty experiences student disclosures and attending to these is a strength of qualitative research. Examining participants' experiences with disclosures, along with other role-based campus experiences, through the use of reflective and probing inquiries typical of qualitative approaches, we can see how faculty understand these experiences and how they navigated them. "In qualitative methods (or approaches), the human and social sciences offer several traditions. These traditions may be method types for data collection, analysis, and reporting writing, or overall designs that include all phases of



the research process” (Creswell, 1994, p. 11). Creswell’s “or” statement can be interpreted as an offering to the researcher to select qualitative approaches as pieces or the study in its entirety. In this section I explain my use of qualitative methodology, including epistemological frameworks. Specifically, I address the utility of feminist grounded theory as emergent and participant-led approaches to guide and situate both the participant interviews and data analysis. These approaches are under-utilized for studying policy issues and are critical to furthering our understanding how campus sexual assault disclosures can be studied in future work.

### **Characteristics and Strengths of a Qualitative Approach**

Qualitative research has several unique characteristics; it is not just different from quantitative work but has distinct components that make it a useful methodology. Adapted from Rossman and Rallis (2012), Marshall and Rossman (2016) presented five characteristics of qualitative research. The first characteristic is that the research exists in the natural world. Sexual assault is a social phenomenon that is present in the natural world and exists at higher frequency in the college environment. The second characteristic, multiple interactive and humanistic methods, is valuable because those individuals who are tasked as being responsible employees have varying life experiences, beliefs, and skills which shape their responses to disclosures, a bidirectional and interactive approach to engaging such employees would maximize the diversity while positioning the researcher to identify themes that emerge from such interactions. Meaningful interactions can both emerge and evolve from in-depth interviews when both parties, the interviewer and interviewee, are engaged in the content and the outcome.

A third characteristic of qualitative research by Marshall and Rossman (2016) is an emergent, rather than a tightly prefigured, approach. Interviews, as opposed to open-ended qualitative survey questions, provide the opportunity to delve more deeply into the topics that are most salient to the participant and relevant to the topic. For example, interview approaches provide the opportunity to ask specific questions about a particular response. In this study, when a participant offered a comment specific to their academic discipline, there was a facilitated conversation, rather than leaving up to chance that they may reflect on that identity or experience. This marker of qualitative work can also be difficult in that it could potentially take the conversation off target. However, emergent conversation can provide the opportunity for future participants to engage in conversations that may not have occurred otherwise and may also allow the researcher to go back to participants and ask new questions.

A fourth characteristic of utilizing qualitative research, as described by Marshall and Rossman (2016), and applicable to the study of sexual assault disclosures is context. The context of campus sexual assault is immensely important, as is the role of the participant. As I discussed in Chapter II, Bronfenbrenner & Evans's (2000) process-person-context-time (PPCT) model refers to context as the nested ecological domains of individual, micro-, meso-, exo- and macrosystems. The way that a university employee interacts in the particular culture of their institution has relevance to the phenomenon, the moment in time in which the disclosure occurred, and how the employee sees themselves in relation to the students who disclose, the institution itself, and the governing policies. The final characteristic of

qualitative research is that it is fundamentally interpretive. As the participants make meaning of their identities and experiences, the researcher will subsequently make meaning of their experience of the interview given their own identities and experiences.

Qualitative methods are not just an appropriate way to learn more about responses to sexual assault disclosures, they are a necessary method of inquiry to answer the research question of how faculty experience and respond to disclosures of sexual misconduct by students. Qualitative approaches are further necessary to gain insight into how university faculty understand those experiences and how they act on that understanding. Faculty, even those with similar disciplinary experiences, described varying life experiences, beliefs, and skills that shape their responses to disclosures. Faculty participants discussed their perceptions and beliefs of institutional policies and procedures, their concepts of reporting as both duty and care along with how they received and responded to disclosures through their advising and instructional roles. It was the power of in-depth interviews which yielded rich interactions and thus maximized my ability to gather a diversity of participant experiences, while positioning me to identify themes that materialized from such interactions. Meaningful interactions emerged and evolved from in-depth interviews when both the participants and I engaged in the content of the interview, as demonstrated by the rich discussion. Each of these findings (described in detail in Chapters IV and V) and their connections to policy development, practice, and future research (described in Chapter VI) illustrate the value of qualitative research and specifically the power of interviews in studying disclosure experiences.

In this research process, it was important for me to create a space where the voices and narratives of the faculty participants told the story of their experiences with student disclosures of sexual misconduct, grounding the findings of this work directly in the experiences of the faculty. Charmaz (2008) wrote about emergent methods as a tool for social scientists to “study research problems that arise in the empirical world and can pursue unanticipated directions of inquiry in this world. Emergent methods are particularly well suited for studying uncharted, contingent, or dynamic phenomena” (p. 155).

Thus far I have used the existing literature to provide insight into the complexities of sexual assault disclosures and also to demonstrate the gap of faculty representation in the literature. I drew particular attention to the gap of studying experiences with disclosures through qualitative approaches. Emergent theories that I drew from for this research were influenced by grounded and feminist grounded theories. I briefly present the theoretical elements that informed this project as a way to ground understanding of the faculty members’ experiences with disclosures in their own individual and collective experiences.

### **A Grounded Feminist Approach**

Utilizing emergent methods like those in a grounded approach allows me, the researcher, to give voice to participants through the simultaneous collection and analyzation of data. Grounded theory comes from a constructivist paradigm. “The constructivist paradigm assumes a relativist ontology (there are multiple realities), a subjectivist epistemology (knower and respondent co-construct understandings), and a naturalistic (in the natural world) set of methodological procedures” (Denzin &

Lincoln, 2000, p. 21). Strauss and Corbin (1998) defined the grounded theory approach as,

A systematic set of procedures to develop an inductively derived grounded theory about a phenomenon. The research findings constitute a theoretical formulation of the reality under investigation, rather than consisting of a set of numbers, or a group of loosely related themes. (p. 24).

Grounded theory is not only a way to collect data about a distinct phenomenon, but also makes way for theories and data to be tested in an iterative and meaningful way to yield knowledge about how the disclosures and reporting occurred.

Marshall and Rossman (2016) described grounded theory as working “from data to theory” (p. 18), rather than from theory to data. Charmaz (2000) established that grounded theory resembles a simultaneity between theory and data, rather than a strict sequence. “Throughout the research process, grounded theorists develop analytic interpretations of their data to focus further on data collection, which they use in turn to inform and refine their developing theoretical analysis” (p. 509).

Grounded theory is a way to situate theory, data, and analysis in an iterative and emerging way. In her study of Black female survivors of sexual assault, Washington (2001) used grounded theory as a foundation to study the disclosure patterns of her participants. She used this approach to privilege the perspectives and experiences of the women she interviewed, allowing them to make meaning rather than imposing it, but also using her own experience and knowledge to contribute to the emerging data.

In addition to basic grounded approaches, the conceptual approach for my study was also informed by feminist grounded theory and a trauma-informed research approach. In her chapter on grounded theory and feminism, Clarke (2012) identified grounded theory as inherently and “implicitly feminist” (p. 391) because of the shared emphasis on symbolic interactionism and social construction. Wuest (1991) situated grounded theory in partnership with feminist epistemology such that both frameworks position the researcher to critically inquire about the happenings in a particular space around a particular phenomenon. Both feminist and grounded theories ask the researcher to continually interrogate the social structures that exist and to think pluralistically about perceived truths and meaning-making. The shared assumptions of feminist grounded theory approaches are that women are experts on their own experiences. Wuest (1995) also identified that there is also a shared sense of “contextual and relational nature of knowledge” (p. 128) among feminist and grounded theory.

Using these approaches throughout the interviews, I tested theories that emerged from participant data and continued to analyze their words, the ways they spoke about their experiences, and the ways in which their physical presence shifted in the conversation. Using emergent methods from grounded and feminist grounded theory approaches allowed me to attend to the spoken and unspoken narratives of the participants.

## **Research Design**

To fully explain the design of this research project, in this section I describe the specific steps that I took from conception to completion and my rationale for doing so. In order for readers of this research to understand how I determined key findings, tools for analyses, I discuss the decisions I made, the challenges I experienced, and the thought process and perspectives that informed this project. The goal of this section on research design is to provide the standpoint from which it was designed and implemented, but also provide a framework to aid in future research approaches to address faculty experiences with sexual assault disclosures.

### **Participant Criteria, Faculty Recruitment, and Yield**

The participants I invited to the study were full-time faculty members (at the ranks of lecturer, professor of practice, clinical professor, assistant professor, associate professor, and professor) at colleges and universities in the state of Maryland who had received a student disclosure of sexual violence. In this section, I will provide a rationale for the criteria and then describe how I applied that criteria to the recruitment process. I experienced several challenges in recruiting faculty members to this study and will also describe the data and related hypotheses from examining recruitment efforts.

#### ***Participant Criteria***

I excluded adjunct faculty but did include non-tenured faculty such as full-time lecturers and assistant professors. The rationale for this decision was based on consistency in relationships to the institution. While variability existed among all the faculty appointments based on time at the institution and levels of service

(committees, administrative roles, etc.), it is reasonable to argue that adjunct faculty have more varied relationships to the institution based on the nature of their employment as contractual. Full-time faculty, tenured or not, have various other responsibilities in addition to teaching such as committee involvement, shared governance, and advising.

All of the institutions from which faculty participants were invited received federal funding and were also members of the Maryland Higher Education Commission (MHEC). MHEC mandates certain requirements, such as climate assessments, so there were some general expectations among all the institutions that were applied equally. Five of the six institutions were also part of the state university system which had a system-level policy for Title IX. The sixth institution, while an outlier from the state system, had very comparable policies. All institutions classified all of their faculty members as responsible employees. A responsible employee is any person who has authority or reasonably perceived authority to act when they receive a disclosure of sexual victimization or misconduct. Once the responsible employee learns of the issues, “The school must take immediate and appropriate steps to investigate or otherwise determine what occurred” (OCR, 2014, p. 15).

For trustworthiness of a qualitative study, interviews were with individuals who have directly experienced the phenomenon of interest (Patton, 2002). If faculty members had not engaged with a sexual assault disclosure directly, they would likely have had vastly different understandings of disclosures and their response to the students, compared to those that had had direct experience.



### *Sampling Strategies*

I used purposive and snowball sampling techniques to achieve a final sample of 16 participants. At each of the six institutions, I utilized public lists and resources such as faculty governance contacts, LGBTQ “Out” Lists, and faculty across disciplines with whom I have had contact in my work. I also requested and received recommendations for other faculty to interview from both participants, as well as university personnel who were knowledgeable about my project.

I invited faculty members to participate through an email which briefly described the topic as related to receiving disclosures of sexual assault. I asked them to reply to the email if they had received a disclosure and were willing to participate in a one-hour interview (see Appendix A for a sample recruitment email). When possible, I customized communications and included the referring contact and campus affiliation of interest when applicable. In total, I contacted 421 faculty members at the participating institutions.

Sampling participants from multiple institutions, and specifically different institution-types, added a layer of confidentiality and thus protection for the participants. I initially planned to de-identify the universities and refer to them by institutional pseudonyms; however, as the data were collected, I found no distinct differences between the experiences of the participants by institution. The only differentiation that I made about institutions was that of Historically Black Colleges and Universities as compared to predominantly White institutions. I discuss these differences, in particular the added layer of care for students, in Chapter V. De-

identified institutional data, specific to Title IX policies and processes for reporting located in Appendix E.

***Participant Yield***

Recruitment of eligible faculty participants who had received student disclosures of sexual assault was more challenging than I expected. I contacted 421 total participants to yield 16 interviews. Table 1 demonstrates the distribution of responses to recruitment.

Table 1. Distribution of Responses to Recruitment Emails

	No response	Declined participation	Responded yes, interview not completed	Interviewed
Count ( <i>n=421</i> )	248	146	11	16
Percentage of Total	58.9	34.7	2.6	3.8

While 16 interviews were completed, 11 additional faculty members responded with an interest in participating, but either canceled their interview or did not respond to additional inquiries about setting up an interview time. Nearly 60% of faculty members did not respond at all to the invitation to participate. There was a subpopulation that responded to the invitation but declined to participate. A vast majority (79%) of faculty who declined to participate said they did not have experience with student disclosures.

Nine faculty members responded to say that they were either unavailable or felt uncomfortable with the topic. Of the five who were unavailable, they attributed sabbaticals, departing the institution, or feeling overwhelmed with duties in their

position. The remaining four faculty members communicated discomfort with participating in the project. Among those nine respondents who were unavailable or felt discomfort, it was unclear what proportion, if any, had experienced a student disclosure, but were just unavailable or unwilling to talk or if their response was a general statement about their availability and willingness. In addition, 15% of those who responded to decline simply said that they were unable to participate, without providing additional details. Rationales for declining participation are summarized in Table 2. In the recruitment email, I did note that the project was approved by the institutional review board (IRB). I did not offer an incentive of any kind to participate, which may have also contributed to yield challenges.

Table 2. Rationale for Decline of Study Participation

	Unavailable	Felt uncomfortable	No rationale	No experience
Count (n=146)	5	4	22	115
Percentage of Total Participation Decline	3.4	2.7	15	79

### ***Participant Demographics***

In total, I interviewed 16 full-time faculty members from six MHEC member institutions. From those six institutions, one school was private and one participant worked at that institution, whereas the remaining five institutions were public and represented the other 15 participants. Three of the participants identified as Black, while the remaining 13 identified as White. Among the three participants of color, all of them worked at HBCUs. Four participants identified as male and 12 identified as

female. All participants identified as cisgender. The information form that faculty filled out as part of the study can be found in Appendix C and a full summary of participant demographics such as age, gender, discipline, and institution are listed in Appendix F.

Faculty identity is important to consider in the context of their relationship to the institution as demonstrated by statistics of rank and gender. According to the Chronicle of Higher Education Almanac (2018), there are representative differences across faculty appointments when examined by gender. Men represent over 67% of the professor rank whereas women represent just over 32%. The rank of associate professor is similar where men represent 55% of faculty and women represent 45%. At the assistant professor level, women represent just over half at 51%, whereas men represent nearly 48%. From the almanac data, I combined lecturer and instructor as the source did not differentiate between the positions. Perhaps unsurprisingly based on the other trends presented here, women represent 56% of lecturer and instructor roles. As rank decreases, the representation of women increases. Women represented 75% (n=12) of the participants in this study. Among those women, four had the rank of associate professor, three were assistant professors and each were actively seeking tenure and promotion. Five participants had lecturer appointments, which represented full-time positions, but without the opportunity to obtain tenure. Among the four men, representing 25% of the participants, three were associate professors and one full-time, non-tenured position. Of these men, all of them had more teaching and student engagement obligations, than research.

The participants' age and length of time at their institution was surprising to me, since I had anticipated that students might disclose more often to younger, more relatable faculty. This still may be true as the small sample size only includes those self-identified faculty members who were interested in talking about their experiences of receiving disclosures. Younger faculty may have received disclosures but chose not to participate. Additionally, the participants spoke about disclosure experiences that occurred at some point in their career, but it was not necessarily at the institution at which they were employed.

The mean age of participants was 50 years old and ranged from 37 to 71 years of age. Twelve of the participants had worked at their institution for seven or more years, with eight of those faculty having served more than 10 years. Two participants were at their institutions for between four and six years, and two had been there for three years or less. The mean age of the four male participants in this study was 67 years. Three of these men spoke explicitly about their plans to retire in the near future, whereas the fourth, Peter, came to work in academia later in life and did not raise the issue. These men represent a similar perspective not just rooted in gender, but also age and stage of life.

In addition to the variation in demographics of each participant (Appendix F), the participants each expressed a richness of lived experiences and identities of themselves as faculty members and as humans. They identified as mothers, fathers, daughters, sons, husbands, wives, partners, gay, Caribbean, New Jerseyan, scientist, feminist, and not-a-therapist. These are just some of the unique and intersecting identity-based terms that faculty participants used to talk about themselves and their

experiences as faculty in general, and faculty who cultivate relationships with students that yield disclosures of sexual violence by students. While I did ask the participants to tell me about themselves and their roles at their institutions, explicit questions about the faculty members' identities were not part of my protocol. Sharing dimensions of their identities as individuals, as members of families, and members of departmental and disciplinary communities emerged naturally and consistently throughout each of the individual interviews. It was evident from the participant reflections and stories that the multiple roles they inhabit with students have influenced their approaches to building relationships in instructional and advising roles, and that their conceptualizations of their own identities have been iterative and influenced by the social and relational landscapes that occur in those faculty and student dynamics.

### **Data Collection**

Qualitative research on faculty experiences with student disclosures of sexual assault has, prior to this study, primarily been limited to open-ended survey questions or brief structured phone interviews. The meaning-making of those experiences is important to understand and that understanding can be best achieved through interviews rather than survey questions alone. Interviews yielded data about meaning-making and allowed for deeper insight into faculty conceptions and actions related to their institutional roles and responsibilities. In this section, I describe the approach and rationale of each method in more depth.

### *Qualitative Interviewing*

The skills needed for successful interviewing are much of what makes the interview itself artful (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). Roulston (2010) acknowledged that an interviewer who engages in the semi-structured format must have strong listening skills to discern if the questions have been answered, and also to appropriately determine how additional probing questions can be used purposefully. Seidman (2013) also identified listening as the most important skill in interviewing and notes three levels of listening. The first level is substantive listening, being attuned to the level of detail, and the ability to understand. The second level of listening is discerning between inner and outer voices of the participant. This is the boundary between what is known to be true for the environment in which the participant operates but may not be the experience of the participant. Thoughtfully probing for more information, particularly during moments of participant reflection is key. The third level of listening identified by Seidman is listening for the content, but also the environment in which the content occurs. It can be quite difficult to be present in the words, but also be prepared for what Seidman refers to as explorations (probes) or the next question, and also to note nonverbal cues and respond appropriately. The author suggested recording and transcription as tools for navigating the challenge of multi-level listening. Following up on a particular comment of interest, while not disempowering the participants' level of autonomy can also be a challenge. This is once again where the artfulness of interactions can be delicate, but also fruitful. Due to the sensitive nature of discussing sexual trauma, I further investigated interviewing from feminist and trauma-informed approaches.

*Feminist Interviewing.* Sexual assault has long been regarded as a women's issue. Women are most frequently the victims of sexual assault, but in a rape-supportive culture, women are also tasked with the responsibility of preventing assault, notwithstanding men as the overwhelming majority of victimizers. Despite its nomenclature, feminist interviewing refers to the approach rather than the specific method. One of "the distinguishing features of feminist interviews is that they are used for the purpose of doing feminist work, and contributing to the advancement of women's causes in a patriarchal, capitalist society" (Roulston, 2010, p. 23).

Reinharz and Davidman (1992) identified several characteristics of feminist approaches. Feminism is not itself a way to research. It is a perspective that informs a variety of singular and mixed methods. Feminist research is categorized as a critical genre such that it requires immediate and on-going criticism of theory, while also examining the contexts and constructs in which it exists. As such it can be what the authors identify as "transdisciplinary" (p. 240) and it also can be trans-theoretical. Social change is one of the primary goals as it aims to represent human diversity, though the focus is not just on women, but on marginalized populations in general. The process of feminist interviewing is reflective and incorporative not just the participant. The relationships between the parties is not merely a fortuitous byproduct of the interview, but rather a point of emphasis. Denzin and Lincoln (2000) characterize the relationship between researcher and participant as "coequals who are carrying on a conversation about mutually relevant, often biographically critical, issues (p. 634). Finally, Reinharz and Davidman (1992) address the relationship that the researcher also has with the reader of the work.



Each of the characteristics of feminist interviewing identified by Reinharz and Davidman (1992) support the intention of studying of responses to sexual assault disclosures and remain consistent with approaches of grounded theory. Through both approaches women are regarded knowers of their lives and their experiences; they are the experts of their own experiences (Wuest, 1995). The ways that faculty of all genders receive messages about their roles and their gender can be addressed. Feminist approaches are not exclusive to research with female-identified participants. For example, in their study on victimization disclosures to faculty, Richards et al. (2013) noted that disclosures were associated with the discipline being taught, rather than gender itself. Thus, thoughtful interviewing approaches on the subject with men can be equally as valuable.

***Trauma-Informed Research Approaches.*** Trauma, as described by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA, 2014), may result from an “event, series of events, or set of circumstances that is experienced by an individual as physically or emotionally harmful or life threatening and that has lasting adverse effects on the individual’s functioning and mental, physical, social, emotional, or spiritual well-being” (p. 7). Thus, a trauma-informed approach to research should reflect the idea that the participants may have experiences of trauma or experience a negative impact on their well-being by discussing a particular topic of trauma. Campbell et al. (2009) conducted a qualitative study with rape survivors to gain insight into recommendations for interview practices. The authors asserted that anyone who conducts research on victimology must first be knowledgeable about the topic. While the research presented here does not explicitly ask participants to reflect

on their own experiences as survivors, survivor perspectives are a strong reminder to be conscientious and trauma-informed. A well-documented statistic about the prevalence of sexual violence is that between 20% and 25% of women have experienced assault (Fisher et al., 2000; Sinozich & Langston, 2014; Tjaden & Thoennes, 2006; Wolitzky-Taylor et al., 2011). Of the participants in this study, 12 identified as women and thus a conservative estimate would suggest that approximately two of the women participants may have been survivors. Prevalence statistics range for men anywhere between 3.2% and 28.7% according to a meta-analysis by Forsman (2017), yielding a possibility of survivorship, albeit low, among the four male participants. Other identities such as sexual orientation or gender expression may increase the likelihood that participants have had experiences with sexual violence. Because of these high rates of trauma, I entered the interviews with the assumption that a participant was a survivor, regardless of their identity, and waited to be proved otherwise, rather than assuming the majority had not been. Approaching the participants with compassion and empathy of a trauma-informed approach is always useful, even if the participant has not experienced harm in that way.

Through their research and analysis with survivors, Campbell et al. (2009) identified several themes, with knowledge emerging as the most significant. Survivors wanted interviewers to acknowledge the fact that sexual assault could happen to anyone, while also affirming the individual experiences of the survivor who was present with them. Participants wanted interviewers to know that their assault experience had an impact on their lives in all domains. “Survivors wanted

interviewers to be prepared to hear about more than *just* psychological trauma. Rape is a crime that hurts mind, body and soul so interviewers need to comprehend its impact at a deeper level” (Campbell et al. 2009, p. 605). Another hope that survivors had for their interviewers was understanding without identification. In other words, even if the interviewer themselves was a survivor, the complexities of intersectional identities preclude others from knowing the true breadth and depth of one’s individual experience. Survivors also reported wanting their interviewer to be truly present and listening. An active presence and knowledge of sexual assault allowed for survivors to be their authentic selves, “talk[ing] at their own pace and giving them control over what they choose to discuss” (p. 606). Following the empirical data from participants, the authors tied their work back to specific training tasks for interviewers, thus creating a tangible guide for those who will conduct research on such a topic.

Given the valuable data that has emerged from this work, I approached each interview recognizing that each participant is the knower of their own experience and that the person who has willingly given up their time to participate in the interview may also bring their trauma, sexual assault related or otherwise, into the conversation. This approach helped me develop rapport with participants and likely yielded more intimate conversations than if I entered with a mistrust of their experiences.

In my interview design, I drew on these feminist and trauma-informed approaches. As a result, I developed an interview protocol with a single, semi-structured design with multi-level listening, additional probing questions, and post-interview reflections built in. I conducted interviews to the point where I achieved

saturation of the data and continued with four additional interviews as a measure of trustworthiness. Interviews averaged 65 minutes in length with the shortest being 30 minutes and the longest was one hour and 54 minutes. All interviews took place between July 2018 and April 2019. My intention was to do all of the interviews in person, however two of 16 took place through an online video-based system. For those online interviews, the participants' locations were not known to me, though it appeared that both of them were in their respective places of residence. All of the in-person interviews took place in the faculty member's office, except for one for which I reserved a private conference room.

I started each interview with thoroughly reviewing the informed consent form (Appendix B). I was able to send the form in advance for the participants to review, but also presented it again and offered to read through it with them or allow them another opportunity to read the form prior to signing it. Regardless of what they selected, I made sure to reiterate that the interview was recorded, how that recording would be stored and used, and limitations of confidentiality. I then distributed the Participant Information Form (Appendix C) for the faculty member to complete. Some participants elected to fill out the form at the end. I then began with the interview questions (Appendix D).

Roulston (2010) presented three types of interviews, structured, semi-structured, and unstructured. I determined semi-structured interviews were the useful method because it allowed for a scaffolded approach, starting first with rapport-building questions and then moving progressively through deeper questioning, while allowing the participants experience to determine the path to follow. After the first

five interviews, I assessed how I was using questions and made minor adjustments to the protocol in consultation with advisors. Consistent with grounded theory, I used themes and insights that emerged as the interviews progressed to adjust my approach, I used the data to ask about a particular phenomenon or skipped questions that did not seem relevant. As I frequently revisited my protocol, before and after each interview, informed by those which came before, I also used those moments as an opportunity to examine my own presence. I considered the level of directness that I communicated in the interview and considered how to adjust my approach to empower the participants. I also identified areas where I needed to be more directive of the conversation as well.

Denzin and Lincoln (2000) characterized interviews as conversations that are artful and not neutral. “The interview produces situations grounded in specific interactional episodes” (p. 633) such that the identities of both the interviewer and the interviewee are not just important to note, but actually influence the data. Allowing space for those identities to come alive and be a presence, rather than a distraction is important.

### ***Researcher’s Journal***

Throughout the project, I maintained a researcher’s journal where I recorded and reflected on the interviews, current events, and interpersonal interactions that I experienced throughout the time-frame of the interviews. In their meta-analysis of field notes for qualitative research, Phillippi and Lauderdale (2017) assert that it is generally understood by scholars and researchers that “field notes are an essential component of rigorous qualitative research” (p. 381). I used the journal record

emergent analysis and identified themes in a systematic way. For example, I noted a pattern of defensiveness from the participants when I would ask about their knowledge of Title IX and faculty responsibilities. I used the journal to process my interview jottings, along with personal reflection. I was able to then use my notes in consultation with my mentors to help reframe the interview questions in a way that felt less quizzical or more genuine. Working through the journal aided in the deep analyses that allowed me to see issues of expertise and role confusion taking place, rather than defensiveness.

Throughout the interview process, there were several events that occurred on the campuses and in the mainstream media, which I discuss further in the section on the social conditions of the interviews. I used the journal to capture my own thoughts on the events, both personal and informed by research, while also examining and comparing my reflections to those of participants in those ways. Journal notes assisted in answering questions at different points in the study in my own words and the words of the participants.

### ***The Socio-political Conditions of the Data Collection***

The social and political conditions in which the interviews took place is an important dimension to examine as it impacted the ways that both I as the researcher and the faculty as participants presented themselves and the material that we discussed. The study was conceptualized in the fall of 2016 through a course related project. At that time, the Dear Colleague Letter (Ali, 2011) was the primary guidance, provided by the Obama administration, to which institutions were accountable. Later that fall President Donald Trump was elected, bringing with him the perception of a

permissive approach to sexual assault. Shortly after his inauguration, the new Secretary of Education, Betsy DeVos, rescinded the 2011 Dear Colleague Letter and alluded to significant and substantial changes that would be made to Title IX, changes that would favor respondents who have been accused of sexual misconduct. Regulations were issued in May of 2020 and are currently being reviewed by legal experts and higher education administrators for implementation by August 2020.

A result of the cultural shift of the new presidential administration, sexual assault and harassment was showing up outside of politics as well. Related to Hollywood sexual harassment scandals, the “Me Too” movement, though originally conceived in 2006 by Tarana Burke, was reignited in October of 2017. Carrying with it a flurry of social media attention and organizational attempts for accountability, regular stories of problematic behaviors and career-ending news of celebrities consumed media space. It was nearly impossible to be anywhere or do anything without sexual violence of some type being part of discussions.

Recruitment for the study and interviews began in July of 2018. Two key incidents occurred in September of 2018 which influenced various aspects of my own experience and that of the participants. The first incident was a campus crisis. Of the six institutions represented by the 16 participants, a majority of the participants came from a single institution. That particular institution was involved in a public case whereby institutional betrayal and mistrust by students and faculty came to the forefront of campus discourse. Of all the participants employed at that institution, 37% of them participated in the study after media attention and institutional response began. The topic of trust and institutionalization arose in each of those conversations,

although those topics were not exclusive to those post-incident interviews. The incidents came up in several interviews with faculty not affiliated with that institution as well.

A second key event relating to sexual assault during the interview period was the confirmation hearings for Supreme Court Justice Brett Kavanaugh, which also occurred in September of 2018. For several days the hearings and related conversation as to whether or not Justice Kavanaugh was fit to serve in such a capacity given the accusations of sexual assault leveled against him consumed every media outlet. This incident served not only as a reminder of individual trauma for many, but as a reminder of the pervasive existence of violence against women by men in power and the lack of accountability.

Each of the aforementioned incidents came up multiple times during my interviews and clearly influenced the individual conceptions of sexual assault held by the participants. I am confident that my engagement with these events, personally and professionally, influenced the interviews. When the topic arose, I attempted to make space for the participants to talk about the impact of those situations to the extent that they felt it was important and valuable, even when it strayed from direct connections to disclosures. Navigating these complex events was difficult, but it was also a rich experience that added to the value of the interviews. I connected with the participants over the shared experience of having reactions to these experiences and those shared experiences connected the participants to their disclosure experiences.



## **Data Analysis**

In order to engage deeply with the interview data, I chose to personally transcribe the interviews. I spent between eight and 10 hours transcribing per one hour of interview recording. I became attuned to the nuances of the participants' communication styles, including tone, pacing, and cues such as silence. I was also able to consider my own presence as part of the experience. "Embedded in the details of transcription are indications of purpose, audience, and the position of the transcriber toward the text" (Bucholtz, 2000, p. 1440). As stated in this quote, I also became attuned to my utterances to things I did not agree with, unique pacing of which I spoke, and the level of directness or indirectness I used in relation to what I perceived as sensitive issues.

Audio data from each of the interviews was recorded using a digital recorder. Once the individual interview was completed, I transcribed the recordings into text utilizing basic word processing software. In addition to the audio files, I engaged in note-taking during the interviews and also memoing immediately following the interview. Glaser (1978) argued for memoing to be a priority in research in order to retain information throughout the data collection and analytical processes. As I transcribed the interviews, jottings from the in-interview note taking were added as comments, memos, and primary, thematic codes. I uploaded the documents into NVivo Qualitative Data Analysis Software for further analysis. Each transcript and digital audio recording were stored separately in secure, password protected folders in an encrypted cloud-based service. After each transcription was typed and memoed, I used multiple coding methods to understand faculty experiences more deeply as told

by the person experiencing it directly. Field notes, though already typed, were treated the same as transcription and coded using a similar approach. All of the data presented in subsequent chapters has been de-identified through the use of pseudonyms or minute changes to quotes in keeping with my commitment to protecting participant confidentiality.

Charmaz (2008) described the analysis in grounded theory as systematic. She said, “The grounded theory method integrates and streamlines data collection by constructing systematic comparisons throughout inquiry of data with data, data with code, code with code, code with category, and category with category” (p.162). I noted previously in this chapter that faculty experiences in general were not something I was knowledgeable about. As a starting point in the coding process, I used Charmaz’s systematic comparison method while attending to the power structures derived from critical discourse analysis (CDA) and the context of the social ecological perspective as tools for initial data coding and categorizing. As I did that, I identified new codes and categories in an iterative way.

### ***Critical Discourse Analysis***

Critical discourse analysis uses language as a theoretical tool, in this case to help understand how sexual assault is situated socially. It can also be used as methodological tool by which to understand how faculty experience student disclosures of sexual assault. CDA is the “analysis of linguistic and semiotic aspects of social processes and problems” (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997, p. 271). Wodak (2001) identified concepts of power, history and ideology as key to all CDA work. I subscribe to the notion that power and ideology are embedded in history and have

impacted the ways I engaged with participants and other social spaces related to sexual violence. CDA has a “particular interest in power, and its underlying assumption that the social relations reflected in language phenomena were part of a larger pattern characterized by unequal power relations” (Breeze, 2011, p. 496). Because the topic of this study is gender-based violence, attending to language as a way to understand the power dynamics that existed in the interview as well as ideology was key to my approach at each step of this project.

Lea (2007) described the aim of transcription and analysis as way to “expose the linguistic building blocks of talk about crimes of rape that form the social commonplaces that circulate in our society” (p. 498). Analysis of the transcripts in relation to sexual violence provided space to consider the impact of rape, but also refer to points of interest, such as broader constructions of the rape behavior in an institutional environment (Gavey & Schmidt, 2011). For example, the ways in which faculty spoke about sexual assault in relation to gender, policy, and legal contexts provided insight into the how sexual assault exists throughout social ecological domains, but such analyses also provide insight into the relationships that faculty had with the institution, which implicitly or explicitly exists in a world where power-based personal violence exists. “This discourse provides an overarching conceptual framework or template for shaping understandings of the impact of rape. The distinct components interlocked in various ways, although not always in a completely seamless manner, with some being more central than others” (Gavey, Schmidt, 2011, p. 439).

As I sat with the participants and then read through the transcripts, I repeatedly asked myself questions and interrogated the documents to understand who the faculty were talking about, their relationships to those individuals and systems, and the power dynamics that were both implicitly and explicitly present. Knowledge of CDA contributed to coding for themes such as ambiguity, comparisons, and discourses about reporting, but also the interplay of social structures explained by a social ecological approach.

### ***Social Ecological Perspectives***

Ecological systems theory, developed by Bronfenbrenner (1979) and discussed in greater depth in Chapter II, is derived from the interconnected relationship of the social spheres which both impact and are impacted by individuals and is presented as a series of nested structures which exist within each other. Through this model, Bronfenbrenner situated layers of context as crucial for understanding the development of an individual. “The ecological environment is conceived topologically as a nested arrangement of concentric structures, each contained within the next. These structures are referred to as the micro-, meso-, exo-, and macrosystems” (p. 22). Colleges and universities are comprised of and exist in relation to individuals, communities, industries, governmental bodies and social and cultural values. This organizational complexity can be examined and explained through the lens of a social-ecological model. The social ecological model and ecological systems theory has been applied to a variety of environments and conditions. For example, in their study of the impact of sexual violence on mental health outcomes, Campbell et al. (2009) explicitly noted that the utility of an

ecological framework for epidemics such as sexual violence in the development of prevention and response strategies with aims of mitigating harm. Using such a model situates the various ecological factors and the interactional nature in which they exist. One way that I used this model was to organize codes in the various ecological domains. For example, faculty spoke about the various relationships they had in the institution; those with students, those with other faculty, and those with the institution in general. Within those dynamics, findings related to the specific roles, such as instructor and advisor, emerged as key sub-topics which became a primary finding, discussed in Chapter V.

### *Application of Theory to Analyses*

I applied aspects of CDA and the social ecological perspectives to my systematic approach, as described by Charmaz (2008) by engaging in two main phases of analysis coding. In the first phase, what Saldaña (2009) referred to as the first cycle, I went word by word and line by line to identify themes that emerged. In this phase I used process coding whereby I sought active, actionable statements. The concept of “reporting”, as one example, emerged as relevant. The term report represented multiple parts of speech in the ways the participants spoke to and about reporting. The emergence of reporting as a theme is unsurprising in that it is a known element of response to disclosures, but I had not anticipated all the ways in which the word carried meaning and value for each participant. Such primary coding techniques allowed for the similarities and differences to emerge at the individual level. The first phase of coding allows for comparison and refinement of coding. With reporting, I created codes that allowed me to compare the data and coding across several

interviews and examine the various ways that reporting was increasingly relevant. As this process continued, codes became clustered into several categories that overlapped and had what Charmaz (2008) described as indistinct boundaries. Categories such as “reporting as punitive” overlapped with “reporting as mandated referral” such that faculty felt as though their mandates were punitive toward the survivor, but this was not a universal belief.

