"It Probably Hurt More Than It Helped": LGBTQ Survivors of Sexual Assault and their Experience with the College Title IX Reporting Process

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Abstract: *Sexual assault in the college context disproportionately impacts lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) students. Title IX law requires that college campuses have a mechanism in place to respond to reports of sexual assault, and professional social workers are often embedded throughout this process as advocates on-campus and in the community. This study explores the experience and perceptions of LGBTQ survivors with the Title IX reporting process. A sample of 409 LGBTQ survivors of college sexual assault were recruited via social media. Results of bivariate analysis indicate that LGBTQ survivors who reported had less trust in college officials and a more negative perception of the reporting climate than those who did not. Further thematic analysis suggests that students who reported faced issues related to mandatory reporting policies and accountability in sanctioning. To improve the experience of survivors with reporting sexual assault to college officials, social workers can advocate for transparency at the institutional level and less stringent mandatory reporting policies.*

Keywords: *Sexual assault, LGBTQ college students, Title IX, institutional betrayal, institutional courage*

Sexual assault on college campuses is a persistent problem (Cantor et al., 2020; Fedina et al., 2018; Krebs et al., 2016) that impacts the well-being (Carey et al., 2018) and academic success (Jordan et al., 2014) of students. While early research focused almost exclusively on the experience of college women without assessing for sexual orientation, more recent studies have found that lesbian, gay, bisexual, and queer/questioning (LGBQ) students are between two (Greathouse et al., 2018) and three times (Coulter et al., 2017) as likely to experience sexual assault in college compared to heterosexual students. College students who identify as transgender are also significantly more likely to experience sexual assault than their cisgender peers (Griner et al., 2017; Krebs et al., 2016). LGBTQ students who experience sexual assault in the college context are also more likely to experience negative mental health outcomes (Graham et al., 2019) and negative academic outcomes after an assault than cisgender, heterosexual students (Kammer-Kerwick et al., 2019).

Title IX of the Education Amendment Act of 1972 has been the primary policy tool used to address these educational inequities. Despite changes in political party leadership, the United States Department of Education (US DOE) has consistently communicated, through both Title IX guidance and regulations, that sexual assault in college impedes students' ability to access their education free of discrimination (US DOE, 2020; US Office of Civil Rights, 2011). The White House Task Force to Protect Students from Sexual Assault (2014) also reinforced that how colleges and universities respond to sexual assault is an important part of providing a safe learning environment for all students. For several decades higher education institutions have been required to have a procedure in place, separate from the criminal justice system, to respond to reports of sexual assault among

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students (US DOE, 1997). Recent Title IX regulations further specified required aspects of the college response including the provision of supportive measures for reporting parties, live adjudication hearings with optional cross-examination, and the ability to address some reports through informal measures (US DOE, 2020).

A variety of staff and administrators in higher education who work directly with the application of Title IX. This includes investigators, Title IX Coordinators, student conduct officials, hearing advisors, and victim/survivor advocates. Victim/survivor advocates assist student survivors through the navigation of reporting options and supportive services, and provide emotional support (Association of Title IX Coordinators, 2015). Professionals in this advocacy role are often trained social workers (Brubaker, 2019) who may be embedded in the campus environment or contracted from a community agency. They are uniquely positioned to not only assist individuals who have experienced sexual assault, but also to advocate for policy change at the institutional level.

While colleges are required to have these reporting mechanisms in place, few students actually use them. Between 4% (Fisher et al., 2003) and 12% (Krebs et al., 2016) of students who experience sexual assault in college report the incident to a campus official. Research has found little difference in the reporting rates between the LGBTQ community and cisgender, heterosexual students (Eisenberg et al., 2017; Landgenderfer-Magruder et al., 2016). However, there is some evidence that compared to heterosexual students, LGB students are more likely to perceive that their university responds poorly to incidents of sexual assault (Smidt et al., 2019; Smith et al., 2016). While there is emerging research on general student perceptions of university reporting systems, less is known regarding the experience of students who do report to campus officials. This study seeks to fill this gap through a focus on the following research questions: 1. Is there a difference in perceptions of the sexual assault reporting climate between LGBTQ survivors who make a formal report of sexual assault to college officials and those who do not? 2. Is there a difference in perceptions of trust in campus support systems between LGBTQ survivors who make a formal report of sexual assault to college officials and those who do not? 3. How do LGBTQ college student survivors who do report the incident to college officials experience the Title IX reporting process? and 4. How do LGBTQ survivors of sexual assault in the college context believe the Title IX reporting process can be improved?

