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Willingness to Report Sexual Victimization Through Formal and Informal Routes and the Correlation to Victim's Race, Sexual Orientation, and Gender Identity

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WILLINGNESS TO REPORT SEXUAL VICTIMIZATION THROUGH FORMAL AND INFORMAL ROUTES AND THE CORRELATION TO VICTIM'S RACE, SEXUAL ORIENTATION, AND GENDER IDENTITY

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ABSTRACT

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The purpose of this study is to understand the impact, if any, that holding marginalized identities has on the willingness to report sexual victimization to law enforcement, Title IX offices, and informal support routes. This study examines the various factors that may influence one's willingness to report sexual victimization through both formal and informal routes. Formal routes include law enforcement and Title IX, while informal routes involve the self-disclosure of victimization to families, friends, or romantic partners. This research specifically explores how racial and ethnic identities, sexual orientation, and gender identity can influence an individual's perceived willingness to report sexual victimization that they may experience. Four hypotheses were analyzed.

H1 Individuals with marginalized identities will have a lower perceived willingness to report sexual victimization to law enforcement.

H2 Individuals with marginalized identities will have a lower perceived willingness to report sexual victimization to their university's Title IX office.

H3 Individuals identifying as male will have a lower perceived willingness to report sexual victimization through either of the formal routes.

H4 Individuals, regardless of their identities, will have a higher perceived willingness to disclose sexual victimization to their friends and family, compared to their perceived willingness to report through formal routes.

Using an anonymous online survey, this study analyzed survey data to identify trends and underlying reasons for these relationships. A sample was collected from undergraduate students attending the University of Northern Colorado. Approximately 80 professors received the survey and were asked the distribute the survey to undergraduate students enrolled in their courses. The final sample included 73 respondents. The previous literature revealed significant disparities in reporting rates among different demographic groups highlighting the impact of systemic biases and social support networks. However, in this study, findings revealed little significance between these identities and perceived willingness to report, based on a survey ranking trust in these different reporting entities. Students were generally more willing to report to Title IX over law enforcement, and more willing to disclose sexual victimization to friends over family members. Of the different identities studied, the connection between willingness to report and sexual orientation did appear to be the most consistent with previous literature, which supported the claim that non-heterosexual and non-cisgendered individuals would be less willing to report sexual victimization.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

The far too common experience of sexual victimization was brought into a communal perspective with the popularity of the #MeToo movement. According the to Me Too website (2020), the movement, originally started by sexual assault survivor and activist Tarana Burke in 2006, encourages victims of sexual assault to speak out about their experiences and demand better care and resources for victims. The impact of this movement gave victims strength in numbers and changed the landscape of reporting. The accusations of sexual assault against the now-convicted Hollywood director Harvey Weinstein served as the catalyst for the movement in October 2017 (Tuerkheimer, 2019). Conversations surrounding sexual assault were building prior to this when former president Donald Trump was accused of sexual assault, sexual harassment, and rape by 26 women during the 2016 presidential election, prior to his success in the election against the first ever female presidential nominee, Hillary Clinton (Relman, 2023). Media coverage soon began to focus on the sexual misconduct of other powerful men in Hollywood, including the likes of comedian Louis C. K. and "Today" host Matt Lauer. *The New York Times* reported that 201 powerful men lost jobs or major roles in the wake of #MeToo (Carlsen et al., 2018). This impact, however, came with severe backlash. Due to the nature of allegations against a sitting president, the movement had become political. The large amount of media attention the movement received contributed to a growing belief that victims were falsifying their experiences for attention or as a convenient excuse to get a disliked co-worker fired (Brown, 2022).

Sexual assault is an increasingly common violent crime. Among the most impacted groups include women, college-aged students, women of color, queer people, and transgendered individuals (Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network, 2023b). While individuals of any identity can experience this form of victimization, it's quite peculiar that sexual violence is so common among some of the most historically marginalized and discriminated identities.

Sexual violence has a unique impact on marginalized identities. Not only are these individuals more likely to experience victimization, but there are additional barriers to reporting. Individuals with intersecting marginalized identities experience this at heightened levels. Most victims feel incredibly dissatisfied with police presence and the criminal justice process following a report (Carbone-Lopez et al., 2016). Thus, future victims often feel discouraged to report out of the belief that the criminal justice system won't help and, especially for these marginalized identities, out of fear of experiencing repeat traumatization or continued harassment from actors within the system.

How does holding marginalized identities impact one's willingness to report sexual victimization? The purpose of this study is to understand the impact, if any, that holding marginalized identities has on the willingness to report sexual victimization to law enforcement, Title IX offices, and informal support routes. This study specifically focuses on racial identity, where the marginalized identity is any that is not white; sexual orientation, where the marginalized identity is any that is not heterosexual or straight; and gender identity, where the marginalized identity is any that is not cisgendered. The study was conducted using a Likert scale survey to measure this willingness. The survey is broken out into multiple sections to measure willingness to report to law enforcement, willingness to report to Title IX, and willingness to disclose their victimization to informal support routes, such as family or friends.

Responses will be compared to the participant's disclosed identities to discover possible connections between reporting victimization and holding marginalized identities.