In the second phase of coding, codes were narrowed, but more fully developed. The theme of care under the conditions of positional obligation is one example that emerged from this process. Charmaz (2014) stated that “perhaps your codes lead you to make a phenomenon explicit that many people experience or witness but had not yet conceptualized. Your focused codes may lead you in unanticipated but exciting directions” (p. 140). During the interviews, faculty participants reflected on their experiences with at least one student disclosure of sexual misconduct. They spoke about the ways in which the disclosure was made and how it informed their response. They included references to support, resources, and also presupposed ways in which they believed students wanted them to respond to such a situation. They rarely used explicit words associated with care, but rather talked about mechanisms for support and an investment in the outcome. They used their individual ideologies about institutions and systems of oppressions to inform how they would respond to a student in a way that empowered them. I went through each interview transcript and used NVivo “to preserve participants’ meanings of their views and actions in the coding itself” (Charmaz, 2014, p. 134). Drawing from literature on care in education and intentional coding, the theme of care under the

conditions of obligation emerged as a key conceptualization of faculty responses to disclosures. I returned to the ecological systems framework, to consider the interplay and interdependence of the emergent themes across contexts, which resulted in determining that faculty experience disclosures through their knowledge and beliefs of institutional processes and faculty relationships with students.

### **Ethical Considerations**

All research, regardless of epistemology, ontology or methodology requires researchers to consider potential ethical issues and safeguards. Human participants should be ethically and purposefully regarded throughout any research project, but given the complexities of sexual assault, disclosures, and responses, attention to ethical matters must be especially prioritized. The method itself, sampling, and analysis also need to be considered when approaching such high-stakes, emotional issues. In addition to a variety of safeguards to protect the participants in this study, the study was approved by the University of Maryland Baltimore County (UMBC) Institutional Review Board (see Appendix E). Participants were assigned a pseudonym and any identifying information was slightly modified for additional protection.

Throughout this process it has been a priority to both protect and honor the experiences of the participants. In addition to thoughtful storage of data, the ways in which I reflect each faculty member's experiences in these chapters was done with intention. I have been mindful about the ways I described faculty members in an effort to protect their anonymity. As noted earlier in this chapter, I assigned all the participants pseudonyms and de-identified their institutions. As demonstrated in

Chapters IV and V, I modified the language in participant quotes where they made potentially identifiable references to people or institutions, typically denoted by a set of brackets. I also made minor modifications to the quotes in other ways, such as inserting my own words in brackets to ensure clarity of meaning. There are some examples where exact and complete transliteration of utterances and process-based talking is important to the argument I am making. In other instances, I edited out utterances such as hesitations and repetitions that are simply common to everyday conversational patterns and that were distracting from the point of the argument, based on my own knowledge and experience of how the interview unfolded and what meaning the participant was communicating.

Two primary issues related to the campus' sexual misconduct policies arose and were addressed. The first issue was related to non-compliance with the campus policies. The policy at UMBC, for example, stated that those employees with the designation of 'responsible' must notify the Title IX coordinator following a student disclosure. I had originally been concerned that I may be perceived, in my staff capacity, as someone who enforced policy, and that faculty may be resistant to participating entirely or limit what they did share out of fear of consequences.

The second issue was around faculty disclosures of sexual assault that might be shared in the interview and what my reporting obligations were as a responsible employee. In order to address both issues, I gave a list of campus-specific resources to each participant, in the event that they needed support or resources, something I specified in my IRB protocol. However, I made it clear that I was exempt from any reporting obligation, other than for issues of immediate harm such as suicide,



homicide, or sexual abuse. I reviewed this protocol with each participant as part of the informed consent process (see Appendix B). In addition to providing these referral lists, I was also prepared to engage skills which parallel counseling, while maintaining a bounded relationship between myself and the participant, all of which are consistent with the foundations of feminist interviewing (Reinharz, 1992). Of the 16 interviews, only one participant shared that she was a survivor of violence. She also shared that she felt supported and cared for by the university when she sought resources. I thanked her for her vulnerability in sharing. I thought a lot about my roles on campus when doing this research; my identity, my positionality, my approach. I felt that I could and should use the interview to model what I believed students might want to receive as part of their disclosure experiences.

### **Reflexivity**

A primary critique of qualitative research is the inherent subjectivity and perceived lack of systematic approach. Reflexivity does not diminish subjectivity, but rather situates it as part of the research process and design and accounts for it throughout the process. Ping-Chun Hsiung (2008) defined reflexivity as “a process that challenges the researcher to explicitly examine how his or her research agenda and assumptions, subject location(s), personal beliefs and emotions enter into their research” (p. 212). Another way to consider reflexivity, is to situate the researcher in relation to the participants, the research question, the process, and relationships discussed (Ackerly & True, 2008). The process of reflexivity is important to all dimensions of qualitative work but fits seamlessly into the practice of using interviews in an emergent research approach such that it is an ongoing process that

develops over time. Lincoln and Guba (2002) describe reflexivity as the “conscious experiencing of the self as both inquirer and respondent, as teacher and learner, as the one coming to know the self within the process of research itself” (p. 183).

Patton (2015) illuminated the subjectivity of qualitative inquiry as a strength, rather than a deficit.

Qualitative inquiry is personal. The researcher is the instrument of inquiry. What brings you to an inquiry matters. Your background, experience, training, skills, interpersonal competence, capacity for empathy, cross-cultural sensitivity, and how you, as a person, engage in fieldwork and analysis-these things undergird the credibility of your findings. Reflection on how your data collection and interpretation are affected by who you are, what’s going on in your life, what you care about, how you view the world and how you’ve chosen to study what interests you is part of a qualitative methodology (Patton, 2015, p. xiv).

I believe that the perspectives and experiences of the researcher are present elsewhere in research, regardless of methodological approach, across a multitude of disciplines. I applaud those scholars brave enough to acknowledge such a truth and then hold up that perspective as a strength rather than a weakness. My being and my presence have been an important element to this process from recruitment of participants, the analysis of transcripts, and the words I chose to document the experience. My identities as an educated, cisgender woman who has had a career exclusively in higher education shaped this study from beginning to end.

I have been drawn to studying campus sexual violence through a variety of personal and professional experiences, which are derived from my values for human and community connections, as well as student development. Between interactions and engagement in the literature, I believed that faculty felt ill-equipped to respond to sexual misconduct in a way that was congruent with both their personal values and their positional obligations to the institution. I entered into this project not just as a step to complete a doctorate but guided by the belief that by engaging in research around faculty responses to disclosure, I might be able to formulate and propose solutions to help remediate negative consequences associated with sexual assault reporting. I could influence how institutions address resources, faculty support, training opportunities, and intentional debriefs (Branch et al., 2011). I came to this work with a strong commitment to human development. My academic work and professional work have focused on young adult interactions, and I have clinical counseling training with an emphasis on working with survivors of intimate partner violence and sexual assault. I am trained in counseling, and that experience informs how I operate interpersonally.

Relational competence are aspects of the researcher's identity, including positionality, social identities, and understanding of the topic. This competence requires researchers to consider their relationships with participants of the study and the evolving role of the researcher (Jones et al., 2014). Throughout the recruitment process, including before, during, and following the interviews, I considered how my campus position influenced the data. At the time of the interviews, my staff appointment facilitated engagement with faculty on a variety of significant topics

such as behaviors of concern (e.g. violence, threats, mental health), relationship violence prevention initiatives, and bystander intervention programming. Because of the previously discussed public incident at my institution, I was also aware of how my proximity to senior level administrators and my role in the university's Title IX process might have presented itself in the interview space, including my hesitation to discuss topics. I found during my employment that I was often also associated with campus-based survivor work. This was not explicitly true, other than my role as a support and resource for all students, but that perception is important. I found that most participants at the institution where I worked had little knowledge about my role, though they did ask resource-based questions.

I am often curious about what others think of me when I share that I am interested in sexual assault research. Driven by my trauma-informed lens, I assume that the other party automatically believes that I must be a survivor. Why else would I do this work? The moments when I have that thought, I am catapulted back to the statistics of one in five. One in five women, conservatively speaking, is a survivor of a completed or attempted sexual assault (Fisher et al., 2000; Sinozich & Langston, 2014; Tjaden & Thoeness, 2006; Wolitzky-Taylor et al., 2011). The likelihood that I, in that moment, am talking to a survivor strikes me and informs the words I choose, the way I deliver them, and my follow-up. While I am unsure if the status of my survivorship matters, I do identify strongly as someone to whom people disclose trauma. I am also someone who operates within an institution where I am required to share that information as a responsible employee. This compelled reporting is antithetical to feminist approaches such that attempts to establish equality between

the interviewer and participants is a primary goal, along with information sharing and attention to emotions (Campbell et al., 2010; Reinharz, 1992). I believe I used the interviews to address issues of power and institutional structure and accessed my own relational competence. Congruent with feminist grounded-theory and feminist interviewing practices, I took cues from the work of Campbell et al. (2010), whereby they inquired about the experiences of the interviewees talking about a subject as difficult as their own victimization.

### **Trustworthiness**

In quantitative work, validity is a term used to assess and comment on the strength of a study. The assessment of validity serves to demonstrate the soundness of the study in conceptualization, data collection, and analysis. While validity, along with measures of fitness such as reliability and generalizability, were grounded in another form of inquiry, they should not be outright rejected, but perhaps reconceptualized (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). In qualitative inquiry, where the researcher is “the instrument”, calling oneself reliable is not sufficient. “Instead, we distinguish the traits that make us personally credible and ensure that our interpretations of the data are trustworthy” (p. 44). Lincoln & Guba (1985) named alternative constructs that more fully illuminate qualitative work, rather than limiting the measurement through quantitative constructs. Credibility, dependability, and transferability are more typically the terms that are used in this genre. The authors also provided qualitative researchers with standards by which to measure each of the constructs. Credibility is gained through prolonged engagement in a setting. While possibly more directly applicable to an ethnographic study, this can also be

interpreted as experience and knowledge of a particular environment. For example, I have worked in higher education for more than a decade and have been involved with sexual assault reporting for a substantial portion of that time. While this could also serve as a limitation or bias, I contend that despite not engaging in multiple sessions with a single participant or observing them in their work, my deep knowledge of such institutions provided credibility to this study.

Marshall and Rossman (2016) encouraged member checking as one tool of qualitative validity. Following the interviews, I shared the full transcription and a brief paragraph summary of the themes from the conversation with participants. I asked for feedback or corrections on both the summary and transcription. I received responses from 14 of the 16 participants and no corrections were offered. However, I did receive a total of three clarifications one about engagement in the compelled disclosure process and two about the sequences of events. Between achieving saturation and additional safeguards, I felt as though I took multiple steps to develop and implement a trustworthy study.

### **Limitations**

All studies have limitations, but I took several steps to both account for them in advance and address the issues as they arose. Sample size and the lack of objectivity are two of the greatest criticisms of qualitative inquiry. As it relates to sample size, saturation of data may or may not be the goal. “Qualitative samples must be large enough to assure that most or all of the perceptions that might be important are uncovered, but at the same time if the sample is too large data becomes repetitive and, eventually, superfluous” (Mason, 2010). Charmaz (2006) suggested that the

researcher determine the sample size based on the size and scope of the research projects, while other scholars of research approaches (e.g. Creswell, 1994; Morse, 2004) outlined specific ranges of participants depending on the selected approach. Strauss and Corbin (1998) argued that the opportunity to yield new data from participants may be endless, but the constraints of the project should dictate the stopping point, rather than an arbitrary number of interviews. The ability to draw generalized conclusions about populations or subgroups is not typically a result or concern of qualitative work. Instead, however, is an emphasis on meaning making for smaller groups (Maxwell, 2012). Drawing from a grounded approach, the intention is to use data, and theory derived from data, to reach a saturation point. Saturation in grounded theory, as described by Charmaz (2006) is when no “new properties of the pattern emerge” (p. 113). While I believe this was achieved, as demonstrated through member checks, in this study, the population was relatively homogenous in terms of race, with 13 participants white-identified participants and three Black-identified participants.

A second limitation is subjectivity. Interviews are often discredited as a valid method because the individual narrating their experience is not trusted to share an accurate experience. This subjectivity, however, is not exclusive to interview work. When participants are asked to reflect on an experience through either quantitative or qualitative survey questions, the participants are still relying on their own interpretations of their lived experiences and their ability to recall. Observation of disclosures and responses are unrealistic and offer ethical challenges; however, training environments or staff meetings may also assist in capturing an individual's

behavior and their own assessment of such. I was fortunate to be involved in several opportunities on one campus that allowed for engagement with faculty groups and to observe communication about ideologies and perceptions related to campus sexual misconduct, both of which are reflected in the results. My own subjectivity, however, is a variable in that data.

Objectivity of the researcher remains an issue as well. How one comes to their research topic can be highly personal. The personal investment of the work can have profound effects on the research, which both enhance and detract from the work. Whether or not one is a survivor of sexual assault, there is real emotional labor that likely goes into this work. Rebecca Campbell (2002) wrote a book about the emotional process involved in conducting and analyzing work with survivors and how that impacts the researcher. She labeled the concept of emotionally engaged research,

which most simply means drawing upon feelings for scientific purposes and valuing and utilizing the kinds of knowledge that can be revealed through careful attention to the affective experiences of the researcher and the participants. (Campbell, 2002, p. 123)

Feelings are considered data in these circumstances and should be both acknowledged and analyzed as such. Campbell's work places value on member checking, peer feedback, and reflexivity as integral to doing survivor-focused work. I contend that disclosure research is in this same category of research and thus demands the same rigor. As a result, I applied these principles to this study.



## Chapter Summary

In this chapter I described my approach to developing a research project to study the experiences of faculty receiving disclosures of sexual assault from students. Through a qualitative research design based in feminist grounded approaches, I described the planning and execution of interviewing 16 full-time faculty members from six institutions who have experienced disclosures from students. This constructivist approach allowed for an iterative process whereby I repeatedly looked at how data, coding, and categories emerged as interdependent and cross-cutting to result in an even deeper look at the data and analysis. This work was not without challenges. Recruitment of faculty members who self-identified as having received a disclosure from a student was difficult and yielded a sample of faculty members who had served their institutions for a long period of time and the sample was largely racially homogenous. It was only through more intentional recruitment that I was able to include faculty members of color. Throughout the recruitment and yield processes I questioned the interpretation of my request by faculty as they responded with experiences of not receiving disclosures or a discomfort talking about them. Of the nearly 250 faculty members who did not respond to my invitation to participate, I remain curious about how many of them may have had powerful disclosures stories to tell and what barriers kept them from participating.

## **Chapter IV: Should, Could, and Did: Intersections and Divergences of Beliefs, Knowledge, and Actions**

The relationships and individual qualities of the recipient of a sexual assault disclosure combined with how that disclosure recipient responds can powerfully influence the extent to which an individual is able to overcome an experience of trauma. The first disclosure experience is especially powerful for survivors (Ullman, 2000). Faculty are not typically the recipients of a student's first sexual assault disclosure, or the majority of disclosures in general (Fisher et al., 2000; Newins et al., 2018), but it is necessary to understand faculty experiences with disclosures so that the experiences and related outcomes can be improved. In order to understand and improve faculty experiences with disclosures, it is also necessary to understand the institutional and discursive circumstances in which those faculty operate.

The concept of institutional betrayal (Smith and Freyd, 2013) points to the importance of faculty impact on disclosures as part of a larger institutional system. In their work, Smith and Freyd (2013) define institutional betrayal as actions or inactions of a college or university, such that the institution failed to adequately protect students from assault or responded to the assault in a way that caused increased harm. In their research on institutional betrayal, Smith and Freyd (2013) identified aspects of inaction or harmful actions related to sexual misconduct in higher education, and also in prisons and military organizations. Institutions, while bigger and more powerful than the individual people who operate within their spheres, are comprised of diverse individuals, employ human-made policies, and institutions reflect the social systems in which they operate and which they influence.

The film *The Hunting Ground* (Ziering & Dick, 2015), described in more detail in Chapter II, presented several instances where betrayal by powerful institutions occurred across the U.S., as detailed by narratives of students who were retraumatized by negligent and harmful practices and policies. In several cases described in the film, students' reports of violence were ignored, while prominent athletes and community members were protected. While the concept of institutional betrayal refers to the powerful institution as a distinct entity, the film itself addressed several circumstances where a particular individual or small group of administrators took action or inaction consistent with the definition of institutional betrayal.

In addition to describing institutional betrayal, in Chapters I and II, I described examples of problematic discourses on sexual assault as demonstrated by high-profile cases in higher education and introduced the concept of rape myth acceptance to situate the social-ecological impact of intimate partner violence and sexual assault. I presented cases from elite academic institutions including Duke University, Michigan State University, and The Pennsylvania State University where individual staff and faculty members found themselves at the center of controversy due to their ambivalence to action or collusion to cover up violence. Institutional betrayal and collusion among administrators represent a dominant narrative that positions students and the institution in an adversarial relationship. Students may either see faculty members as part of this problematic collective or they may see individual faculty members as a singular deviation from a betraying institution. This study, however, is about the experiences of faculty members in relation to sex and gender-based violence, reflecting their own conceptualization of their roles, beliefs and actions.

The participants in this study shared their experiences engaging with individual students, the institution, and policies related to Title IX. The narratives of faculty participants about disclosures and how they responded to them were rooted in the varied ways they conceptualize their roles in relation to policy, duty, and care. In this chapter I present three primary findings, each of which represents the interaction between the faculty members and Bronfenbrenner's contexts of meso- and exosystems, and as undergirded by the macrosystem.

The first finding is that faculty express an immense uncertainty and lack of confidence about how to respond to disclosures. Through my analyses of participant narratives, I demonstrate the frequency with which participants communicated their uncertainty, describe their reported lack of training across institutions, and illustrate faculty confusion as demonstrated by the discrepancies between what faculty state they should do when they receive a disclosure and what they actually do. When faculty are able to identify policies and practices for disclosure response, they also perceive a profound tension between care for the student and adherence to policies.

The second primary finding is that use of the term "reporting" represents varied and sometimes divergent and conflicting aspects of participant understanding and action related to disclosure experiences. Faculty used variations of the word "report" to reflect their perceptions of faculty roles of receiving student sexual assault disclosures, ideas of how the policies obligate them to act, and how their understanding of roles and policies inform how they respond to student disclosures directly. Through their understanding of reports and reporting, participants communicated a general mistrust of the administration and policies in efforts to

address sexual misconduct. Faculty believed the policies existed to maintain institutional reputation at the expense of student care. Participant experiences revealed that individual interpretations of a particular disclosure experience superseded what they interpreted as policy. Their relationships to the institution at varying levels allowed faculty to distance themselves from the administration and the institution and overtly critique the management of sexual misconduct and compelled disclosures.

The third finding was a deep sense of care that faculty expressed in various ways. Despite the substantial variation in how the participants responded to disclosures, including the differing responses from a single faculty member experiencing multiple disclosures, I argue that the presence of response is the presence of care. All recipients of sexual misconduct disclosures have the choice of whether to act or not act in response to a disclosure. Based on the experiences described by the faculty members, every participant in this study performed an action to provide care and support to the students. Those actions were not always overtly caring, and not always rooted in compassion, but rather obligation. Regardless of their philosophical approach, their responses represented care. In the third section, I describe how care and obligation intersect in action, but ultimately represent an intention of care.

### **Faculty Perceptions and Beliefs of Institutional Policy and Duty**

*Like I would never think of going to a professor and talking about my life. Ever. So that, I think, has changed. And I don't know if I just never was like that with my teachers, but I feel like it's more like that. There are just things I*

*would never think to say to a professor and the boundaries are really much more kind of blurry. So I think since those boundaries are now more blurry, we need to talk about what our boundaries are, and I think it's going to be different.*

*Lauren, Social Sciences Lecturer*

In her reflections of disclosure experiences, Lauren, a lecturer in the social sciences, spoke about a changing dynamic between faculty and students. A shift toward more personal disclosure by students represented to Lauren greater uncertainty, generational and organizational change, and prompted an examination of herself through conditions of the institution. Lauren's statement about change and navigating uncertain terrain captures the sentiments of other participants as determined through my analyses. These thoughts and feelings that frame disclosure experiences for faculty are reflection of the micro-, meso-, and macrosystem, such that faculty consider their roles and relationships in relation to other faculty, students, their discipline, and discourse.

In this section, I present the perceptions and beliefs that faculty have about the policies and duties, specifically addressing those aspects of the institution and the roles that challenge their perceived ability to support students who have experienced sexual violence and intimate partner violence. First, faculty expressed being challenged by sexual assault disclosures and navigating policy because that they are not expert in the work; this is often in stark contrast to their disciplinary expertise. This concern for competence was demonstrated through the ways actively faculty

talked through their understanding of their duties and the ways in which they minimized or qualified their knowledge. The second challenge to perceptions and beliefs was the gap between what they knew and what they did. In this subsection, I address the discrepancies in knowledge, but also the conditions under which faculty fail to fulfill their own self-described obligations. Finally, I conclude this section with a discussion of role clarity and balancing boundaries in a dynamic environment such as those that the participants describe.

### **Faculty as Non-Experts: Resistance to Identifying What They Know**

At a Title IX association conference, I participated in a conversation with faculty about faculty engagement in how universities address sexual misconduct. The faculty members who participated in that conversation demonstrated humility and spoke about the culture of faculty as trained experts in a specific discipline. From that position, faculty can speak with authority and are often sought for consultation on related issues. They have a very specific area within a discipline or disciplines, in which they are studied and often distinguished. Asking faculty to reflect on a topic where they are not experts, but they are operating under conditions where discourse tells them their employers are harmful and their jobs could be at stake, likely makes them nervous to assert their knowledge. Based on the resistance to identify a process and the variations in their individual responses, I could deduce that faculty could not identify a process because it was difficult to understand and also did not want to identify a particular process because they did not want to be obligated to follow the process in all circumstances.

When I asked directly, the participants had a difficult time describing the scope of their duties related to responding to student disclosures of sexual assault. I used three questions in the interview protocol (see Appendix D) that addressed faculty responsibilities related to responding to disclosures. I asked about how their actions related to the disclosure of interest discussed in the interview reflected their responsibilities, what the specific responsibilities were, and to what extent the institutionally mandated responsibilities were aligned with their personal beliefs. In different ways, but consistently throughout the interviews, I was met with the participants' varying amounts and types of resistance to identify the policies for responding to sexual assault. I present the ways the participants worked through their resistance to eventually identify some sexual misconduct response knowledge. Even for those who were more readily able to identify what they knew about their roles and requirements, they often used qualifying or discounting statements about their knowledge. The combination of such reluctance to identify the policies and required roles, combined with the ways faculty talked about their experiences with disclosures, led me to interpret the resistance as a reflection of faculty's lack of confidence and the participants' pressing concern to be right. Being right in the case of responding to students' disclosures is important because students' lives are impacted so significantly by assault. It is possible that faculty were equally as concerned with getting their response right, as they were with not getting it wrong.

### **Faculty Work Through What They Know by Talking**

I asked participants directly about how they would describe processes or policies on their campuses for responding to experiences of sexual misconduct. Of the



16 participants, 10 of them answered initially with a response of “I don’t know” or “I have no idea.” When I asked Gregory, STEM professor, he looked at me and leaned back in his chair and said, “I really don’t know.” With Gregory, and with the other participants who communicated uncertainty about their policy and process knowledge, I paused. I attempted to use a moment of silence to allow them to gather their thoughts on what they possibly did know. Gregory, also like the other participants, eventually did go on to describe something:

Great question. And unfortunately, I would not have a great, of course, I have a vague idea that Title IX is gender equality and that we have a policy for it. It’s a big deal in studies that we receive like every other year because women are particularly underrepresented in STEM.... Uh so because of that we’re constantly faced with a question of well why and what can we do? And that turns into Title IX type things. It's not that we have that we give women less access to facilities or it's not like oh there’s a women’s hockey team that’s 25 members. I don’t know how big a women’s hockey team is and there’s a football team that’s a hundred...It's not that kind of thing. It’s merely that there is something structural in the program or in the profession that discourages women.

I found Gregory’s statements important for two reasons. First, I asked Gregory directly about his responsibility to respond to disclosures of sexual assault or sexual violence and he went down a very tangential line of thought. He avoided talking about any type of violence or harassment in general and moved straight to gender. He was not wrong in what he generally discussed in relation to Title IX’s historical

purpose, but he strayed from the primary topic of our interview conversation itself, which was explicit in the invitation to participate (Appendix A). The other factor that is important with Gregory's experience is the way he articulated this particular line of thinking. Similar to other faculty members, he was working out what he thought and believed about the policies as he was talking about them. There was no expectation that participants would do research or give much thought to their experiences in advance, but participants were fully aware of the topic discussed in the interview and the purpose of the study.

Peter, a human services professor, had a slightly more specific response that was more closely related to gender violence, but he exhibited a similar pattern to Gregory in how he actively talked through his answer, discovering what he knew as he was saying it.

Um I know we uh we have mandatory sexual um domestic violence and we have to do modules on um sexual harassment and um. But you know, that's an interesting question. Um, I know that in the athletic department I think they have a Title IX coordinator. They might have one in HR as well. Um but I don't recall any seminars or anything on that. So, but uh uh so we are encouraged to report students to the counseling center, and I know a lot of students are not comfortable going to the counseling center in a campus setting.

Peter had some awareness of campus resources and demonstrated some knowledge initially, but then questioned his knowledge and the scope of resources. The use of his term "report", which he uses to mean a referral to the counseling center, is of

importance here. The term report has a great deal of power over the process and the way the term is used dictates how faculty see themselves as agents of an institutional process. Reports and reporting are discussed more thoroughly in a later section of this chapter.

Ilene, assistant professor in an interdisciplinary program, was very dismissive of the notion that she had any idea of what the policy said or what she should do. The following is an excerpt of our conversation, one which jumped back and forth between us quickly due to short answers and an initial unwillingness to think through what she might know. Ilene began with her response to my question about how she might describe the university's process for responding to sexual misconduct and then concluded with the demands of her role with faculty governance as they endeavored to consider how to address sexual misconduct differently.

Ilene: no no no idea.

Jaelyn: Okay. Yeah. How about policies? Do you have any idea? And this is not meant to be a quiz.

I: No no no no no. No idea.

J: Okay

I: I've read it. But I don't know how to enact it. I don't know.

J: Interesting. So, have you, either through faculty governance or other places,

have you been to any training or sessions?

I: No

J: It's all what you've read on your own?

I: Yeah.

In this interaction, Ilene used minimal responses to demonstrate her resistance to identify what the process was, despite her involvement through her governance role. This was a frustrating interaction for me as the interviewer, initially. I was comfortable with Ilene not knowing, but it was her unwillingness to engage as demonstrated through her terse responses was off-putting as I was not sure where else in the conversation she might demonstrate these behaviors. After further analyses and additional context Ilene provided through her disclosure experiences, I realized that her response was tied up in her thoughts, feelings, and positionality.

While Ilene's reaction to my inquiry about her duties was the most visceral of the participants, her reaction was demonstrative of what others felt. It was evident that faculty had not previously been given the verbal spaces to work out what it was that they thought and felt about their duties as responsible employees. Of course, it is possible that the faculty just did not know more details, but as demonstrated through the disclosure examples they shared and other experiences, most of them knew more than perhaps they were aware of.

### ***Faculty Qualify or Discount Their Knowledge of Policy***

Some participants responded more readily to my questions about how they would respond to disclosures or describe the processes and policies to a colleague. Even those faculty members who initially led with confidence, however, often added qualifying statements or discounted their knowledge. Maxine, a tenured arts professor, illustrated this experience directly. She initially asserted her confidence and then quickly added a qualifying statement. I asked how Maxine would describe the

obligations of faculty who receive a disclosure and she said, “Well, we’re mandatory reporters.” After a pause, she added “I believe.” Maxine was a member of her institution’s sexual misconduct hearing board, worked at her institution for nearly a decade, and served in several roles that were highly engaged in both student life and institutional processes. In Maxine’s retelling of her disclosure experiences she outlined the actions she took, listed the offices she connected students to, and talked about providing emotional support. In one example, Maxine talked about receiving a disclosure from a student who had experienced relationship violence from a non-student. When I asked about notifying the Title IX coordinator, she said she had not taken this action because the perpetrator was not a student at her institution. Maxine did not waver on the decisions of her actions at those points, even though the actions of her response could be interpreted as non-compliant with her institution’s policies. She had been confident in some areas of response and asserted a self-assured response about her role, but immediately retracted that confidence despite showing it elsewhere.

When I asked Olivia, assistant professor in the social sciences, how she might describe what her obligations were to respond to a student at her university if she were talking to a colleague at another institution, she was very complimentary of the support services provided to students at her university, but then stated that she was unaware of anything other than disability support and campus police for such issues. She was newer to her institution relative to the long tenure of many participants, but she had been there for more than one academic year.

If there is a Title IX coordinator, I'm not aware of who the Title IX coordinator is. And what I would say is that if it was an incident where I thought somebody was in danger or if I needed to make a report, we do have an on-campus police department and so that's what I would believe would be the next step even though I'm not 100% sure that if there was something major that then I would have to call campus police if it was an unsafe situation.

Olivia had experience with Title IX and sexual misconduct reporting at her former institution, and said she knew exactly who to go to in that context but was unaware of anything at her current institution.

When I asked Naomi, a tenure-track assistant professor in the social sciences, to describe her responsibilities to respond to a disclosure by a student, she said "out of sight and out of mind." She started with that dismissive answer of not knowing and not seeking to know, but Naomi eventually identified signs that a student may disclose something reportable, at which point she addressed the scope of her reporting duties, and acknowledged her training, albeit minimal.

You know, everyone comes [to training] during faculty week, so we hear different speakers across campus saying, "hey I work in this office and I'm responsible for Title IX education for both faculty and students." So we don't talk about it continuously. And as a result, I forgot the information that was given to me at the beginning of the academic year because it's annual. It's like clockwork, I know that I'm going to hear from someone from that office give a little ten-minute segment or thirty minutes about Title IX. And what I will

say, I thought I had the little brochure and pamphlet in front of me, but what I will say is that we do have a Title IX office and they do educate us. I will not take that away from them. However, us as faculty members, I know basic protocols given extreme circumstances. The obvious. So, if someone were to say to me in private, “uh Dr. Nelson, I want to talk to you because you seem very cool and I can relate to you” da da da da da sucha sucha and they tell me this in confidence, I know that I have the obligation, given my Title, to do what? Report that. That I do know, okay? And then you have the stories that I hear from students in which they went through the entire process, but they still feel as though they’re being victimized again.

Naomi demonstrated an initial resistance to acknowledge that she did know the information, even if not every minute detail. In her response she moved between describing what she herself knows and how faculty experience things in general. For example, she said, “Us as faculty members, I know...” In her statement Naomi reflected both her internal orientation to the process, but also faculty discourse of resistance to engage in the university’s process due to mistrust of the university’s processes; I discuss this issue further in the next section.

### **Between Knowing and Doing**

At each of the six institutions represented in the study, university personnel, including both faculty and staff, were designated as responsible employees. The Office for Civil Rights (OCR) defined a responsible employee as any person who has authority or reasonably perceived authority to act when they receive a disclosure of sexual victimization or misconduct. While the policy language varied slightly from

institution to institution, the general definition of a responsible employee was derived from OCR language. At each institution faculty members are designated as a responsible employee, and, as such, they are all required to notify the Title IX coordinator when they receive a disclosure of alleged sexual misconduct. All institutions generally defined sexual misconduct the same as well: an umbrella term that is inclusive of rape, sexual assault, stalking, intimate partner violence, and domestic violence (see Appendix E for a table of the institutions' definitions of a responsible employee and the scope of actions required of a responsible employee). A small number of institutions also provided more specific reporting protocol and additional personnel to whom folks could make a report but, in all instances, the Title IX coordinator was the recipient of reports.

I asked the participants to describe their campus processes for responding to sexual misconduct. I categorized their responses into four types of action: general report, report to chair, refer, and unknown. This first category, general reporting, was often ambiguous with the participant referencing an administrative form, a conversation with the Title IX coordinator, or a consultation with a key staff person in the counseling center, the student conduct office, or student affairs administration. The second category was reporting to the department chair. Participants discussed reporting to the chair as part of reporting, but because this was not referred to in any of the institutional policies, I categorized it independently of general reporting. Given the general lack of participant knowledge of and confidence in sexual misconduct processes and policies, it is reasonable to believe that the department chair, also a faculty member, may share a lack of confidence and knowledge and also may not act



in accordance with the policies. The third category of mandated sexual misconduct response is referral. Only one participant initially used language about referral as a mandated response, though referrals to campus resources came up much more frequently in the narratives of disclosure experiences. The fourth category of sexual misconduct mandated actions was “unknown.” This category included participants explicitly stating that they did not know what to do and were unable to hypothesize about what a mandate might be.

Eleven of the participants used the term “report” in some capacity. I describe and discuss the use of the term in the next section from a sociolinguistic perspective, but in this section, I discuss reporting as a general action faculty described as part of participants’ responses to students’ disclosures and how that compares to the actions they took in response to a student disclosure. Half of all participants referred generally to reporting as a process where they would notify either the Title IX office or a key person in student affairs. Another three participants who used the term report referenced reporting to their department chair. While 10 participants initially said they did not know or were unsure of what action to take, only four participants maintained that they did not know even after I asked additional probing questions.

After I categorized the participants’ descriptions of mandated actions, I compared what the faculty members identified as the mandate to the actions they took when they received a disclosure of sexual assault. I present the comparison in Table 3. In addition to the varying beliefs about what was required of responsible employees who have received disclosures of sexual misconduct, there were discrepancies between what they believed they were supposed to do and what they

actually did when they received a disclosure. Of those 12 participants who were able to identify actions required of faculty to respond to sexual misconduct (general report, report to chair, refer), there were six instances in which the faculty members said they were required to do a specific action, but when they received a disclosure they acted differently than what they described was required of them. Of the four participants who were unable to identify required faculty actions or policies in response to a disclosure (labeled as unknown), three of them did take actions, though none of them were congruent with what their institutional policy outlined.

Table 3. Participant Descriptions of Mandates Compared to Participant Actions Following a Disclosure

		<i>Participant reported actions</i>				
		General report	Report to chair	Refer	Self-support	Rate of congruency
<i>Participant-reported mandates</i>	General report (8)	4		1	3	50%
	Report to chair (3)		2	1		66%
	Refer (1)				1	0%
	Unknown (4)			3	1	N/A
Total (16)		4	2	5	5	

As discussed thus far, there were discrepancies between what some of the faculty members said they were required to do and the reality of the action they took when they received a disclosure. For example, eight participants said they should engage in reporting when a student discloses to them, but only four of those faculty

members engaged in reporting when they received a disclosure. Three faculty members said they would report to their department chair and two of those faculty members followed through on those actions. The column in Table 3 labeled “rate of congruency” is the percentage of participants in each category who identified the mandate and then did the mandated behavior in response to a disclosure. In describing their actual responses, faculty identified self-support as an action, in addition to general report, report to chair, and refer. Self-support is when the participant identified follow-up actions such as outreach via email or individual meetings to support the students, but no referrals or other actions were explicitly taken. Throughout all the interviews, participants identified campus resources available to help them, even if those resources were not explicitly named in their sexual misconduct policies and processes. While campus resources were generally included as a part of participants’ understanding of their institution’s general offerings, explicit referrals were not always stated by the participants and thus I did not include their responses in that category.