Theoretical Framework: Institutional Betrayal

The concept of institutional betrayal provides a path to consider questions related to the relationship between individual survivors and institutions when sexual assault occurs. The phenomenon is understood to take place when an institution such as a school, the military, or a faith-based center "…deliberately or unknowingly causes harm to an individual who trusts or depends on that institution to keep them safe and treat them fairly…" (Stader & Williams-Cunningham, 2017, p. 198). Institutional betrayal has been primarily used to explain reactions to sexual assault victimization on college campuses. It is theorized that colleges can create a sense of betrayal through both overt actions such as punishing people who report sexual assault, or through perceived failures to act, such as not preventing sexual assault that occurs (Smith & Freyd, 2014). Studies have found that

survivors who experience a sense of institutional betrayal report significantly increased anxiety, dissociation, and trauma-specific sexual symptoms, compared to those who did not (Smith & Freyd, 2013). Additionally, Smidt and colleagues (2019) found that LGB college student survivors experience higher levels of institutional betrayal after a sexual assault compared to heterosexual students suggesting that sexual orientation plays a role in survivors' relationship to and perception of their campus. The concept of institutional betrayal was used to develop the research questions for this study and as a guiding touchstone throughout the analysis.

Literature Review

Reporting Sexual Assault

In the aftermath of experiencing sexual assault, college student survivors have two primary reporting options: law enforcement and college Title IX officials. Emerging research has explored student awareness of college-based reporting options after an assault. In a small study of LGBQ college students, Schulze and Perkins (2017) found that 62% of participants were aware of at least one on-campus service for survivors of sexual assault, but only 3.7% identified the Title IX Coordinator as a possible service. In a single qualitative study of sexual and gender-diverse college students, researchers found that students had limited knowledge of services available to survivors (Hackman et al., 2020). However, in one of the largest data sets of campus-based sexual assault, Cantor et al. (2020) identified an upward trend from 2015 to 2019 in student awareness of the on-campus reporting process and procedures.

Despite this increased awareness of reporting, actual reports of sexual assault remain low in the U.S. Studies of college students have consistently found low rates of reporting sexual assault to police (Krebs et al., 2007; Sabina & Ho, 2014). College survivors are slightly more likely to report sexual assault to campus officials than to police (Fisher et al., 2003). In one study of sexual misconduct and campus climate, approximately 20% of survivors contacted campus officials about Title IX violations in general (i.e., sexual harassment, intimate partner violence, stalking, and sexual assault; Cantor et al., 2020). Krebs et al. (2016) found that only 2.7% of students who experienced sexual battery and 7% of students who experienced rape reported the incident to a college official. Studies have not found a significant difference in the rate of reporting sexual assault to campus authorities between heterosexual and LGBTQ college students (Eisenberg et al., 2017; Richardson et al., 2015).

Perceptions of the Reporting Process

Perceptions of the reporting process may influence formal help-seeking intentions (Mushonga et al., 2021). LGBTQ adults in the U.S. express concerns about systemic discrimination and bias within reporting agencies (Gentlewarrior & Fountain, 2009), and fear of being "outed" by authorities, which could lead to negative implications in other aspects of their lives (Cruz, 2003; Mendez, 1996; Merrill & Wolfe, 2000). In community-based studies of sexual and gender minority adults, participants perceived police officers

to have a lack of sensitivity, competence, and education in working with the LGBTQ community (Nadal et al., 2015; Todahl et al., 2009).

In the college context, LGBTQ students are more likely to perceive that their college responds inadequately to reports of sexual assault than their cisgender, heterosexual peers (Mennicke et al., 2019; Seabrook et al., 2018; Smith et al., 2016). LGBTQ survivors of sexual assault are also more likely to perceive the response from their university as negative and harmful (Mushonga et al., 2021; Smidt et al., 2019). Echoing the results of community-based studies, sexual and gender minority students express a strong lack of confidence in college administrators' ability to adequately respond to sexual assault in the LGBTQ community (Hackman et al, 2020; Ollen et al., 2016).