Rape is defined by the Federal Bureau of Investigation as "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" (FBI, 2013) while sexual assault is more broadly defined as sexual contact or behavior without consent of the victim including rape, attempted rape, fondling, groping, or forcing the victim to perform sexual acts (Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network, 2023a). The term sexual victimization will be used throughout the study and encompasses both definitions of sexual assault and rape.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Sexual Victimization and Marginalized Identities

Much is known already about the connections between marginalized identities and sexual victimization. The identities participants will be asked to disclose include racial or ethnic identity, gender identity, and sexual orientation. Race is the social construct that describes the categorization of humans based on physical and social qualities and is most often categorized in existing data as Black, White, Hispanic, or other. Gender identity is the personal sense of one's own gender identity, whether male, female, mixed, or non-binary. Mixed gender identities mean someone could identify as a combination of identities, such as male and female, or female and non-binary. Non-binary denotes that an individual does not identify within the binary of gender, that is being either male or female. This is different from sex, which is a biological assignment given at birth. Sex and gender identity can be different from one another. Sexual orientation, in a broad sense, defines the gender identity individuals are attracted to, whether it is the same as or different from their own gender identity. While many may be familiar with this concept in terms of gay, lesbian, or bisexual, there are countless other sexual orientations. Sexual orientation is the broad term commonly used but in actuality there are two terms: sexual orientation and romantic orientation. Sexual orientation describes who a person is sexually attracted to, while romantic orientation describes who a person is romantically attracted to. For simplicity of this study, sexual orientation is used in the broad sense, and romantic orientation is assumed to be the same, as it is rare for the two to be distinguished differently in studies or data.

In an analysis of several studies, research has consistently found that sexual and gender minorities experienced higher levels of sexual victimization compared to heterosexual and cisgender individuals (Abreu et al., 2023; Armstrong et al., 2018; Eisenberg et al., 2021; Kammer-Kerwick et al., 2021; Mennicke et al., 2022; Smith et al., 2022; Tillewein et al., 2023). Further, LGBTQ+ individuals who are more "visibly out" and are easy to "identify" are at an even higher risk for experiencing sexual victimization (Ussher et al., 2022). Among LGBTQ+ individuals, females experience sexual victimization at higher rates than LGBTQ+ men, similar to rates among non-LGBTQ+ victims (Langenderfer-Magruder et al., 2016). In fact, 87.3% of sexual minority women reported experiencing sexual victimization at some point in their life (Blosnich & Goldbach, 2020), while transgender individuals also experienced sexual victimization at disproportionately high rates (Du Mont et al., 2019). Among college students, 21% of transgender and gender-queer students experience sexual assault, compared to 18% of cisgendered females and 4% of cisgendered males (Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network, 2023b). Other studies have indicated that transgender individuals experience sexual victimization at rates up to 66% (Office for Victims of Crimes, 2014) or 47% (James et al., 2016). One study found that transgender males, who were assigned female at birth (AFAB) experience sexual victimization at higher rates than transgender females, who were assigned male at birth (AMAB) (Ussher et al., 2022). Other studies disagree, finding that transgender women experience higher rates of victimization and violence than all other groups in the broader LGBTQ+ community (Human Rights Campaign Foundation, 2023; Ussher et al., 2022) and that transgender women of color are at the highest risk (Ussher et al., 2022). Research has indicated this is likely due to the intersection of discrimination on racial, gender, and sexuality identities. The severity of this can

be demonstrated by the fact that in 2000, transgender women made up 8.6% of the LGBTQ+ population but accounted for 44% of all murder victims (Ussher et al., 2022).

The majority of violence impacting LGBTQ+ individuals is perpetrated by individuals external to the community (Bedera & Nordmeyer, 2020) which furthers the idea that sexual victimization against queer individuals may be rooted in homophobia and transphobia. In one study, queer sexual assault victims noted that their heterosexual and cisgendered male perpetrators knew of their sexual orientation. These perpetrators invoked the victim's sexual identity leading up to and during the assault (Bedera & Nordmeyer, 2020).

Compulsory heterosexuality is the concept that women are assumed to be heterosexual and positioned as "gatekeepers" for men's normalized aggressive sexual behavior (Bedera & Nordmeyer, 2020). Women in general experience sexual victimization at rates much higher than men. 90% of all rape victims are female. Based on national reports, one in every six women has been the victim of attempted or completed rape, compared to one in every 33 men (Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network, 2023b). This translates to roughly 17% of women and 3% of men that have reported attempted or completed rape. In the lens of queer victimization, queer women are viewed as sexually available to men and labeled as promiscuous, untrustworthy, sluts, sex objects, or as potential participants for threesomes. Lesbian women reported sexual assaults where they were perceived as a sexual challenge for their perpetrator (Bedera & Nordmeyer, 2020). This fetishization and stereotypical view of queer women may contribute to their higher levels of victimization.

Studies have highlighted that black women experience sexual victimization at a rate disproportionately high to white women, and that Native American women are also at an elevated risk of experiencing sexual assault (Aloisi, 2023; Armstrong et al., 2018). Nationally,

data has agreed that, on average, 20% of black women will experience rape in their lifetime, and 34% of American Indian and Alaska Native women will be raped in their lifetime (Aloisi, 2023). The intersection of these identities puts potential victims at an even higher risk. The overlap of sexist, homophobic, transphobic, and racist ideologies contribute to these higher rates of victimization. These ideologies are also heavily rooted in historical contexts about race and gender. Many scholars and advocates argue that sexual victimization is all about domination and the assertion of power over another. Historically, sexual violence was used by whites to dominate other races. Rape was used as a weapon during the colonization of Native American tribes, and slave owners used rape to subjugate enslaved black women (Armstrong et al., 2018). The sexual abuse of Black women was treated as a right of inheritance by white men well into the 1950s (Washington, 2001).