There are two important implications from the discrepancies between what faculty believe they should do and what they actually do in response to student disclosures of sexual assault. The first implication relates to training. While 12 of the 16 participants were able to identify an action that they were required to take as responsible employees, only half of all participants gave answers that were congruent with the policies, all which were related to general reporting. The faculty who participated in this study were self-selected. I initially hypothesized that those faculty members who choose to participate in such a study, which was explicitly about sexual

misconduct disclosures to faculty by students, would have a specialized knowledge about or interest in the topic. As demonstrated by the lack of participant knowledge, specialized knowledge was not overtly present and thus not the case in this study.

As I articulated in Chapter I, the 2017 Faculty Survey of Student Engagement (FSSE) found that two-thirds of faculty reported that they understood their institution's sexual assault policies and procedures, but less than half of respondents reported receiving training and half identified inadequate support for students who have experienced sexual assault. That study, however, likely did not match the knowledge with the behaviors of participants, nor did it further compare the results to the existing institutional policies. The sample of participants in my study is substantially smaller, but the nuance and realities of this small sub-population should not be discounted. If faculty in the FSSE were merely asked the extent to which they were knowledgeable about policies, there were not any measures of validity to see if they were accurate in that knowledge, thus making the case for the value of qualitative and complimentary research such as what I have presented thus far. Explicit training on specific action steps that faculty should take when they receive a disclosure is largely missing, despite being absolutely critical to faculty acting in compliance with institutional policies and state and federal laws.

The second implication relates to consistency. Even when faculty identified their institution's mandate for responding to disclosures, they inconsistently followed through with actions in accordance with the mandate. Only half of those who identified reporting as the mandated response option and a quarter of the overall participants followed through with the mandated response option they identified.

Maxine, an arts professor, who I referenced earlier in this chapter, discussed a disclosure from a student who had been in an abusive relationship. Immediately after saying she was a mandatory reporter, she stated that she thought she did not need to report because the perpetrating student was not a student at the institution.

Maxine (M): Well, we're mandatory reporters. I believe.

Jaclyn (J): It's not a quiz. However, you describe it is okay.

M: But in this [domestic violence] case because [the perpetrator] wasn't a student here. I didn't think that that applied. So I was just really concerned with making sure that she had the support and connection to the resources that she needed um and not thinking about...

J: If the other person were a student here, would your obligation be different?

M: Yes. I mean at that point, if she had said that this was a [university] student then I think I wouldn't have known what to do that second, but I would have then thought okay now I need to find out if I need to report this or how and like investigated more.

The discrepancies that I described here are important. In the previous paragraph I argued for the need for increased faculty training so that faculty know how to respond. Training alone, however, will not close the gap in inconsistent or non-existent reporting. Faculty need to have confidence in the reporting measures. Such understanding might be the purpose of reporting, the process, student and faculty rights and responsibilities in the reporting processes. When they do not have faith in those institutional processes, faculty take decision making into their own hands and potentially put themselves, the reporting student, and the institution at risk.

Participants utilized their own personal assessment of intimate partner violence or sexual assault situations to determine their response actions and in some cases to purposefully defy the mandate. When asked further about a situation where faculty members might be willing to not follow the institutional process (as they understood it), a variety of responses emerged, all reflective of concern and care of the student. Alexandra said,

Definitely if a student came to me and disclosed child abuse, I mean, anything that happened a long time ago, I am not sure what I would do, but something that's relatively recent or something that's currently impacting their lives, because there are people who come to me and say this happened to me a long time ago, I'm going to therapy, I've dealt with it, I'm good.

The policy at Alexandra's institution, and all institutions represented in this study, does mandate that any disclosures of childhood abuse are documented and elevated to the university personnel regardless of when they occur or the therapeutic treatment that was received.

Naomi, shared a similar sentiment, based not on temporal proximity, but the help-seeking component that Alexandra referenced. Naomi, a social sciences professor who was working toward tenure at the time of her interview, stated that she had never experienced a student who refused or requested something other than the compelled disclosure process. In the interview she stated that she would likely honor their wish if she felt confident that the student was seeking help from other resources such as therapy.

Luckily, I've never encountered [knocked on desk] that, but you know, you bring up a very good point because you always want to honor one's wishes. However, it's like you have an obligation, right? It's just like you're torn. I would honor their wish only if I know that they are seeking help elsewhere. I'd honor it. That's the only caveat. So if they say to me, "You know what, please don't tell anyone. I'm going home this weekend and will talk to my family or a therapist." I'm all, okay, well, eh, you're going home. And you're going to get help at home versus here. I'll respect their wishes. Because at least I know that they have the family support and they're going to seek something home to deal with this situation

Naomi did not identify a mechanism for following up with the students to ensure they received care, but merely identified that as a core variable in her decision making.

Naomi's experience, similar to those of Alexandra and Maxine, show that a variety of factors widen or narrow the gap between what faculty believe they should do and what they should actually do. By asking participants to describe their responsibilities and then tell me what they actually did held up a mirror to their experience, revealing some dissonance they felt for a variety of reasons. I have described training, trust and personal judgment as some of the mechanisms that prohibited them acting in accordance with their beliefs. Role confusion, discussed in the next section, is another aspect of the faculty experiences with sexual assault disclosures that was relevant to both the participants of this study and reflected in the literature.

## **The Need for Role Clarification**

I asked the faculty members to describe what they believed their roles to be at the institution as faculty members who receive student disclosures of sexual misconduct. In their responses I initially felt that the participants were defensive, but upon further analysis, I concluded that the faculty were yearning for role clarity. In their research on faculty experiences with role strain as a result of sexual assault disclosures, Hayes-Smith et al. (2010) found that role negotiation contributed to role strain. Strain was found to also be associated with isolation and feelings of being emotionally burdened. I use this understanding to further consider the conditions that elicited the participants' responses, which were initially off-putting to me.

Ilene's response, initially discussed in the last section, demonstrates this confusion. Ilene, a tenure-track assistant professor in an interdisciplinary program, was very resistant to identifying a process or a policy. When I asked her multiple times in multiple ways, she declined to give any answers. With additional probes, silence on my part, and even repeating back her words, she was unwilling to hypothesize what she might have to do. I inquired about her role in faculty governance and she discussed how her role placed an undue and inappropriate responsibility on faculty senators to comment on the institution's efforts to revise their handling of sexual misconduct.

And even now after the university session, the faculty senate will discuss [the university's approach to sexual misconduct], but we need to comment on it. I feel this is strange that our senators were somehow given more importance to comment on this. You know like how is this how does that make me better



judge? You know? I really don't think I'm a good judge. And I feel like I'm not going to comment on it to be honest. I don't think it's my... I think they want it to be my place uh but I don't.

Her statement about the importance of the faculty governance board's opinions demonstrates that it was not defensiveness that kept her from commenting, but rather the desire to have clear boundaries on what was appropriate for her to do in her various roles. The need for those boundaries is derived from the need for security: security in knowing that the response to the students who disclose are not inviting more harm; security in one's own confidence and competence; and positional security. In Ilene's case, she was not yet tenured and operating in an unknown space could have personal consequences for her and not just the student.

Lauren, social sciences lecturer, identified role clarity explicitly as a need to be addressed. She was at one of the few institutions that had required training for all faculty and staff. When I inquired about the nature of the training, she talked more about identifying specific behaviors that fall under sexual misconduct and also the conduct that is expected for university employees, but there was not any training to address the specific required actions one should take if they suspect misconduct or receive a disclosure directly. As shared in the epigraph at the start of this section, Lauren makes the case for role clarity under the conditions of changing roles.

I guess we need to clarify what our roles are. You know? I think that the role of the faculty member's changing. Now that it's less stuffy white guy or less stuffy white lady. Right? Like I would never think of going to a professor and talking about my life. Ever. So that, I think, has changed. And I don't know if

I just never was like that with my teachers, but I feel like it's more like that. There are just things I would never think to say to a professor and the boundaries are really much more kind of blurry. So I think since those boundaries are now more blurry, we need to talk about what our boundaries are and I think it's going to be different.

Lauren addressed the changing dynamic of a diverse faculty workforce and I also believe this is a comment on the changing dynamic of academia. Specifically, what Lauren is commenting on is the accessibility of faculty to students based on their identities (e.g., non-stuffy white lady) and the ways in which students see the possibility of interacting with faculty in general.

Helen, a humanities lecturer, echoed Lauren's thoughts about students' expectations about the institution.

[Students] are coming with more expectations for services. They really expect the institution to care for them. When I think about myself in college, I didn't expect that from my institution. I felt like it was the school, um, not like my therapist. Um, so those expectations seem different.

While Lauren referenced students' conduct with faculty, Helen spoke to students' assumptions of reliance on and expectations of the institution. The combination of students' expectations of relationships to individual faculty, faculty as a community, and the institution in general, may result in competing and confusing faculty roles, while also furthering students' perceptions of institutional betrayal.

Both Lauren and Helen are lecturers, at two different institutions and in different disciplines. They separately talked about being perceived by the students as

more youthful and thus accessible. At the same time, there are other faculty who are tenured and are perceived as more parental, who had similar experiences. Maxine, a tenured professor of the arts who has served at her institution for a decade and who has served in a senior administrative capacity as well, also spoke about role confusion:

They don't know if they're talking to the department chair who's a full professor and has been here for thirty years or someone who is teaching one class that semester and will never teach it again. Like, no clue.

Alexandra, a social sciences lecturer, also shared similar sentiment, with a strong focus on support and care for adjunct professors in their responses to disclosures of sexual assault. Because of the marked differences between adjuncts and full-time faculty, they were not included in this study, but attention to their roles is critically important to consider. Hierarchy and positionality are important to the faculty role. The rank of the professor is directly related to job security through tenure, institutional respect, and self-perception. As demonstrated by participants' descriptions of roles and ranks, students do not have an awareness of such organizational dynamics, despite the potential for their disclosure to be impacted by the knowledge and experiences of those faculty who are on the receiving end.

Alexandra's attention to role confusion related to responding to student disclosures of sexual assault was not only related to her concern for how adjuncts experience disclosures. Alexandra experienced disciplinary challenges where students thought she would be more capable of counseling them. In the following statement,

Alexandra referred to a new level of consciousness she had for sexual assault disclosures after she had attended a university training.

Once I became aware of [reporting sexual assault], you know, I was trying as much as possible to listen when students said things. I will admit that I try right away, you know if I hear them starting to go into it I will say, I am a, you know, I am. Whatever, it's a, you know, I must respond if you tell me this. I'm going to have to report it, um a mandatory reporter or whatever. So I try to pipe up right away. I'm not a clinician. I always tell everyone because being in [the social sciences] field, students come in and they just want to start pouring.

Alexandra directly stated six times in her interview that she was not a clinical mental health professional or therapist. It was evident that students often perceived her as having credentials in an area she was not interested in, but was also not trained to do. The confusion about her role was a distinct aspect of her faculty identity as she related to students. The constant need to clarify one's position for oneself and for one's students can be an exhausting aspect to work, especially when there is additional pressure from the student and the institution to respond in a particular way when a student discloses sexual assault. Hayes-Smith et al. (2010) also found this role strain with their participants, but the response of their participants varied. One faculty participant in their study noted they were a trained mental health clinician and as such "went into that mode" (p. 13). Neither Alexandra nor the faculty member in the other study was more right than the other, but their personal assessments of their skills,

combined with the ethical code of their disciplines and institutional boundaries should be considered.

Naomi, social sciences professor, quickly walked me through the full scope of how role confusion is problematic from disclosure to follow up.

Honestly, when I hear these cases, the few cases I've heard, I couldn't be there for them because I had my obligations. You know, I couldn't cancel class. I had to, I hate to say this harshly, I had to pass them along. I had to refer them to others. But then I had to say in the back of my mind, do they have that support system here? And if you know that you have an office in which you have to schedule to make an appointment with a counselor to seek counseling, what if the student has other obligations? Then what? If something closes at 5PM, but you need assistance at 8PM, do we have a, what do you call that, telephone hotline service center for some students? I don't know. And as a professor, it's almost like you have to block certain things out. So you and I are talking and when I leave here am I going to think about this conversation? Not much. Because I'm going to be on to something else. And when you move from class to class and you engage with students it's like you almost have to have to compartmentalize and distance.

In this quote, Naomi demonstrated how catastrophizing can occur when faculty are concerned about the scope of their responsibilities while simultaneously holding deep concern for the students' well-being. A more in-depth examination of faculty care is presented later in this chapter, but the role confusion that comes from deep care while also lacking clarity on expectations can be stressful to the faculty members who

respond. The level of stress may eventually impact a faculty member's willingness and ability to respond at all.

Role clarity could make a significant difference in the level of confidence for faculty to respond to disclosures. If faculty were confident about the scope of what they might experience, what is expected of them by the university, and what students might be expecting, they would be better able to anticipate the disclosure and formulate an effective and compliant response. The institution should use evidence-based practices to ensure that the role clarification is compliant with local and federal regulations, but also to ensure that those who occupy the roles understand the impact of their disclosure response. Clarification of faculty roles and responsibilities for students would also help support the faculty immensely. The examples from the faculty members demonstrate a mismatch of expectations between students and faculty and between students and the institution. If the faculty members felt confident that the students understood faculty responsibilities and duties to respond to sexual assault, faculty could potentially respond more effectively and in ways that are more aligned with student and institutional expectations.

In the next section, I further discuss discourses of "reporting", including techniques such as "interrupt to inform" as a tool some faculty use to clarify their role, though the notion of stopping a disclosure has the power to impact students negatively if they feel dismissed or burdensome. The faculty participants want to do what is just for the student and I believe they want to be compliant with policy--but when they do not feel confident in what they should be doing or how to do it, compliance and care can feel like competing priorities.

## **Report, Reports, and Reporting: Influences and Impacts of Language on Faculty Experiences with Disclosures**

*I think when I initially found out about [reporting], it sounded like a really good idea to me that that faculty would disclose such things. I think I didn't really critically evaluate that, and then when I started attending meetings and hearing other people respond to disclosures and the policy and oh maybe students don't want to have that experience disclosed, I thought, huh. That's really interesting too. And I never really settled on, like, which is a better approach to things, but I always kept in mind, like if a student is about to disclose, you might want to inform them that you're obligated to disclose. On the other hand, yeah, if a student discloses, I'm going to then report the incident.*

*Fiona, Interdisciplinary Professor*

As I demonstrated earlier in my synthesis of participants' proposed responses compared to their actions taken (Table 3), the concept of reporting was referred to frequently throughout each of the participant interviews as a component of perceived responsibility and completed action. The word "report" can represent various parts of a disclosure and response process and it also carries additional linguistic and emotional value. As illustrated in the opening quote by Fiona, reporting is complex. Fiona, a tenured faculty in an interdisciplinary program, demonstrated this issue as she shifted her use of terms such as disclose, disclosure, report and reporting. In addition to her language choices, Fiona also vacillated between the merits of her duties as a responsible employee and the autonomy of the disclosing student.

In this section, I situate how “report” is used in policies from which participants' obligations are outlined, but also rarely understood. I then present faculty narratives demonstrating the variations of use of the term report and how the use of the term in a particular manner reflects their own negative beliefs about institutional processes and thus impacts how the faculty respond to the disclosure. As an extension of faculty views of reporting as negative, some participants used a technique called “interrupt to inform,” which is designed to alert students to reporting obligations and either have the student stop disclosing or make an informed choice. All of these negative perceptions of reports and reporting are undergirded by faculty members’ critique of flawed institutional management of sexual misconduct. The concept of reporting illustrates the impact of the exosystem (policies) on mesosystem (faculty obligations to institutions), microsystem (direct response to disclosures) and individual choices (action).

### **The Policy Framing of Reporting**

In the text of the policies related to responsible employees at each of the institutions represented in this study (see Appendix E), the term report can be found consistently in the definition of the responsible employee or in the directives about what a responsible employee is expected to do. Throughout the policies and procedures of the six institutions represented, there are 20 references to report or reporting with the range of references between one and 12 in a single policy. In the policies, “report” is used as either a noun or a verb. As with the statement from Institution F’s policy, the responsible employee is “expected to file a report”, report is the noun and includes sharing information with the Title IX coordinator. There are



several instances similar to institution A, where report is used as a verb. For example, the language reads “All Responsible Employees are required to report incidents of Sexual Misconduct to the Title IX Coordinator.” Regardless of the part of speech being used in the policies, a key consistency is that “report” is always serving as a term to reflect information. As a noun, the report is the notification, in-person, online, paper or otherwise. As a verb, reporting refers to the process of the notification.

Among the six colleges and universities there are hundreds of pages of policies reflective of laws and regulations and adapted by institutional legal counsel. One participant reported a mandatory online training whereas at another institution a participant engaged in a role-specific training. However, at the remaining four institutions there was limited or no training for faculty on expectations for responding to disclosures and making notifications to the appropriate personnel. According to what was shared by my participants, it was unclear to me if, across the institutions, the training was made available but was just not attended, or if training was not provided at all.

Additional factors related to faculty not knowing their responsibilities may have been the changing landscape of Title IX directives from the Office for Civil Rights during the timeframe in which the interviews were conducted, which encompassed the Secretary of Education rolling back regulations for how colleges address sexual violence and the anticipation of new regulations released in May of 2020 and effective August 2020 (Anderson, 2020).

### **“Reporting is Snitching”: Participant Conceptualization of ‘Reporting’**

Use of the term “report” has power. Reporting, especially as a mandate, may sound punitive, disempowering, and as a requirement may contrast the sometimes misunderstood and misconstrued culture of faculty freedoms (Euben, 2002). According to the mandates of the Clery Act, institutional personnel must file reports when they receive notification that a crime has been committed. Individually identifying information of those involved in the situation is not required; however, at many institutions the police are the recipients of the report. Title IX, while not universally required to engage police, does require responsible employees to share all identifying information, including the name of the student who is alleging sexual misconduct and, if known, the name of the alleged perpetrator along with the date, location, and nature of the behaviors. Holland et al. (2018) illuminated the complexity of compelled disclosures, also known as mandated reporting, stating that “Education about the importance of consent is central in sexual assault prevention efforts; yet, compelled disclosure policies can and do result in reports made *without* survivors’ consent” (p. 3). According to Holland et al. (2018), there is limited data to support the effectiveness of compelled disclosure policies and practices, like those imposed on the faculty participants in this study. In other words, there has not been sufficient research to determine if broad designations of responsible employees increase practices of compliance or if that compliance serves students. Though the research on compelled disclosures is relatively new and limited, participant narratives and publications such as *Inside Higher Ed* and the *Chronicle of Higher Education* share a

critique reflective of Holland et al. (2018). Reporting, and specifically mandated reporting, is generally viewed as negative.

Whereas Fiona grappled with the complexity of honoring autonomy and engaging in the support of survivors, as shared in the quote at the start of this section, Naomi, tenure-track professor in the social sciences, acknowledged the conflict between mandates and the culture of reporting at her institution and in her community. In referring to the students at her university who have grown up with limited resources and in a culture of violence, she said, “You have been conditioned to tough it out and complaining or reporting is snitching.” A key element of reporting is understanding what it means to report--which is referred to in the policies, but which remained ambiguous or unclear to the participants. Part of this ambiguity may exist as a result of receiving limited training, ineffective training, or no training at all. Other discrepancies in how reporting is perceived are embedded in the extent to which faculty have confidence in the institution to handle such reports, if they believe it should be in their scope as faculty, and how those two concepts intersect. In this section, I present narratives representing faculty conceptions of reporting and how such conceptions impacted their response to students and their disclosures.

Peter, tenured faculty member in human services, received a disclosure from a student enrolled in his course when he inquired about her absences. When she came in to meet with him, she disclosed an experience of sexual assault which was impacting her academic performance. Peter responded to the student by asking if she had reported it and when she stated that she had not, he referred her to do so. According to the policy of his institution, this disclosure by the student constitutes a

notification to the institution, thus necessitating Peter's action. Peter's inaction was not out of malice, but he just did not know. When asked about the policies, processes, and personnel at this institution Peter was unaware of his mandated actions as demonstrated by the following quote:

I know that in the athletic department, I think they have a Title IX coordinator. They might have one in HR as well. But we are encouraged to report students to the counseling center, and I know a lot of students are not comfortable going to the counseling center in a campus setting.

Peter continued to talk about the various options for students to access care off campus through private insurance. At the beginning of his interview, Peter did refer to training he had taken online related to sexual harassment and domestic violence, but he did not connect the content of that training to his role as a faculty member. In reflecting back to Peter what he said, I used the word "refer" rather than report when I summarized his ideas about connecting students to the counseling center. He validated my comments and said, "Right, right, right. Refer. Refer." At the time of this final interview, reporting had been used intentionally by the participants, but in Peter's response, it felt to me as though he thought I was judging his use of 'report', which was not intentional on my part. Later in this chapter, I describe Peter's disclosure experience further and in his conversation with me about the students, he shifted his language away from reporting and toward referral, which demonstrates how individual level change can influence and be influenced by institutional level and federal policy exosystem change.

Danielle, a STEM lecturer, received a disclosure from a student who was the recipient of sexual advances by a faculty member. Similar to Peter, Danielle did not perceive the disclosure she received as the student's "report", but rather believed it was incumbent upon the student to take additional action.

So I encouraged her to report it because, well one for her own sake, but then also for the sake of future students. You know, I think she kind of knew she should report it, but I think she just was scared to report it and didn't know how to or where to... which I think is part of why she came to see me.

In this situation, Danielle served as a liaison between the student and the Title IX office. She reached out to the Title IX coordinator with the intention of connecting the disclosing student with them because the student did not know how to do that on her own. Danielle was intentionally supporting the student, but inadvertently fulfilled her duties as a responsible employee. Peter and Danielle's experiences reflected a belief in a multi-step process on the part of the student when in actuality, the faculty can serve as an exclusive link between the student and Title IX staff.

Karen, a lecturer in human services, described her experience with reporting more as an opportunity for consultation.

You know, if a student comes to me with an issue, okay, not only am I responsible to try to refer them to necessary resources on campus, but it is also compulsory that I notify those individuals on campus. Now it is my understanding, and this may be incorrect, that I can get advice from them in an anonymous manner. 'Hey, this is Karen. I just had a student come to me. This

is that student's situation. I've referred them to you, what do I do'? And let them tell me. Because they're the experts, not me.

Karen outlined the process in a way that was almost perfectly consistent with what her institution directed responsible employees to do, demonstrating her understanding of a required process. But when Karen described her disclosures, her responses to the students were not consistent with what she outlined as the process. Several reasons emerged as rationale for not engaging in the compelled disclosure process or "reporting" other than being unaware of institutional policies, processes, and personnel.

Just like Karen, several participants felt as though their individual assessments of the situation took precedent over the policies, but it was reflective of the participants' beliefs that reporting was inherently negative. Benjamin, tenured professor in the Arts, used what he identified as situational ethics to determine that a situation did not need to be reported. A disclosure came to him by way of a class assignment where a student was using a creative outlet to address the violence she had experienced.

I thought, man, not only does it open a whole can of worms, it's not really related to the university, but for her it's going to be terrible. Because now she's got to go back and relive this whole thing all over again... Because I, you know, it was my, I knew what I was legally supposed to do. I knew ethically too, but I didn't think it was the right thing to do in the situation. Situational ethics. That's what they call it.

Benjamin determined that he would not report if he thought it would put the student at risk. Alexandra identified time as the factor for reporting, and if something happened a long time ago, she would not report. Maxine determined that she would report only if both students were enrolled at the institution. A challenge to what Benjamin referred to as situational ethics, found throughout the participant narratives, is that faculty operated from beliefs about the best interest of students and beliefs about faulty institutional processes. This is problematic because such beliefs could have a high rate of inaccuracies given their lack of knowledge about the Title IX process and general trauma. If they felt negatively toward institutional processes, they either made a determination on how to proceed or made attempts to stop the disclosure from happening altogether as demonstrated by strategic interruptions.

### **Interrupt to Inform: Approaches to Avoid Disclosures and Reporting**

In the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, Brown (2018, August), stated that the highly regulated climate of higher education has put many professors in the awkward position of having to interrupt a student who has just brought up a traumatic experience in mid-conversation, so they can tell the student that they will have to report anything the student says. Brown goes on to say that faculty, tenured, adjunct and graduate assistants may have to violate students' requests for confidentiality. According to Title IX, the Clery Act, and the policies of the institutions represented by the participants of this study, any disclosure that a faculty member received is required to be reported to the appropriate personnel, thus demanding a violation of such requests for confidentiality.

“Interrupt to Inform” is a concept that is based on the likelihood that students may be unaware of their faculty member’s reporting obligations as responsible employees. Interrupting to inform the student is a way for the responsible employee to have the student pause when they begin sharing information that sounds like it may be a disclosure of sexual violence. This process of informing the student of reporting obligations theoretically shifts the power back to the student to decide how they would like to move forward. This technique was used by several of the participants as they received disclosures of sexual misconduct. This section began with a quote from Fiona, a tenured professor in an interdisciplinary department. Fiona talked about a growing critique of the responsible employee duties as she weighed the requests and desires of the student making the disclosure. She went on to summarize a philosophy of interrupt to inform.

So if you have a feeling that a student’s about to disclose, you should tell them that you are obligated to disclose if they tell you and that gives the student a little more power in the situation.

Fiona referenced a “feeling” that one might get from the conversation at hand. What she is referring to here is intuition. Faculty bring a broad range of skills and characteristics to their work with students. Intuition, if had at all, is personal and person-specific. In addition, the format of the disclosure can impact the ability to make this interruptive gesture; for instance, an interruption is different during a verbal disclosure than when a disclosure consists of something written in an assignment, sent in an email or shared in documentation for seeking accommodations.



Jeanette, social sciences associate professor, recalled a departmental discussion of what appropriate faculty responses to student disclosures of victimization might look like. This discussion had happened early in her career at her current institution and she remembered being surprised by what she heard:

So it's a little foggy to me, but they said you know if a student discloses that they had been victimized as children or whatever you have to report it. So one of my colleagues was like, you know, "do we have some guidelines or some procedures, some protocol for what we should do then? Other than to call that emergency number and report it?" And our chair was like, "well just avoid it. Like don't bring this stuff up. Don't talk about it. Don't get students to tell these things." And we just sat there in the back like are you kidding me? We might be the only person they feel safe disclosing to. Like some students look up to us and feel like we have answers.

With this statement, Jeanette recalled a situation that occurred more than 10 years previously and that stayed with her throughout her career. In that moment she was being told by a senior faculty member that the best way to avoid a disclosure was to stop the student from ever saying anything, essentially to create an environment where sexual assault was never discussed. Jeanette's disclosure experience, discussed in detail in Chapter V, was received years after this meeting with her department chair. She taught a course addressing gender and violence which directly addressed the issue of college sexual assault. Several years previously, that senior faculty member had the insight to realize a class discussion of that nature would elicit a disclosure, but because the chairperson's approach was unsupportive and dismissive,

Jeanette did not hear a critical aspect of their message; talking about assault elicits disclosures. Jeanette remained unprepared for a disclosure in that environment under those circumstances.

Lauren, a full-time lecturer in the social sciences was very forthcoming with her use of interrupt to inform as a primary technique. She gave an example of a time when she used it to respond to a student.

I have one instance of a student I talked to a lot. She was like, “well my brother...” and I was like zzzzip (gestured to closing her mouth). No more. I was like “I don’t know what you’re going to say, but I kind of have a feeling what you’re going to say, and I have to tell you that if you tell me this, I have to report it.” And then she backed off from the language, right? So she didn’t disclose, but I kind of knew she was about to. So mostly students are pretty savvy about disclosing without disclosing.

In this instance, Lauren used her intuition, similar to what was indicated by Fiona, to stop the student before a particular threshold was met. There are two striking components of Lauren’s experience. The first is her interruption tactic. She boldly stopped the student from disclosing with a physical gesture whereby she used her hand to symbolically zip her lips closed and went so far as to say, “no more.” The student discontinued her story. What is unknown in this instance, and in other cases of interrupting to inform, is what the student experiences. While the faculty member using the technique is intending to help the student by giving them a choice, they may inadvertently be sending several other messages to the student. Such messages might include that the faculty are ill-equipped to respond, that they do not want to do the

work of responding, and/or that subsequent steps related to a report are inherently negative.

The second striking feature of Lauren's disclosure experience was her reflection about students being savvy. She stated that students are now well-versed in sharing details without sharing so much that an administrative process would be triggered. In Lauren's example, however, it was Lauren herself that stopped the disclosure, not the student. Her example did not illustrate intuition or savviness on the part of the student. This example also raises the question of a threshold for information sharing. It is clear that Lauren knew there was a disclosure that was in progress and was able to stop it. Even if the student did not say so explicitly, Lauren had an awareness that the student had experienced sexual assault. This situation raises questions about the threshold for awareness and knowledge of the issue to initiate responsible employee duties and what can be left to employee discretion. If a faculty member saw the compelled disclosure process as one that yielded support and resources for students, and viewed the Title IX staff as supportive and helpful rather than as punitive and harmful, they could be more inclined to facilitate disclosures and refer students appropriately. The opposite may also be true.

Alexandra, tenured social sciences professor, was one of only four faculty members who said they believed they were obligated to report and followed through with that action. Throughout her interview, Alexandra was process-oriented and spoke certainly and frequently about the boundaries of her role on campus. She talked about learning about Title IX and her responsible employee role not through institutional training, but rather an assignment by a student enrolled in her course. She

reflected on how that understanding changed her approach to working with students when she felt like a disclosure was forthcoming: specifically, she focused on listening and mapping out where the conversation might be going before it went there. When she described her response to students Alexandra said:

If a student comes to me and tells me [about sexual assault] as long as I catch them in time (laugh)... my concern is that someone's going to say something before I have the time to catch them and then I tell them I have to [report] and they're going to be upset. So far, I think it was three people, the three people that I dealt with all were like, no it's fine.

The primary disclosure that Alexandra discussed during the interview was when a student provided documentation to Alexandra when she was falling behind in class, necessitating extensions and absences. The student handed Alexandra a folder with the letter in it and when Alexandra opened the folder, she saw that the doctor had been treating the student for post-traumatic stress disorder related to sexual violence. While her approach was informed by “interrupt to inform”, she was not able to employ that tool in this particular instance. Again, disclosures that happen in a written format may impact whether and how a faculty member can activate an interruptive technique.

Naomi, tenure-track professor of social sciences, referenced several proactive and reactive ways to empower students to engage in institutional processes on their own terms. She discussed notifications from the counseling center to faculty and syllabus language as being two strategies. Similar to Fiona, Naomi also critiqued the

process of compelled disclosures, specifically related to those that happen as part of academic work as there is no opportunity to interrupt to inform.

What I think is not fair is that you ask students to do an assignment. They do the assignment and then now you're going to report them. So we need to inform them that um that you know that certain things that you share you know could be reportable. And make sure they are aware and clear about what the faculty's responsibilities are and then also what the resources are available to them.

Half of the participants, mostly in the social sciences, arts, and humanities, reflected Naomi's concerns about disclosures in academic work. Three participants who work in Arts-based disciplines--Benjamin, Carl, and Maxine--separately communicated concerns about situations where students worked on artistic projects in their respective courses and issues of violence came up. They individually expressed difficulty navigating the intersection of academic freedom for the students and an appropriate response, and how interrupting the moment might have stifled their creative expression. Two faculty members in human services areas noted that students often write about their own experiences as part of assignments. The students are fulfilling the reflective nature of the assignment, but they may be unknowingly initiating an administrative process. These particular scenarios also make the disclosures difficult to interrupt.

In contrast to research by Brown (2018), which found that faculty believe students do not already know about the bounds of confidentiality of responsible employees, Newins et al. (2018) found that students reported high levels of

knowledge of faculty reporting requirements and also high level of agreement with those mandated responsibilities. The same study found that university employees were both knowledgeable and, when presented with a case study, likely to follow university policy. As demonstrated by the findings of Newins et al. (2018) and Mancini et al. (2016) on employee attitudes toward compelled disclosures, employees had knowledge of reporting policies and said they would comply with such policies. However, when it came to taking action on the disclosure, less than half of those who stated they would report actually did so. While Newins et al. (2018) also found that employees and students had positive feelings about the reporting requirements, participants in this study did not have favorable attitudes of their own and also believed that students also had unfavorable attitudes. Even among those participants who acknowledged reporting as a requirement, some engaged in a process to stop a disclosure in order to prevent reporting. In each of those cases, the prevention of reporting was not overtly to avoid engagement in their institution's administrative processes, but rather to help the student understand what the consequences of their sharing might be and ultimately protect them from what the participants perceived to be a harmful institutional process.

There are gaps in research about “interrupt to inform” as an evidence-based strategy. Most of the college sexual assault literature focuses on either prevention or prevalence with additional emphases on identity-based sub-populations such as those related to race, gender and sexual orientation. A systematic literature search yielded no peer-reviewed articles on the topic, although I did find a small number of institutional and organizational documents. Northern Arizona University (NAU) is

one example that uses such language. They have a faculty and staff reporting best practices document that outlines which behaviors to employ and those to avoid when interacting with a student under the conditions of a disclosure (Heinonen, n.d.). The language used at NAU is accompanied by a recommendation for what staff and faculty should do, which states, “Interrupt to inform” the individual about your limits to confidentiality and that you will only report to those who have a need to know” (Heinonen, n.d.). The University of Texas at Austin uses the term “gentle interruption” to alert a conversation partner: “it feels as if a conversation may lead to a disclosure, gently interrupt to inform the person of your reporting duties so that the person can decide if they would like to share more information with you” (University of Texas at Austin, 2020). Approximately a dozen other institutions have similar wording reflected in their guidance for responsible employees.

### **Required Reporting as Reflective of Flawed Institution Process**

In both ideology and actions such as interrupt to inform, faculty referred to reports and reporting as negative. Holland et al. (2018) raised the violation of requests for confidentiality as one key dimension of reporting as problematic. Based on institutional betrayal discourse illuminated in films such as *The Hunting Ground* (Ziering & Dick, 2015), where institutions protect those students who are seen as an asset to institutional reputation at the expense of survivors and overall campus safety, it is reasonable for both students and faculty to distrust institutions. In my study, faculty participants referred to institutions and policies as a depersonalized system several times. Helen, humanities lecturer, talked about systems that were “really bad at dealing with harm.” She identified that her institution was no exception. She spoke

critically about “the system’s” inability to address the true social problems of sexual violence.

So there’s a problem with the law. In some ways, the system is working as it’s supposed to then it’s a sign that the system can’t deal with sexual violence.

[The system] can’t deal with sexuality and it can’t deal with drinking cultures and it can’t deal with men. I might be alone in this, but I’m not left thinking [the University] is terrible. I think this university is like any other institution.