Experience With the Reporting Process

While there is a small but growing body of research focused on perceptions of reporting sexual assault to college officials, few studies explore the experience of individuals who have reported. It is possible that this gap in the research is due to the extremely low rate of reporting sexual assault to college officials. However, there is some evidence of reporting experiences from data presented in community-based studies. Amongst LGBQ adolescents who reported sexual assault to law enforcement, half of the survivors described the experience as blaming of the victim (Koon-Magnin & Schulze, 2016). Additionally, only half of bisexual and lesbian women who reported sexual assault to police found them to be helpful (Long et al., 2007). In a qualitative study of transgender women, participants were discriminated against by law enforcement when reporting sexual violence (Hereth, 2021). These studies suggest that some gender and sexual minority survivors of sexual assault have a negative experience reporting to law enforcement. More research is needed to understand the experience of reporting to both law enforcement and college officials.

Method

Sample and Procedures

LGBTQ college students are an under-studied population in the college sexual assault literature and are considered hard-to-reach (Ellard-Gray et al., 2015). On-line surveys that utilize social media as a recruitment tool have successfully attained samples of LGBTQ persons (Edwards & Sylaska, 2013; Murchison et al., 2017; Sterzing et al., 2018). For this study, an on-line, anonymous survey was administered through social media to collect data. After receiving approval by the University of Connecticut Institutional Review Board (Protocol # X19-085), recruitment efforts were conducted. Data were collected from July 2019 through mid-September 2019. Participants were recruited through several means: sponsored social media posts, social media posts shared by relevant organizations to closed and/or open groups, and individual social media users sharing the recruitment information with their peers. Ultimately, participants were recruited from the following social media platforms: Facebook (55%, n = 213), Instagram (22%, n = 87), Reddit (20%, n = 78), and Twitter (3%, n = 11). In order to deter participant misuse, no incentive was provided for participation.

Eligibility criteria for the study included the following: at least eighteen years of age, currently attending a four-year college or university located in the United States, a current undergraduate student, identify as a sexual minority, and experienced sexual assault while attending their current college. A total of 409 individuals ultimately qualified to participate in the study.

The sample of participants who had experienced sexual assault attended colleges throughout the four major regions in the United States: Northeast (21%, n = 87), Midwest (26%, n = 107), South (25%, n = 101), and West (27%, n = 109). Approximately half of participants attended a public institution (58%, n = 234) and the remaining attended a private school (42%, n = 167). Slightly over half of participants lived on-campus (53%, n = 216) and just under half lived either at home or at an off-campus apartment or house (47%, n = 193). First-year college students were excluded from participation as recruitment was primarily conducted during the summer of 2019. Students entering their fourth year (42%, n = 171) represented the largest academic class, followed by students entering their third year (32%, n = 130), second year (20%, n = 82), and fifth year (6%, n = 26) in college. See Table 1 for further sample demographics.

Table 1. *Demographic Characteristics (n = 409)*

Characteristic	n (%)
Gender Identity (n = 407)	
Female	210 (51.3%)
Male	72 (17.6%)
Transgender	30 (7.4%)
Genderqueer/gender non-conforming	35 (8.6%)
Non-binary	55 (13.4%)
Another	7 (1.7%)
Sexual Orientation (n = 409)	
Bisexual	183 (44.7%)
Gay	76 (18.6%)
Lesbian	69 (16.9%)
Questioning	13 (3.2%)
Another	9 (2.2%)
Asexual	14 (3.4%)
Queer	23 (5.6%)
Pansexual	21 (5.1%)
Race (n = 403)	
People of Color	49 (12%)
White	354 (86.6%)
Ethnicity (n = 403)	
Hispanic	43 (10.5%)
Not Hispanic	364 (89%)
Age (n = 409)	
18	16 (3.9%)
19	79 (19.4%)
20	124 (30.4%)
21	118 (28.9%)
22+	71 (17.4%)

Measures

The following measures were used in this study:

Formal Report of Sexual Assault

Participants were asked several questions regarding reporting sexual assault. First, participants were asked if they "told anyone" about the assault, and could answer "yes", "no", or "prefer not to respond". Participants who answered "yes" were asked who they told about the incident and provided a series of responses that encompassed their personal and campus life. Participants could mark multiple responses. Respondents were then asked whether they made a formal report using campus procedures. Participants had the options of, "yes", "no" or "unsure". Participants who marked "yes" were considered to have made a report. Participants who marked "unsure" were excluded from the study. Participants who responded "yes" were then asked who they formally reported the incident to at their college. Response options included, "Title IX Coordinator", "Student Conduct Official", "Police Officer/Safety Officer", "Faculty Member", "Other College Administrator" and "Other". These questions were adapted from the University of New Hampshire Unwanted Sexual Experience Survey (Banyard et al., 2012).