Another explanation for the higher rates of victimization among Black women specifically is rooted in long-held stereotypes surrounding the sexuality and persona of Black women. Stereotypes have portrayed Black women as having increased promiscuity, utilizing sexual manipulation, and perpetuating the idea that Black women provoke sexual assault (Franklin & Garza, 2021). These stereotypes and biases have negatively influenced public perceptions of the experiences of Black women and downplayed the impacts of their victimization (Franklin & Garza, 2021).

Minority stress theory (Katz-Wise & Hyde, 2012; I. H. Meyer, 2003) is a theoretical model explaining the unique mental health disparities that sexual and gender queer individuals experience. The theory argues that queer individuals are at an exceeded risk for excess mental distress. This theory is based, in part, on several studies that agree queer individuals experience prejudice and violence at higher rates. While this theory originated to discuss queer identities,

scholars have expanded its use to racial minorities as well. Consistent with minority stress theory, there is a lower likelihood for victims with marginalized identities to report or use any formal resources (Mennicke et al., 2022). Victims who hold a minority identity face additional stressors and mental health challenges and may face future discrimination if they report to official functions like law enforcement.

There are several different hypotheses for the cause of sexual victimization and why marginalized groups may experience it at higher rates (Blosnich & Goldbach, 2020). The risky spaces hypothesis is used to specifically explain alcohol-related sexual assault. This hypothesis postulates that minorities, including women, are particularly vulnerable in marginal spaces, such as bars, and their risk of sexual assault in these risky spaces is enhanced. The disclosure hypothesis suggests that minorities and women are accustomed to divulging personal information about themselves. This could include disclosing their status as a sexual or gender minority, or relationship status. This disclosure of information may increase the risk that a perpetrator will target them. The predator hypothesis states that perpetrators will target minorities and women on the belief that they can manipulate the victim. These perpetrators may also recognize that minorities are more ostracized, therefore making an "easier" target. The final hypothesis, the policing hypothesis, suggests that perpetrators use sexual violence to enforce sexuality and gender norms.

Male Victimization

Men who experience sexual victimization are known for having lower rates of reporting. There is a long-standing belief that women are always the victims of sexual violence and men are always the perpetrators of it. These notions are damaging to these victim groups, and the mindset about who can experience sexual victimization must be radically altered (Murphy-Oikonen &

Egan, 2021). Men were significantly less likely than women to disclose their victimization, whether formally to law enforcement or informally to family and friends (Mennicke et al., 2022). This lack of reporting is extended even further because sexual minority men experience sexual victimization at rates much higher than those of heterosexual men (Ammerman & Jones, 2020; Eisenberg et al., 2021). In general, any victim with a gender identity different than that of a cisgendered woman is less likely to report (Mennicke et al., 2022). Male victims tend to face higher levels of disbelief than women (Khan et al., 2018). Men who do report to law enforcement often face severe scrutiny and judgment. It is well documented that police are "unsympathetic" and do not take the issue of male rape seriously (D. Meyer, 2020). This is likely because men in general are perceived to "always" desire sexual relations due to the gendered sexual roles that have been socially constructed. This belief has contributed to myths surrounding male victimization and a perceived lack of believability (Khan et al., 2018).

Reporting to Law Enforcement

Reporting rates for sexual assault are incredibly low, making it the most underreported crime among violent and non-violent crimes (Franklin & Garza, 2021; Tuerkheimer, 2019). In 2022, the National Crime Victimization Survey conducted by the U.S. Department of Justice reported that roughly 21% of victims report their sexual assault to law enforcement. During this survey period, 0.4 per 1,000 surveyed indicated that they reported to law enforcement, while 1.5 per 1,000 reported that they were sexually assaulted but did not report. Female college students are much less likely to report sexual victimization to police than females not enrolled in college (Koon-Magnin & Schulze, 2019). Research has indicated there are additional barriers to reporting among college students, such as social alienation among peers, a lack of knowledge

about resources, disruption to academic performance, or a negative culture surrounding rape on campus (Spencer et al., 2017).

When victims have reported experiences of sexual victimization to law enforcement, they expressed frustration and discouragement with the process. These victims felt the justice response to sexual victimization was nonchalant, that their experience was minimized, or they experienced victim blaming during the process of reporting (Decker et al., 2019). Among victims who did not report, several studies summarized key reasons these victims cited when deciding against reporting. Most victims cited internal reactions, the feeling that they were to blame or at fault for the assault (Griffin et al., 2022; Johnson, 2017; Lathan et al., 2023; Reich et al., 2021). The next majority did not report because of expected negative reactions, such as not being believed (Griffin et al., 2022; Lathan et al., 2023; Reich et al., 2021). Some cited the identity of the perpetrator as a reason to not report, such as the identity of a high-profile or well-respected individual. With this, many feared retaliations from the perpetrator (Johnson, 2017; Reich et al., 2021). Other reasons included societal myths, such as the myth that victims lie about being raped, when in actuality they regretted consensual sex. Several victims report that they did disclose the incident to a family member or friend and received a negative reaction, and then chose not to tell anyone else. Other reasons included wanting to protect others, feeling like there was a lack of evidence, or believing they had no substantial reason to report (Griffin et al., 2022; Reich et al., 2021).

Several victims have also shared that they chose not to report because reporting means they must accept and label their experience. For many, the act of labeling through disclosure or reporting makes the experience “real.” By not labeling their experience, many victims feel they can continue to be productive in their lives – but labeling the experience would be detrimental to

them (Cruz, 2020; Khan et al., 2018). Victims who fall into this category of not labeling their experience may be doing so out of denial or because they genuinely do not believe their experience was sexual assault. Many who have experiences that meet the definitions of sexual assault fail to label it as such because they have been influenced by negative attitudes and beliefs surrounding sexual assault, such as rape-myth acceptance. Others may not qualify their experience based on levels of intoxication or their relationship to their perpetrator, the latter being common in marital rape (Khan et al., 2018).