Helen continued to talk about the over-simplification of sex in American society and felt as though she lacked university, disciplinary, and interpersonal spaces to grapple with behaviors which that could be sexual assault as compared to situations which elicit discomfort or regret. Helen was deeply concerned that her thoughts could be perceived as victim-blaming or accepting of rape myths, but her concern was a reflection of the lack of opportunities to engage in meaningful conversations on the topic. Helen’s experiences of isolation were also reflected in the findings of Hayes-Smith et al. (2010). The authors found that isolation in grappling with the complexities of sexual assault, as Helen does, exacerbated role strain and thus distress.

Whereas Helen spoke about the institution as an extension of society, Benjamin, arts professor, positioned institutions as entities that are made up of individuals. “The institution is just a thing, right? It just sits there. And it’s the people that are in it that create the ambiance.” In his statement Benjamin was referring to a cultural shift that occurred in the institutions he worked at--specifically, a change in the culture from one that he named as “sexually free-wheeling.” In such a climate it



had been acceptable for faculty to date students, it was an environment where sexuality was discussed and demonstrated more openly, and also where students and faculty attending parties together was normalized. Benjamin was speaking to a generational and conditional shift in how individuals behave as a reflection of the values of an institution made up of people, rather than a static entity that is out of control from individuals. Benjamin and Helen shared a critical eye on the system, and specifically on policies that enable a culture of violence but that also limit the ability to have meaningful discourse about the social and structural dynamics to address the violence.

Despite not knowing the process, social sciences lecturer, Lauren, talked about what she and students who disclosed to her believed might happen at an institutional level following the submission of a report to the Title IX office. She expressed concern that the accused student would be “accosted in class” by the administration but admitted that she did not have any direct knowledge of that occurring. I asked Lauren to propose, from her perspective, what a good tool for addressing sexual violence at colleges and universities might look like. Her response, similar to Helen’s, integrated multiple ecological contexts, combining policies, institutions, practices and relationships.

I don’t know. It’s so hard to, like, disentangle the institution from the world. I think the university actually, I think Title IX did a lot of good and I think whatever’s on paper, which is not usually not how everything works out in the real world, but like whatever’s on paper is actually I think right. I don’t know because I guess, I guess we just live in such a frickin’ patriarchal world that I

don't know to disentangle what we do on campus from all the real-world consequences that aren't necessarily related to the policies.

Helen then described a situation where a student she was working with experienced stalking from another student. She did not engage in a formal process, but rather addressed the behavior directly, resulting in her peer group ostracizing her.

So like, informal consequences were just as consequential if not more consequential. So it doesn't matter whether people report it or not, but I think the moment it's uttered, like that person is going to go under a microscope.

And like I don't know how to... I don't know how we change that.

Lauren addressed the complexity of intersecting systems, specifically that interpersonal relationships are reflective of various oppressive ideologies, in this case patriarchy, and become even more complex with institutional systems, policies and procedures. Lauren's statement was consistent with the interdependent contexts of ecological systems theory. As a result, the theories and beliefs that faculty have about institutions in general contributed to the ways that they saw themselves in relation to their own institution and also to students.

### **We and They: Critiques of Institutional Process**

When asked to share her thoughts about being a responsible employee, Naomi, tenure-track faculty in the social sciences, critiqued policy and practice. She said, "It looks great on paper. When it's executed is it like, is it really great? And that's my problem. Like judging from their stories, I'm like, no, we need to definitely improve." Karen, lecturer in human services, spoke similarly from her public administration background.

There are great ideas. There are great policies but they're often poorly administered. So, the university, the administration, has some great ideas. It's getting those ideas put into motion that they often struggle with and sometimes their priorities are either inappropriately placed or lackluster attempts are made.

A key difference in the way Naomi and Karen talked about their ideas was in their connection to and reflection of the institution. Karen used language specifically referring to "the administration," a group that she was explicitly not included in. Naomi, however, used "we" to talk about change. In this case, Naomi was an outlier. Participants mainly referred to "the administration" as separate from themselves with more frequency than seeing themselves reflected in the institution. Jeanette, tenured social sciences professor, critiqued the institutional interests of having lawyers in the roles of Title IX coordinators from arm's length, indicated through her use of "they."

And like, they're all about risk management not about, they don't want advocacy for students. I don't think folks are really, like the administration, is [not] really ready for any hard work. I think they want to say we are this thing and we care. And maybe they do, but they really but they'd really like it to just go away.

Her pointed use of "they" and strong critique signaled her distance from the way the institution handled sexual misconduct. Jeanette went on to discuss what she envisioned to be a better system.

I think the policy for response would illuminate, like, what we *should* do, like what kind of policy and procedures we should have in place. And I'm not sure

what the right way is forward. There are days when I say why is the university at all involved in this? This is a legal matter. This is about not just student safety. This is about basic human rights and um and personal safety. We should be calling the police. But then I think ugh. They'll fuck it up too. So I don't know what the right thing to do is, but it worries me deeply that we could find a student, you know that our current system could say yeah, this student raped his classmate, but he'll get to stay in school.

In her statement she captured the complexity of doing sexual violence work more effectively at the institutional level in higher education. She separated herself from this issue, placing responsibility on a nebulous, faceless institution that she is part of, but only to an extent.

Fiona moved between very specific references to her institution and ambiguous references to nameless, yet powerful, universities. When critiquing policies and procedures, she recalled her initial recollections of when responsible employee policies were getting attention related to assault-related scandals at The Pennsylvania State University. She talked about the complicity of institutions in such scandals, but also about avoiding the appearance of institutional complicity with abuse.

Universities are very powerful, and there could be an impulse to see universities as a kind of idealized ivory tower, as always doing the right thing as being places of good. I think they have to earn that actually. I don't I don't think it's automatic. I don't think a university is automatically a good place. And so I see it a little bit less from the perspective of the whole university and

maybe this means that I'll never be in administration, but I think the university actually has, like, a pretty big duty to society and it's not so much that we shouldn't assume that the university is a good actor. The university has to prove itself and constantly over and over prove itself to be a good actor.

After spending a good deal of time speaking nebulously about her institution and institutions in general, Fiona quickly moved to using "we" to talk about the duty to respond appropriately and responsibly.

We have a lot of power, even if we're threatened by budget cuts and things like that. We still have a duty to do right by the people who attend the university. I think there are a lot of people who'd argue with me and I think it'd be an interesting argument, but I do think there's a very strong duty.

From the interviews, I determined that tenure impacted the extent to which a faculty member critiqued the institution due to positional security. Neither Naomi nor Karen were tenured at the time of the interview, whereas Jeanette and Fiona were.

Based on the interviews I conducted, I was not able to identify a relationship between the type of faculty appointment and position from which the faculty spoke about the institution. At various campus events, ranging in size from small meetings to large open forums, those who spoke critically and with confidence were faculty and students. At one institution, I attended a town-hall meeting with consultants hired by the university. Of the 12 people who spoke at the event, eight of them were faculty, three were undergraduates and one was a graduate student, who spoke from their perspective as a graduate teaching assistant. Several staff members were in attendance, but faculty and students appeared to feel more empowered to publicly

offer criticisms of the institution. At the events I attended to observe public speech about the institution, I was not able to identify the faculty appointment of the speakers, however. Further research on faculty's attitudes about public institutional critique might offer some additional insights into the ways in which faculty feel empowered to critique the institution and how such attitudes and beliefs impact their behavior in regard to compliance with policies.

Faculty responses to disclosures of sexual assault are complex. The interviews conducted for this study revealed that there is no single predictor or determining factor that explains how an individual might respond to a disclosure. A combination of conditions of the disclosure along with knowledge and beliefs about what goes into institutional reporting and responding, as well as individual characteristics, skills, and disciplinary training, are all variables that impact what happens after the disclosure and also how the recipients of disclosures make meaning of the experience. The policies and procedures at each of the individual institutions gave brief and often ambiguous overviews of what happens once a disclosure is elevated through the compelled disclosure process. The lack of confidence that participants had in the institutional response was rooted in discourse of institutional betrayal and differing comprehension of what was expected of them and the skills and characteristics they had with which to respond. One consistency across all participants, regardless of experience, appointment or disciplines was a desire for transparency and care for the students involved. Their actions, though varied and unpredictable, reflected an ethic of care.

### **Obligation and Care: Competing or Compatible Interests?**

*I want you to be safe. [The University] wants you to be safe. So I'm going to [report this] as an effort, as a way to try to make you safe. That's the reason this policy exists. I'm not sure, I want to say it's the sexual harassment or physical abuse policy, I don't know if it's Title IX. I'm not sure what it is, it's probably all those things.*

*Carl, Arts Professor*

The epigraph in this section is an excerpt of Carl's response to a student's disclosure of relationship violence. This portion of his response is one where he moved between his individual interests, a caring responder, and the institution's interests which he characterized as derived from care as well. He integrated policy with his practice and used his knowledge of experiences (albeit while indicating a lack of confidence in this knowledge) to name the behaviors, the offices and the policies. Carl raised the notion that the institution cared for the student's safety. As addressed in the previous section, participants often felt as though the institution was often more interested in their own reputation than how the student felt cared for, a reflection of Institutional Betrayal (Smith and Freyd, 2013). Carl's recollection of his experience sets the stage for a closer examination of how care and obligation are used to serve the student, the faculty member, and in some cases the institution's interests as well; it also raises the question of whether it is possible to serve the interests of each of those parties simultaneously.

As demonstrated earlier in Table 3, faculty members did not consistently follow their institution's procedures, if they chose to follow them at all. This lack of compliance was not, however, due to an intention to betray the student in favor of the institution. In fact, most instances of not acting in accordance with the policies were a result of either an explicit request by the student, or more commonly, faculty perceptions of what the student wanted. The manner in which a student disclosed, coupled with the relationship between the student and faculty member, had an impact on the way the faculty member responded both with care and obligation. A disclosure in one's office, as demonstrated by Carl's experience, provided a different opportunity for response than a disclosure in a large classroom setting, as was the case with social sciences faculty Jeanette and human services professor, Olivia, which I will describe later.

In this section I present three different styles of response: responses rooted in obligation, responses rooted in care, and those responses which combine obligation and care. While I present the disclosure responses as three separate categories based on the faculty members' presentations of their experience, I argue that based on my analyses of the disclosure experiences combined with institutional betrayal discourse and care theory, any response from faculty members reflects an orientation of care. In all of the disclosure experiences the faculty could have silenced the student immediately or washed their hands of the incident without further action. Through application use of Noddings' anatomy of a caring interaction, I determined that care, or at least the intention of care was present.



## **Responses of Obligation**

A professor in the social sciences, Alexandra, referred several times to her disclosures as being “straightforward” situations in which she was able to employ the same “interrupt to inform” method that Carl also used.

Well, you know, it was pretty straightforward. I mean I think, like I said... for the most part I've been fortunate in that they've been pretty straightforward. If a student comes to me and tells me this, as long as I catch them in time... my concern is that someone's going to say something before I have the time to catch them and then I tell them I have to do this and they're going to be upset. So far, I think it was three people, the three people that I dealt with all were like, no it's fine.

The statement by Alexandra demonstrates the complexity and perhaps the problem with interpreting a student's motive for disclosure and what it is that they need and feel. When Alexandra used the term straightforward, she is referring to a linear process of disclosure, interruption, and a redirection away from more sharing, all with the purpose of acting in support of what she believed a student wanted, which is to avoid a university process. Alexandra did not use terms explicitly related to care or concern, but rather stayed with process and obligation by specifically referring to “catching them” before they make a disclosure, so she did not “have to do this” --with “this” referring to engaging in the compelled disclosure process by reporting.

The primary disclosure that Alexandra discussed was from a student enrolled in her course who had been missing several classes and assignments. The student had initially been given an informal accommodation, but when more substantial work was

being missed, Alexandra requested additional documentation. The student handed the professor a folder with the note inside, as instructed, and the note from the health care provider referred to trauma from sexual assault. Alexandra, now aware of the student's experience, responded by talking with the student in person. The most poignant part of Alexandra's response was not the response itself, but the way she talked about it from a primarily obligatory perspective, with minute elements of care intermixed.

Now I have to have a conversation with you because I've seen that there's, that this is not just, you didn't get robbed. Something actually happened because it did... I don't remember what it said but it, you know, it was something that made it clear on that first look that she had been sexually assaulted. So I was like, because you don't want to have to deal with this, you know? I'm sorry. I know that it's difficult, it's difficult for the student and then I do worry. Is the student going to be upset about this? I don't want to, I don't want to reopen wounds. I don't want to put students in a position where they have to worry about is someone going to, you know, are people going to be coming to them and asking them lots of questions? So. It's sensitive. And I don't really want to have to deal with that certainly. Um, yeah, but obviously we do deal with it.

Her utilization of phrases such as "have to" and "deal with it" suggest a level of inconvenience, but in a caring way, Alexandra also shifted to the projection of what the student might be concerned about, such as being re-traumatized or burdened by a process without reference to asking the student what services or options she might

wish to pursue. The faculty perception that students absolutely do not want to engage in an institutional investigative process or receive formal accommodations can be problematic but is generally reflective of faculty attitudes that include negativity and wariness toward compelled disclosures and reporting, as referenced earlier in this chapter.

Peter, tenured human services professor, came to academia later in life after serving as a practitioner in the same discipline. Peter did not have meaningful experiences from the disclosures he had received. When he recalled an incident where a student in his course disclosed an experience of being raped, he shared that the conversation occurred when he had inquired about her absences from his class. In that instance, the student did not seek him out to disclose as had happened with several other participants, but she did have a choice to disclose the reasons for her absences. Regardless of how the disclosure occurred, Peter also had a choice of how to respond and he did so by inquiring and referring. He first inquired if she had reported the incident. When the student stated that she had not reported it, he instructed her to do so and then referred her to another female faculty member. He expressed concern that the student may not feel comfortable speaking with him because of his gender. Peter was very pragmatic in his description of the experience.

There was a student who, a couple years ago, who told me she was raped. I asked her had she reported it and she told me she had not. I told, um, advised her to go and report it. And what I did was, I don't know if she was comfortable talking to me about that as a male, so I referred her to another colleague who was close to her.

He described the experience with limited detail about the student, the experience and any emotion that may have been part of it. Peter's solution-focused approach did potentially help the student receive help, but he was not sure if that had occurred. Even in his retelling of the situation he moved quickly on to another question I asked previously in what felt to me like avoidance to discuss the disclosure experience:

Jaelyn: Before we go to that question, I want to stay with the example that you just gave for a moment. Do you remember the circumstances of which that student came to you? Like why is it that she came in to tell you that that had happened?

Peter: Usually, you know, it's from long absences from class. So I said I don't know where you've been, and she told me this is what happened. So yeah.

J: And you referred her to your colleague. Was there any additional follow up?

P: So, I referred her. I talked with my colleague about her and she referred [the student]. She told me she had reported it. That they did something about it. I don't know, followed up with it.

While Peter was attuned to what the student might need as it related to her identity, he demonstrated a level of disengagement. Once he told the student to report the incident and made the referral to the faculty member, he did not see a continued need for involvement. These actions demonstrate an obligation-based approach rather than one resulting from a philosophy of care. I also argue that the referral itself is an act of care, demonstrating that perception of care is incredibly subjective.

Benjamin, a tenured arts professor, responded to both parties involved in allegations of sexual misconduct. Benjamin first heard concerns from the victimized student weeks after the incident occurred when she came to him seeking accommodations in the course she shared with the alleged perpetrator, also known as the respondent. Benjamin minimized the victimized student's experience and attributed her response to previous experiences with assault. In his retelling of his disclosure response experience, he focused substantially on his conversation with the respondent. I asked Benjamin if there was anything he would have done differently in terms of engaging with either party.

I think I did what I should have done. I think I listened to her. I didn't give any value judgments. I didn't say well oh, just somebody said blah blah. I said, uh, I can see why you're offended. Let's see if we can resolve this. And she seemed to agree that although she didn't really. That's why I was surprised when [the investigator] called up. I thought that was done. I think I was, as far as things go, I think I was sympathetic.

There are two key elements at play in what Benjamin described. The first is his use of the word "should." Use of this term can have multiple meanings. His use of "should" may have referred to his obligation from the university or his orientation to caring for students. He outlined caring behaviors such as non-judgmental listening and validation of the student's feelings, however, Benjamin's characterization of the overall incident did not demonstrate that he agreed with or valued how she experienced the incident initially or the evolution of her reaction to it over time. His

actions toward the student were more aligned with resolution and making the situation go away than one of support.

The second element of note in Benjamin's recollection of the disclosure experience is the definition of care. He felt that he gave a caring response to the victimized student because of his "sympathetic" approach, but he notes that the student he engaged with did not get her needs met in regard to the resolution she was seeking.

Returning the literature on disclosure response, negative reactions (victim blame, stigmatizing responses and controlling reactions) were associated with disclosures to formal support resources (Filipas & Ullman, 2001). Research has focused on negative reactions such as shame (DeCou et al., 2017) or the absence of a negative response more frequently than the composition of a positive response. Positive social reactions to disclosures such as support, listening and believing had a negligible impact on recovery, while negative social reactions, such as blaming, hinder recovery (Campbell, Ahrens, Sefl et al., 2001). It is a lot harder to train faculty on what not to do, rather what to do, but the evidence is not yet there. As an intermediate step, In the next section I present a multi-part theory of care proposed by Nel Noddings (2002) to understand the anatomy of a caring interaction and proactively engage the student from a positive reactionary perspective.

### **Responses of Care**

Noddings (2002) researched care as a moral dimension, spending her career looking at care in education and subsequently the intersection of care and education policy. While Noddings' work is expansive and enduring, a particularly relevant

dimension is the identification of three elements of a caring encounter. The first element is that person A, in this case faculty, cares for person B, the student, and the care is characterized by attention and motivational displacement. In the college environment, this is when the faculty member turns their attention to the student to address the issue at hand, which may start off initially as accommodation-seeking, course content, or directly about emotional support. This displacement is where motivation shifts toward the student. The second element is that the faculty member performs an act in accordance with their attention and motivational displacement. According to their institutional policies, the faculty member would notify the Title IX coordinator. As demonstrated, there are a series of other acts that are in accordance with individual faculty members' values, despite being inconsistent with policy. The third and final element of a caring encounter is that it occurs when the student recognizes that the faculty member cared for them. This present study focuses on how the faculty members responded, rather than the student acknowledgement of being served, but based on the multiple experiences shared by the faculty participants and the manner in which they acted, I operate under the evidence-based inference that students acknowledged the response as a dimension of care, even in the instances where they would have preferred a different outcome. In this section, the narratives of faculty participants, specifically the language they use to describe experiences with disclosures, will serve to reflect ways in which care and obligation converge to serve students.

Gregory, a full-time, non-tenured STEM professor, spent time reflecting on the valuable relationships he developed with students over the years of institutional

service. The disclosures that Gregory responded to came from students who were seeking support based on having him as an advisor. When I asked Gregory explicitly about what characteristics made him a resource for students, he shared the following:

Have office hours. Care. Care about the students. I don't think you can fake it. I do care about the students and again that's something you'll see on rate my professor or the [evaluation] sheets...I understand that there are these other demands on [faculty] time, but nevertheless have as many office hours as you can. And be there. Respond to the students. Let them know that you actually care about their process. Um, progress not process.

Gregory went on to discuss his general approach to delivering a caring response when a student discloses trauma:

Well, first I'm going to let them, I mean the first thing out of my mouth is going to be "oh I'm so sorry." Right, like I can't imagine the pain that you're in. Okay. I'm going to encourage them to take care of themselves because usually when I've had students who've had problems, been in an accident or something, and I said, "Listen, the most important thing for you to do is to get well. The short-term thing for you to do is you need to notify all your faculty members. If it becomes necessary for you to withdraw, withdraw from the semester not on a course on a one by one basis because academically that's much better for them to do, but you need to take care of yourself. You need to take care of yourself first. And we'll get, you'll get around to the schoolwork. I know it seems you're 22 years old, and it seems like if you're going to spend



another half a year in school that's just an incredible waste of time, but I tell ya, looking back from 65 plus it's not time at all to worry about it."

Gregory communicated an explicit commitment to caring for students in his theoretical and actualized approaches to student interactions. Care was of primary emphasis in his advice to faculty as well as in his personal framework for how he would respond. Of note in this expression of deep care is that at multiple points, Gregory communicated that he had no knowledge of the institutional process for addressing sexual violence or gender-based issues on campus. Throughout his interview he raised examples of supporting transgender students, female students who had experienced gender-based discrimination by professors in a classroom setting, and relationship violence, but he had difficulty identifying a process, policy or aspect of his role that could be helpful. At one point he referenced the women's center and counseling center on his campus, although he used language that could be perceived as dismissive such as "I would send them..." to talk about such referrals.

Maxine, a tenured-professor in the arts, had a specialized role in supporting students that was unique to her institution. Similar to Greg, she talked about the particular skills and characteristics that made her a fit for the role, which were all centered on ability to provide care.

I certainly think part of why I was selected and why I am good at the role is because I have those sort of listening and compassion and care for the whole person skills. I already use them in my faculty role, but it's certainly eye-opening to talk to students and to see the incredible range of complexity of situations that students are managing while they're students. And it's certainly

given me so much appreciation for that. You know I think that some faculty are cynical about students that they're trying to get away with something. And they're like okay Show me the obituary of your dead grandma which is just not something that I've understood. And this has only just reinforced that.

In this statement, Maxine talked about her skills not just as an asset to students, but as a way to set her apart from other faculty. She felt as though having trust of the student was critical for her to provide care. Trust was assumed at the onset of her relationships with students, rather than something that had to be earned. While Maxine felt that this approach to working with students was fulfilling her specialized role with them, it was her deep care and respect that drove her actions rather than obligation.

When asked if students had ever requested participation or information about the university's Title IX process, Helen, Ilene, Lauren, Karen and Maxine (representing four different institutions among them), confirmed that students sought care from them as individuals, rather than as an obligatory institutional process. The disclosures that Karen received, as characterized by her, were a product of her open-door policy and the physical and emotional intimacy that came with her discipline in human services. She felt that a response that was "right" would reflect a level of care that was appropriate for the faculty position, the policies, and the student. She also felt that she was not knowledgeable of what that appropriate level might be.

I really would like a better understanding of, and this is going to sound horrible, but how much compassion is okay to give. Um, you know, I'll do anything for anybody that's hurting. I'm in [a helping profession]. It's what I

do. But sometimes I don't want to offer things that either don't meet the policy or are I guess are not appropriate, but not in a bad way. You know like we have tons of resources. In our work our students have seen terrible things. Karen's reference about students seeing terrible things was a reference to the nature of her disciplinary and academic work. Karen referred to a faculty member in her department who had expertise in helping to process trauma. In her questioning of "how much compassion is okay to give", she was using the interview to process if a referral to that departmental resource would be appropriate for a situation where a student had experienced sexual assault or intimate partner violence.

Would something like that, is referral okay? Is that something we're allowed to do? Or do we have to turn that over to the Title IX coordinator and let it go through that office. So just a little bit, I guess most people are like well what do we have to do?

The oversimplified answer to Karen's question, based on her institution's policy, is that she can do both. She was not required to make additional referrals, although she was required to give a resource guide to students, which is a more casual form of referral. This question about what faculty are "allowed" to do, came up multiple times, both in interviews, but also in my professional interactions with faculty talking about student issues. Individual concerns about what is permissible relate back to seeking role clarity in a litigious context. In this role, how much am I allowed to care? What would be appropriate? Those are very difficult questions to answer because of all of the individual and contextual factors, especially from an institution whose

policies do not consider nuance. The questions are important nonetheless and implies that faculty need both permission to care and boundaries to care.

Whether it was concerns about the efficacy of reporting mandates, general uncertainty of requirements, or other extraneous factors, participants were attuned to the fact that some actions could cause additional harm to the disclosing student. These were typically in situations where students were in ongoing relationships with the person who was being violent with them. As determined by how they reflected on the decisions they made in responding to a disclosure, participants identified that the act of not engaging additional parties, at the request of the student, generally felt like a gesture of care. Another act of care was to protect the student from a process by avoiding it. As discussed in this chapter, participants spoke disparagingly about “reporting” students to Title IX or the university. In the discussion of care and obligation, faculty behaved with the intention of serving the student, even though their actions were sometimes a projection of their own perspectives of the institution. Faculty participants demonstrated this service by limiting the details students shared, both by limiting the scope of the details they asked for, but also by stopping the student from speaking through the “interrupt to inform” technique. Faculty talked about what was necessary or needed to know and generally used responses like that of Fiona who said:

I feel like it makes it even harder for me to process things if I have too many details. I’d rather they just say, like I’m having trouble. I’m having family trouble. I’m having personal trouble. I’m having health trouble.

In the case she shared, Fiona wanted to help the student, and throughout her interview she talked about both compliance and critique of the institutional processes, all in service to students. This statement may sound devoid of care at face value, despite her intentions to connect with the student, provide them a service, and have them feel cared for. Out of context, I would have thought Fiona's response was uncaring, but in context, it was clear to me that Fiona's thought process was to digest the information. Her approach might be different from someone who wants more detail or who processes information more quickly. This is why individual characteristics and relationships, discussed further in Chapter V are also necessary to consider.

### **Obligation and Care as Compatible Interests**

Thus far I have presented disclosure responses that are enacted out of obligation: faculty respond to students in a way that they perceive is compliant with what they believe a policy dictates or they act to ensure they have done something, rather than nothing. The experiences of Alexandra, Benjamin, and Peter that I presented earlier in this section are examples of those faculty who are driven by fulfilling what they believe is mandated. The responses of Gregory and Maxine highlight a deep sense of care for students. In the five examples I have presented, care or obligation were the primary ways that I categorized the responses. Faculty also employed responses that reflect a combination of care and obligation. Those participants who were able to navigate both care and obligation differed from each other in their responses, based on their understanding of policies, their relationships with students, and their orientations to care and obligation, each of which I describe below.

Carl, tenured professor in the arts, recalled meeting with a student (referred to here as James) about a project for Carl's course. In the middle of their conversation, while speaking at a fast pace, James lifted the hat on his head and motioned to a scar on his forehead. He shared that the scar was the product of a partner punching him in the face during the previous summer. Carl responded to the student with an "interrupt to inform" approach, whereby he interrupted James in order to inform him about his obligations regarding sharing information with the university. As Carl recalls his approach, he verbally organizes his response into two distinct ways, obligation to process and care.

Okay. I'm glad you're okay, but um, you just shared something with me. That means I have to now let you know that I am obligated to do something about the information you just shared with whether you agree I should do this thing or not. And I'm going to tell you what it is. And that is that I have to report that you have been physically abused by a loved one. By a partner. Okay. And it happened in Ohio. So I'm not quite sure how to, how what I'm going to find how this happens and then what happens is after I report it you'll be, someone will be in touch with you about it and then you can go further with it if you wish or not, but uh the whole thing, James, is that I want you to be safe. [The University] wants you to be safe. So I'm going to do this as a as an effort, as a way, as a, to try to make you safe. That that's the reason this exists, this policy exists. I'm not sure, I want to say it's the sexual harassment or physical abuse policy, I don't know if it's Title IX. I'm not sure what it is, it's probably all those things.

In his obligation-based response, Carl allowed for James to speak about his experience but at the first opportunity, he interjected to lay out a series of steps and an overview of the institutional policy as he understood it. In the description of the disclosure he shared in the interview, Carl moved between processing his response and the retelling of his response as if he was transported back to the experience and what he might have been thinking at the time, although he did not make those explicit distinctions. Also in the retelling of his process obligations, he slowed his words, leaned in with his elbows on the desk, and described his response in a steady way; differently than his frenetic style of engaging with me during the other aspects of the interview.

Almost immediately following the sharing of his process obligations, Carl moved into care obligations.

Yeah, so what's going to happen now is I'm going to make some phone calls, not right now while you're sitting here, but uh I'm going to you know because I want you to have support for this. Because absolutely what has happened to you should not have happened to you. You do not deserve that. You need some you need you deserve the utmost respect and no physical violence aimed at you and so I'm going to do this because I care about you and I want you to be safe. So I'm going to do these things.

The ways in which Carl described how he shared this information with James, followed the same linguistic patterns of how he described his process response, including slowed speech, direct eye contact, and he physically leaned in after resting his elbow on the desk. These actions demonstrated engagement and perhaps were a

physical embodiment of care. In his retelling of his response, as demonstrated in the quotes, Carl used many “I” statements, focusing on what he was going to do. I don’t know if his language mirrored exactly what he did with James, but the way he spoke about the experience centered himself, rather than the student. He can only recall from his own experience, but his behavior in the interview could have implications for training; specifically helping faculty stay focused on the student as the primary component of the disclosure and then move toward the process and the faculty impact.

Danielle, STEM lecturer, described a disclosure where the student had received sexual advances from a male faculty member. When asked how she responded, Danielle initially grappled solely with her own feelings of disappointment about such an incident as she navigated her identity as a female instructor in a male-dominated field. When asked specifically how she responded to the student, Danielle’s response straddled obligation and care whereby she referenced acting in a way that was “right” and then moved into care for the student based on experiences that may be forthcoming.

It was like a little bit nerve-racking because I wanted to ask her the right questions and get the right, get enough feedback to be able to help her in the best way possible. But mostly I just, I just, I just felt bad that she had gone through this and I wanted to help her in whatever way I could because she was obviously about to go through a lot...Oh and I forgot to mention that I did also encourage her to immediately make an appointment with the counseling center...um, because I knew that it was going to be coming, that she was going



to mentally have to process and recover. So that was the other piece that I encouraged her to seek help immediately. Don't wait.

This brief excerpt reflects the complexity of the disclosure-response experience. The quote illustrates the pressure faculty members feel to respond in a way that is "right", but what does right mean? In some experiences of the faculty members, "right" refers to compliance with university policies or processes, a response to the student that is non-maleficent, beneficent or both, a response that aligns with their personal values, or some combination of all of those. As if getting through the task of asking the right questions was a fixed period of the response experience, Danielle described utilizing the right questions to collect feedback. Use of the term feedback is also important. Based on the interview and the quotes that follow next, I believe that Danielle used the term feedback as information about the incident which may guide a process, but the term itself cannot be discounted when contextualized by her concern for doing it "right." She communicated the importance of serving the disclosing student and so the feedback she received was either going to validate her approach or provide cues to respond differently.

The final part of Danielle's statement reflected an emotional connection to the issue. She first referenced that the student was about to go through a lot, though did not specify if this was an emotional process, administrative process, or a combination therein. After a brief pause, she remembered and enthusiastically stated that she made a referral for this particular student because Danielle knew what "was going to be coming that she was going to mentally have to process and recover." In this statement

she clarified that her anticipation of the student's experience was going to be psychological and the counseling center would be a resource for her.

To further demonstrate the complexity of care and obligation, Danielle, also wanted to limit the student's detail because she was worried it would color her experience with the faculty member throughout the process or in the future:

It didn't seem necessary for me to know who it was. So, you know, so that's why I didn't ask because I didn't want it to influence any interaction that I had with the faculty member. But if a student, you know, did disclose a name I think I would've been able to handle the situation the same. I think it would just affect me differently if I knew who it was.

Danielle was open to hearing the full scope of the student's experience, but in order for her to provide care and fulfill her obligation, she acknowledged that it was not a necessity. Boundaries are an important, if not essential, element of care.

In the cases of Danielle and Carl and Maxine, they fulfilled the dimensions of a caring encounter (Noddings, 2002). They displaced their attention, took action, and it can be inferred that the student felt cared for. According to Noddings' elements of care, an act out of obligation can also be an act of care. An offering or extension of a university process can be described as an action. In other words, if care was completely absent from a faculty member's response, it is reasonable to believe that the student making the disclosure would be explicitly dismissed or silenced. While an intention of care may be devoid of process or obligation, an obligation to the institutional process can be indicative of care for the student depending on how the individual faculty member views the process; as one of support or one of harm. In

contrast to Gregory's perspectives of care, there were several participants who were primarily focused on their compliance with a process and perceived obligation to the institution.

Naomi, a social sciences professor who was working toward tenure at the time of her interview, stated that she had never experienced a student who refused or requested something other than the compelled disclosure process. In the interview she stated that she would likely honor their wish if she felt confident that the student was seeking help from other resources such as therapy.

Luckily, I've never encountered [knocked on desk] that, but you know, you bring up a very good point because you always want to honor one's wishes.

However, it's like you have an obligation, right?

It was not explicit from this statement who she felt obliged to, the student or the institution. Based on other elements of the interview, it was as though she was concerned about holding simultaneous obligations to both care for students and to fulfill her role at the university.

Fiona, tenured interdisciplinary professor, had once received a disclosure from a distressed student while riding with her in a car. She also described multiple experiences where she received disclosures, and despite describing a process, she did not follow it. She then grappled with the idea of duty and what she or the institution is responsible for doing, and in that processing, embedded her approach in care.

Since those two incidents where students reported relationship stalking, I've had two other students report to me other kinds of things and it really made me think about what is [the university's] duty to care for members of the

community. So even though they weren't like relationship-related I felt like yeah, [the university] needs to know about this. So I think there's a... there's a protective duty if you know something's going on. Kind of like if you see something, say something... like someone needs to be told and the student who discloses needs care. [Students] need to be informed of their options for care. They need to be informed of legal options so that they can be un protected like in absolute physical and emotional sense.

Fiona continued on to verbally unpack the spirit of Title IX, specifically focusing on barrier-free engagement in academia and learning in general. In her description she referred several times to the university, making direct reference to the institution where she worked. The university has a duty to care and a duty to accommodate. When asked further if she was imagining a person or group of administrators, she elaborated even more fully on institutions and their obligations to students, but also highlighted the history of problematic and self-interested behaviors that institutions have demonstrated.

Fiona's reflections raise important questions that are beyond the scope of what this research can answer. Are institutions capable of care? If they are capable of care, how do institutions demonstrate their care to students and faculty? And if they do not care, does something need to change? Based on the experiences and reflections of the participants, care is at the center of the faculty responses to students' disclosures of sexual assault. The challenge with such care, however, is that it looks different with each faculty member and depending on the circumstances such as disclosure delivery, pre-existing relationships, and institutional climate. As a result, a response that is

intended as caring could be perceived as not uncaring or even harmful. Duty and obligation are key components in care as well. Faculty spoke about what they have to do, which initially may sound devoid of care or compassion, but doing something still demonstrates care. Every single participant in this project was in some way responsive to the students who chose to disclose to them and thus, in that regard, they demonstrated care. While that care was not always delivered imperfectly, the care is a critical counter-narrative to the pervasive discourse of institutional betrayal. Increased attention to this counter-narrative could be a component of trust building between the faculty and the institution and between faculty and students.

### **Chapter Summary**

Among the universities where I have been employed, even in positions where I did not work directly with sexual misconduct, I have been aware of the duties I have as a “responsible employee” or mandated reporter, meaning that I understood that I was required to share disclosures of sexual assault to a designated campus administrator. In each of those roles I could confidently speak to the forms I needed to complete, the individuals I needed to notify, and the ways I might respond to the student who chose to disclose to me. The positions I have held have all been rooted in student development and student support, so perhaps it was the institution, the position, or my own general interest that led to my understanding of responsibilities and action.