Perpetrator Affiliation

Participants were asked two questions regarding the perpetrator's affiliation with their college. First, they were asked whether the person (or any of the people) was a student at their college. Next, they were asked whether the person (or any of the people) was an employee, staff, or faculty member of their college. Responses for both questions included "yes," and "no" (Banyard et al., 2012).

Trust in Campus Support Systems (TCSS)

Perceptions of participant trust in campus officials to manage a crisis and keep students safe was measured using the TCSS Scale (Sulkowski, 2011). Example items include "If a crisis happened on my campus, officials would handle it well" and "My campus does enough to protect the safety of students." The six-item measure had responses ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree" on a five-point Likert scale. In a pilot study with college students, the scale has been found to have strong validity (Sulkowski, 2011). The Cronbach's alpha coefficient for this study was .79.

Sexual Assault Reporting Climate (SARC)

Participant perceptions regarding the reporting process were measured through their score on a revised Perceptions of Leadership, Policies and Reporting Scale (White House Task Force, 2014). Twelve questions were asked regarding how likely it was that campus authorities, other students, and alleged perpetrators would respond in a fair and sensitive manner if someone were to report a sexual assault to a campus authority. Example items include "Campus officials would support the person making the report" and "Campus

officials would take corrective action against the offender." Response options for each statement ranged from "very likely" to "not at all likely" on a four-point Likert Scale. In the current study, the Cronbach's alpha coefficient was 0.87.

Gender Identity and Sexual Orientation

The participants were asked to identify their gender identity. Responses included "female," "male," "transgender female," "transgender male," "genderqueer," "gender non-conforming," and "other (please specify)." As more than three people identified as non-binary in the "other" category, this was added as an additional category. The participants were also asked about their sexual orientation. Responses included "gay," "lesbian," "bisexual," "questioning," and "other (please specify)." Answers in "other" were coded by the researcher and new categories were created when more than three participants identified the same category. The new categories were "asexual," "queer," and "pansexual."

Race and Ethnicity

Two questions were used to operationalize race and ethnicity. First, participants were asked what their race is (as they define it). Responses included "American Indian or Alaskan Native," "Asian," "Black or African American," "Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander," and "White." Participants were able to mark all categories that apply. Second, participants were asked about their ethnicity. Responses included "Hispanic or Latino," and "Not Hispanic or Latino."

Student Status and Housing

Participants were also asked about demographics related to their student status. As recruitment for the study was conducted during the summer, questions were developed to best understand their relationship to their campus. First, students were asked about what best described their living situation during the past academic year. Responses included "on-campus", "off-campus (apartment, sorority/fraternity house)," and "off-campus (at home)." Second, students were asked what their academic status would be in the forthcoming academic year. Responses included "first year undergraduate student," "second year undergraduate student," "third year undergraduate student," "fourth year undergraduate student," and "other." Participants who selected "other" were able to write in answers which were primarily "fifth year undergraduate student" and coded in to a new category.

Perceptions of Title IX Reporting

Two open-ended questions addressing Title IX reporting were included in this study. First, all participants were asked, "What recommendations do you have for college officials that might improve the reporting process for LGBTQ survivors of sexual assault?" Next, all participants who indicated that they reported a sexual assault to campus officials were asked, "What else would you like to share with us about your experience of reporting sexual assault to college officials?" Participants could either skip open-ended questions or write an answer.

Analysis Plan

First, categorical and continuous variables were assessed using descriptive statistics. Next, bivariate analysis was conducted through independent sample t-tests to explore the relationship between independent variables (trust in campus support systems, sexual assault reporting climate) and the dependent variable (reporting to college officials). Missing data were handled using pairwise deletion during all statistical analyses. All statistical analyses were conducted using SPSS 22. Responses to open ended questions were reviewed by the researcher using an open-coding technique (Saldaña, 2013) and then assessed for specific themes (Padgett, 2016).