Several victims stated that reporting to police specifically was the issue. These victims felt that the police would not believe them or that the police would judge them for their experience. There were also fears that the police would not do anything or that they would experience poor treatment by both the police and the trial process (Johnson, 2017). There is some support for the beliefs victims and allies may have about police. Despite serving diverse communities, police are predominantly white and male. There is the belief that police will not respond appropriately to crimes like sexual assault because of this. A lack of gender and racial diversity amongst police forces may have negative impacts on organizational outputs, such as appropriate and sensitive responses to crimes that have a predominant impact on women – more specifically women of color – and gender-queer individuals (Morabito et al., 2018). It is also well known that sexual assault cases do not move far in investigations or court systems. Proving guilt in these cases can be incredibly difficult, as there is often a lack of witnesses or evidence (Daly, 2006). Furthermore, judges may often dismiss cases when considering practical restraints of the courts such as maintaining the efficient flow of cases (Kelley et al., 2022). Roughly 14-18% of sexual assault cases will not be prosecuted (Campbell et al., 2012) due to insufficient evidence. Given the short time frame prosecutors are given to bring charges to an accused

perpetrator, usually 24 to 72 hours, the standard of evidence required is nearly impossible in most cases of sexual assault (Lonsway & Archambault, 2012).

On the contrary, one study found that individuals who have never experienced sexual assault were more likely than victims to endorse concerns about law enforcement, such as nothing will be done or not being believed (Lathan et al., 2023). Victims may be more likely to name internal barriers to reporting. Those without the lived experience of sexual victimization may not understand the internal triggers, and they may be more concerned with the outward and visible barriers, such as police. In fact, many reasons for not reporting were directly linked to the trauma of the incident. Victims simply did not want to think about the event anymore, did not want to relive it through reporting, or do not remember many details of the assault as a result of the brain's trauma response (Lathan et al., 2023).

Several victims did not report because their rape did not meet the "real rape" standard that has been perpetuated by rape myth acceptance (Franklin & Garza, 2021; Kelley, 2023; Lathan et al., 2023). The "real rape" standard is the societal acceptance of how people define what classifies as a "rape" and determines when a victim should be believed. This standard requires the perpetrator to be a stranger, the perpetrator threatened the victim, the perpetrator used a weapon, and that the victim was bleeding or seriously injured after the attack (Kelley, 2023). Stereotypes surrounding sexual assault have pushed this myth for years: that all assaults involved a stranger, a weapon, and a violent blitz attack. In reality, the majority of perpetrators of sexual violence are somebody the victim knows or trusts (Branscum et al., 2023). The Rape, Abuse, and Incest National Network reports that 80% of rape victims know their perpetrator, the largest groups including 39% of acquaintances and 33% committed by a current or former partner (Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network, 2023b).

When a victim is considering whether to report, the “real rape” standard has held up in tested studies. Victims shared their consideration in whether a weapon was used and the location of the attack when making reporting decisions. Victims were significantly more likely to report if the offender threatened the victim with harm. These factors serve as indications of possible future violence, and many victims felt the duty to report to prevent this future violence (Kelley et al., 2022). Oddly enough, the threat of harm had a more significant impact on reporting rates than actual harm, as suggested by the “real rape” standard. Victims were more willing to report their assault when threatened, and less likely to report when the offender physically attacked them (Kelley et al., 2022).

An extension of the “real rape” standard is the concept of a “true victim” (Lathan et al., 2023). The “true victim” is a concept used to define the types of victims easily believed by actors in the criminal justice system and by public opinion. This victim is a well-behaved white woman. She does not have a criminal record, no history of mental health disorders, nor problematic conduct such as substance use or risky sexual behavior. She reports the assault in a timely manner and remains engaged with the entire criminal justice system process (Lathan et al., 2023). This ideology of a true victim is inaccurate and harmful. It prevents victims from reporting when they know they will not be believed. The concept of “real rape” and a “true victim” are both rooted in rape myth acceptance (Lathan et al., 2023). Rape myths are misconceptions about rape and sexual assault that often shift blame from the perpetrator to the victim, justify the violence, or dismiss the severity of such acts (Lathan et al., 2023; Vonderhaar & Carmody, 2015). These rape myths may include placing blame for the perpetrator’s actions on the victim’s alcohol consumption, clothing, or other behaviors at the time of the assault. Some rape myths imply that consenting to a date is equivalent to consenting to sex, or that only

promiscuous women get raped, and it is therefore their fault (Carmody & Washington, 2001). Rape myths have been found extremely prevalent on college campuses, especially among college men. Studies have found that college men tend to find peer groups among men who share their similar views or beliefs, and this is demonstrated best by the cultures that form among fraternities and sports teams (Hayes et al., 2016). In a study among two universities, it was found that college men reported higher rape myth acceptance, and students indicated that alcohol and binge drinking was a dominant influence on rape myth acceptance (Hayes et al., 2016). Alcohol is heavily present in college culture and is often a determining factor when determining blameworthiness of a victim or perpetrator, thus making alcohol a dominant part of rape myth acceptance on college campuses.