In contrast to my confidence, I experienced faculty grappling differently with their own knowledge, resources, and competence. In a past professional role, I interacted with faculty based on their concerns for student well-being and behavior

related to sexual misconduct and other mental health issues. Faculty concerns were often rooted in their experiences of classroom disruptions or driven by their emotional reactions to hearing from students about their struggles. I quickly noticed that faculty did not share my orientation to institutional processes to support students. I questioned whether faculty concerns were based on their lack of interest in providing direct support to students and their preference to delegate, their lack of understanding of sexual assault as a systemic issue, or some other extraneous factor. From my own experiences helping faculty navigate student issues, I found that faculty were generally willing to help students directly once they were apprised of the systems in place. On those occasions where I was met with faculty members' resistance to address the student directly, such resistance was typically a result of competing responsibilities or a reflection of their lack of confidence in how to respond. These professional experiences piqued my curiosity about what faculty know about the sexual misconduct processes and how that knowledge shaped the experiences of receiving and responding to disclosures of sexual violence by students. This study is in many ways an outgrowth of that curiosity.

Earlier in the chapter, I recalled an experience where I spoke with faculty about how difficult it is for them to operate in the institutional environment where they are regarded for their expertise on disciplinary topics, but feel as though they are not well-trained to know about the sexual misconduct policies or how to respond to violence in compliant and caring ways. What I heard from the faculty at the conference and from the participants in this study was the desire for training to help them do it "right." Doing this work in a way that is right means they are trained to

respond to students to the extent that they feel both competent and confident. As such, faculty need understanding of policies, role clarification, trust of the institution, and support for boundaries.

Taken together, we can infer that faculty are asking for options to respond to disclosures that consider the nuances of a student's circumstances and the varying levels of skills and knowledge they have on the subject. In the absence of these options faculty respond based on their own assessments of the circumstances. There is a continuum of behaviors demonstrated by the faculty participants. At one end, the responses reflect enmeshment, where faculty are emotionally entangled with what they perceive students want and need. They feel a sense of obligatory care derived from their own emotional orientation and projection, rather than requirements. Fiona and Ilene, while demonstrating an awareness of the policies, responded to students purely based on how their own personal experiences influenced them in the moments of disclosure and response. At the other end of the continuum are those faculty who are more acutely attuned to the policy implications and work in direct opposition to them. Those who operate in this end of the spectrum believe that that the institution is self-interested and facilitates the practice of policies which are harmful, rather than in-service to students. Those faculty, like Lauren, prevent or halt students' disclosures so as to avoid further involvement in a university process. There are, of course, faculty who operate all along this continuum and even those who might find themselves positioned differently depending on the circumstances and have varying levels of how they enact the policy.

Policy formation does not take into account the individual differences of all the individuals involved. Campus sexual assault policies, however, should be presented as a floor, rather than a ceiling. In the interviews, faculty posed questions both to me and rhetorically about the extent to which they are allowed to respond, rather than how they could get by doing the bare minimum. Institutional training efforts should therefore focus on providing knowledge and skills for basic levels of competency, but also give faculty permission, and perhaps go so far as to invite them, to provide care in a way that enhances the community. I acknowledge this is nuanced and difficult, but not providing adequate training or not engaging in these difficult conversations is more problematic and pushes faculty to the polar ends of the response continuum.

In the next chapter, I present data from the participants which demonstrates that while faculty think about their beliefs and actions, their experiences with disclosures are also informed by the individuals and relationships. Narrowing in on the microsystems between the faculty members and students is essential to understand how faculty experience student disclosures of sexual assault. For instance, when interpreting faculty responses to disclosures through the lens of their roles as instructors and advisors, we can better interpret students' driving factors for disclosures and the ways in which faculty understand the disciplinary and social dynamics of the situation. As a result, we get a clearer and more fulsome understanding of the broader context of student disclosures and faculty responses in a college or university environment.





## **Chapter V: “It’s Not Like She Was My Advisee”: Relational Dynamics of Faculty and Students Influence Receiving and Responding to Disclosures**

*I don't know what I could have done to help her more because she's a student. A student that I don't know that well. It's not like she was not my advisee, you know like not someone who you have a strong relationship with.*

*Ilene, Assistant Professor, Interdisciplinary Program*

In an interview with Ilene, a tenure-track Assistant Professor in an interdisciplinary program, she told me about a student who disclosed in a way that she did not think she could do anything about. The student was enrolled in her course, and Ilene had noticed a sharp decline in her performance. The student had gone from being “vocal and participative” to not attending class at all. When the student missed an exam, Ilene emailed her, but did not receive a response. Close to the end of the semester the student wrote back, shared that she had been raped, and wondered if there was an opportunity to receive an incomplete or course accommodation to finish successfully, rather than withdrawing or failing. From the email exchange, Ilene recalled being “shocked” to hear that the student had experienced a sexual assault. Ilene wrote back to the student “asked if she had help or needed support” and if Ilene herself could do anything for the student but was met with no response. According to Ilene the student did not successfully finish the class.

Two years later, the student re-enrolled in the course. Ilene remembered feeling relieved that the student was safe, but also feeling trepidation about

addressing the disclosure directly. Ilene asked how the student was and the student said she was fine and was committed to finishing the semester, but neither the rape nor the student's response to the rape was discussed. As Ilene explained it, she offered help, but did not know the student well, limited by the relationships since the student was "not my advisee." Ilene later stated that she had done online research, provided the student with links to the university's women's center and other campus resources, but did not receive a response about the student's use or even receipt of those resources.

In listening to Ilene tell this story, I was immediately struck by her assertion that the relationship between student and faculty was shaped by her campus role and Ilene stated it as if that was a universal experience for faculty. Her statement crystalized what I had heard from other participants as well: that their roles and relationships with students fundamentally shaped how students disclosed and how the faculty members felt they could and should respond.

Because of the emergent qualitative approaches of this study, I returned to the data to more systematically examine the ways in which faculty talked about their roles and relationships in their descriptions of student disclosures and their own responses. I found that the participants' ability to foster intimacy with students was a key characteristic of the disclosure experience. In talking about their individual relationships, the participants described interactions that impacted the student's ability to be vulnerable and get their needs met by the faculty member.

Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory helps situate these relationships in the context of the microsystem, whereby the individual characteristics, values, and

identities of the faculty and student, are interdependent on the faculty's perceptions of their institutions' management of sexual misconduct (meso- and exosystem) as discussed in Chapter IV.

From the disclosure experiences shared in the interviews, I organized the relational roles that faculty play with students into two categories: instructor and advisor. There are several instances where faculty described situations where a student was enrolled in their course and was also an advisee, but it was the faculty member's primary description of their relationship which informed their response. Faculty role was not predictive of behavior across participants, but, at the individual level, the role served as a salient consideration for how the faculty member received and responded to the disclosure.

Within the instructor and advisor roles, participants also discussed their perceptions of the conditions under which the student disclosed, which I identified as driving factors. Based on the participants description, I categorized those driving factors into three experiences; course-related, accommodation-seeking, and emotional support seeking, each of which are discussed in significant detail. In this chapter, I use data from interviews with the faculty members and notes taken in my researcher's journal to analyze faculty conceptions of their relationships with students as a central factor that affects how faculty understand and respond to sexual assault disclosures. The relational factors and disclosure experience described by Ilene and illustrated further in this chapter by other participants make explicit the need to examine experiences of disclosures and responses based on relationships.

It is the aim of this chapter to highlight that disclosures occur across roles, thus necessitating training for faculty that addresses the variety of roles and relationships they may encounter. With such training, faculty would be better prepared to support students and may even be able to anticipate disclosures and respond with both care for students and compliance with institutional policies. These findings have implications for institutional policy makers, those who provide faculty training related to Title IX, and also for other institutional community members who engage with faculty.

### **Faculty Experience Disclosures as Course Instructors**

The instructional relationship is a formalized role in which a student is enrolled in the faculty member's course or engages with them in academically-related content. The faculty participants discussed their experiences with disclosures in those instructional relationships by reflecting on factors such as class size, the mechanism students used for disclosure, and the faculty member's perception of why the student was disclosing to them.

I initially believed that I could examine how faculty experience and respond to student disclosures of sexual assault through the relationship faculty had with students, the mechanism or modality in which the students chose to share the disclosure, and the driving factors for the disclosure as three separate dimensions of the disclosure. In reality, these three concepts are deeply connected and not context-independent.

Within the 13 instructional relationships described by the faculty participants, all of the participants identified a driving factor for the disclosure. I selected the term

“driving factor” purposefully given the scope of the study focusing on faculty experiences. It is important to acknowledge that driving factors are not necessarily synonymous with motivation for disclosure. Driving factors reflect the entry points for the disclosure as determined by the faculty member who received the disclosure, rather than a comment on the individual experience or intention of the survivor.

In this section, I use the participants’ narratives to describe their experiences with disclosures in the instructional setting based on their driving factor. Course-related activities include a disclosure that is related to the content of the course, such as gender dynamics or psychology and in one case it includes misconduct that occurred during a class-related activity between two students in a course.

Accommodation-seeking in an instructional relationship is the request for extension or shift from what is offered to the other students, generally speaking. The third category, emotional support, includes a specific request for resources or a desire to leverage the perceived status of the student-faculty relationship to obtain empathy and care. There are disclosure experiences that fall within more than one of these categories, however for the purposes of this study, I used the sum of the interview conversation with the participant to determine the most appropriate way to categorize the faculty member’s understanding of the primary driver of the disclosure.

I identified a complexity and nuance to the relationships faculty have with students and the ways in which faculty experience student disclosures of assault. Individual faculty members often serve a single student in more than one capacity and respond to a number of driving factors. For example, five faculty members received their disclosures in connection to course-related activities in the instructional

relationship. There are multiple instances where faculty roles intersected with faculty interpretations of what the students wanted from the disclosure. Two disclosures in this category occurred between the student and the faculty member exclusively and occurred as part of a course-related activity such as discussing an assignment, rather than in relation to the specific course discussion. After I examined the disclosures more closely, I determined that one driving factor was more dominant, just as I had noticed with the dual roles of instruction and advising. The combination of intersecting roles and driving factors for disclosures demonstrate a complexity that faculty must navigate.

### **Disclosures to Instructors Connected to Course-Related Activities**

From the 13 instructional relationships described by the faculty, five of the disclosures related to the course in which the student was enrolled. There were two characteristics that separated the disclosures that occurred as part of course related activities. The first characteristic was the faculty participants' facilitation of appropriate intimacy with the student, which I identified as "closeness". I begin with the individual disclosure experiences of Carl and Fiona who describe disclosures that occurred in direct relation to course activities and were made in private. A second characteristic of disclosures in course related activities was that the course content was related to studying gender violence. Three disclosures, experienced by Jeanette, Naomi, and Ilene, were demonstrative of such circumstances. These three disclosures had another characteristic in common which is that they were made during class or related activity and thus other students were present. The instructor had to consider

the dynamics of the classroom, while also attending to the individual needs of the student making the disclosure.

### ***Closeness in Instructional Relationships Yielded Disclosures***

An instructor's relationships with students are important to consider. In their instructor roles, Carl, a tenured professor in the fine arts, and Fiona, a tenured professor in an interdisciplinary program, each experienced disclosures that were connected to a course-related activity and were made in private as part of a meeting the student had with the instructor about course material. This private setting for a disclosure is not unusual. Richards et al. (2013) found that approximately three-quarters of students made their disclosure in office hours. Carl and Fiona's experiences do not reflect the totality of participants' experiences with disclosures during office hours, but rather a sample therein. For each of them, the disclosure they received privately, and the nature of the conversation began in their capacities as instructors, but emerged as something different.

The disclosure experience that Carl shared was related to a course he taught; one where the dynamic of the course yielded a close relationship. He instructed a small seminar that was tied to a program he managed, which he described as resulting in a more intimate classroom learning experience and more of a mentoring role. Because Carl played multiple roles for the students in this course, I elaborate further on this disclosure in the section on advising below. It is relevant to consider, however, that the student disclosed during a conversation about an assignment in Carl's office. Students were asked to make a video about an important relationship or moment in their life. The student came in to discuss the project and shared his



experience with intimate partner violence. Carl responded with care and information about his institutional obligations.

What was striking about Carl's experience as an instructor is the approach he described to supporting students' identities, which is reflective of the closeness he strives to facilitate as a teacher. When sharing his disclosure experience, he deviated from the story to talk about the type of environment he created in class, which was one of freedom of identity, freedom of expression, and a space to challenge a culture of norms, all embedded in how he shared his own identity.

I'm gay, I tell them. The first day I say to the students, I say it at orientation, I'm gay and you know who I am. I say 'I want you, while you're in my room, while you're in the scholar seminar, while you're here, I want you to be, my number one thing is for you to be yourself. To feel like you can be yourself'...because I want them to really express what they want to express because perhaps they've been told otherwise. So, let's hear it.

Carl used this framework of freedom to set up ground rules for the classroom in hopes that students would immediately challenge this notion of expression. Carl described students' reactions to his ground rules as "pushing boundaries" in that they typically responded quickly with expletives and he responded quickly by doing the same.

Fiona also described receiving disclosures while participating in course-related activities. Fiona talked about two disclosures she received in this capacity.

With the first one, it was so long ago I can't even remember how she brought it up to me. It was really close to the end of the semester I think, and I think

she just came up to me after class and quickly told me what was going on. I think that was it and I would check in with her later and say like how are things going? Is everything okay? Um and I think that was mostly by email or maybe face to face. Um my memory of that one was really sketchy because it was such a long time ago. The second one was really strange. We had a course I was teaching a course that met [off-campus] and I sometimes carpooled with students and I was actually in the car with the student.

Fiona received two disclosures, but the one that was most present in her mind was the one that occurred under extraordinary circumstances. Not only was she in the car with a student driving her, but immediately after the disclosure the student hit another car. Fiona attributed the accident to the distress that the student experienced in relation to the disclosure, although it was unclear to me from Fiona's description whether the distress was related to the experience of violence or the decision to share with Fiona at that moment.

The student was clearly distressed. Like the fact that she basically side-swiped a truck, [she was] clearly distressed over what was going on. And you know I checked in with her later and made sure she was safe and then later realized that that the disclosure should have, that I should have reported the disclosure.

Fiona responded to both disclosures by following up with the student several times, both in person and through email. Fiona was the only participant in the study who disclosed that she had been victimized by sexual violence. In her statement above, Fiona noted that she should have reported the disclosure. She later attributed her inaction under these conditions to her preoccupation with her own experience of

sexual violence, which had happened recently in relation to receiving the disclosure in the car, something I discuss below in the section on emotional support.

There are two binding threads between Carl and Fiona's experiences. The first, of course, is that they were both serving students in instructional capacities and students were engaged in a course-related activity. The second thread is a philosophical approach to facilitate close-knit environments between students and faculty members. In the instances described by both Carl and Fiona, they were positioned in a one on one environment that was predicated on course-work to respond to the student's needs. In Carl's case, he explicitly spoke about the ways in which his pedagogy informed the classroom environment. He shared his identity and invited students to do the same. Fiona, while less explicit in her approach, demonstrated a commitment to the students in her disclosure response and follow-up, much which is likely present in her approach to relationship building. While the pedagogical approaches of Carl and Fiona fostered a kind of intimacy that provided the grounds for these disclosures, the content of other courses did so as well.

### **Discussing Sexual Violence Elicits Disclosures**

In the cases where students disclosed in a classroom with other students in attendance, such as with Jeanette, Naomi, and Ilene, those disclosures were connected to discussions about gender-based violence being as part of course content. While all three situations are quite different in terms of size, scope of engagement, and the nature of the disclosure itself, a similarity among each of these disclosures is that the topic in those instructional spaces focused on sex and gender-based violence. This occurrence is consistent with the findings that those who taught "sensitive topics",

such as courses on crime, victims, assault, gender and or sexuality, were more likely to receive a disclosure than those who did not teach on sensitive topics (Richards et al., 2013) Jeanette and Olivia were explicitly addressing this topic whereas in Ilene's case, it was the individual student who was doing research on the topic in a course that was related.

Each of the disclosures were connected to an academic experience where multiple other individuals were present. Teaching a sensitive topic was a significant predictor of receiving a disclosure. "Professors who taught sensitive topics were 2.63 times more likely to receive a student disclosure than professors who did not teach sensitive topics" (Richards et al., 2013, p. 1416). Despite these data, in the narratives that follow, participants describe situations where they were facilitating academic engagement and were caught off guard by a disclosure. In the following descriptions, these faculty reflect on grappling with their ascribed institutional roles, the complicating factors of being in more largely populated spaces, the impact of perceived anonymity by students, and what might have played out differently under varying circumstances.

Jeanette, a tenured social sciences faculty member, described an example of a student disclosing during a course about gender in a class-session focused on assault in institutions. She recounted a time when a student stood up and publicly disclosed that she had been sexually assaulted during a class discussion of the film "The Hunting Ground" (Ziering & Dick, 2015), the documentary film discussed in the first chapter that examines responses of higher education administrators to reports of campus sexual assaults and various instances of institutional betrayal (Smith & Freyd,

2014). The disclosure occurred in a mid-size lecture of approximately 80 students, where Jeanette shared that the size of the class contributed to her not learning the names of her students. She reflected on the tension between knowing that there was a process that faculty were supposed to follow, while recognizing that the way the disclosure occurred made it difficult to ascertain the necessary information for such a process. Jeanette explains:

We're in a lecture hall and she raised her hand and said, you know, my freshman year I was sexually assaulted. And I don't remember a lot of the details of what she said, other than it was like, alright I need to follow up with her. You know, and I didn't know her name. The class was too big that I hadn't bothered learning names, you know? So I got into my roster right after class [but] she left right after class. She didn't, like, come and talk to me afterwards and I didn't want to call her out in the middle of class, like 'Hey! Before you leave...I need to file something'.

Having located the student in her roster, Jeanette followed up with her after class via email to schedule an appointment, However, the student did not attend the scheduled meeting and later replied by email to say she had had a panic attack and was choosing not to come in for additional conversation.

In her recollection of this disclosure, Jeanette talked about formulating her response to the student based on the circumstances of the class discussion. In the following text, Jeanette interpreted the classroom discussion as a call to the student to disclose. She also justified using her instructional relationship, which lacked mutual

rapport and familiarity, to not take additional action required of her as a responsible employee:

I felt like I didn't have anything to report and I didn't want her to be bothered about it anymore because I felt like she didn't want to talk about this. She reported it in this, like, intense moment in a class because there was all this encouragement to disclose essentially. We just watched a film about why nothing happens on college campuses because of all these systems related to athletics, the Greek system and money that keep any real policy changes from happening and how there's plenty of reasons for women to keep quiet and yet she felt called in that moment to say something. I think once out of that situation and the mood changes, she went back to her you know, I kept quiet for I want to say it was like two to four years. I mean it was several years. And that was working. And maybe one day she'll disclose in a different context and maybe she won't, but I ended up not filing a report.

According to Jeanette, the student did not communicate her interpretation of the disclosure or what she hoped Jeanette would or would not do in response to the disclosure. Jeanette inferred what the student needed from brief email interactions and canceled meetings. Jeanette's inferences were based on her limited relationship with the disclosing student, the classroom factors at the moment of the disclosure, and Jeanette's own orientation to her institution's Title IX process, as described in Chapter IV.

Ilene, a tenure-track faculty member in an interdisciplinary program, provided a second example of a course-related disclosure where other students were present. A

student in Ilene's course was working on a project about survivorship and the "#MeToo" movement. As the student reflected on her positionality in her study, she disclosed to the class that she identified as a survivor of sexual assault:

[The student] decided to work on the community of practice with the 'Me Too' movement—so, a community of survivors through a Facebook page or something...And then came the class where we talked about our positionality in the community or outside because that's a big part of doing qualitative research. You need to know yourself to know the other...She said that she was herself a survivor.

When I asked Ilene to describe the reaction of the other students in the 10-person seminar, she described responses that were full of verbal and non-verbal compassion. Ilene went on to share that part of her intent of the interaction had been to challenge the student to reflect her own experiences in the paper, which the student was resistant to. When asked in the interview if she had ever discussed additional resources or options for the other students in the class, Ilene paused and processed her position on the matter.

It's been about the process of the paper. I thought that... Hmm, that's a good question. Now I'm questioning my reasoning, not questioning in a bad sense. I perceived it as a 'reclaiming my experience. This is happening to me. I'm sharing it with you and more like I don't need'... not that I don't need help. I don't think that's what the message was, but that's kind of how I reinterpreted it. That it was research, not a personal sense. So that's where I kept it...but

that's interesting that I didn't...yeah anyway I didn't. I didn't question and I didn't ask.

Ilene maintained her decision, but the pauses, utterances, and verbal processing of the incident indicated to me that she was actively questioning and differentiating disclosure experiences that would move her to believe she should or should not engage in a university process. Of the multiple disclosure experiences that Ilene discussed, both were in the role of instructor, although the driving factors (according to Ilene) were different in that she identified one incident (discussed in more depth in advising) as a “cry for help” and the disclosure discussed here as a reclamation of a student’s experience. Regardless of the driving factor perceived by Ilene, she did not engage in a formal institutional process for either student.

The third example of a course-related activity was not in a course, but in an academic setting and one that was public. Olivia, a tenure-track faculty member in a human services discipline recalled a situation at her former institution. During the 2016 election several faculty members hosted a “teach-in” event where the community could come together and share their reactions to several challenging socio-political issues specifically related to the presidential election of Donald Trump and where women stand politically. During the event, a student stood up and shared that a friend, her roommate, had been groped sexually on campus during a candidate rally event. The faculty members who participated in the event came back together afterwards and grappled with policy, practice, and climate. Olivia described a room overflowing with deep emotions as they decided how to manage the situation that had



occurred during teach-in because they did not prepare a response if someone did disclose.

...We had a faculty meeting that was a faculty debriefing. Everybody was in tears and it was so emotional. Are we supposed to report it? You know, the students were sharing in confidence. We didn't practice informed consent. You know, all of these, what are we supposed to do now when it's a second-hand account and so it was, you know, the decision was made to report it. And so, I don't know what the outcome of it was because the person who was the primary coordinator of the event ended up taking responsibility for having to do the report. As faculty we didn't think about what we were going to do if somebody shared that they had an incident...But as a faculty we just decided because of the university policy that we had to make the report.

I want to highlight a key section of Olivia's statement and focus on the second to last sentence. "As faculty we didn't think about what we were going to do if somebody shared that they had an incident." According to Olivia, the purpose of the teach-in event was to respond to the complex political climate where a presidential candidate was revealed to have explicitly said that he can and would grab women's genitals. There were, of course, other complex social issues surrounding the candidate's ways of being, but this was one of the primary situations the teach-in was responding to from Olivia's perspective. The experiences Olivia described illuminated the lack of preparation for faculty to receive a disclosure of sexual assault in an event that was designed to address that very same issue.

Jeanette, Ilene and Olivia each described a situation where they were serving in an instructional capacity, discussing some aspect of sexual assault or related violence, when a student made the decision to disclose their own experience with violence, for which none of the three faculty were prepared, instructionally or emotionally. The data presented here, combined with the findings of Richards et al. (2013), confirms that teaching sensitive topics can elicit a disclosure of sexual assault or experience with victimization of crimes in general. Anticipation of such disclosures should absolutely be a consideration when designing how such content will be delivered.

Both Jeanette and Olivia, whose course activities focused on sexual assault, could have made a comment at the start of their respective discussions about what might come up for students and how the faculty member will respond. Jeanette, who received a disclosure while teaching her gender violence course, described how she felt about such “trigger warnings”:

I always sort of say at the beginning of my semester, I don't do trigger warnings because every class is a problem then. Like it's just, you need to know on day one, this stuff comes up every day.

It is understandable that a warning about the impact of content at the start of every class would feel repetitive. An alternative solution that Jeanette could have implemented would have been for her to reiterate the boundaries of her role and present a hypothetical response to a disclosure. Olivia's experience paralleled Jeanette's such that, according to her, she and her colleagues did not preface the

activity with how they would respond to students if disclosures occurred and what the boundaries of their roles were.

Ilene's seminar was not focused on gender violence, but rather a single student was interested in this topic for her research. Much like Jeanette and Naomi, Ilene was aware that the student's topic for her paper was about a social movement connected to sexual assault in advance of the student's disclosure. If she had insight that discussion of such topics elicits disclosures, she could have addressed the nuance of sexual assault disclosures to faculty members in advance. Ilene's experience differed in that her disclosure occurred in a small classroom environment where she had more close-knit relationships with the students. The setting of the small classroom environment and knowledge of the individual students, independent of victimization, could have enabled a more nuanced discussion of Ilene's role in advance of disclosures of any kind. In these cases, Jeanette and Ilene used their personal judgment to make the decision not to make a report to Title IX, whereas Naomi relied on the consensus of the group to make the decision to report.

As we have seen, course instructors who received disclosures of sexual and intimate partner violence by students as part of course-related activities fell into two categories, those which were a product of close relationships and those which were related to the sensitive subject of intimate partner violence and sexual assault being discussed. Those disclosures made in close relationships were done in a private setting, where those related to subject matter were done in classroom communities with several other students present. Both types of disclosures required a response

from faculty, which varied both in the immediate moment and in the longer term, based on the various environmental and relational factors.

The participants' experiences with disclosures that occurred between the student and faculty during the intimacy of office hours or in a classroom setting with students and a faculty instructor when sex and gender-based violence is being discussed is consistent with the findings of Richards et al. (2013). These data are important to present to faculty as they do their work and for staff who conduct campus training. These are just two of the ways in which students choose to share their experiences with assault or trauma, but it does the students a disservice if the faculty are not attuned to the possibilities of what can emerge from course-related instructional relationships.

### **Disclosures to Instructors that Include Accommodation-Seeking Requests**

Faculty instructors in this study discussed circumstances in which student disclosures were prompted by requests for accommodations that were related to the course itself or the university. In their survey with 126 participants on crime disclosures by students to professors, Richards et al. (2013) found that faculty reported that 68% of their disclosures did not include requests for leniency in the course--that is, only 32% were seeking accommodations. However, my data found a striking difference otherwise. Of the 13 disclosures that I classified as occurring between a student and their faculty instructor, eight of those students sought course-related accommodation. In other words, just over 61% of faculty participants received a disclosure from a student who was also asking for accommodations or leniency. As defined in my study, accommodations include extensions on coursework deadlines,

additional excused absences, or a request for specific additional resources, including insight into the Title IX process or a referral to campus office.

Requests for accommodation-seeking can be experienced as transactional in nature. Alexandra, a social science lecturer, used the term “straightforward” to talk about the way a student approached her about the absences and missed deadlines that had accumulated in her class. Alexandra asked the student to provide documentation about why she was missing class, and in this transaction, the student provided a letter from a medical provider stating that the student was being treated for trauma related to sexual assault. Alexandra’s approach to disclosures was to report them to her campus security organization and also to the Title IX coordinator to receive guidance on process, as well as resources for the student. Despite providing accommodations, Alexandra shared that the student did not complete the course to a standard of which she had hoped, which impacted Alexandra emotionally, who “felt bad” as a result of giving the student a grade of “D.”

She never really quite got back on it. Even though she did come to class, she, you know, I don’t think she was paying attention to, she couldn’t really focus on what we were doing. She ended up getting a D in the class. I felt bad, I tried to give her every possibility but by the same token I can’t just hand over a grade. Then at the end of the semester she wrote to me, ‘is there anything I can do’? You know, she was understanding. She knew she deserved the grade she got but she wanted...

Alexandra explained how she had talked through various options with the student for grade replacement and course substitutions. Alexandra also acknowledged that there

was no emotional nuance to the conversation at the time of disclosure or when negotiating next steps. The student did not request additional emotional support, nor did Alexandra offer it.

Benjamin, associate professor in the arts, was approached by a student in his course who had experienced harassment of a sexual nature from another student during an in-class activity. That student then went to Benjamin with a request for the faculty member to address the behavior through in-class accommodations related to limiting the two students' engagement and interaction with each other. Benjamin believed that the disclosing student's goal was to have the other student removed from the course altogether, though Benjamin noted that the disclosing student did not make that request to Benjamin directly. Rather, the disclosing student made an explicit request to not have to be required to engage with the student who had allegedly caused her harm. Benjamin was able to provide this accommodation to the student, but he also decided to go beyond the scope of her request. Benjamin chose to address the behavior with the student who initiated the problematic behavior and instructed him to apologize. The disclosing student, in this case, did not request emotional support or resources.

Benjamin and Alexandra experienced their accommodation-seeking student disclosures differently, which makes sense because the experiences with the students differed in the parties involved and also the nature of the incidents that were being disclosed. Alexandra saw her interaction as transactional, whereby the student disclosed as in providing a doctor's note and she Alexandra responded to let the student know what the institution's process required of her. Conversely, Benjamin

interpreted the disclosure based on variables known to him through his relationship with the other student to determine what the follow up should be. If these two perspectives represent opposite ends of a continuum of accommodation-seeking response, where Alexandra represents a direct response to the request of the student and Benjamin represents an interpretive response to what he believed the student was requesting, Helen represents a perspective that falls in the mid-point of that continuum.

Helen, a humanities lecturer, described the flow of information when a student makes a disclosure: “It's always like, ‘this is why I wasn't in class’. Because I'm the teacher and they think I deeply care if they're in class, which is not totally true.” Helen's ambivalence toward attendance policies differs from what Alexandra described about how she managed her classroom attendance and deadlines. Helen went on to describe how disclosures of all kinds, including anxiety, depression, and personal or vicarious trauma come to her at the midpoint and end of the semester as if it's something so frequent she was able to anticipate it. She took a proactive stance at the beginning of the semester where she said,

“Listen, this [emotional difficulty] is going to happen for some of you. It's okay. Contact me and let me know so that I can help you be successful in the course.” And then I remind them that I know I'm asking them to do the thing that's probably the hardest to do. So I think that because I'm so open about mental health issues, like they know that I'm, like, sympathetic to this stuff, I think that they are more willing to tell me about stuff. It's usually in the context of not being able to get work done in class.

Similar to those instructors who received disclosures in course-related activities like Jeanette, Ilene and Naomi, Helen also taught a sensitive topic. At a former institution, she taught a class of 18 students and 11 of those students disclosed some form of interpersonal sexual violence over the course of the semester. As a result of those experiences, which she only spoke about generally, Helen provided a proactive accommodation to her students.

There can also be a lot of veiled discussion of [sexual violence] when we're talking in class. Like next week we're reading something which has graphic depictions of sexual violence and so I'm giving my students a head's up, because I can tell that a lot of them need a head's up. And it's just from teaching for this long and seeing their nods or their, like the way their bodies get more sort of tense um, but there are not as many disclosures as there used to be about sexual violence in my office.

Helen's former experiences informed her approach to provide an accommodation before the request of the students or as a result of students' reactions. Providing such an accommodation is not required, but with this action, comes an informed reaction. Students may trust Helen to seek support instead of accommodations or it may also provide an opportunity to engage in the material differently than if the students were traumatized by the content.

Helen's approach differed substantially from Benjamin as well. Whereas Benjamin interpreted what was being requested, Helen used her collective experiences to be proactive and set a general guideline for what students might experience and what the response might generally look like. Her approach did follow



the recommendation that faculty anticipate the likelihood of disclosures, although her responses were not necessarily aligned with policy. I have proposed that responses to accommodation-seeking by faculty can be examined on a continuum. Thus far I have described three accommodation-seeking disclosures which fall on that continuum in three different ends, Alexandra as transactional at one end, Helen's experience-based interpretation at the midpoint, and Benjamin being highly interpretative at the far end of Alexandra. The remaining disclosures classified as accommodation-seeking can be situated on either side of Helen's experience at the midpoint.

Danielle, STEM lecturer, received a disclosure from a student who was specifically seeking out a university process, such as those offered by the Title IX coordinator, to address misconduct the student had experienced from another faculty member. Danielle was able to provide the resources the student requested, but also discussed her anticipation of the emotional difficulty that the student might experience and enacted that compassion and empathy with the student directly.

I mostly felt compassion for the student and just sort of like removed from this being a student in my class. Here's this vulnerable 19-year-old or whatever who is frightened, and I have the, I potentially have the ability to help her. So at that point it didn't matter that she was in my class. It mattered that she was a student at [the university] and she needed help and guidance. And I was just very concerned about getting her, like sending her in the right direction. I was a little nervous because I wanted to get enough information from her to help her, but I didn't want her to tell me who the professor was because I kind of just didn't want to know.

Despite the student being in her class, which disciplinarily was distant from any content related to sexual violence, Danielle did not experience the disclosure as course-related and focused more on providing an institutional resource to the student.

Course accommodations and resource-seeking were the driving factor for student disclosures to their instructional faculty members, which resulted in faculty members responding with variance. Variation of the faculty responses can be appropriate in some circumstances, but it can also be experienced as disempowering to a student who has been victimized. As with course-related disclosures, faculty members who teach should be able to anticipate that students may approach them with various requests and accommodations related to disclosures of sexual assault should be part of the discussion.

### **Accommodation-Seeking at Historically Black Colleges and Universities**

Three participants in the study worked at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) at the time of their interview, each who received and responded to a disclosure in the capacity of their role as a course instructor and specifically in accommodation-seeking. Compared to the 13 participants from Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs), the general disclosure experiences of faculty at HBCUs did not vary, but the faculty participants at HBCUs described the environment in which they received their disclosures as unique, compared to PWIs. It is important to note that the faculty who worked at HBCUs also represented the only Black faculty in my study. Naomi and Olivia were both tenure-track assistant professors and Peter was an associate professor. Naomi and Peter were both in human service disciplines, whereas Olivia was in the social sciences, though her professional

background before coming to academia was similar to Peter and Naomi's backgrounds.

Though the experiences of the students making the disclosure were quite different, it was the framing of institutional duty that was shared across the HBCU experiences. Each participant spoke about the deep responsibility that comes with working at an HBCU. The participants individually expressed a deep value for supporting students who came from marginalized communities and who may not have had an opportunity to participate in higher education without the HBCU experience. They individually communicated a shared sentiment about doing more for students with fewer resources than most institutions, while also trying to balance career progression by presenting scholarly work with limited institutional support but substantial institutional expectations.

Olivia compared her experiences at PWIs and her current HBCU, specifically discussing the role of the HBCU as serving the local community. Olivia's institution is situated in an urban neighborhood and is committed to serving the local city community, responding to gun violence in addition to intimate partner violence and sexual assault. When she described the experiences she has had, she directly addressed the resilience of her students to ask for accommodations to persist in a challenging environment; one that has been more challenging than the other institutions she's experienced.

Every semester there are deaths and there are funerals and there's lots of emails from our campus police about crime that are not necessarily on the campus, but it's in the neighborhood around us. So you know the students at

[our university] specifically face a lot of the challenges that we see reflected in the news, but it also speaks to their resilience. They still come. They still show up. Last semester so many students were affected by the murders that happened in the city, but they still show up. And they ask for accommodations, you know they may have a lot of absences, but they will reach out and say and they'll send you a long email with a copy of the obituary, with a doctor's note, with a you know all this over the top information about the incident that happened. But they, you know, but they still try to push up and get the assignments done.

This comment by Olivia sheds light on the general support and accommodations that she was able to provide her students. She continued by describing a disclosure where she made accommodations for a particular student based on the "student's deterioration" she had observed in the classroom. In this particular incident, the student did not disclose her experience with domestic violence until after the class was completed.

She really wasn't doing well, and you could tell. You know, it's really hard when you can see that students are deteriorating but there's really nothing you can do about it but inquire about them. She came into my office earlier this semester, she's getting ready to graduate, and she looked totally different. She just looked amazing and so I was just telling her how great she looked, and she closed the door and shared with me that last year when she came, she had been in a domestic violence relationship. Last year we were having the conversation about her and her assignments and I ended up having to let her

come to a Saturday class to do her presentation because I just wanted her to finish. She passed the class, but she barely passed the class. She came in and shared all of the things that she had been going through in that relationship and you know how grateful she was that, you know, most of the professors who she had last year worked with her to finish up that semester.