Results

Descriptive Statistics

An analysis of descriptive statistics was conducted. Participants were asked questions about the status of the person who assaulted them. Sixty-two percent (n = 243) said that the person who assaulted them was also a student at their college at the time of the assault, while 28%, (n = 113) said they were not. Additionally, 10.5% of participants said that the person who assaulted them was affiliated with the college as an employee, staff, or faculty member at the time of the assault, while the majority of participants (79%, n = 322) indicated that they were not.

Approximately 36% (n = 145) of participants told no one, including family and friends, about the sexual assault, while 60% (n = 242) did disclose to at least one other person. Amongst all student survivors, 10% (n = 41) formally reported the incident to their college. More than half of participants who made a formal report did so by communicating with the Title IX Coordinator at their college (56%, n = 22). This was followed by reporting to another college administrator (21%, n = 8), a faculty member (12.8%, n = 5), and a safety officer (10%, n = 4).

Initial analyses of continuous variables indicates that, amongst all student survivors, there was a moderate level of trust in campus support systems (M =13.1, SD = 4). Also, on average participants reported a moderately strong perception that their campus would respond appropriately to reports of sexual assault by students (M = 30.5, SD = 7.14).

Bivariate Analyses

Independent-sample t-tests were conducted to compare trust in campus support systems and perceptions of the sexual assault reporting climate for participants who made a formal report to campus officials and those who did not. There was a significant difference in the perceptions of the sexual assault reporting climate for participants who made a formal report (M = 27.4, SD = 7.78) and those who did not (M = 31.09, SD = 6.91; t (226) =2.99, p = .003, two-tailed). The magnitude of the difference in the means (mean difference = 3.69, 95% CI: 1.26 to 6.12) was moderate (*Cohen's d* = .5). There was also a significant difference in the trust in campus support systems scores for those who made a formal report (M = 11.63, SD = 3.78) and those who did not (M = 13.05, SD = 3.98; t (234)

= 2.09, p = .037, two tailed). However, the magnitude of the difference in the means (mean difference = 1.42, 95% CI: .08 to 2.75) was between small and moderate (Cohen's d = .36).

Table 2. *Reporting to College Officials by Trust in College Officials and SARC*

	Reported to College Officials? *M* (*SD*)				
	Reported	Did Not Report	t(234)	p	Cohen's d
Trust in college officials (*n*=230)	11.6 (3.78)	13.1 (3.98)	2.09	.037	.36
Sexual assault response climate (SARC) (*n*=228)	27.4 (7.78)	31.1 (6.91)	2.99	.003	.50

Open-Ended Results

After completing descriptive and bi-variate analyses, two open-ended questions were explored to further understand the experience of reporting sexual assault to college officials for sexual minority survivors. First, all student survivors who reported sexual assault to campus officials (n = 41) were asked to respond to the question: "What else would you like to share with us about your experience reporting sexual assault to college officials?" More than half of these participants responded to the question (n = 26). Overall, the open-ended written answers expressed a highly negative experience with the Title IX reporting process. This is exemplified by one participant's overall assessment of their experience, "It probably hurt more than it helped, as I reported it and received little to no help after. Having them know but not do anything was hard. It made me doubt that I was even being taken seriously."

While participants who reported sexual assault to college officials indicated a negative experience, it was often noted that the negative experience was not with Title IX officials but rather with student conduct and law enforcement officials. At many campuses in the U.S, student conduct campus officials will actually investigate and adjudicate sexual assault reports when a current student is accused of violating Title IX policy, while Title IX officials provide oversight for the process. Several themes emerged from these participant experiences: heightened risk after reporting, limited communication from officials during the reporting process, and a lack of accountability for offenders of sexual assault on campus.

Participants wrote about feeling more unsafe after reporting to college officials. In every instance, this heightened risk was connected by the participants to being required to make a formal report due to mandatory reporting policies at their college. For example, one participant wrote, "[I was] forced to report, despite asking not to out of fear for my own safety. The situation got so severe after reporting that I wanted to transfer schools." Another participant explained further, "I did not have a choice to formally report as an RA found out, and it was the worst thing that had ever happened to me. Going through the Title IX process scarred me and they did absolutely nothing to help me."