High acceptance of rape myths indicates a person who believes in these harmful ideologies, while low acceptance indicates a person who rejects these ideologies. Individuals who have no history of sexual assault tend to hold the highest levels of rape myth acceptance, while victims who did not report their sexual assault to law enforcement tend to have the lowest levels of rape myth acceptance (Lathan et al., 2023).

Reporting to A University's Title IX Office

Title IX was established as federal law in 1972 as an addition to the Civil Rights Act of 1964. The law bans discrimination on the basis of sex in educational activities or programs that receive federal funding, such as universities (Bolla, 2019; Gómez, 2022). Title IX protections cover various forms of discrimination including pregnancy, parental status, admission to athletics, and more. Since its start, Title IX has been established and now widely used when addressing reports of sexual assault, stalking, and dating violence on college campuses (Bolla, 2019). The application of Title IX to sexual assault was established through case law and federal

guidance, resulting in sexual assault being formally considered a form of sex discrimination (Holland & Cipriano, 2021). The majority of Title IX reports, estimated around 70%, are for sexual assault (Branscum et al., 2023). Title IX uses terms like “responsible” and “not responsible” in place of guilt, as Title IX establishes if a student violated the university’s student code of conduct. Title IX does not establish if a law was broken and does not produce criminal sanctions. Some argue that universities should amend their Title IX policy to permit the use of restorative justice, as the student conduct proceedings create unreliable systems (Vail, 2019).

University students are significantly more likely to experience sexual victimization (Lindquist et al., 2016). Women in college aged 18-24 are three times more likely than all women to experience sexual victimization (Koon-Magnin & Schulze, 2019; Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network, 2023b; Tuerkheimer, 2019) and male college-aged students are 78% more likely than non-students of the same age to be a victim of rape (Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network, 2023b). In addition to this additional burden, university students are in a unique context that is likely to influence their decision to report or disclose sexual assault (Lindquist et al., 2016).

Formal Title IX investigations have a fairly similar process to police investigations. An investigator is assigned to the case to conduct a prompt, fair, and thorough fact-finding report of the alleged incident. The investigator interviews the reporting party and the responding party, as well as any relevant witnesses they provide. Evidence, including photos, videos, digital communication, and even campus security footage is collected as evidence. The investigator then makes a determination if the preponderance of evidence (more likely than not) supports that the respondent is responsible. Sanctions are then determined by a different campus office designated to student conduct and discipline (Branscum et al., 2023). In lieu of formal investigations, most

reports to Title IX offices resulted in victim accommodations, such as referrals to counseling or the establishment of a no-contact order, similar to a criminal protection order, but instead enforced by the university (Branscum et al., 2023).

On college campuses, students did not tend to report to the university, often citing the university's past reputation for handling cases poorly or for protecting perpetrators (Griffin et al., 2022). Reporting rates range from 2-10% across samples (Holland & Cipriano, 2021) and students more often report sexual assault to law enforcement over Title IX (Richards, 2019). The US Justice Department estimates that only 5% of victims report their assault to campus officials (Vail, 2019). Reporting rates among LGBTQ+ students are even lower than non-LGBTQ+ students, as these students are more likely to have a negative perception of how their university handles incidents of sexual assault (Nightingale, 2021). Students have described reporting their sexual assault to their university as one of the most traumatizing aspects of their entire victimization (Cruz, 2020; Webermann et al., 2023). Victims rated the Title IX coordinator and university administrators among the least helpful of all resources and indicated feeling let down and confused by the process (Holland & Cipriano, 2021; Webermann et al., 2023).

Many of these students experienced institutional betrayal, caused by action and inaction of the university that amplifies the impact of an already traumatic experience (Cruz, 2020). Institutional betrayal theory highlights the unique ways in which institutions have the ability to harm marginalized groups through institutionalized sexism, cissexism, heterosexism, racism, and ableism. Many institutions have utilized a one-size-fits-all approach to handling sexual victimization on campus, neglecting to acknowledge the impact marginalization has on victimization and levels of trust among formal institutions (Holland & Cipriano, 2021). Students holding these identities often feel let down, unprotected, or ostracized by institutional processes.

Research has found that LGBTQ+ students, who are 2-3 times more likely to experience sexual victimization (Nightingale, 2021), also experience institutional betrayal at higher rates than their cisgender and heterosexual counterparts (Holland & Cipriano, 2021; Webermann et al., 2023). LGBTQ+ students are more likely to experience negative academic and mental health outcomes after their assault (Nightingale, 2021), and often feel betrayed by the university who does little to assist them with these struggles.

Generally, students have low levels of trust in their university to appropriately respond to allegations of sexual victimization. They fear retribution, state there is a lack of clarity around campus processes, and that there is an overall lack of access to resources and support services provided by the university (Cruz, 2020). Similar to fears of reporting to law enforcement, victims cited fear about social consequences, concerns about the perpetrator, the minimization of their assault, concerns about inaction, and negative treatment from the Title IX staff as reasons not to report. Unique to university reporting, victims consistently cited not knowing how to report as a reason for not reporting (Holland & Cipriano, 2021), with reports of awareness ranging from only 35-50% of the student body (Shah & Storch, 2023).

The Sexual Assault Reporting Climate (SARC) developed by researchers may help students determine if they want to report their sexual assault to their university by understanding student perceptions of their campus. While this is not a nationally recognized tool, it may be useful for colleges to implement. The SARC determines campus climate through an understanding of historical legacies, attitudes, perceptions, and interpersonal relationships on campus. How student perceive SARC was directly correlated to how students felt their university would respond to sexual assault reports. LGBTQ+ students who experienced sexual assault were more likely to have a negative perception of SARC, consistent with the same study's finding that

only 45% of victims believed their university officials would take their report seriously (Nightingale, 2022).