Olivia's offering of the student to finish in the Saturday class was illustrative of the institution's culture of student support and accommodation. She described several instances where she taught different sections of courses offered identically in mornings and evenings, or in this case on weekends, so that students could attend a different section when life challenges came up. Her attention to and intuition about students' experiences with assault and trauma were reflective of an institutional commitment to serving students in accommodating ways.

Peter, an associate professor in human services, called a student into his office to talk about her attendance in class, but ended up aiding the student in getting support from staff and faculty that he perceived to be of greater service to the student. His drive to speak to her was in support of her academic success, but the conversation revealed more than just class attendance as an issue.

I've had students come in with 1.8, 1.9 [grade point averages] and really you need a 2 point or 2.5 to maintain good standing. So I've seen what academic counseling and mental health counseling can do for retention and to pull that [GPA] up. I had recently a student come in for missing classes and um and just and in jeopardy of flunking the class who told me she was raped...so I referred her to another colleague who was close to her.

The student did not initiate the conversation to make the disclosure, but when she did, Peter was available and responded with the resources to get her the support that she needed in service of retention and academic success.

Peter's attention to retention was rooted in the unique culture of working at an HBCU. He spoke about the responsibility to fulfill research obligations, but with limited resources available to him and specifically talked about the unique needs of the students.

Most of my training, including undergrad, was all at an HBCU. The special needs that the students at an HBCU have keep me here. They need that extra help. You know, not that they can't get that at a PWI, but it's just that I think I can do my best work here to help them get to where they need to get. Drawing from a lot of experiences and whatever.

Peter grappled with the balance of supporting students with high needs for accommodations with the professorial obligations of research. He struggled to find the time, especially during the academic year, to write and publish with rigor since his teaching load was four classes per semester.

Naomi, a tenure-track sociology professor, reflected on the difficulty she experienced balancing student support, such as providing accommodations and space for the students to talk, with her obligations to thoughtfully teach and do her research. One of the several disclosures of sexual assault that Naomi received was by a male student who reported harassment from a university employee. In this situation, the student had reported his experience to university personnel, but had a negative experience with the process.

I heard the gentleman's story about his victimization, I thought he never spoke up because you know how it is with male on male victimization. I was like maybe he didn't speak up. I was like hey do you know about the university's resources? And he was like 'yeah, I went'. I was like oh. Okay. And that's when he decided to tell me more about his experience and what [the institution] did as opposed to did not do and how he felt and to have this person still be an employee. He felt it was disrespectful to him and what he experienced. He felt overlooked. Like his story didn't matter. He wrote everything down. He spoke to whatever person who's in charge of documenting these [situations].

In the experience Naomi described, she initially thought the student was coming to learn about the institution's sexual misconduct process, but when he had already utilized the resource, she recognized she needed to offer more support but felt stuck, uncertain about what to offer. The only other resource she was aware of was the counseling center but had heard that the office was not timely with their response to students who were in need. Prior to employment at the HBCU she taught at a PWI and talked about a highly effective counseling system they had in place when students were struggling. She described her interactions with the counseling center when she encountered a student who had not attended class in several weeks. As a faculty member, Naomi was aware of the student's trauma history, but was unaware of the student's specific experience.

I received an email from the counseling center and they wrote a letter, a business letter and they copied all of her professors and they said please

excuse the student because on this date this happened. They didn't go into detail. This happened, as a result she has been coming to the counseling center for the past days and it listed everything. The student did not have to email me. She did not have to ask me what her homework assignment was. Nothing. It was almost as if she had her lawyer. And the school was her lawyer and that's what we need.

I was initially surprised to hear that faculty would want such a directive about what steps to take to offer students resources and accommodation, but in times of uncertainty to address large issues for students, Naomi wanted the added layer of resources to refer her students to, which would almost make her role as a disclosure recipient obsolete; something I think she hoped for to enable her to devote more time for the more explicit responsibilities of her job of instruction, advising, and research.

Naomi, Peter, and Olivia received requests from students in their classes for accommodations related to extensions and absences, but the primary accommodation was resource-seeking. All of the students disclosed under the conditions of navigating a complex institutional process. These stories are significant, but also are limited in number. The ways that the professors at HBCUs received and responded to disclosures of cannot be generalized to all faculty at HBCUs. It is important, however, to understand the experiences of faculty of color at PWIs and see if there were differences or similarities in how they experienced disclosures as a reflection of their institutional commitment and to further study the experiences of faculty at HBCU who represent a diversity of identities with high expectations and limited resources.



Faculty participants who, in their instructional role, received a disclosure as a result of accommodation-seeking, responded with the best of intentions and to the extent that they were aware of what they were able to do. Knowledge of institutional processes, resources for support, and how accommodation requests should be handled would have increased not only the efficacy of the faculty response, but also their confidence in doing so. Specific training on what the faculty can offer students independently and what should go through offices such as institutional equity, Title IX, or the student disability office can and should be part of regular faculty communications.

### **Disclosures to Instructors who Provided Emotional Support**

Eight of the 13 faculty members in instructional roles identified emotional support as one of the driving factors for the disclosures they received. Emotional support includes a desire to leverage the perceived status of the student-faculty relationship to obtain empathy and care or space to talk about their experience. In this section, I present five examples of instructional faculty members' interpretations of student disclosures driven primarily by emotional support seeking. These five disclosure experiences are consistent with other findings I have presented thus, as they contain driving factors or primary relationships that fall into more than one category. The driving factor of emotional support seeking in the instructional relationships needs attention because it is likely the least addressed aspect of the faculty role. An emotionally supportive response from the faculty may require emotional labor or may impact the faculty member. In their study of how professors experience disclosures of sexual assault, Branch et al. (2011) noted that in some cases

students disclose at “difficult times for professors such as, after a long lecture or right before class time” (p. 68). When emotional support seeking is the driving factor, this may complicate the timeliness and effectiveness of the response. Consistent with the findings I present here, Branch et al. (2011) also found that that faculty acknowledged the need to make the time for the student, even when it is inconvenient.

Naomi, a tenure track professor in the social sciences, described a situation where a student came into class late, was disruptive, and Naomi asked her to stay after class to talk about what was going on.

This person came in noticeably late and she walked in looking like Jennifer Lopez, had the shades on, had a Chanel thingy. And I’m like, “Hey, you’re late and come in here looking like a superstar about to shoot a video. Stay after class.” I didn’t know what was going on, so I just said stay after class because I did not want to lose my rhythm when it came to lecture. Afterwards she and I talked after class and this is an 11 o’clock class. As soon as I said, “what’s going on with you?”, there was a stream of tears. She was assaulted. She’s going through a lot of emotions, right? And I’m okay, “Calm down. Do you have someone to talk to?” Because again I have a class, right, so I’m thinking, okay. I’m going to listen but like, “okay do you have someone to talk to because I don’t feel comfortable walking away when you’re feeling this emotional.” Some students when they’re emotional, they become violent or they become angry. And this person, going back to experience, is a hot head. So yes, she’s sad but within a minute [snap], she can turn. If she feels

violated or disrespected, she'll become aggressive [snap]. Because now she feels justified to now lash out on the person.

Naomi went on to talk about how she rearranged her approach to her classes for the remainder of the day so she could sit with the student.

I was there for an hour and a half with her. I did not go up to my one o'clock class because again I have an 11 o'clock class that ends at 12, then at one o'clock and two o'clock. Since I was there with her for over an hour and a half, no 1 o'clock class. I literally said, give me five minutes, went upstairs and I said, "hey, because you're working on your papers, please use the time to work on your papers." I went back downstairs, continued. More time with her. She left smiling so it was worth it.

Naomi said that she felt accomplished when the student left with a smile on her face; validating Naomi's time, effort, and attention to the situation. The student's safety was a priority for Naomi as well, though stated less explicitly. When Naomi talked about being concerned for the student's anger-based reaction, she expressed concern for the student's safety in that moment and beyond. It was important to Naomi to take the time to keep the student safe in the immediate moments of their interaction, but also included resource provision and safety planning though she did not name those actions in such clinical terms. Naomi offered this support as an extension of her knowledge but did not go through her institution's reporting process.

Earlier in this chapter, I briefly presented the disclosure experience that Fiona, a tenured professor in an interdisciplinary program, received. Fiona was alone in a vehicle with the student returning from an off-site course activity. Fiona received the

disclosure as an instructor as part of a course-related activity, Fiona described the student's experience as distressed and emotional, thus the appropriate primary driving factor is emotional support. Immediately after disclosing the incident, the student struck another vehicle. Fiona attributed the accident to the distress the student must have been experiencing as a result of disclosing and of dealing with the victimization.

So she just told me while she was driving me back to campus...there are some liability issues in terms of student safety. And so my presence in that, like my very presence in that car, might have been a little bit of a problem. The student actually got in a minor accident while I was in the car, so it was an extremely awkward car ride. The student was clearly distressed. Like the fact that she basically side-swiped a truck, [she was] clearly distressed over what was going on. And you know I checked in with her later and made sure she was safe and then later realized that that the disclosure should have, that I should have reported the disclosure.

Fiona explicitly identified the high level of distress the student was experiencing during and after the disclosure. Fiona noted that she did not engage in "reporting", commonly used by the participants to refer to engaging in the compelled disclosure process. In fact, in sharing multiple situations where students had disclosed sexual assault experiences to her, Fiona shared that she had been distracted by the care for the student in the moment and her individual follow up, but never engaged in formal institutional processes such as reporting. Fiona's individual experiences may have

shaped both her own identity and her personal framework for responding to students in crisis.

Fiona was the only participant who identified as having experienced interpersonal violence. She stated that her own experience of rape had been quite different from others she was aware of. Whereas the majority of victimizations occur between people who know of each other (Baker et al., 2016; Kahn et al., 2003; Sasson & Paul, 2014), Fiona's attacker was a stranger, which she saw as differentiating her experience, specifically by lessening self-doubt.

Following my assault, I learned that the treatment people experience from these different kinds of sexual assault experiences are really different. I was immediately put into the system where I live and got six months of counseling there. My counselor recommended group therapy and I was the only person in that group who had been raped or assaulted by a stranger. Ever everyone else had experienced rape or assault by someone that they knew. And their experiences, I thought were way worse than mine. Like, nobody blamed me. My whole community came out to support me...Then I went to these group therapy sessions and was just shocked at how other people had been treated because they were blamed. Even if that case gets to court, like their whole identity and personality is called into question.

In speaking about her experience, she talked about how attuned she was to the challenges of knowing one's attacker and how differently she was treated in the legal system and made the connection between that experience and what students experience in both the legal and university settings. Her attacker had been arrested

almost immediately and, as demonstrated in the previous statement, she had been provided services. She compared this to how students might experience seeing their perpetrator on campus, where they study, work, and live.

The person was arrested within a day. The trial was terrible, but there was so much support for me during the trial. I know this person is going to be in prison for a really long time. So like, in terms of the justice system that was very easy on me compared to how it was for these other people in many cases, like they can still run into the other person who assaulted them. That was a life changing experience to see how people who've experienced sexual assault like just struggle for a lifetime...I feel like I have a pretty strong understanding now you know, from those six other people who were in my group therapy, but I think it the commonalities in their experiences gives me a like sociological understanding almost of what being um being a survivor of acquaintance rape is like.

Fiona felt that it was important to share this experience to communicate her perspective and approach to providing emotional support to students. In Chapter IV, I described Fiona's perspectives in more depth, specifically noting her commitment to care and her understanding of how her duties as a responsible employee, in conjunction with the responsibilities of her instructor role, are conceived and enacted.

Lauren, a lecturer in the social sciences, acknowledged emotional support as the primary and often sole driving factor for the sexual assault disclosure she received. The content of her courses addressed "sensitive topics" (Richards et al.,

2013), similar to the experiences of Jeanette, Olivia, and Ilene discussed earlier in this chapter. Sensitive topics were those of violence and content in disciplines such as social sciences, education, and liberal arts. As demonstrated in those cases of Jeanette, Ilene and Olivia, such content can enable difficult conversations in and out of the classroom. For Lauren, her experience was that the sensitive topics in the classroom made her accessible to students for emotional support outside of the classroom and independent of the coursework, though not divorced from her instructor role. For example, Lauren described class assignments and discussion about social movements, such as “Black Lives Matter”, as content that situated her as someone that students, and particularly Black female students, felt comfortable sharing personal information with outside the classroom. Students might come to office hours just to discuss something personal, including sharing an experience with violence or other trauma.

So I’ve had a lot [of disclosures of sexual assault]. In part because what I do is, I have a, like I teach gender and gender stratification. The first half of the second class on gender is about rape and rape culture so we learn about that. I tell people as a trigger warning. I send out an email. “Next class, the first half hour, this is what it's about if you feel like this is something that you’re, you know all too well...”, you know.

Lauren described her experience differently from those of Jeanette, Ilene, and Olivia. She teaches on topics that can elicit disclosures, but the sensitive topics and course-related activities, such as conversations about class or assignments, were never the focus of the disclosure. Lauren saw her teaching of various topics as a mechanism

that opened the door, but emotional support seeking was the primary driving factor. Despite her frequent referrals to counseling, Lauren found that most students who came to her had no interest in speaking other university offices or services but were coming to her specifically because of their perception of her care. Lauren's approach to navigating her role and her duty to respond to disclosures was detailed further in Chapter IV, focusing on her conceptualization of the administrative challenges of mandated reporting.

Karen, a lecturer in human services, shared several instances where her role as the instructor in the classroom enabled deep relationships, which were reflective of a close-knit department. Her approach to working with students is important to how she provides emotional support, both when students are in crisis and otherwise. Karen identified two key aspects to how she conducts herself to do this work, the physical space she sets up and the emotional space.

When a student comes into my office, they control the door. They control the lights. I sit in the dark. I don't care if that door is open or closed. Because somebody might feel a little creeped out being in here with me with the door shut and the lights out. The tenor's got to be set.

Karen's attention to the physical space subtly addressed the power dynamic between student and teacher, and did the same for me when I was in her office.

The second aspect of Karen's attention to student relationships in an emotional support role is reflected by a standing meeting she has with a former student.



There is a student that comes and we have a standing appointment every Tuesday. He doesn't take any of my classes because he's done taking my classes and he'll come in, just to chat and check-in on Tuesdays because the way that he and I are able to interact does something for him. He's kind of a troubled guy and he's had some issues and I'm cool with that. I sit here and eat my lunch and he'll vent, and we'll go on about our business. Um I don't mind, and it does something for him. So it's symbiotic and off we go.

The return on investment that Karen refers to with the term "symbiosis" is more than time to eat her lunch. The relationships that she created with students and with her departmental community are important to her disciplinary and interpersonal work.

One of Karen's experiences with a disclosure was with a student who sought Karen out to process through what they had experienced, questioning whether they should classify the behavior as sexual assault or not. The student making the disclosure was enrolled in Karen's course and came to her office solely to discuss what she was experiencing, rather than to discuss something in connection to academic work or request specific accommodations.

I guess the most recent, the freshest one in my mind, but certainly not the most egregious that I've heard, but I guess the freshest one in my mind was a student who was at a function...of course there was alcohol involved. I can't quite remember what happened. And it's one of those things where innocent until proven guilty, but yet you feel like you may have been violated...Because she didn't come to me and say I was assaulted. She never went anywhere with

it. She just kind of let it go and she didn't have any negative physical negative impacts from it.

Karen perceived the student's request as asking for space to grapple with possibly having been assaulted. In Karen's re-telling of the disclosure experience, she gave emotional space for the student to contemplate the act of violence and the autonomy to identify the act as sexual assault or not. At the beginning of the interview Karen identified that she was knowledgeable about the university's process. She described her institution's systems and resources consistently with how they were written. In contrast to the institutional process and demonstrated here, she felt as though her students were the experts on their own experiences and, unless the student named the behavior explicitly as sexual assault, Karen would trust the student's labeling of the incident.

In Chapter IV, I presented analyses of the discrepancies between what faculty say they should do and the actions they take. The collection of statements by Karen demonstrate the complexity of balancing relationships within and across roles, which is the essence of the mesosystem context. As an instructor, Karen strove to have emotionally centered relationships and respond to the myriad of challenges that students brought to her for processing. The disclosure experience here, however, also reflects that such behavior can operate in contrast to what the institution required of faculty who receive or suspect violence.

Karen, Lauren, Naomi and Fiona described deep personal relationships with students. The depth of the relationships they talked about were rooted in the faculty member providing care and support, rather than a mutual vulnerability from both

faculty and student (i.e. faculty oversharing). They each described the importance of making space for students to come and talk about emotional topics. Carl, Helen, Ilene and Olivia also described emotional support-seeking aspects of their disclosure experiences, but they had other primary driving factors as well or a more dominant role with the student.

Emotional support as a driving factor for disclosures is a complicated concept. As demonstrated in the experiences of the participants, there substantial interpretation on the part of the faculty member of what was being sought by the student. Lauren and Karen were confident that none of the students wanted to engage in a referral or university process, whereas other instructors did not ask if a more elevated process to address sexual violence might be of service. The relational dynamic between the student and the faculty member is of key importance.

As demonstrated in the following sections, advisory relationships were typically regarded by the participants as more intimate and enabled an even deeper level of engagement. While emotional support seeking occurred in instructional relationships, advising for academics, organizations, and mentorship were almost exclusively driven by it. In the following section, I discuss the nuances and intimacy of advising and how those disclosures are experienced by faculty similarly to and differently from instructional relationships.

### **Faculty Experience Disclosures in Advising Relationships**

“It’s not like she was not my advisee, you know like not someone who you have a strong relationship with”: this quote by Ilene, which I presented in the chapter epigraph, demonstrates a deeper level of intimacy than she identified as possible in an

advising relationship, one that operated differently from those connections in instructional relationships. I made the decision to use the term “advisor” to encompass a non-instructional relationship. Advising, as demonstrated in this study and in higher education in general, can include several different types of relationships. In this section I use advising to encompass academic advising relationships, organizational advising relationships, and mentoring. Each of these three types of advising relationships can overlap and intersect with other advising relationships, while eight disclosure experiences emerge from or overlap with instructional relationships as well. Data from faculty interviews and the researcher’s journal demonstrate the nuances of the varied advising roles with unique disclosure experiences.

Advising, categorized by the role of the academic advisor, organizational advisor and mentor, represented 10 out of the 23 relationships discussed in the interviews. Advising, similar to instruction, was a formalized role either through an organizational affiliation or a programmatic designation where the faculty member was assigned to assist with forward academic progress and, in some instances, career advising. Mentorship differed slightly in that the mentoring relationships described by the participants represented the least formalization, which indicated that the relationships were cultivated by both the student and faculty member. While formal mentorship relationships described in this study did not exclusively represent a documented role within the institutions, such as with instructors and academic and organizational advisors, mentoring relationships were connected to academic engagement in some way, and they also reflected a deeper personal connection

between the student and the faculty member. Another key difference between advising and instructional relationships were the ways that the faculty talked about their disclosures experience. In instructional relationships faculty focused more on the disclosure itself, whereas in advising relationships, the relationships and the faculty member's approach to cultivating those relationships were addressed in more detail.

Three driving factors characterized the faculty and student relationship in instructional roles, a course-related activity, accommodation-seeking, and emotional support. Emotional support was the only factor that was found in all three of the relationships, however, it was the sole factor for disclosures in organizational advising and mentoring relationships that did not also include instructional role overlap. The three types of advising relationships, academic advising, organizational advising and mentoring, represent nearly 73% of the 11 disclosures that faculty perceived as emotional support seeking. Several of these advising relationships also overlap with emotional support seeking in instructional relationships. It is important to continue to consider multiple simultaneous roles and intersections of driving factors in the disclosure experience. In order to create thoughtful policy and practice, this complexity must be addressed in the individual roles and in campus sexual misconduct work in general. In this section I present disclosure experiences as described by faculty in the three advising roles, while also making connections to instructional roles and within advising.

### **Receiving and Responding to Disclosures in Academic Advising Relationships**

Five of the participants identified academic advising as a primary role that enabled them to receive disclosures of sexual assault from students. Academic

advising roles, more than organizational advising and mentoring, overlapped significantly with instructional roles. Participants who identified as serving a student in both capacities but were engaged in advising as their primary role when they received the disclosure, experienced disclosures marked by less spontaneity, increased on-going conversations, and increased opportunities for follow-up between the student and faculty member.

Advising relationships do not require personal information sharing by either the advisor or the advisee, but the nature of the relationship is likely to facilitate more personal connection and sharing than a relationship that is exclusively instructional such that the advisor aids in course selection, internship identification, research opportunities, and other engagement in discipline-related activities. Advising relationships serve an important role in students' campus experiences and their lives. J.K. Drake (2011), the former chair of the National Association on Academic Advising (NACADA) who also was a faculty member in the humanities, points to the power that advising has as a tool for,

communicating, and mentoring in student success and persistence to graduation. It's about building relationships with our students, locating places where they get disconnected, and helping them get reconnected. And it demonstrates the powerful effect that out-of-class interactions with a faculty member can have on student persistence (p. 8).

The value of academic advising mirrors the intent of Title IX regulations and the spirit of the responsible employee designation. All students, regardless of sex and gender, should have equal access to education and have the support of key

institutional personnel to aid in their forward academic progress. Just as advisors are perceived to be experts in their discipline, their duties as responsible employees are also perceived to have a scope of authority which allows them to make appropriate referrals and connections, in the spirit of access and thus student success. This is not to assert that “bad” academic advising experiences yield the same negative sequelae for students as experiences of sexual violence, but powerfully positive experiences of support and care in advising in combination with disclosure responses could enable a clearer path to success both in college and beyond. In this section I describe how advising relationships inform the receipt of and response to student disclosures of sexual assault and intimate partner violence for three of the participants. The remaining two academic advising disclosure experiences are discussed in the final subsection of this chapter, which addresses the burdens and challenges of disclosures in advisory relationships.

Alexandra, social sciences lecturer, spoke a lot about her academic advising role. Specifically, she discussed the challenges she faced in clarifying her role with students in an advisory capacity but felt that students’ perception of her work and her discipline often muddled her responsibilities. In addition to advising more than 50 students in her department, Alexandra identified strongly with her maternal identity which drove a sense of care and support for students in such an advisory capacity.

I can listen to you as an advisor, as a mom, and give you some feedback, but I really can’t solve your problems for you. I obviously have students come in and try to get therapy and no. Just no.

Moving from role clarity to academic advising interactions, Alexandra described the emotional outpouring and challenges that arise from the intimacy of advising meetings.

Sometimes I feel like students start pouring things out. They're not always thinking about it. I've had students, a lot of them, talk about things with mental illness and medication they're on and things like this. It's like they just want to get this off their chest.

Alexandra's awareness of how students operate in meetings with her, specifically the "outpouring" of emotions, is helpful for faculty to consider. The ability for faculty who serve as advisors to anticipate how and where students might share such sensitive information, such as disclosures, can assist in preparing for those moments.

Gregory, a STEM professor, reflected several similarities to Alexandra in the ways that he talked about his role as an advisor. Just as Alexandra talked about how her personal identities (mom) inform her work to advise students with emotional challenges, Gregory spoke about his roles as an advisor and a father figure to inform how he created space for students to disclose emotional issues such as sexual assault. Throughout the interview Gregory talked about his accessibility to students as a key tool to successful advisory relationships. Because he spoke so much about access, I asked him to describe the personal characteristics he possessed that made him so accessible to students. His response was "being accessible."

Being so accessible. [Accessibility] is a luxury. I would have no expectation that a tenured faculty member could afford to do that. I can because my assignment is to advise and to teach these students. That's what my



assignment is. My assignment is not to publish a paper so I can get NSF interested so that they'll give me another half a million dollars in grants. I don't have to worry about that. If I did, I would have to be working on that stuff during a lot of those times.

Gregory's statement highlighted important components of general advising relationships and also the competing demands of faculty responsibilities. Gregory stated that his ability to do emotional work with students was reliant on the fact that he did not have the scholarship obligations of most other faculty members. For Gregory, advising is one of his two primary responsibilities, but for many other faculty members advising is one of many responsibilities such as teaching, publishing and several other dimensions of service. Considering the time constraints of various faculty members could aid in training how faculty can effectively, but also efficiently build relationships with students.

Naomi, tenure-track social sciences professor, described several situations that she experienced providing various aspects of support for students, including emotional support and accommodations for those she taught. In an advising meeting, a student shared with Naomi that she had been struggling but did not identify anything in particular as the cause. Naomi heard from other faculty members that this same student was struggling in those classes as well. Naomi called the student in for a meeting where the student shared that she had been raped.

I had her come to me in private, because I was her advisor, and she just shared with me the incident. So I asked her what steps she took. She called 911 before she called the local campus police. She did the whole [forensic] exam.

Everything. She went through that process because she was not trying to make herself seem questionable by external reviewers of her case. And to my surprise, in her story she informed me that this person was still taking classes in which she was also in the same room.

Naomi's disclosure experience followed a pattern similar to Peter's experience described in the instructional relationships. He noticed a student who was not performing as she should and called her into his office. Naomi had a brief initial conversation with the student, which prompted an invitation to discuss the student's challenges further. A significant difference between Naomi and Peter's experiences is reflective of the differences between instructional and advising relationships. Peter held regular class meetings with the student enabling him to notice a pattern of behavior. Depending on the size of the college community, academic advising appointments and interactions occur with far less regularity. Naomi relied on her faculty colleagues to hear that the student was struggling and capitalized on the hearsay and the student's pre-disclosure sharing of struggles to connect the dots and help the student address the situation further. This underscores the importance of both academic advising and instructional relationships in receiving and responding to students who disclose sexual assault as well as those students who are distressed due to other challenges.

### **Receiving and Responding to Disclosures in Organizational Advising Relationships**

Two participants identified their organizational advisor role as the primary capacity in which they received and responded to a student disclosure of sexual

assault, both of which were involved in academic organizations, which Meyer and Kroth (2010) defined as a “student group that provides opportunities for members to discuss information on academic disciplines and careers, network with professionals in the field and/or be recognized for scholastic achievement” (p. 413). Organizational advising, while a small subset of advising relationships reveal important conditions in advising relationships.

There are limited financial or positional rewards for faculty members who advise organizations (Meyer & Kroth, 2010), though it can be considered part of their service portfolio. In their study of employee involvement in organizational advising in higher education, through survey data Meyer and Kroth (2010) found that faculty were more highly represented in organizational advising than staff and then further sub-categorized their involvement by organization type. Academic organizations were the most highly represented (42.9%), “followed by special interest (38.4%), sport (11.6%), and religious (7.1%)” (p. 413). Organizational advising relationships, as demonstrated in the following narratives, are reflective of how faculty interpret students’ approach to advising relationships. Specifically, these relationships are perceived as more casual and more intimate because they exist with increased familiarity, and perceived informality “after-hours”.

Maxine, a tenured faculty member in performing arts, served as an organizational advisor on top of a high-level administrative role and her instructional responsibilities. Advising was central to her. Even when discussing her administrative functions, she described them with an advising lens.

I see students for a variety of issues. Sometimes it's wanting to do a grade appeal. Sometimes it's just trouble with a faculty member in a different department. Sometimes it's just a more general kind of 'what am I doing with my major or What am I going to do after I graduate? That kind of stuff. So it's kind of advising on a grand scale. There's lots of different reasons why they might need to seek out an additional person. And so I am that additional person.

Similar to those faculty experiences described in the previous section on academic advising, Maxine's characteristics and approach to her work is reflective of commitment to caring for students and making space to hear and respond to their challenges.

Maxine's organizational advising experience was also connected to her discipline in the arts.

I'm an advisor to one of the student groups and I direct once a year. As a faculty member, that certainly, I think, puts me in an unusual situation because the work that we're doing can be physical, can be emotional.

Certainly, the students that are in my cast, you know, I might be hanging out with, not hanging out but I might be working with them at, you know, 9:45 at night which is different than faculty members in different disciplines.

Maxine described the disciplinary conditions for her work with students that is more complex than a weekly meeting, such that there were both emotional and physical components. Similar to a lot of student organizations, the group met later in the evening which can blur the boundaries of relationships with faculty members. In her

description of what happens in this role, even Maxine grappled with the nature of the interactions when she initially said, “hanging out” and then retracted that to highlight that those interactions are work for her but can be confusing to students.

One of the students involved in Maxine’s organization disclosed to Maxine that she had been involved in a situation of relationship violence. The student may have been aware of Maxine’s administrative duties as well, but their primary relationship was advising.

She was behind on all of her classes and needed to take incompletes at the end of last semester. The reason that she had gotten behind and needed to take incompletes is because she had gotten into her first relationship with a man who was not a student at [our university] and it turned into a toxic relationship. There was an element of dating violence and stalking. He threatened to kill her...She was able to get out of the relationship, but it was really damaging.

Fortunately for the student, Maxine was very knowledgeable about the university's resources. Despite the incident happening well before the disclosure, Maxine connected the student with academic accommodations with faculty members, explained the administrative process, and various support services provided by the institution.

Helen, a lecturer in the humanities, separately described advising relationships related to discipline-specific organizations such as living-learning programs and academic clubs. Helen shared that students perceive faculty who spend time with them after hours as more committed than other faculty members. Helen shared that

her involvement in the organization reflects her care for students, though she did not believe that such involvement reflected any more care than other faculty members. She did believe, much like Maxine, that the connections that resulted from the organizations allowed her to feel more comfortable with the students, which allowed them to feel more comfortable with her, although Helen had a more overt approach about connecting with students than described by other faculty members. Helen had a strong presence on social media.

One of the ways I am super open with students in the organization and also in my classes, is that I am friends with them, a lot of them, on [social media].

I'm on social media all the time. I love social media. It's like my second home. And I have now had several instances where a "friend" who's a student at [the university] or in my organization or a staff member here was unmentioned something about violence.

Helen went on to describe situations of reading about sexual assault, suicidal ideations, and other acts of self-harm or harm to others that she saw on social media directly or that students in her organizations saw and reached out to her for help. Helen's accessibility, even in virtual space, made her not just accessible, but caring. Helen's integration of this accessibility into her faculty identity, is a factor that allows her to sustain a caring response in response to disclosures of sexual violence.

Several participants shared experiences of organizational advising. They talked about relationships building, service to the institution, and an opportunity to extend their disciplinary experiences to a broader population Helen and Maxine were the only two participants who spoke about receiving disclosures in this relational

dynamic, but it is an important role to consider in the dynamic of sexual assault and faculty relationships generally. Faculty typically receive little or no training for organizational advising. The backdrop of evening hours and more informal interactions can easily position faculty to hear the personal challenges of students. Organizational advising could also position faculty to be more keenly aware of campus resources. Specific training can be offered to this sub-population as a contingency or group recognition. Fortunately for the students who disclosed to Maxine and Helen, these faculty members were knowledgeable about resources and made prompt referrals. Interestingly, both Maxine and Helen were each in favor of promoting resources available on their respective campus, rather than campus policies and procedures as they understood them; an area that could also be addressed in training.

### **Receiving and Responding to Disclosures in Mentoring Relationships**

The third type of advising relationship where disclosures were made is mentoring. Mentoring relationships differ from instructional relationships in that they exist outside of formal teaching. I situated them as a component of advising relationships because the mentoring was tied to their academic discipline, in combination with a relationship where the faculty member and student both take responsibility for. In the “SAGE Handbook on Mentoring and Coaching in Education”, Carol Mullen (2012) describes mentoring as a shared journey between mentor and mentee, in this case faculty and students, respectively. She wrote, “mentors foster critically supportive, nurturing relationships that actively promote learning, socialization, and identify transformation within their work environments,

organizations and professions” (p. 7). Mentoring, as described by Mullen, is similar to the advising roles discussed previously, but the key difference in this study is that the mentoring relationships were mutually agreed upon by the mentee and mentor, rather than a prescriptive relationship based on institutional roles, although a mentoring relationship may not be divorced from such institutional roles either. In this section, I describe three faculty experiences with sexual assault disclosures in mentoring relationships.

Evelyn, a female professor in a STEM discipline, held multiple roles at her institution where she worked for over a decade. In addition to directing a disciplinary scholar program, she had individually mentored students and learners, with whom she maintained long-term relationships personally and professionally. When Evelyn spoke about her disclosure experience, the description of both the student and their relationship was central to her story.

The student was here for like 14 months and we worked very closely together. She was just a lovely person and she had a very unfortunate experience on campus. It’s interesting, I mean I don’t have hardly any experience other than her so I can’t judge, but it seems I think she handled it quite differently than an American student would...there’s a word for it, “Brava.” It just means not putting up with shit from anyone. You know? And that was sort of her attitude.

It was clear to me that it was important to Evelyn to talk about the student who had been harmed. Because of their mentoring relationship, Evelyn felt a kinship with the



student, but also felt a responsibility for her. The student was also described as small in stature, mature, and “lovely.”

The student’s experience, as told by Evelyn, was one of stalking and harassment. Evelyn recalled that a much younger student who took classes with her mentee said “wildly inappropriate” things to her, texted her several times a day about sexual acts, and followed her from campus to her nearby apartment. Evelyn described the behavior as “Not even close to the line. It was WAY over the line” referring to the boundary breaking her mentee experienced. In her long career, Evelyn only recalled one such disclosure situation, but because she had such a close mentoring relationship with this student, she felt a great responsibility toward the student mentee. Evelyn described the nature of the stalking-like behavior her mentee experienced.

Oh. I felt awful, you know? Because I am responsible for her being here. I brought her here and so I felt very responsible and a little bit embarrassed. Oh my gosh this is my university and this thing happened. You know, just wanting to help her and figure out a way to make it okay. Or not make it okay but make her feel better.

Evelyn described her reaction to the situation but recalled little information about a specific moment in time where the student disclosed, other than identifying that the disclosure came soon after her mentee was followed home. Her recollection of the situation in this way can be tied to the on-going relationship with her mentee.

Interactions were both frequent and deeply personal and did not operate separately from the academic work she and the student were doing together. Evelyn helped facilitate a reporting process with institutional officials both at the request of the

mentee who had been impacted, but also because of Evelyn's institutional knowledge which may have influenced the mentee's request for such services.

Karen, like many other faculty participants, served her department and the university in multiple capacities. She described her department in human services as intimate and relationship-centered, especially because of the discipline specific demands, specifically that students and faculty work in close physical proximity to one another. Karen initially named her role as an advisor, but as she elaborated on the types of relationships she had with students, I determined mentoring was more applicable for the ways she reflected the nature of those relationships in her talk and her actions. While the disclosure she recalled was one where a student came in, closed the door and verbally grappled with whether or not she had been sexually assaulted at a recent party, Karen generally focused on culture and relationships in the department, rather than a single relationship, which was quite different from the way Evelyn reflected on her experience. When asked about the university process, Karen identified a step-by-step process which included compelled disclosures, but in the case of the individual situation she described, she did not follow such a process because the student did not identify her situation as assault so Karen did not believe she needed to move forward and define it as such. Karen noted that students came in and disclosed things to her very regularly. When asked if the frequent flow of student disclosures was associated with the nature of the discipline, Karen responded:

Oh absolutely. We are in, we as a profession have to operate within very tight quarters and there's very much a brotherhood aspect...So there's very much a brotherhood aspect to it.

Evelyn shared a close mentoring relationship where she felt a duty to the student and sense of responsibility for the functioning of the institution. Karen, however, reflected on how she cultivated relationships with students in general, and which facilitated a moment in time where a student felt they could grapple with whether or not they had experienced sexual assault.