Multiple participants also provided detailed accounts of how limited communication during the Title IX process, and the amount of time the process took, impacted them negatively. In the words of one participant:

My assault happened on the very last day of classes. Because I first told a professor who I already had a super close relationship with… and trusted a lot. He helped me secure incompletes for my classes and made the formal report. Title IX was very accommodating and kind. The college has not done anything since I left the campus three days after it happened. I have no idea what they're doing internally and feel like I am being pushed into making a criminal investigation of it which I do not want to do.

Participants also discussed the amount of time the process took and how it negatively affected them. For example, "The Title IX office was phenomenal. The conduct office was what made my life miserable. They prolonged the hearing for over 6 months all while I had to live with the person who assaulted me." Another participant expressed the following, "When I reported, I had to sit down with male police officers to describe every detail of my incident which was not very comfortable. I also had a month-long delay between reporting and my on-campus trial date, so I spent a month constantly looking over my shoulder and being afraid. It was my first semester on campus too."

Notably, 14 participants wrote explicitly and at length about how their campus failed to hold their offender accountable, most often by finding the offender responsible for sexual assault but giving them an outcome perceived by participants as too lenient. One participant wrote, "The school found my assailant guilty of rape formally after an investigation but they did not punish him in any serious way. He had to go to therapy for the rest of the semester and that's it." Another student, who attended a religious school with a very small program for their academic major wrote, "They did nothing to keep the person out of my classes even after I 'won' the case. They weren't punished at all and were still in all my classes."

Several participants discussed how they used the appeal process to push back on the sanctions that they perceived as lenient.

Even though there are immediate protective measures, the situation didn't completely resolve until after I went forward with charges (via Title IX Officer) and appealed the original sanction for being too lenient. He was originally placed on probation, in addition to a no contact order and room change. He was banned from living on campus after I appealed it.

The appeal process for these students helped them continue to pursue their education in a safe environment but also contributed to their feelings of blame and mistrust of college officials.

There was no way to get around the fact that reporting forced me to face memories that I didn't want to or couldn't face/remember. That didn't help but it wasn't the school's fault. However, the initial result was very invalidating. They gave my attacker a 5-page essay and academic probation as sanction for finding him guilty of raping me. I protested that and the sanctions were increased, but it was still invalidating that some people thought it wasn't that bad. Also, (again, not the school's fault) nothing would feel like justice. No revenge or punishment would

*feel adequate or make me feel any better or fix the situation or undo what he had
done.*

Next, all student survivors in the sample (n = 409) were asked the following question:
"what recommendations do you have for college officials that might improve the reporting
process for LGBTQ survivors of sexual assault?" Approximately 50% of participants
provided a written answer to this question (n = 206). A number of participants (n = 61)
wrote explicitly about the need for their college or university to include the experience of
sexual minority, as well as transgender and gender non-conforming college students with
sexual assault in campus-wide trainings. These students indicated that sexual assault in the
LGBTQ community is not addressed by their college, creating an appearance that sexual
assault only occurs between cisgender, heterosexual individuals. For example, one student
wrote in response to this question regarding improving the reporting process, "Stop
ignoring us. At the beginning of college, they talk to us about consent. Straight consent.
We're always left out." Other participants further recommend, "Bring LGBTQ people into
the conversation so that we feel confident enough to report incidents of sexual assault
without fear of discrimination." Another participant wrote, "I think most materials focus
on women as the victims of sexual assault prevention. I think it's important that colleges
include LGBTQ people in their materials, and also emphasize that sexual assault does not
determine someone's sexual orientation (e.g., if a man is assaulted by another man, that
does not mean that he is gay or reflect on his orientation in any way)."

Second, students (n = 28) also identified that acknowledging that there are LGBTQ
students on campus, and providing support to these students, would improve the reporting
process for survivors of sexual assault. A written answer that exemplifies these responses
was, "Create a culture where it is okay to be out in all ways." Another participant
recommended that administrators should, "Yell to the mountains that our experiences are
valid and that we have a safe place to report. They're scared of promoting that they have
services specifically for LGBTQ+ students because we are located in a conservative area.
Their reputation matters more than our safety." Underlying these responses is a perception
that when LGBTQ students are not welcomed on campus, and when their experience of
sexual assault is not part of the narrative of sexual assault communicated by campus
officials, reports of sexual assault are also unwelcome.