However, one noted benefit to the Title IX process is the allowance for victims to decide if law enforcement becomes involved in the case (Bolla, 2019). As previously stated, Title IX addresses violations of the student code of conduct. Police are not often involved in Title IX cases, unless the victim initiates the reporting process through both entities. Another benefit to reporting through Title IX is the amnesty clause. Amnesty clauses in Title IX policies intend to reduce barriers to reporting by granting immunity for other campus policy violations that may have occurred concurrently with the victimization, such as underage alcohol or drug use. (Graber, 2019). This clause aims to encourage students to report when they may otherwise be hesitant due to a fear of facing disciplinary action.

Students may lack the desire to report through their Title IX office because of past case outcomes. In a study of all institutions in one state, only about 25% of reported sexual assaults resulted in a formal investigation. Less than half of those resulted in the accused student being found responsible, and less than half of those found responsible were sanctioned in an expulsion (18.49%), or suspension (28.57%) (Branscum et al., 2023). This means that for every 100 reports of sexual assault to Title IX, roughly six reports would result in an expulsion or suspension from the university. Consistently, other studies have found similar results. Most reports do not produce a formal investigation, and the ones that do rarely yield a responsible finding (Holland & Cipriano, 2021; Richards, 2019).

Among students who did report to Title IX, many of them reported that they experienced negative treatment from the Title IX staff such as victim blaming, name-calling, stalling their cases, or being told the school could do nothing for them (Holland & Cipriano, 2021; Shah &

Storch, 2023; Vail, 2019). Several of these barriers are rooted in experiences of discrimination, mistrust, and shared experiences of institutional betrayal (Shah & Storch, 2023). These victims also reported a significant disruption to their education as a result (Holland & Cipriano, 2021). Students also indicated several inconsistencies in the appeal process, reporting that the university had a strong tendency to favor the appeal of the perpetrator over the appeal of the victim (Holland & Cipriano, 2021). Appeals can be made by either party in a Title IX investigation if the party does not agree with the outcome or sanction given. Reporting students have indicated feeling *more* unsafe *after* reporting to their university Title IX, with fears that the university would do little to protect them from retaliation (Nightingale, 2021). Among LGBTQ+ students who reported to Title IX, over 60% reported that the school did not take action, and more than 20% were told to change their behavior to avoid future victimization, such as dressing and acting "less gay" (Shah & Storch, 2023). There is no consensus on why university Title IX's may choose to take no action or close a case, as cases are handled individually, and determinations are made based on available evidence, witnesses, and levels of participation from the victim.

In one study of students who reported to their university's Title IX office, victims provided mixed results on feelings about interactions with the Title IX staff. Some students indicated positive experiences and expressed being treated with kindness and empathy by staff. Others indicated that the Title IX staff prioritized due process and neutrality over the care of or empathy for the victims (Webermann & Holland, 2022).

Title IX is federally regulated and therefore can be amended by the President and the Secretary of Education. Under the Trump administration, Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos implemented new and controversial regulations for Title IX, making the process more restrictive for victims (Carter, 2021; Webermann et al., 2023). DeVos argued that students accused of

sexual misconduct have “insufficient rights” and that universities showed favor and bias towards the victims (Carter, 2021). The new regulations also narrowed the definitions of what qualified as sexual harassment and sexual assault; DeVos arguing “if everything is harassment, then nothing is” (Carter, 2021, p. 81). The new regulations for reporting also narrowed investigatory requirements, heightened evidentiary standards, and expanded the rights for the accused (Carter, 2021) along with the addition of a live hearing, similar to a court proceeding, that includes cross-examination of both the accused perpetrator and the victim by an advisor who does not have to have any qualifications, for such tasks (Rahman, 2023). The cross-examination and advisor aspect of the new regulations have face severe pushback as this could be retraumatizing for the victim, especially when being asked questions by an advisor, which could even just be the student’s parent or a close friend, who has no training or certifications to be handling matters this sensitive. This decision has been heavily criticized for disregarding the well-being of the victims enduring this adversarial process (Webermann et al., 2023) and for discouraging victims from reporting sexual victimization and leading to higher rates of claim dismissal (Carter, 2021). New regulations proposed under the Biden administration in 2022 have vowed to reverse the Title IX regulations put forth under the Trump administration, restoring Title IX to a similar state as it was pre-Trump, under the Obama administration (Rahman, 2023). These new regulations were supposed to be rolled out in Spring of 2023 but have hit several days since. At this time of writing, the new regulations have yet to be implemented.

Several of the failures noted by victims who have worked with Title IX offices could be a result of a larger failure on behalf of the university to appropriately allocate resources towards addressing campus sexual victimization. Title IX offices are commonly understaffed, underpaid, and overworked, resulting in a poor handling of cases or a desire to dismiss cases quickly

(Gómez, 2022). Should universities make dismantling rape culture and sexual victimization a priority on campuses, they would allocate the resources towards this goal appropriately, and Title IX offices may be better equipped to handle cases with the attention and sensitivity they deserve.