The final mentoring relationship was from Carl, a tenured instructor in the fine arts. Previously in this chapter, I described Carl's experience receiving and responding to a disclosure from a student when discussing a class project. It was that assignment in Carl's class that prompted the initial discussion, but Carl's approach to the class and his cohort-style disciplinary program was more closely aligned with mentoring. Carl began to describe the disclosure by discussing the strategies he used to make himself accessible, and then moved into talking about the disclosure experience itself. In the course-related activity discussion earlier in this chapter, I presented Carl's desire to share that he was gay with the students. He also went on to push boundaries related to language.

“While you're in the scholar seminar, while you're here, I want you to be, my number one thing is for you to be yourself. To feel like you can be yourself and say whatever the fuck you want to say when you want to say it, okay?

Those are the ground rules. We're going to try to go with those rules, okay?”

And they test me right away. Like someone swears and so I swear back.

After discussing several other individual interactions where students push boundaries of gender and sexuality, we returned to the question about Carl's experience with disclosures. The student came in to discuss an assignment and mid-conversation, to

the surprise of Carl, the student shifted to talk about an experience of domestic violence.

So he's talking to me and he's talking about a mile a minute about all kinds of stuff and he said, and I don't remember what we were talking about, but he goes see this scar right here (lifts up baseball cap and motions to his forehead above his right eye). He said that's where my boyfriend punched me in the face last summer.

Carl's response was informed greatly by his understanding of university policies and ideas of institutional care, which I discussed in Chapter IV.

Carl's conceptualization of his own mentorship to students is of note. Carl served as the instructor for a program connected to scholars which had both living and learning components. He oversaw an intensive seminar course related to the program, which required a rather reflective capstone presentation. The student who made the disclosure to Carl had been recruited by him for that scholar program. In his recollection of relationship building with the student, Carl described the importance of bringing his identity and openness to the classroom which facilitated a mentoring role with this particular student and opened the door for the student to disclose multiple vulnerable aspects of his identity. It was in on-going meetings with the student about his work that the disclosure occurred, and which was later used for an assignment.

The disclosure experiences of faculty who served as mentors were characterized by intimate relationships with students that were fostered over time. While the relationships between the faculty members and students had many

commonalities, that was the end of the similarities. Each of the incidents of violence, as described by the faculty, were different. They represented relationship violence, sexual assault, or stalking. In Karen's example, nothing was reported because the student did not name the behavior specifically as something reportable. Evelyn and Carl did engage in reporting, but they did so out of different motivations; Evelyn's mentee specifically requested assistance and Carl reported based on his knowledge of positional obligations. In each of these cases, the situation required a response that matched the depth of the relationship which was described by the faculty members as emotionally challenging.

### **Burdens of Disclosures in Advising Relationships**

As demonstrated thus far, several of the participants facilitated a close relationship with their advisees that yielded a disclosure. As I described in instructional relationships, this was also frequently the case, but disclosures in advising relationships were different such that they were less spontaneous and were characterized by a more developed, on-going relationship. Advising relationships, however, do not inherently have intimacy built in. It is the characteristics of the individuals involved, among several contextual factors in the micro- and mesosystems which may yield a disclosure. Academic advising, organizational advising, and mentoring relationships, just as with instructional relationships, all present emotional challenges. Hayes-Smith et al. (2010) found that faculty reported role strain including feelings of isolation and emotional burdens, which is consistent with the experiences of faculty particularly in advising relationships. In this section I

describe three advising relationships that yielded disclosures and relationships which were notably challenging for the participants.

Jeanette, a social sciences professor, talked about her own feelings of betrayal which she experienced from an advisee related to discussion of sexual violence. The advisee had read some of Jeanette's writing about a sub-topic of sexual assault and went to the university's Title IX coordinator to file a complaint. "The student had actually been my advisee and I had known her for several years and thought I had a good rapport with her." Jeanette was caught off guard; she had expectations of the advising relationship that were incongruent with the advisee's actions. As part of the complaint process the student disclosed she had been victimized by sexual assault.

The student was like 'my professor is a fraud. She's victim blaming and I was sexually assaulted, and this isn't fair. She doesn't care'. And so she went to the Title IX coordinator and said you know, she shouldn't be involved in the university's response to gender violence. She went to the women and gender center, she went to my colleagues in Gender studies and showed copies of that one page, not the stuff that came right after it. She posted on Facebook about this, on social media.

This experience was further complicated by Jeanette's general mistrust of the university's processes to address sexual misconduct, which were detailed further in Chapter IV.

The implication of Jeanette's experience is that advising relationships are not immune to the social and cultural dynamics of the environment in which they are made and received. The chapter epigraph implied that there was something inherently

special about the relationship between the advisor and their advisees, which may have merit, but faculty cannot rely solely on that. Ecological systems theory reminds us that contexts are interdependent, and as such, individuals will create knowledge and develop through their experiences in those contexts. In Chapter IV I discussed Jeanette's critique of the ways institutions handle sexual misconduct. Undoubtedly this experience shaped some of those ideas, but her construction of institutional mistrust and her perceptions of her relationship with her advisee are contextualized by the student's experiences as well. It is possible that Jeanette caused the student harm, even if accidentally.

Because context and conditions are critical to relationships, such attention should be applied to the ways in which faculty receive and respond to disclosures of intimate partner violence and sexual assault. The students' experiences on campus, their perceptions of faculty, and their own agency, in combination with all these same dimensions of faculty, contribute to the way experiences of sexual violence are disclosed and received by faculty. The investment in the advising relationships has to also be on-going in order to facilitate trust and openness where such issues of harm are talked about. The power dynamics of advising can complicate this and put the responsibility on the faculty member to address it.

As discussed in the previous section, Naomi and Olivia were both tenure-track faculty members in the social sciences and worked at different Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs). As women of color at similar institutions, with similar professional experiences at PWIs, their experiences with advising students were similar in many ways, while their approaches to responding to disclosures of

sexual assault differed. Each spoke thoughtfully and personally about an implied duty to support students at HBCUs as they themselves had been supported. They had parallel experiences where classroom and academic advising relationships provided a structural framing to student and faculty relationships. They each separately discussed their campus reputations as “helpers” and how that was combined with an implied duty at HBCUs to support students. In the following statement, Olivia spoke not just about the HBCU experience, but about expectations of faculty of color to serve students of color as well.

One of the things about being a faculty member of color, whether it's in a HBCU or in a predominantly white institution, is that students, especially students with a lot of needs, will seek you out for support. Especially if you are the faculty member that has an open door, which I am an open-door faculty member. So, I get students from all across the department who, even from other departments, will hear something from somebody. Last week I got a student from a community college who's not even affiliated with our college at all, but she heard that I, you know, give good advice.

Olivia referenced various campus resources, but in general, did not have any knowledge that there was a designated staff member or office that would coordinate a Title IX process on campus, which is a condition of institutions that receive federal funding as was the case at Olivia's institution. Naomi's campus experience shared many similarities with Olivia's reflection about working at an HBCU. Both shared that it can be burdensome to negotiate the multiple responsibilities one has. As an advisor to a cultural group on campus, the number of students seeking her out had



impacted her productivity so significantly that she felt the need to put some boundaries around her engagement.

To the point where it's like please do not come and harass me. If it has nothing to do with class, advising, um or just future planning, because they will literally see an open door and just sit down and tell me everything but the sun. And I'm just like, do you know I have stuff to do? But I get it. It goes back to having a professor where it feels as though you could be vulnerable and not feel judged.

The environments that these two respective faculty members work in, combined with the multitude of professional roles they are tasked with, enable relationships which facilitate disclosures. Different from Olivia, however, Naomi was very clear that she would follow her institutional process. She named a process that included notifying her department chair of the incident for their follow up. When asked if there was a situation where she would not follow that process, she named a situation where she would make an exception if the student could demonstrate that they were receiving immediate support from home or a therapist.

### **Chapter Summary**

Institutions of higher education are complex organizational structures. The relationships that exist within institutions are embedded in and reflective of power structures both in and out of the campus. The relationships that exist between faculty and students are no exception. In this chapter I described the key roles of instructor and advisor, both which have variation within them. In each of these faculty disclosures experiences, I used interview data to demonstrate the participants actively

grappling with their decision of how to respond to a student. They compared disclosures to other similar experiences, considered the nuances of that particular moment in time, and worked through the extent to which they were knowledgeable and supportive of institutional faculty disclosure policies as discussed in Chapter IV.

Participants identified three key driving factors for students' disclosures; course activities, accommodation-seeking, and emotional support. Faculty who experienced disclosures in course related activities, received them in response to course content of sensitive subjects, and as a result of fostering close relationships with students. Faculty identified accommodation-seeking as an important driver in the disclosure process. Students requested adjustments to course policies related to attendance or deadlines to be addressed and in the process of the request made a disclosure.

Advising relationships, including academic advising, organizational advising, and mentoring, represented many of the disclosures. Different from instructional relationships, faculty who served in advising capacities spoke more in depth about the types of environments and relationships they facilitated with students to receive disclosures, rather than specific details of the disclosures themselves. Additionally, the hardships of the advising and disclosures themselves were expressed more explicitly by those in advising roles as well, which I attributed to the faculty member's descriptions of increased intimacy of advising relationships, compared to their instructional relationships.

It would be short-sighted to look only at the role of the faculty members to understand how they experience disclosures. Upon closer examination, it is the

pedagogical and interpersonal approaches of their work that impact the ways in which disclosures are made to them, but more importantly how the faculty respond.

Throughout both instructional and advising roles, close relationships that reflected an intimacy between faculty and student were a critical component of disclosures. There are many factors that can determine the extent to which a faculty and student relationship is close; the boundaries of the individuals, shared experiences, and identities. The examples of course activity disclosures where sensitive subjects were taught did not address intimacy of the relationship. In fact, two of three disclosures were made by students who were unknown to the faculty member at the time of the disclosure.

The roles and relationships described in this chapter provided more insight into how the faculty member experienced the student and the exchange of information in a disclosure but provided little insight into how faculty as a population respond. Throughout this chapter I described different disclosure experiences to the same faculty member who responded differently depending on the circumstances of the disclosure. Olivia is a perfect example of this. She experienced two disclosures in her instructional role, one where the incident involved the discussion of sexual violence and the other was responding to a student who needed support. From the first example, Olivia worked with a group of faculty members to determine that the situation needed to be reported, but in the second example she did not know that her institution had a Title IX coordinator and managed it on her own. The conditions under which the faculty are operating will dictate their response more than the role itself.

Advising and instructional responsibilities are not the only roles which faculty occupy in their position. They do this work in addition to scholarship obligations, committee work, service to the institution, and service to their professional associations as well. The data I presented here reveal that more attention needs to be given to faculty as they navigate varied responsibilities in complex relationships at institutions which often have an imperfect history of supporting survivors. Training should attend to the environmental factors (public vs private disclosures, sensitive subjects), characteristics that yield disclosures (accessibility), and the processes and resources that are present in the institution to serve students, faculty, and staff. I discuss each of these further in Chapter VI.

## Chapter VI: Discussion and Implications

The purpose of this study was to examine the ways in which university faculty experience students' disclosures of intimate partner violence and sexual assault given their unique relationship to the institutions at which they work and the nature of their complex roles with students. The voices and perspectives of faculty have largely been missing from the literature on sexual violence specifically as it relates to higher education's prevention of and response to such violence. Furthermore, disclosure research specifically occurring within higher education is also noticeably absent. Literature on disclosure experiences has generally centered on survivor experiences, rather than those of the disclosure recipients (e.g. Campbell, 2006; Campbell, 2008; Ullman, 1996a; Ullman 1996b; Ullman, 1999). Those few studies that have addressed the disclosure experiences of faculty and staff have been limited in research approach. Several studies used hypothetical scenarios to determine how employees might respond to a particular situation and often did not differentiate between faculty and staff approaches to experiencing disclosures (e.g. Holland and Cortina, 2017; Newins et al., 2018). Qualitative studies about general crime disclosures were brief, fairly structured, and conducted over the telephone (e.g. Branch et al., 2011; Hayes-Smith et al., 2010). This study, however, took a more open, emergent approach, which yielded deeply personal, participant-lead narratives capturing the nuance of faculty experiences.

Faculty experiences with sexual assault disclosures are essential to examine because faculty members play critical roles in the quality of students' experiences (Astin, 1977, 1993; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991) and in the overall functioning of

the institution. As a result of their institutional roles, they have been designated as responsible employees. Responsible employees are typically required to participate in a compelled disclosure processes (Holland et al., 2018), which mandates that when they learn of sexual assault or harassment, they are required to share the information disclosed to them with a designated staff member such as the Title IX coordinator. Participating in compelled disclosures is required, even without the consent of the reporting student. Additionally, the sweeping designations of responsible employees are applied universally throughout the institution to all faculty and staff with limited research as to the efficacy of such policies and with limited evidence-based training for those employees.

A single research question guided this study: *How do faculty experience student disclosures of sexual misconduct?* The goal of this research is to use the understanding of faculty experiences with students' sexual misconduct disclosures, grounded in the faculty members' personal experiences and reflections, to inform institutional policies and practices, which has two aspects: first, to help institutions help their employees become trauma-informed and second, to address violence inappropriate ways that mitigate harm in the present and the future. In order to expand the perspectives of scholars and activists who have been foundational to advancing sexual violence discourse, I used Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological contexts to conceptualize the circumstances and conditions in which such violence exists so as to more fully understand college sexual misconduct through faculty experiences. This final chapter includes a summary and further discussion of key findings from faculty experiences, specifically addressing how faculty are

simultaneously products of troubling discourse while reinforcing it. I conclude with implications of the findings for policy, practices, and future research.

### **Summary and Discussion of Findings**

During the interviews I asked participants to reflect on their roles including their scope of responsibilities, the extent to which their roles as faculty members have changed, the perceptions of their duties to respond to student disclosures of sexual misconduct, and their experience of students disclosing intimate partner violence and sexual assault to them. In my analyses of the data in the interview experiences and transcripts through a feminist grounded approach, I identified two major findings. The first finding is that faculty bring to their roles a set of values and beliefs about the institutional processes and those beliefs can impede the extent to which faculty members act in compliance with the obligations as dictated by policy. The second finding is that circumstances such as the relationship between the faculty member and the student that are present before, during, and after a disclosure of sexual violence will impact how the disclosure is received and responded to. These findings were a result of recursively attending to the data by consulting with faculty participants to determine the extent to which they had shared collective experiences or unique individual experiences.

### **The Disconnect of Faculty Knowledge and Faculty Action**

While faculty members' responses to disclosures were informed by their role and relationship with the students, those factors were not the only considerations that informed the faculty members' actions in the moment or in their reflections on the experience thereafter. Faculty expressed a wide array of understanding of their

institution's policies and processes, they reflected a complexity in the ways they talked about compelled disclosures and positional duties, and they talked about the tensions that often exist between compliance and care. Each of these three dimensions of their experiences informed and were informed by the myriad interactions and perceptions of their campus experiences, in addition to their social identities and their perceived capacities.

When talking about their duties, participants vacillated between confidence and ambivalence. Recall Maxine, an arts professor involved in her institution's sexual misconduct hearing board, who led with a confident and correct answer and then quickly minimized her knowledge and backed off. Ilene, a member of her university's faculty governance board, refused to discuss at all, repeating a simple "no" to each of my probing questions. There was no distinct pattern to the participants' willingness to describe their knowledge of policies or practices, but all of the participants expressed a desire for more role clarity and training. Only four of the 16 participants (25%) correctly identified their institution's process and followed through with those same obligations when faced with a disclosure. Of those faculty who did not follow their institutional process, they also typically did not ask the student what they wanted from their disclosure and instead projected their own perceptions and beliefs onto the student.

The language surrounding sexual assault is complex, dynamic and reflective of individual values. The varied use of the term "report" is a clear example of how personal beliefs get muddled with policy language. Reports can refer to the paper or electronic form that a responsible employee files after they receive a disclosure.



Referring to reporting as a verb, however, has a punitive connotation and that often gets combined with the simple act of communicating information. In the interviews and in many of the professional interactions I had with faculty, they frequently discussed obligations to “report students.” I interpreted the participants’ understanding of their duties to participate in compelled disclosure as a punitive act toward the disclosing student. For example, a pervasive narrative of compelled disclosure is that once the university is notified of a report, it will take drastic action. Based on faculty members’ talk, I propose two “worst-case scenarios” that faculty imagine about how these institutional reactions happen. The first response is one where administrators and police storm a lecture hall, mid-class to find the alleged perpetrator and escort them away. This scenario is public, shaming to a student, and also “outs” the victim. The second scenario of institutional response that faculty ascribe to is a situation where the victimized student is found responsible for something like under-age alcohol consumption and is “kicked out” of school. With the vast number of sexual assaults that occur annually and the history of poor institutional management, these actions are not out of the realm of possibility. They are not, however, the ways that most institutions handle misconduct. There is a great need to clarify what report, reports, and reporting mean for individuals and their institutional policies and practices.

Providing clarity of roles, language and policy can also serve as a tool to build trust with faculty members, and the community in general. The faculty participants, especially the women, who were in disciplines in the social sciences, humanities, and human services, were especially attuned to systemic issues of sexual violence and to

problematic institutional structures that exist throughout the country, as well as at their universities. In discussing such issues, they often situated themselves outside of the “administration” so that they could critique the institution as separate from themselves. Faculty members’ mistrust for institutions makes it difficult to conceive that colleges and universities can provide survivor supportive policies and practices, especially contextualized in a world that does not typically believe or support survivors. This dissonance further distances faculty from seeing themselves as collaborators to find a solution for the students at their shared home institution. The perceptions that policy and practice are inharmonious with care increases the divide between faculty response and compliance even more.

I identified care as a theme of faculty response very early on in the interviews and analyses. Perhaps it is my own orientation to assume the best intentions of others, but it was obvious to me that the faculty had a choice to do something or do nothing when confronted with a disclosure. Recall Lauren, a social sciences lecturer, who in anticipation of a disclosure stopped the student, put her hands to her mouth and gestured as though she was zipping her mouth shut. Lauren believed, based on past experiences, that if the student shared their experience of sexual violence they would be forced to go through an unwanted administrative process. Her act, while questionably compliant, was intended as an act of care toward the student. She was operating from a framework of what she believed the student would want and responded in a way that allowed for the student to continue to process feelings without explicitly naming the act that would require “reporting.”

Lauren's response, as well as the actions of many other participants that I have shared in this dissertation, raises important questions for policy and practice. Should compelled disclosure actions be activated on the presumption that a student experienced violence? The response of the faculty will be dependent on how they view the process. If involving the Title IX coordinator at the institution is seen as something that is helpful to the student in accessing resources and academic accommodations, it would be fruitful to follow through with those actions. Conversely, if faculty see the process as punitive and harmful, they are unlikely to take action to connect the students with the coordinator. The mid-point on those two belief processes would be for faculty to make appropriate referrals and follow up with the student to access the resources that the student needs. This requires some additional steps and a shift to actively think beyond compliance and focus deeply on care. To care in this way relies on intuition and skills, which can be difficult to train and presents challenges to the institution about compliance with the Clery Act and other related regulations. Accountability for institutions and assurances for student support must operate symbiotically for this to work.

### **Faculty Receive and Respond to Disclosures in Various Role Capacities**

The experiences of the faculty participants in understanding and responding to disclosures of sexual assault are shaped by the ways they interact in their positions as faculty members. The two main capacities in which faculty received disclosures were in their roles as instructors and as advisors. Instructional roles were those where faculty were responsible for teaching content and assessing student work. The three instructional capacities in which faculty received disclosures were as part of course-

related activities, course-related accommodation requests, and emotional support seeking. Those disclosures which occurred as part of course-related activities were a result of two separate, but occasionally intersecting ideas: facilitating close relationships with students and discussing sensitive topics. Recall Carl (Arts) and Fiona (interdisciplinary studies), who facilitated relationships with students as part of the students using discussions of course-related issues to disclose. Neither of those courses addressed sexual violence, although Carl's assignment asked the students to reflect on a significant event and his student focused on an intimate relationship where domestic violence was present. Consistent with the findings of Richards et al. (2013), discussing sensitive topics frequently elicits disclosures. In comparison, recall that Jeanette (social sciences), Ilene (interdisciplinary studies), and Olivia (human services), who were each facilitating activities or discussion that specifically addressed sexual assault when the disclosures occurred, and each of these disclosures happened in the presence of other students. The immediate responses and follow-up varied immensely, but of note is that only four of those five disclosure recipients followed their institution's policy as written.

Disclosures that were driven by students seeking accommodations or emotional support followed a similar pattern to disclosures to the instructional faculty, though with markedly less spontaneity. For disclosures where either the student or the faculty member initiated, those conversations happened exclusively between the student and the faculty member, though occasionally a support person, invited by the student, was present. Recall Alexandra and Peter, who engaged students whose attendance and performance had noticeably declined and during their

discussions the students disclosed that they were managing the sequelae of sexual violence. Benjamin (arts) and Danielle (STEM) experienced disclosures by students who were actively seeking information on their institution's processes for reporting and responding to sexual misconduct. Benjamin's disclosure experience was related to an interaction between two students in his course, while Danielle's experience was a student reporting sexual harassment from another faculty member. Peter, Naomi and Olivia each worked at HBCUs and separately reflected on the challenges of supporting students through accommodations and emotional support-seeking in the unique environmental condition of an HBCU. Specifically, they each reported that the culture of the institution and the needs of the students demanded a "high-touch" experience, often at the expense of student accountability, positional expectations to publish, and their own personal time and emotional energy. Finally, recall Helen and Lauren, lecturers in the humanities and social sciences respectively, who both commented on the changing dynamics of students' approaches to relationships with faculty and students' expectations of their institutions. Though Helen and Lauren work at PWIs, the impact on how faculty and institutions operate in response to sexual violence disclosures will be exacerbated by such expectations and perhaps bring an increased burden as is often experienced by faculty of color and faculty employed at HBCUs.

Several of the disclosure experiences occurred for faculty in advising roles, which reflected an important aspect to relationship building for the faculty participants. In this study, advising was an inclusive role that encompassed academic advising, organizational advising, and mentoring. Several of the participants served

students in both advising and instructional capacities, but the advising relationships were typically closer and thus provided the relational conditions for the disclosure to occur in those cases. Advising relationships were reflective of more intentional relationship building and attachment that transcended an exclusively instructional role. As a result, faculty identified emotional support-seeking from students as the primary driving factor in these types of disclosures, rather than accommodations-seeking and course-related requests.

For the advising relationships where participants described a disclosure, there was an increased sense of intimacy between the faculty member and student. Intimacy and closeness are complicated matters when discussing sexual assault in general and exacerbated when considering the power dynamics between student and faculty. For the purposes of this study, intimacy and closeness is reflective of a mutual relationship that is deep and caring (Bennetts, 2002). Academic advising was the least intimate, organizational advising was more intimate, and mentoring was the most intimate. The continuum of intimacy that I presented reflects an indirect relationship between formality and intimacy such that academic advising has the most prescribed structure, but the least intimacy. Mentoring had the least formalized structure, but the most intimacy. The intimacy, as experienced by the individual faculty members, guided the participants in how they interpreted the disclosure and their individual response.

The levels of intimacy and relationship development that were present for advising relationships and instructional relationships varied. Participants expressed different interests, skills, characteristics and intuition related to fostering connection

with students. The extent to which faculty create an environment where students feel safe to disclose is dependent on several variables. Of course the faculty member can set a tone for the classroom, office, or student organization that allows for and invites students to find comfort in sharing personal experiences. However, the student survivor's choice to disclose is based on many variables as well. In addition to considering the relationship to the perpetrator, the circumstances around the assault and the how the victimized student perceives others might respond all impact the decision to disclose sexual assault (Carey et al., 2015; Fisher et al., 2000; Kahn et al., 2003; Krebs et al., 2007). Other personal characteristics, past experiences, and beliefs about the processes and policies at the institution will also impact their decision. For example, recall Jeanette's experience, in which a student disclosed in a classroom of about 80 other students after watching a film about college sexual assault and institutional betrayal. According to Jeanette, the student felt compelled in this particular moment to stand up and disclose. It is possible that the student considered her actions before class, but those variables are unknown. Such circumstances are important to attend to in policy and practice, in order to obtain a comprehensive picture of all the variables and conditions involved.

### **Faculty Are Products of and Contributors to Problematic Institutional Discourse**

Examples of egregious mishandling of sexual violence at institutions such as Columbia, Penn State, Michigan State, Duke and Stanford, as described in Chapter I, demonstrate that issues of violence and problematic discourse do not live exclusively between perpetrators and victims. When these cases make the news and films such as *The Hunting Ground* (Ziering & Dick, 2015) are the lens through which institutional

and community stakeholders understand sexual violence in higher education, the campus discourse is one of institutional betrayal. Throughout the interviews for this study, faculty participants also discussed these negative examples as part of their own understanding. As such, they made choices to respond to students along a continuum. One set of participants spoke about the duties of being a responsible employee and how they enacted their institutional process seamlessly. Conversely, another set acknowledged what was being asked of them and made the conscious choice to work in opposition to their institution's policies. Throughout this dissertation I have referred to the first set of participants as agents of the institution. I then identify the second set as conscientious objectors: they made informed decisions to enact a response that they believed would increase the benefit to the student. Because of my conclusions that faculty operate from a framework of care to support students, both sets of participants--the agents, the conscientious objectors, and those who fall somewhere in between those polarities--have the same goals of providing support, though they may be enacted differently. Further, these roles also have consequences. The negative results of actions across the spectrum may adversely affect the student, the faculty member, or the institution. I suggest that institutional mistrust that results from public discourse and signals institutional betrayal actually maintains a disconnect between faculty and the university and has the potential to result in more institutional betrayal. In the next section, I delve into this concept, and specifically address the absence of faculty in both the literature and in campus-based violence prevention and response efforts, before examining faculty intentions versus impact when in an environment rife with mistrust.



### *The Absence of Faculty Voices Perpetuates Mistrust*

Throughout this dissertation, I have emphasized the importance of faculty involvement in creating a community of care on college campuses. While discourse literature focusing on the unique aspects of higher education is limited, the presence of faculty voices in that literature is even more narrow. I have argued that the approaches to studying faculty experiences on this issue have not done justice to their knowledge or experiences. For example, the 2017 Faculty Survey of Student Engagement (FSSE) found that two-thirds of faculty reported that they understood their institution's sexual assault policies and procedures. Studies that ask faculty to rate their knowledge of policies without verifying the knowledge, however, do not tell a complete story. My study, though substantially smaller in size and scope, found that half of the participants were not even able to accurately identify their obligations, and even fewer followed through with their actions when presented with a disclosure.

As a higher education practitioner by training, I found the gaps in knowledge and further discrepancies in action by the faculty participants unsurprising, despite what the FSSE found. As described in my prior experience working with faculty to address challenging student concerns combined with the participants' variation in the ways they talked about compelled disclosures and positional duties, it is clear that they are not provided the infrastructure to do what is being asked of them. Training, institutional engagement, and accountability should inform and be informed by faculty experiences and expertise. I will further discuss the specific practical implementation of this in the implications section, but it is clear that the faculty's lack of presence in addressing sexual violence contributes to increased tension between

the faculty and the institution, and thus increased tension between compliance and care.

In addition to faculty experiences related to sexual violence being absent from the literature, their presence in American discourse on sexual violence is also missing. Throughout the interviews, as particularly highlighted in Chapter IV, faculty distanced themselves from the institution. They critiqued institutional management of sexual assault at arm's length as if they were separate from "the administration." Discourse across context is important to consider. On the meso- and exosystem levels, through media such as *The Hunting Ground* (Ziering & Dick, 2015) and news coverage of campus controversies through media, a distinct message is being communicated: Institutions are harmful. If faculty are able to disassociate themselves from those harmful organizations, they can position themselves as separate and even as immune. For better or worse, due to that distancing, one consequence is that faculty are left out of the conversation altogether.

As I have discussed throughout this work, in many instances such as Duke and Michigan State, institutions did not act in good faith and harmed students. But what of faculty who are part of an institution, and who may even be administrators, yet who are also individuals? For the public, and as also indicated by the faculty participants, it can become difficult to identify when and how faculty administrators are differentiated as individual people as compared to being identified with "the institution." In other words, who is responsible and how is the accountability applied? Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory asks us to consider the nested contexts as having simultaneous impact on an individual's development. Ultimate

responsibility for choices rests with the individual; however, in the case of sexual violence in higher education, the institution is typically burdened with responsibility. The school's reputation becomes jeopardized resulting in lost alumni dollars and costly lawsuits, while individual employees of the institution who may have colluded receive a slap on the wrist. There are, of course, many circumstances where that slap on the wrist was termination. The highly public situations of violence which occurred over decades at elite academic institutions leave consumers remembering the name of the institution and on occasion the perpetrator, but rarely the names of the employees who did harm.

I am not arguing that faculty should be held responsible differently than staff or that they should be defamed in a public manner. I am noting, however, that when discourse frames the problematic behavior through an organizational or institutional lens, it becomes easier for faculty to distance themselves from the administration. As a result, they demonstrate independent judgment for responding to disclosures, taking actions that are frequently incongruent with policies and practices in ways that can continue to pose a risk to the students and the institution, and which can also perpetuate institutional betrayal. To begin to build trust, institutions must start with transparency and faculty must be willing to engage. I describe transparency as part of institutional courage (Freyd, 2018) further in the implications section.

### ***Consequences of Institutional Mistrust***

Institutions are made up of individuals, and thus there will be variance in how faculty responses to disclosures of sexual violence, just as is the case with other policies such as plagiarism and grading. Every disclosure of violence will be different

based on the incident of violence the student experienced, the relationship between the student and the faculty member, the driving factors for the disclosure, how the disclosure was responded to, and the characteristics of the individuals involved. These variables are further complicated by faculty's mistrust that the institution will act in support of students. As faculty or any institutional employee acts incongruently with campus policy, the discourse of institutional betrayal will be upheld. There are several consequences of this mistrust. The first is that faculty and institutions are continuously in an adversarial relationship at the expense of climate and thus community satisfaction. When faculty do not trust the institutional to manage misconduct in a manner that is just and caring, they take matters into their own hands. As a result of faculty straying from the policies, students are not guaranteed a consistent response and as a result may not be properly served.

As described in Chapters IV and V, several of the participants used or considered using "interrupt to inform" as a technique to halt a student's disclosure. Some faculty took this action because they did not believe that the culture of their institution would serve the students (exo- and mesosystem), as informed by their knowledge of victim blaming that is endemic of rape culture (macrosystem). Others used the tool as an opportunity to maintain the choice for the student to move forward with the disclosure predicated on the understanding that the faculty member would act on that information in accordance with institutional policy. As with other approaches, the outcome of student support appears to be the same, but the intentions are different.

In several cases, the participants projected their own beliefs that the student would not be served by policy and thus the student would have independently chosen to not continue with a disclosure. Faculty as instructors and advisors are positioned as employees and as such there is a power differential, in addition to the perceived expertise of faculty by students. When the students are interrupted, especially abruptly, students are not provided an opportunity to make the choice of how to proceed. If faculty believe that the institutional management of sexual misconduct was designed to support students, they may make a different decision. There are cases where faculty judgment is accurate, but if the administration and faculty do not make space to discuss those judgments, then their rogue actions can have significant consequences for the institution, the faculty and the students involved. In contrast, with greater trust-building between the institution and faculty, a result would be that faculty could acknowledge incidents of where students may or may not have been served by institutional processes and also individual actions. Faculty participants acknowledged that there are supportive mechanisms on campus; whether they served on hearing boards, helped a student file a complaint, or used a checklist to provide resources. It is important to engage in critical discussion of how these tools are used.

Faculty may be accurate in understanding ways in which institutions can be harmful. Yet, subscribing solely to a discourse of institutions as being problematic without first-hand knowledge or experience can also be dangerous. For instance, the consequences of an assertive application of “interrupt to inform” approaches are unknown. While faculty frequently stated they regularly made referrals to the counseling center, it is possible that the students did not follow through or know how

to access the resources needed to be successful in school, which can yield increased distress (Chuang et al., 2012; Campbell, 2006, Smith and Freyd, 2013) and lower grade point averages (Baker et al., 2016). Conversely, it is possible that students may feel dismissed by their instructors and advisors and proceed with a formal complaint to the institution or the Office for Civil Rights. Either circumstance poses a risk of institutional betrayal. Furthermore, with discomfort inherent in being a responsible employee, lack of role clarity, and concern for saying or doing the wrong thing, it would be easy for faculty to step away from addressing disclosures at all, yet their care for students prevents them from doing nothing. When faculty do not trust the institution, they choose to respond in accordance with their own values; however, doing so has the potential to result in additional, yet unintended harm to the student. The challenge is therefore that faculty who aim to prevent harm may unintentionally be causing harm.

While faculty have mistrust of the institution, responsible employee designations and compelled disclosure requirements are a result of institutional mistrust of faculty. Policies can provide a standard of care and response to students, while also maintaining institutional compliance with laws and regulations. As a result of the attention given to institutional compliance, colleges and universities over-applied responsible employee designations without data to support their effectiveness. Evidence of compelled disclosure policies contributing to student support or improved institutional compliance does not exist. Holland et al. (2018) argued for the need to measure the efficacy of compelled disclosure policies and responsible

employee designations, overall. They also challenge institutions to find more purposeful approaches supporting students while maintaining compliance.

While the study of policy effectiveness has been limited, several studies have assessed attitudes related to the policies. Research found that students, as well as faculty, are both knowledgeable of and agreeable to responsible employee designations, though the literature is inconsistent in describing the execution of those policies (e.g., Mancini et al., 2016, Newins et al., 2018). If students are aware of compelled disclosure duties, then the use of interruptive techniques is unnecessary. The measurement of the utility and efficacy of interruptive techniques is also needed while institutions continue to sort out how they will improve the management of their response to sexual violence, though timeliness is critical.

In the following section, I present and discuss specific implications of my work for policy development, practice and additional research. Indeed, the nexus of data informed policy and practice is the cornerstone of this project. All of these human processes can be improved, but if the constituents at the institution do not share experiences, provide feedback, and peel back the layers of a system rooted in rape culture, change cannot and will not happen. As a result, institutions will betray, students will be betrayed, and faculty will be in the middle.

### **Implications: Intersections of Policy and Practice**

At one institution where I worked, the community colloquially used the term “Title IX” to refer to the policies, procedures, supports and resources related to sexual misconduct. The office that received the notifications of a student’s experience with violence fell under that umbrella. The form that responsible employees were required

to submit upon disclosure was commonly called the “Title IX report form.” Issues of sexual misconduct were frequently referred to as “Title IX issues.” Title IX is not an office or a person, but laws. Policy and law are frequently muddled in the practical application of such regulations. I initially planned to separate the implications from this study into two separate categories, policy and practice, but the challenge in implementing policy through manageable applications is due to this false dualism. In order to think critically about the findings and their applications, policy and practice must be considered simultaneously and in an iterative way. In this section I address the implications of my research findings on trust building through engaging faculty in institutional management of sexual assault and the application of responsible employee guidance including the impact on training and assessment. I also discuss the importance of shared language as an extension of training, but also as a shift in how the campus community addresses sexual misconduct in an effort toward institutional courage.