Many participants (n = 45) also suggested that to improve the reporting process for
LGBTQ survivors, colleges should provide resources for these students, in particular a
mental health counselor who had experience with both trauma and the LGBTQ community.
As one participant explained,

> *Offer counseling and therapy for issues other than homesickness. At [my school]
> if you have a history of mental illness you're generally not considered fit for
> treatment thru the university. This is extra bad bc through the university is often
> the only way it would be affordable to the masses.*

Another student eloquently wrote, "Give us a place to turn to. The amount of times I was
asked to be silent and had no one to talk to destroyed me. Give us some support in the
meantime while we wait. I don't think it's asking for much to want someone to be with you
through the trauma of the reporting and investigation process." Participants also repeatedly

recommended hiring LGBTQ staff in both counseling and Title IX areas. For example, one student wrote, "have more lgbtq representing officials so that we feel more comfortable confiding and reporting. It's a bit hard to say anything when a majority of college officials are cisgendered and straight/straight passing."

And finally, several students (n = 20) recommended that colleges provide additional training on how LGBTQ identities intersect with gender and racial identities for staff who interface with the Title IX process. One participant explained that this suggestion came out of barriers that they faced with the reporting process, "Educate yourself on transgender people because LGBT doesn't just stand for gay men. I was misgendered my entire interaction with reporting my rape and may have been more likely to file a formal report with the school if I had been shown more respect and consideration." Another student explained, "I recommend that college officials do their research on identities. No one wants to report to someone who does not understand intersectionality, especially as many who get assaulted are also minorities and people of color."

Discussion

Findings from this study expand the college sexual assault knowledge base through a focus on the experience of LGBTQ student survivors who have made a formal report of sexual assault to college officials. Notably, only 10% (n = 41) of survivors in this sample made a formal report to their college, consistent with previous research regarding low rates of reporting (Cantor et al., 2020; Krebs et al., 2007). LGBTQ survivors who had reported sexual assault to college officials had less trust in college officials and a less positive perception of the reporting climate than LGBTQ survivors who had not reported. This suggests that the act of reporting to campus officials is associated with negative perceptions. Open-ended responses from survivors who did and did not report provided a more nuanced understanding of the relationship between reporting experiences and perceptions. Overall, LGBTQ survivors who reported sexual assault to college officials indicated having a negative experience with the process.

When survivors of sexual assault report the incident to their college and then receive a response that is not supportive of their well-being, survivors may experience institutional betrayal (Smith & Freyd, 2014). Institutional betrayal has been found to exasperate post-traumatic stress symptoms experienced after an assault (Smith & Freyd, 2013). Additionally, sexual minority identified college students may experience institutional betrayal at higher rates (Smidt et al., 2019). Freyd (2018) has conceptualized a path for college campuses to address sexual assault through *institutional courage* rather than institutional betrayal, which involves transparency, education for leadership, and sensitive responses to disclosures. The experiences highlighted by LGBTQ survivors in this study inform the experience on the ground of students who proceed through the Title IX process, and how policies and practices can be improved through institutional courage.

LGBTQ survivors in this study who had reported an incident of sexual assault to college officials expressed concerns about both being forced to report due to mandatory reporting policies and limited accountability for offenders. Mandatory reporting has been an oft-discussed policy area in higher education for the last ten years. The now-rescinded

Dear Colleague Letter (Office of Civil Rights, 2011) guided colleges to include a wide swath of faculty, staff, and student workers as "responsible employees" who must report any information regarding possible sexual violence to campus officials, who in turn must respond to the allegation. Since then, a great majority of colleges and universities identified all employees, except for those with unique confidential roles such as campus clergy, medical professionals and counselors, as responsible employees (Holland et al., 2018). Mandatory reporting policies have proved controversial. Faculty members who teach on college campuses have been outspoken critics (Flaherty, 2015; Moody-Adams, 2015). A primary concern of this population is that mandatory reporting can change the relationship between faculty and students, limiting trust and openness, which could impact the learning experience (Weiss & Lasky, 2017). However, college students generally believe that such policies would increase their personal likelihood of reporting sexual assault and that they prevent colleges from covering up sexual assaults (Mancini et al., 2016). The general public also tends to support mandatory reporting policies as a way to keep campuses transparent and safe (Mancini et al., 2019). Regardless of these perceptions, new Title IX regulations do not prohibit campuses from including all employees as "responsible employees" but they do clarify that colleges are only officially "on-notice" regarding an allegation of sexual violence if the Title IX Coordinator or other such authority is notified (US DOE, 2020).