Reporting Among Marginalized Identities

Beyond experiencing traumatic victimization, the identities that the victim holds may have a severe impact on their willingness to report or their experience reporting. Among women of color, there are several additional reporting barriers identified. Reasons include a lack of representation within university administration, whitewashing of survivorship, a lack of understanding of violence within racial-ethnic communities, and low levels of trust in police (Aloisi, 2023; Decker et al., 2019). Whitewashing of survivorship is a form of censorship that refers to a societal and media habit of highlighting only white victims, while ignoring that people of color experience victimization at a disproportionate rate and may experience additional hardships as a result. This can be applied to several different forms of victimization, one including the "missing white woman syndrome" that describes the media fascination with young middle-class white women who go missing, while ignoring those who fit different demographics, especially women of color, that go missing at higher rates (Conlin & Davie, 2015). This phenomenon is often a cause of the lack of understanding of violence within racial-ethnic communities. While news outlets and social media continue to push one "type" as the common victim, it creates a lack of awareness and understanding among the public about higher rates of violence within other demographics.

Low levels of trust in police are dominant among Black and LatinX populations (Decker et al., 2019). This mistrust stems from historical inequities perpetuated by the criminal justice system. Inequities have ranged from disparities in arrests of Black or LatinX individuals,

excessive police surveillance of Black and LatinX neighborhoods, racial bias in convictions, and mass incarceration (Decker et al., 2019).

Black women disclosed fear of reporting due to fears of how law enforcement would respond, rooted in racial discrimination that is contextualized in the historical and present-day evidence of police brutality and abuse targeted at people of color, specifically Black individuals (Decker et al., 2019; Lindquist et al., 2016). Black women also face additional hurdles around victim blaming and being believed when disclosing sexual assault, more so than white women. In a study, participants failed to define an experience of sexual assault as "rape" when the victim was a woman of color but did not have this struggle when defining the experience for white women (Franklin & Garza, 2021). Black women face additional culturally specific barriers to reporting through both formal and informal routes. The stereotypical belief of the "strong black woman" emphasizes self-sufficiency and resilience. Upholding this persona may deter Black women from disclosing their experience (Lindquist et al., 2016). It is important to understand the different experiences that women of color have when processing the intricacies of sexual assault and deciding if they want to report. Intertwining the experiences of all victims to one universal story risks distorting and masking the unique experiences that women of color face (Decker et al., 2019; Kelley, 2023).

Queer victims are often reluctant to use formal reporting routes and resources that are associated with the criminal justice system, as these institutions have a long history of homophobic practices and structures. Further, these experiences are more intense for queer victims of color who also must battle institutionalized racism in the justice system (Bedera et al., 2022). In general, queer victims may be less likely to report their experience, expressing concern that they will be blamed. This concern is heavily based in the perception that their assault does

not conform to social standards and beliefs surrounding what rape is and looks like (Koon-Magnin & Schulze, 2019).

The experiences of gay men reporting their experiences of sexual assault to law enforcement have been severe in many cases. Police officers tend to associate homosexuality with victims being highly questionable regarding truthfulness and credibility (D. Meyer, 2020). In a study documenting these experiences, queer men consistently reported their sexuality being brought up as a point of contingency when they reported their sexual assault to law enforcement. One respondent was told by the officer, "you can't rape the willing," while another was asked "don't you guys (gay men) like rough sex anyway?" (D. Meyer, 2020, p. 240). These statements support claims from data that queer victims often choose not to report to avoid facing secondary victimization from law enforcement.

Transgender victims have significantly low reporting levels (Du Mont et al., 2019), and often avoid receiving critical treatment or services, citing fear of discrimination. It extends beyond just reporting to law enforcement and includes seeking informal routes for support. In one sample, almost 60% of transgender victims had not accessed any emotional help in the first year following their assault, and 91% did not receive any medical help (Du Mont et al., 2019). Consistent with minority stress theory (Katz-Wise & Hyde, 2012; I. H. Meyer, 2003) transgender victims experience long-term physical effects and negative psychological consequences following a traumatic assault, with 54% having lifetime suicide attempts (Du Mont et al., 2019).

Informal Reporting Routes

Most victims will disclose their experiences to informal support systems such as friends or family, while disclosure to formal supports previously discussed is far less common (Lindquist et al., 2016). Across numerous studies between 2003 and 2010, it is estimated that

anywhere from 65% to 92% of victims will disclose their sexual assault to at least one person, and the average victim will disclose to three support persons (Ahrens & Aldana, 2012). Victims are more likely to disclose their experiences of sexual assault to their mothers and siblings over their fathers, and victims who disclose to their families receive a mix of positive and negative reactions (Bedera et al., 2022). Several victims indicated not pursuing reporting options through law enforcement or forensic exams so that their parents do not find out. However, college students with open relationships with their parents are more likely to disclose and seek help from their parents, especially if they have an open dialogue around sex and sexuality (Bedera et al., 2022).

Among friend disclosure, female friends provide more emotional support that victims want in comparison to both family members (Bedera et al., 2022) and male friends (Koon-Magnin & Schulze, 2019). Queer youth are unique in that they may be less likely to disclose to family and more likely to disclose to friends, although this experience is more reserved for victims who are not "out" among their family or whose families do not accept their identity (Bedera et al., 2022). Approximately one in three female undergraduates and one in five male undergraduates reported that a friend has disclosed sexual assault to them (Ahrens & Aldana, 2012; Koon-Magnin & Schulze, 2019). Women were more likely to be supportive while the men commonly shared that the disclosure was uncomfortable or awkward. This is of considerable importance, as the response victims receive from these informal support routes can have a profound impact on their mental health and overall well-being (Ahrens & Aldana, 2012). Romantic partners are likely to struggle with negative reactions (Ahrens & Aldana, 2012) following sexual assault disclosure such as anger, guilt, betrayal, or a desire for revenge. Family and friends also often face feelings of anger or frustration.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Before beginning this research, approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) through the University of Northern Colorado was obtained (Appendix A). The IRB regulates the use of human subjects in research. For this study, I was granted IRB Exempt Determination for research involving benign behavioral interventions in conjunction with the collection of information from adult subjects through verbal or written responses.