### **Faculty Champions for Institutional Management of Sexual Violence**

I identified involving faculty in policy and training development as an antidote to the bi-directional mistrust that exists between them and their institutions. The institution, through research interests, shared governance representation, and student selection, should identify a group of faculty champions. Champions would be academic content experts, advocates for policy, and trauma-informed practitioners who come together to address various aspects of institutional management of sexual violence. Institutional compliance will always be a part of the Title IX process, but



the voices of the people who are actually responsible for responding to disclosures need to be part of the process and the training that supports it.

Both the findings of this study and the literature are supportive of creating faculty communities and coalitions around sexual violence, both among themselves and with the institution. Roles strain is associated with experiences of disclosures of sexual assault. Specifically, the literature found that as a result of receiving disclosures in the absence of community, faculty felt isolated and emotionally burdened (Hayes-Smith et al., 2010). In my study, I also found faculty grappling with how much care they were allowed to give. Creating a community among faculty that was contextualized by institutional transparency would allow space for faculty to come together to discuss these issues. They could build relationships among one another that were rooted in support, rather than judgment and questioning, rather than fear.

Another result of an approach that includes faculty voices in policy and practice is that potential to reduce the amount that faculty members distance themselves from the administration. Principles of academic freedom and the historical culture of faculty as activists will persist beyond these changes, but a full shift in institutional culture that is embedded in transparency and courage could shift this relational dynamic. Further research on faculty's attitudes about public institutional critique might offer some additional insights into the ways in which faculty feel empowered to critique the institution and how such attitudes and beliefs impact their behavior in regard to compliance with policies.

## **Application of Responsible Employee Guidance**

Faculty members' experiences with disclosures illustrate the disconnect between policy and practice. Half of the faculty participants identified their institution's required practices associated with being a responsible employee, but only a quarter of the total participants followed through with a compliant action. The gap between knowledge and action as demonstrated by the participants has important implications for the ways that responsible employee designations are mandated, how they are applied, and the efficacy of such implementation based on thoughtful assessment. In the example I presented at the start of this section about the colloquial use of "Title IX," I demonstrated the over-application of language that has often occurred in relation to sexual violence and harassment in education. The application of the responsible employee role is similar. The American Association of University Professors (AAUP, 2016) asserted that the broad designation of responsible employee status for mandated reports reflects the "disjuncture between OCR mandates and institutional realities which has pushed overzealous administrators to implement policies that are not required under Title IX and have harmful effects on the educational mission" (p. 84). The AAUP noted that such sweeping designations, among other related issues, pose a threat to academic freedom. The AAUP's interest is the preservation and advancement of faculty roles, whereas the University of Oregon's Office of Investigations and Civil Rights Compliance (OICRC, n.d.), with the help of institutional betrayal scholar Jennifer Freyd, has examined such policies from the perspective of student support with attention to compliance.

The sexual misconduct policies of the institutions where the participants were employed generally had the same general language about the duties of staff as responsible employees. The policies were rooted in OCR language to designate those who can be reasonably expected to remedy prohibited conduct. The depth and detail of those policies and their location all had variability, and in some instances, there were even discrepancies between a single institution's web pages. Whether the aim of the responsible employee designation is for institutional risk management, student support, or a combination of the two, in order for faculty to put policies into practice an institution must decide how it will proceed and write clear and consistent policy accordingly. Furthermore, in consultation with community stakeholders such as faculty, staff, students and general counsel, institutions must develop processes and training that relate directly to the policies as written.

I heard from faculty participants that they were not adequately trained to fulfill their responsible employee obligations and that their experiences were fairly typical among their peers. In the midst of conducting this study, one of the participating institutions launched a mandatory online training and an in-person training, both of which I participated in. Similar to the experience that humanities lecturer Lauren discussed, the university addressed the legal and regulatory mandates that undergird institutional processes (Clery, Title IX, VAWA) and they talked about gender violence and trauma from a philosophical lens. What was lacking was (and is) clarity on practical, role specific obligations.

Freyd and Smidt (2019) argued that training is a buzzword that dominates the prevention, intervention, and response discourse in higher education, but with little

intentionality. They echo Freyd's (2018) list of action steps that institutions can take to move from institutional betrayal to institutional courage, focusing on four actions: compliance, responding with sensitivity, making a leadership-driven commitment to reading and developing research on sexual trauma, and harnessing the power of the institution to address the issue of sexual assault. In a format that emphasizes education over compliance-based check-boxes, Freyd and Smidt (2019) suggested ongoing education rather than one-time interactions, skill-based training related to effective listening and response, the use of a harm reduction approach to policies, and institutional contributions to the advancement of knowledge in the field of violence. The purpose of this study was not to study the semantics of training versus education. Instead of focusing on what institutions choose to call their programs, I advocate that there should be required education in multiple formats driven by adult-learning theories that provide information to the faculty and staff about the scope of their responsibilities and the action steps required. Providing this education in an evidence-based manner is critical for faculty's self-efficacy, role clarity and institutional risk-management, all of which also benefit disclosing students.

The participants in this study communicated a desire for clarification of responsible employee obligations with specific examples of how to enact those obligations with students. The training that I participated in lacked a specific website where faculty can locate the required forms and the phone number of where to call with questions. Both online and in-person training lacked a human element which does not enable faculty to see themselves in the role when the situation arises for them to receive a disclosure and respond in a way that facilitates resources and

healing, rather than exacerbating harm (Campbell, 2008). Based on the faculty experiences with disclosures that this study's participants shared, I advocate that training content should address the multiple roles in which faculty may receive disclosures, including both instructional and advisory roles. Training should also include the various environments in which students may disclose, such as office hours, writing assignments, and during class with other students present. Faculty should also receive education about some of the factors that drive the disclosures so they can anticipate and appropriately respond to students in contexts where students are discussing sensitive topics, making accommodation requests, and/or seeking emotional support.

The final implication of the findings related to responsible employee designations is about assessment. There continues to be limited data about whether responsible employee designations and compelled disclosures are helpful to students (Holland et al., 2018). An institutional commitment to measuring the effectiveness of its policies and responding to that data is an act of transparency, and thus institutional courage (Freyd, 2014). I noted in the introductory chapter that in states such as Maryland, colleges and universities are required to conduct campus climate surveys related to sexual misconduct (Maryland HB 571, 2015). The state requires institutions to collect data from students, which is important, but once again faculty perspectives are missing. An expanded climate survey is a critical opportunity to collect data on the number of disclosures faculty receive, the extent to which faculty are knowledgeable about their roles, and qualitative responses that provide feedback and question aspects of the process. A comparison of faculty, staff and student data would

provide institutions with a more comprehensive view of their institutional climate, which could then translate into campus conversations, further advancing the ways institutional communities engage in violence prevention and response.

### **Developing a Shared Language**

Faculty participants in this study communicated an overall lack of education and training, tools to help them navigate a disclosure, and the lack of space to connect with other faculty who have experienced disclosures. Endemic to this gap in resources is the lack of shared language to talk about array of behaviors included in sexual violence. A key example is embedded in “reporting.” The use of the term report, in any format or tense, has proven to be problematic for the ways that faculty conceptualize their duties and also in the ways they frame the experience for students. As indicated by the faculty participants, attention to the words involved in sexual misconduct disclosures and responses are important. I want to avoid getting bogged down in semantics, but there is an inherently punitive dimension to the term “report” that is not present with a term such as “refer.” If compelled disclosure practices of responsible employees instead focused on the assets of information sharing, which I believe are the spirit of “reporting,” the emphasis of responding to students could shift. Instead of using techniques to stop students from disclosing or avoid their disclosure altogether, responses can focus on connecting students to supportive resources.

A solution that institutions can adopt to develop a shared language is a guidebook or set of scripts. The University of Oregon’s OICRC offers disclosure conversation guidance to their responsible employees (also known as designated

reporters). The office still uses the term report, but the emphasis is on responding with respect and kindness, listening to the students before making referrals, and attending to the needs of the survivor without judgment, paternalism, discrimination or retaliation. A primary theme evident in the experiences of the participants was variance. It is difficult to account for and capture all the variables that are present in a disclosure in a single guidebook, but having some tools that help faculty see themselves as part of a community that has a duty to respond to violence is essential.

Another implication that arises from my findings which can be addressed via institutional shared language is a sense of security for the faculty members. Faculty participants articulated concerns for how to do this aspect of their work, which can be addressed by training, but they also communicated a sense of concern about transparency. Faculty are concerned about the extent to which they are able to serve students and how much retaliation they might receive. Former Harvard Professor Kimberly Theidon is an example of a faculty member who took her reporting obligations seriously but faced harsh consequences. After advocating for students, she filed a report against Harvard with the Massachusetts Commission Against Discrimination when she believed harassment of and retaliation against victims had occurred. Despite receiving professional accolades and achievements, she believed her actions gave the institution cause to deny her tenure (Bombardieri, 2014). Because of Theidon's experiences and the experiences of many others who have faced problematic consequences from their institutions for student advocacy, faculty members have joined together in solidarity to develop Faculty Against Rape (FAR), "voluntary collective of faculty members across the U.S. standing strong with

survivor activists to end sexual violence on campus” (FAR, n.d.) Institutions with a commitment to transparency and accountability as demonstrated through shared language does not remove the need for groups like FAR, but more solidarity among faculty at individual institutions could exist if the collective experience was valued publicly.

As it relates to campus sexual assault, Bachar and Koss (2001) identified a gap between evidence-based practice and those programs, services, and policies that are implemented. Similarly, it is clear that there is a gap between what is being legislated nationally and locally and how those policies are actually enacted on campus. Kiss and Feeny White (2016) called attention to the need of campus administrators, faculty, and staff to adopt and engage an ethic of caring. Using Noddings’ (1992) framework for caring, there is a clear connection to education and demand for “responsibility for morality and fidelity linked to expression of true concern for individuals” (p. 105). Justice and care must take precedence to produce “people who engage successfully in caring relations through modeling, dialogue practice and confirmation” (p. 96). Compliance with the Clery Act is important, but the spirit and intention of the legislation is to foster safer campus communities (Kiss & Feeny White, 2016).

### **Implications for Future Research**

The findings of this study raise many more questions than answers. I have integrated opportunities for future research and assessment into the implications for policy and practice, but I have additional recommendations on ways to advance scholarship related to disclosures. Findings from this study touch upon several



dimensions of the ecological systems framework (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), including the power of identity, institutional responsibility, institutional care, and the presence and influence of rape culture.

### **The Power of Identity as a Factor of Disclosures**

Identity can serve as powerful tools to help facilitate disclosures or to avoid them. Identities influence the ways that faculty receive, experience, and respond to a disclosure. In every interview the participants talked about aspects of their identities and the ways that those identities informed how they perform their faculty duties. I did ask the participants to tell me about themselves and their roles at the institution, but explicit questions about the faculty members' identities were not part of the protocol. Sharing dimensions of their identities as individuals, as members of families, and members of departmental and disciplinary communities emerged naturally, and most importantly, consistently, throughout the interviews. It was evident from the participants' reflections and stories that their multiple roles vis-a-vis students have influenced their approaches to building instructional, advising, and mentoring relationships. Further, their conceptualizations of their own identities have been iterative and influenced by the social and relational landscapes that occur in those faculty and student dynamics. If I had included a second interview as part of the protocol, I would have gone back and explored further how faculty members' identities shaped their experiences before, during, and after disclosures. In addition to socially constructed identities such as race, gender, and so on, I am also interested in the ways that faculty appointments and correlated job security influence the

experience, how experiences of sexual assault survivorship impact faculty, and how the perspectives differ among individuals involved in the disclosure experience.

As I mentioned in Chapter III recruitment was difficult. Despite intentional recruitment from faculty organizations focused on underrepresented groups, faculty of color were a small fraction of the total participation of the study. The limited participation left little opportunity to make any generalizations about experiences based on race. I wondered if the lack of participation was related to the underrepresentation of faculty of color in full-time faculty roles or if my challenges were a result of something else happening with disclosure experiences. I think both are likely true. Future research should focus on the experiences of faculty of color as related to sexual misconduct in general and disclosure experiences could be an aspect of that. Additionally, the faculty of color in this study were exclusively from HBCUs. Intentional studies focusing on recruitment across school types could potentially compare the experiences of faculty of color at PWIs and HBCUs and extend to institutions that serve other marginalized and underrepresented populations.

I focused on full-time faculty because of a perception of shared experiences that were different from adjuncts and graduate students who have dual roles as students and possible instructors. There is value in further understanding the experiences of these groups as they have a lot of student contact. Students do not typically give attention to varying ranks of faculty. As Maxine, arts professor, so eloquently stated, “[Students] don’t know if they’re talking to the department chair who’s a full professor and has been here for thirty years or someone who is teaching one class that semester and will never teach it again. Like, no clue.” While rank and

employment status may not make a difference to the students, it is possible that there is a difference among faculty in disclosure experiences. Additionally, further research can include applicability of findings and comparative studies with staff and undergraduate students. Faculty are often lumped together with staff for research purposes (e.g. Newins et al., 2018, Newins & White, 2018), but because they have vastly different employment experiences, their experiences with disclosures should be examined separately and then compared.

I hypothesized that faculty members to whom students disclosed experiences of sexual assault may have higher rates of survivorship and that the identity of victimhood or survivorship would come up in interviews. Only one participant disclosed that she was a survivor of sexual assault. She discussed how her experience impacted the way she thinks about survivors' experiences on campus and the deep empathy she feels. She also believed her experience informed her response. For example, she had recently returned to work when she received one of the disclosures. She noted that she did not act in accordance with what she believed she was supposed to do as a responsible employee, but she had given that minimal thought or reflection until the interview. Further exploration of faculty who identify as survivors would be valuable to consider in terms of understanding the faculty experience in general, but also to identifying patterns of behaviors related to survivors who support other survivors.

This study was conducted to understand the experiences of faculty as told by faculty. The student experiences, while not captured in this project, continue to be essential to study. It is possible that students experienced the disclosures that the

faculty described in vastly different ways. There are some studies about student survivors' experiences with institutional processes and several forthcoming, but a specific focus on students' experiences disclosing to faculty would be important to learn from just as much as the faculty experiences, especially since it may reflect back a different reality than the faculty recall on their own.

### **Institutional Duty and Care**

A question has stayed with me since I identified care as a key dimension to the ways that faculty experience and respond to student disclosures of sexual assault. Are institutions capable of care? The concept behind institutional betrayal is betrayal trauma, which "occurs when the people or institutions on which a person depends for survival significantly violate that person's trust or well-being" (Freyd, 2008, p. 76). This sense of dependence is based on the institution's ability to inspire pride and sense of family among students. Institutional betrayal theory implies that this sense of trust and connection to the institution keeps students from bringing forward cases of sexual misconduct out of implicit concern for betraying an institution they have been groomed to adore. If institutions can facilitate this deep level of dependence, is it possible for them to reverse the narrative and provide care and foster well-being? Furthermore, if institutions can care, what would that care look like? How would the characteristics of a caring institution differ from those which are not labeled caring? Institutional courage (Freyd, 2014) is a component of institutional care that could aid in the study of this work. An example of institutional courage is the acceptance that rape happens at institutions; individual institutions would publicly name that truth and then have a specific plan to address that on their campuses. There is, of course, risk

that goes along with this step toward courage, but the courage to take these bold steps could have an enormous impact on rape culture.

### **Rape Culture and Rape Myth Acceptance**

Rape culture “refers to multiple pervasive issues that allow rape and sexual assault to be excused, legitimized and viewed as inevitable” (White & Smith, 2004, p. 174). An example of rape culture is the acceptance of rape myths, which are defined by Lonsway and Fitzgerald (1994) as “attitudes and beliefs that are generally false but are widely and persistently held, and that serve to deny and justify male sexual aggression against women” (p. 134). Rape myth acceptance perpetuates rape supportive cultures in a variety of ways. The updated Illinois Rape Myth Acceptance scale (IRMA, Payne et al., 1999, McMahon & Farmer, 2011) is an empirically validated tool which assesses subtle rape myths such as implying that women’s behaviors prompted a sexual assault or that those who report sexual assault use it as a tool to get revenge on the perpetrator rather than seeking justice. I used the updated IRMA as an analytic tool to code the interviews. I analyzed each transcript looking for language, comments and subtle cues that would validate the statements of the updated IRMA, but the faculty participants communicated almost no acceptance of rape myths.

There is robust literature on rape myth acceptance and because of the sheer quantity of articles on the subject matter, I thought it would be a highly prevalent attitude expressed by university employees. As such, I thought that rape myths would substantially inform how faculty responded to individual disclosures, and also how they conceptualized their duties in relation to policies that require faculty to respond.

For example, I thought that a faculty member who received a disclosure might blame the student for being intoxicated at the time of assault or that they would dismiss a claim that a student was assaulted by minimizing behavior that could not be proven.

On the contrary, acceptance of rape myths was not part of the faculty disclosure experience narratives. There are two reasons why RMA was not part of their experiences; participant demand characteristics and higher education cultures. Social desirability bias, as a participant demand characteristic (McMahon & Farmer, 2011), is when “participants may respond by exhibiting behaviors designed to confirm the hypothesis, thereby serving as a good subject” (Nichols & Maner, 2008, p. 152). It is possible that the participants avoided making negative or disparaging comments about the situation to appear as the good subject. On the other hand, institutional culture change may account for the absence of RMA. Recall that Benjamin, tenured arts professor, discussed the shifts he experienced from a “free-wheeling” institution where sexual relations transcended institutional role to an environment to a more litigious and sexually conservative culture. The absence of RMA in the interviews does not mean that scholars should not attend to RMA and the structures that contribute to a rape culture. Instead of looking at individual narratives, research should consider the impact of campus advocacy and social change resulted from the “#MeToo” movement.

### **Conclusion**

Faculty experience disclosures of sexual assault and intimate partner violence from students through their knowledge, beliefs, and perceptions as understood through contextual framing of sexual assault. Faculty perceive themselves either

working as an extension of the institution or in active opposition to what they perceive as the betraying and problematic mismanagement of sexual violence by institutions. Through their recursive interactions with students in instructional and advisory roles, faculty iteratively form their understanding of institutional culture of violence and related policies and processes. Ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) situates the complex interplay of individual and institutional relationships and social and cultural values as interdependent. As a result of understanding faculty experiences through this systematic theoretical lens, interventions must span ecological domains in order to provide students with a caring response, while maintaining compliance within a challenging regulatory climate.

When researching the phenomenon of sexual assault in higher education, it is essential to consider the interplay and simultaneity of policy and practice which are contextualized in the socio-political landscape of American education. The purpose of this study was to gain deeper insight into campus sexual assault by looking specifically at faculty experiences with students' disclosures and was achieved by using an emergent design for data collection and analysis. There was variation in what the participants believed they were required to do to respond to student disclosures in their roles as faculty members. As demonstrated by the experiences and reflections of the faculty, there was not just variation among individual faculty members, but even within individuals when they responded to more than one disclosure. As they received their disclosures, faculty considered their relationships with the student who was making the disclosure, the circumstances of the violence, and their personal beliefs about what could and should happen to inform their

response. The shared experience of responding to disclosures was rooted in care for the student and care for their positions as faculty members in imperfect institutions.

Faculty members cannot address issues of campus sexual violence independently. Their obligations as responsible employees are handed down from powerful institutions which have a duty to train faculty to be prepared to thoughtfully respond to students, but also to be in compliance. Not providing training and well-developed policies will result in high costs to the institution in the form of reputation, lawsuits and the “collateral damage from sexual assault [that] extends to staff and employees” (Crosset, 2016, pp. 74-75). Building competency and capacity through training and increased attention to facilitating trust between the institution and stakeholders will yield a culture of care and compliance that fulfills the academic mission of an institution of higher education.



## Appendix A: Sample Recruitment Email

Dear Dr. *(insert name)*,

My name is Jacki Stone, and I am a doctoral candidate in the Language, Literacy and Culture program here at UMBC. I am writing to ask for your participation in a 60-90-minute interview. I am currently conducting research about how University Faculty respond when students share experiences of sexual assault or sexual misconduct. I am interested in speaking to faculty members who have had at least one experience where a student shared aspects of their own sexual assault/misconduct. That sharing can have occurred in person, via email, in a writing assignment, etc. I am reaching out to you because of your faculty appointment and other campus engagement.

If you have had an interaction where a student shared sexual assault/misconduct experience with you and are interested in participating in an interview, please let me know some dates and times that are best for you. I would be glad to come to a location of your choice. The only stipulation is that it is somewhere reasonably quiet and private, given the nature of the conversation. I can also reserve space for us on campus if that is preferable. I will be audio recording our conversation and will cover that further in the informed consent process when we meet.

If you are unable to participate but know someone who might be an asset to the research, please forward those names to me at your first opportunity.

Thank you for your consideration!

Best,  
Jacki Stone  
Personal cell phone: 443-679-3933  
Ph.D. Candidate  
Language, Literacy and Culture  
University of Maryland Baltimore County  
IRB#: Y18BC27202

Mentors:  
Dr. Bambi Chapin  
Dr. Christine Mallinson

## Appendix B: Informed Consent for Participation

### **Whom to Contact about this study:**

Principal Investigator: Jaclyn Stone  
Department: Language, Literacy and Culture  
Telephone Number: 443-679-3933

University Faculty as Respondents to Sexual Assault Disclosures

### **I. INTRODUCTION/PURPOSE:**

I am being asked to participate in a research study. The purpose of this study is to examine the ways in which university faculty experience student reports of sexual misconduct. This study will explore attitudes, beliefs, and reflections of experiences with students and the university. Interviews will address relationships between faculty and the college or university in which they work, as well as faculty and student relationships, in the context of reports of sexual misconduct. I am being asked to volunteer because I am a faculty member. My involvement in this study will begin when I agree to participate and will continue for no more than 6 months to allow for the potential of post-interview follow up. About 30 persons will be invited to participate.

### **PROCEDURES:**

As a participant in this study, I will be asked to participate in an in-person interview. I will be asked to come to a location that I or the investigator select, which allows for in-person conversation and privacy. If an in-person interview is impossible, a video session on a secure platform such as Google hangouts or Ezuce will be used. My participation in this interview will last for approximately 60-90 minutes. Interviews will be recorded on an audio recording device by the investigator. The investigator may take brief notes during the interview. Notes and recording will be transcribed without any identifying information. The interview is designed to be delivered in a single visit, however, additional contact may be requested for clarification and additional understanding.

### **III. RISKS AND BENEFITS:**

I have been informed that participation in this study may involve the following risks: emotional discomfort resulting from recollection of past personal experiences of sexual misconduct. Emotional responses may include but are not limited to shame, doubt, and confusion and could occur during the interview or at a later time. I can pause or stop participation in the interview at any time. I can also seek support from the provided list of resources. I have been informed that my participation in this research will not benefit me personally, but the investigator will use the data for doctoral dissertation research, future scholarship, and the possibility of positive community changes.

#### **IV. CONFIDENTIALITY:**

Any information learned and collected from this study in which I might be identified will remain confidential and will be disclosed ONLY with my knowledge. The investigator will keep my personal information confidential. To protect my confidentiality a pseudonym will be assigned to me that will be used in all analyses. Participant data will be recorded on a digital device and transferred to a secure, password-protected Box folder to which only the principal investigator has access. Once transferred to Box, the original digital interview file will be deleted from the recording device. The recordings will be transcribed by the principal investigator only.

Only the investigator and members of the research team will have access to transcriptions. If information learned from this study is published, I will not be identified by name. By signing this form, however, I allow the research study investigator to make my records available to the University of Maryland Baltimore County (UMBC) Institutional Review Board (IRB) and regulatory agencies as required to do so by law.

Consenting to participate in this research also indicates my agreement that all information collected from me individually may be used by this researcher in such a fashion that my personal identity will be protected. Such use may include presentations at scientific or professional meetings, publishing in scientific journals, sharing anonymized information with other researchers for checking the accuracy of study findings and for future approved research that has the potential for improving human knowledge.

Although my confidentiality in this study is protected, confidentiality may not be absolute or perfect. If researchers believe that someone is in imminent danger, they may need to break confidentiality to access assistance. If the researchers have reasonable cause to believe or suspect that a child has been abused or neglected or if researchers observe any child being subjected to conditions that would reasonably result in abuse or neglect, they are required by Maryland State law and University System of Maryland policy to file a report with the UMBC Campus Police department or Baltimore County department of social services and the UMBC President's Designee for the USM Policy on the Reporting of Suspected Child Abuse and Neglect. Similarly, if I report child abuse that has happened in the past, the interviewer may also need to file a report. The interviewer will inform me if such a report may need to be made.

UMBC policy states that certain research-based disclosures shall not be considered notice to the University of Prohibited Conduct for the purpose of triggering its obligation to investigate any particular incident(s). However, in appropriate cases, researchers are required to provide information to all subjects of a study about their Title IX rights and about available University and community resources and support services. As a participant in this study, I will receive a resource guide that includes Title IX rights for faculty and information about how to report a disclosure of sexual

misconduct to the Title IX coordinator. If a disclosure is made by a participant, the investigator will ask if additional institution resources or follow up is desired and act accordingly.

**V. COMPENSATION/COSTS:**

My participation in this study will involve no cost to me. My participation will not be compensated.

**VI. CONTACTS AND QUESTIONS:**

The principal investigator(s), Jaclyn Stone, under the mentorship of Dr. Bambi Chapin, has offered to and has answered any and all questions regarding my participation in this research study. If I have any further questions, I can contact Jaclyn Stone at [j.stone@umbc.edu](mailto:j.stone@umbc.edu) or 443-679-3933.

If I have any questions about my rights as a participant in this research study, I can contact the Office of Research Protections and Compliance at (410) 455-2737 or [compliance@umbc.edu](mailto:compliance@umbc.edu).

**VII. VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION**

I have been informed that my participation in this research study is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw or discontinue participation at any time. I have been informed that data collected for this study will be retained by the investigator. If I choose to withdraw from the study, the investigator and I will have discussed my withdrawal and the investigator may use my information up to the time I decide to withdraw.

*I will be given a copy of this consent form to keep.*

**VIII. SIGNATURE FOR CONSENT**

The above-named investigator has answered my questions and I agree to be a research participant in this study.

Participant's Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_  
Participant's Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_  
Investigator's Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix C: Participant Information Form

### Faculty Information Form

All responses will be kept confidential, and your identity will remain private. Your responses to these questions are optional but will be extremely helpful in the research. If you choose not to answer a particular question, you may leave it blank. Thank you!

**Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Age:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Gender (please check one):**

\_\_\_\_\_ Male

\_\_\_\_\_ Female

\_\_\_\_\_ Non-Binary

Custom (please describe): \_\_\_\_\_

**Do you identify as transgender (please check one)?**

\_\_\_\_\_ Yes

\_\_\_\_\_ No

**How do you identify racially/ethnically? (Please check all that apply)**

\_\_\_\_\_ Native American

\_\_\_\_\_ Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander

\_\_\_\_\_ Asian

\_\_\_\_\_ African American/Black

\_\_\_\_\_ Hispanic/Latino/Chicano

\_\_\_\_\_ White/Caucasian

\_\_\_\_\_ Other

**What is your professional appointment? (Please select one)**

\_\_\_\_\_ Lecturer

\_\_\_\_\_ Assistant Professor

\_\_\_\_\_ Associate Professor

\_\_\_\_\_ Professor

**How long have you worked at your current college or university? (Please select one)**

\_\_\_\_\_ Less than 1 year

\_\_\_\_\_ 1-3 years

\_\_\_\_\_ 4-6 years

\_\_\_\_\_ 7-9 years

\_\_\_\_\_ 10 or more years

## Appendix D: Sample Interview Protocol

1. Tell me about yourself and your roles at the institution?
2. How have those roles changed over time?
3. What are some challenges you experience as a faculty member?
4. What have your experiences been with students sharing experiences [disclosures] of sexual assault? Relationship violence?
5. Please share more about a particular experience that stands out to you.
  - a. What was the context/circumstances in which that student shared their experience with assault/violence with you?
  - b. What did you think when the student first told you?
  - c. What were you feeling when the student first shared?
  - d. What actions did you take?
  - e. What, if anything, did you do to follow up with the student(s) afterwards?
6. What did you learn from that experience?
  - a. What would you do the same?
  - b. How might you act differently in the future?
7. What is it about that particular experience stand out to you?
8. How did your experience with this particular disclosure reflect what you believe are your institutional responsibilities?
9. What do you believe are your responsibilities to the university related to sexual assault?
10. How have you learned about what the university expects of you in responding to student disclosures of sexual assault?
11. In what ways do you experience those expectations as challenging (concerning/confusing/worrisome)?
12. In what ways do you experience those expectations as supportive?
13. How prepared do you feel to respond to future reports?
14. How do university expectations fit into your personal beliefs about how you should respond to students?
15. What advice would you give to someone else responding to a student report?
16. Is there anything we haven't talked about that you'd like to?
17. Is there anything we've talked about that you would like to go back to and say more about?

**Appendix E: Summary of Institutional Responsible Employee Definitions and Scope**

<b>Institution</b>	<b>Definition of Responsible Employee</b>	<b>Scope of Responsible Employee Duties</b>
A	<p>“Responsible Employee” includes all University administrators, supervisors in non-confidential roles, faculty members, campus police, coaches, athletic trainers, resident assistants, and non-confidential first responders.</p>	<p>All Responsible Employees are required to report incidents of Sexual Misconduct to the Title IX Coordinator. The Responsible Employee must report all relevant details of the incident: Name of the victim, nature of incident, accused, date/time/location, any other details within 24 hours of receiving report</p>
B	<p>Responsible employees are any University employee who: 1) has the authority to take action to redress sexual misconduct; 2) has been given the duty of reporting incidents of sexual misconduct to the University's Title IX Coordinator or other appropriate University designee; or 3) an individual could reasonably believe has this authority or duty. The following individuals at the University are designated as responsible employees: Title IX Coordinator; Deputy Title IX Coordinator; University Administrators; Deans; Department Chairs; Campus Security Authorities; Athletic Coaches; Student Affairs Personnel; Residence Life Personnel; Campus Police; Faculty Members; and all employees serving in a supervisory capacity.</p>	<p>Any information regarding an incident of sexual misconduct that is shared with a responsible employee is required to be reported to the University's Title IX Coordinator.</p>

<p>C</p>	<p>Responsible Employee includes any employee who (1) has the authority to take action regarding Sexual Misconduct; (2) is an employee who has been given the duty of reporting Sexual Misconduct; or (3) is someone another individual could reasonably believe has this authority or duty. Responsible Employees include: the Title IX Coordinator and any Title IX Team members, all institution administrators, all non-confidential employees in their supervisory roles, all faculty, all athletic coaches, institution law enforcement, residential directors and advisors and all other non-confidential first responders. Responsible employees will safeguard an individual’s privacy, but are required by the university to share information regarding Sexual Misconduct with the Title IX Coordinator or a member of the Title IX team in recognition of the understanding that centralized reporting is an important tool to address, end and prevent Sexual Misconduct. Similarly, all students, and employees not designated as Responsible Employees, while not required, are strongly encouraged to report any information to the Title IX Coordinator or team member. Confidential Resources will not share information about an individual (including whether that individual has received services) without the individual’s express written permission unless there is</p>	<p>A Responsible Employee must promptly notify the Title IX Coordinator of any report or complaint of Sexual Misconduct brought to their attention including campus law enforcement. The Title IX Coordinator works collaboratively with the reporting entity making every effort to operate with discretion and maintain the privacy of the individual involved. Prompt reporting is encouraged. Persons are encouraged to report Sexual Misconduct promptly to the Title IX Coordinator in order to maximize the University’s ability to obtain evidence, identify potential witnesses and conduct a thorough, prompt and impartial investigation. No time limits are imposed for the reporting Sexual Misconduct, however a delay in reporting may result in loss of relevant evidence and witness testimony, thus impairing the University’s ability to respond and take appropriate action.</p>
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	<p>continuing threat of serious violence to the patient/client or to others or there is a legal obligation to reveal such information. This policy contains a listing of on and off campus available confidential resources.</p>	
D	<p>A Responsible Employee is defined as including any university community member who (1) has the authority to take action regarding Prohibited Conduct covered under this Policy; (2) is an employee who has been given the duty of reporting/referring Prohibited Conduct under this Policy; or (3) is someone another community member could reasonably believe has this authority or duty. Responsible Employees are Non-Confidential which means they will safeguard the university community member's privacy, however they are required to immediately share the known details of an incident of Prohibited Conduct (date, time, location, names of parties involved, description of the incident, etc.), to the Title IX Coordinator and other need-to-know University officials. Responsible Employees will try to ensure that any community member making a disclosure to a Responsible Employee, understands the Responsible Employee's reporting/referral obligations. Those identified below have been designated as</p>	<p>Required to immediately share the known details of an incident of Prohibited Conduct (date, time, location, names of parties involved, description of the incident, etc.), to the Title IX Coordinator and other need-to-know University officials. Responsible Employees will try to ensure that any community member making a disclosure to a Responsible Employee, understands the Responsible Employee's reporting/referral obligations.</p>
E	<p>A responsible employee is defined as any employee who has the authority to redress sexual</p>	<p>Contact the Title IX coordinator (online, phone or email).</p>

	<p>misconduct, has the duty to report sexual misconduct to the Title IX coordinator, or are employees whom a student reasonably believes has authority or duty, and is not a confidential employee. Responsible employees must promptly report all known relevant information to the Title IX coordinator, including the name of the complainant, respondent and any witnesses and any other relevant facts, including, date, time location of misconduct.</p>	
F	<p>Institution F has determined that all faculty, staff and administrators who are not serving in a privileged professional capacity are “responsible employees.”</p>	<p>Any university “responsible employee” informed of an allegation of gender-based misconduct involving students or other members of the Institution F community is expected to file a report with the Title IX Coordinator and/or one of the Deputy Coordinators. Certain university officials who are serving in a privileged professional capacity (e.g., counselors, doctors, nurses, the sexual violence prevention, response and education coordinator and clergy acting in a clerical capacity) are not bound by this expectation, except as required by law or if information is disclosed outside of noted privileged function.</p>

## Appendix F: Participant Matrix

<b>Participant Pseudonym</b>	<b>Deidentified Institution</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Race/Ethnicity</b>	<b>Appointment</b>	<b>Current Tenure</b>	<b>Discipline</b>
Alexandra	F	56	Female	White/Caucasian	Lecturer	10+	Social Sciences
Benjamin	F	74	Male	White/Caucasian	Associate Professor	10+	Arts
Carl	F	67	Male	White/Caucasian	Associate Professor	10+	Arts
Danielle	F	41	Female	White/Caucasian	Lecturer	10+	STEM
Evelyn	F	53	Female	White/Caucasian	Associate Professor	10+	STEM
Fiona	F	43	Female	White/Caucasian	Associate Professor	10+	Interdisciplinary
Gregory	F	66	Male	White/Caucasian	Professor of Practice	10+	STEM
Helen	F	43	Female	White/Caucasian	Lecturer	7-9	Humanities
Ilene	F	43	Female	White/Caucasian	Assistant Professor	4-6	Interdisciplinary
Jeanette	F	41	Female	White/Caucasian	Associate Professor	7-9	Social Sciences
Karen	F	44	Female	White/Caucasian	Lecturer	7-9	Human Services
Lauren	E	43	Female	White/Caucasian	Lecturer	10+	Social Sciences
Maxine	C	40	Female	White/Caucasian	Associate Professor	7-9	Arts
Naomi	D	37	Female	White/Caucasian	Assistant Professor	1-3	Social Sciences
Olivia	B	48	Female	Black	Assistant professor	1-3	Human Services
Peter	A	70	Male	Black	Associate Professor	4-6	Human Services

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