LGBTQ survivors who were forced to report sexual assault due to mandatory reporting policies have indicated that this process often made them feel less safe than before reporting. Students who were forced to report perceived the process as harmful to their well-being and their academics. The institutional response to these disclosures of sexual assault lacked sensitivity at the institutional level. In order to address sexual assault with institutional courage, campuses should allow student survivors to maintain control during the reporting process (Freyd, 2018). While there is limited research exploring the experience of students who report sexual assault to college officials, it is possible that the experiences of the students in this study may also apply to students outside of the LGBTQ community. Social workers who are involved in the Title IX process as advocates should consider how to balance ensuring that sexual assault is addressed in their community and supporting the reporting decisions and safety of survivors. To this end, social workers can advocate for policies which allow survivors to disclose to trusted faculty and staff on campus without being then forced to pursue a grievance process or criminal action. College officials should also consider providing well-trained, confidential resources for students who would like to access accommodations and/or support services without making a formal report. These confidential resources may provide survivors with further resources to support their safety and well-being.

LGBTQ survivors who reported sexual assault to college officials also indicated that a major issue they faced was the lack of accountability for the accused student, even when the university found them in violation of Title IX policies. Multiple survivors noted that it was only through further appeals via the Title IX process that they were able to find the accountability that they thought justified. While the appeal process helped these survivors, it also created further steps in a cumbersome process. In using an institutional courage frame, colleges can address such issues through increased transparency (Freyd, 2018).

Social workers involved in Title IX should encourage college officials to provide de-identified information about reports and sanctions, which can be shared in aggregate form with the public, so that campus faculty, staff, and students can provide feedback on the consistency and proportionality of sanctions.

LGBTQ students who experienced sexual assault in college and did not make a report to college officials also shared information about the reporting process. These students overwhelmingly identified that for campuses to improve the Title IX reporting process, they needed to create campuses that are inclusive of LGBTQ students. This feedback reinforces a long line of inquiry that has established the importance of inclusive campus climates on the well-being and academic success of LGBTQ college students (Rankin, 1998, 2003, 2005; Rankin et al., 2010). In particular, survivors indicated that campuses should include more information about LGBTQ student experiences in required Title IX training, provide mental health support for LGBTQ survivors, and provide more training for Title IX officials on the experience of LGBTQ college students.

Freyd and Smidt (2019) delineate the difference between training on sexual assault and education on the matter. They assert that for institutional leadership to address sexual assault with institutional courage they should use research and on-going inquiry on sexual violence, rather than a brief annual training module. Social workers who interface with the Title IX process at any level should seek out education on the experience of LGBTQ students, sexual assault in the LGBTQ community, and the campus climate. Institutions should also be thoughtful about hiring mental health counselors and Title IX staff who have expertise in supporting LGBTQ students who have experienced trauma, especially since the prevalence of sexual assault in the LGBTQ community is disproportionately high on college campuses (Cantor et al., 2020; Krebs et al., 2016).

As in all research, this study does have limitations. First, as participants were recruited via social media, it is not possible to identify a sampling frame. Therefore, this research cannot be generalized to the wider population of LGBTQ college students. Second, the sample for this study lacks racial and ethnic diversity. Future research should use sampling strategies that reach a more diverse population of LGBTQ college students. And finally, this study used a cross-sectional research design that only recorded participants' perceptions and experiences at one point in time. While associations between variables can be identified, causality cannot be determined.

Participants in this study shared information about their experiences with and perceptions of the sexual assault reporting process on college campuses. Findings suggest that LGBTQ survivors of sexual assault in the college context often have a negative experience with this process, which impacts their trust in college officials and perceptions of the reporting process. LGBTQ survivors who did report indicate that they faced issues related to mandatory reporting policies and accountability in sanctions. LGBTQ survivors also stated that the reporting process can be improved through more inclusivity for LGBTQ students. Institutional courage (Freyd, 2018) shines a light on how social workers involved in the Title IX process can work to establish reporting processes that are closer to the spirit of Title IX law through transparency and education.

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