Current Study

How does holding marginalized identities impact one's willingness to report sexual victimization? While there is a breadth of knowledge available about marginalized identities and reporting rates among victims of sexual victimization, there is no study to date that analyzes reporting rates compared between law enforcement, Title IX, and informal support routes, and how these rates intersect with individuals holding marginalized identities across race, sexual orientation, or gender identity. Current studies only compare reporting options to each other or analyze statistics of marginalized identities to one reporting option, such as the lack of reporting to law enforcement amongst queer individuals and women of color. This study has bridged the gap to connect all these factors and aims to understand the impact, if any, that holding marginalized identities has on the willingness to report sexual victimization to law enforcement, Title IX offices, and informal support routes.

Hypotheses

This study sought to understand the relationship, if one exists, between different self-identity groups, such as race, gender identity, or sexuality, and one's perceived willingness to report sexual victimization to law enforcement or campus Title IX offices, as well as the perceived willingness to disclose to family or friends as informal routes. The study tested the hypothesis that queer and gender-queer individuals, non-white individuals, and male-identified individuals will have a lower perceived willingness to report experiences of sexual victimization, whether formally or informally, than their heterosexual, cisgendered, white, or female-identified counterparts. Formal and informal methods of reporting were both examined. Formal reporting routes include law enforcement or Title IX. Informal reporting routes include disclosure to family members or friends. The four hypotheses tested are listed:

H1 Individuals with marginalized identities will have a lower perceived willingness to report sexual victimization to law enforcement.

H2 Individuals with marginalized identities will have a lower perceived willingness to report sexual victimization to their university's Title IX office.

H3 Individuals identifying as male will have a lower perceived willingness to report sexual victimization through either of the formal routes.

H4 Individuals, regardless of their identities, will have a higher perceived willingness to disclose sexual victimization to their friends and family, compared to their perceived willingness to report through formal routes.

Variables

There are several dependent and independent variables. Dependent variables include the perceived willingness to report sexual victimization to law enforcement, perceived willingness to report sexual victimization to Title IX, and the perceived willingness to disclose sexual victimization to family and friends. Independent variables include participants' race, gender identity, and sexual orientation. Different characteristics of respondents are also gathers,

including prior victimization, prior justice involvement, religious affiliation, academic program currently enrolled in, and levels of rape myth acceptance. Indication of prior victimization that was previously reported to law enforcement or Title IX was collected, as this could have an impact on one's perceived willingness to report if they already had a positive or negative experience with that process (Webermann et al., 2023). Prior involvement with law enforcement, such as having to contact law enforcement for any reason, is asked for similar reasons to prior victimization. Depending on a recent experience with law enforcement, a participant could have a more or less trust in law enforcement. Exclusionary factors to participate in the study ensured that all participants were over the age of 18 and that all participants were currently enrolled in their undergraduate degree.

Research has indicated that political affiliation has significant influence on rape myth acceptance and the protection of perpetrators, with individuals identifying as conservative or Republican more likely to dismiss claims of sexual victimization or defend perpetrators of sexual victimization (Barnett et al., 2018; O'Connor et al., 2021; Ortiz & Smith, 2022; Schermerhorn et al., 2023). Further, individuals who fall into more marginalized identities are more likely to identify as liberal or be affiliated with the Democrat party (Ortiz & Smith, 2022). High rates of victimization among marginalized identities could indicate that individuals identifying as a Democrat or liberal are more likely to experience sexual victimization. It has also been found that individuals with higher religiosity have higher rates of rape myth acceptance, are more likely to use passive confrontations to sexual victimization and are less likely to report. This could be explained by patriarchal teachings and attitudes surrounding sex within religious ideologies (Barnett et al., 2018; O'Connor et al., 2021). Rape myth acceptance was the final control variable, based on existing research that lower levels of reporting are often associated with low

levels of rape myth acceptance (Lathan et al., 2023) and to measure any other impacts that rape myths have on willingness to report.

Study Design

The study was conducted using an anonymous survey design through Qualtrics to deliver the survey electronically. No personal identifying information was collected, and users were not asked to log into the survey or provide any contact information. All participants of the survey must be over the age of 18 and currently attending the University of Northern Colorado as an active undergraduate student. Graduate students were not used in this study for simplicity of sampling and as most existing literature focuses on undergraduate students. Both criterions were ensured through the use of two separate filter questions at the beginning of the survey. Participants did not need to have experienced prior sexual victimization to participate. The survey was be divided into three sections for this purpose, one focusing on willingness to report to law enforcement, another focusing on willingness to report to Title IX, and a final section focusing on willingness to report through informal routes, with an additional section at the beginning of the survey to gather demographic information and an additional section at the end of the survey to measure levels of rape myth acceptance as a control variable.

The beginning of the survey had three filter questions. The first filter question collected informed consent. If participants did not consent, they were taken to the end of the survey and would not answer any additional questions. The informed consent included information about the nature of the survey, including that questions will be asked about past sexual victimization, and this may be retraumatizing for some individuals. The informed consent also informed potential participants that their responses would only be accessible by myself as the sole researcher, and information would be kept on a password-protected computer. Results are to be shared as part of

the research in generalized numbers and data, and no identifying information about participants was or ever would be collected.

The second filter question asks participants if they are currently at or over the age of 18-years-old. If a participant answered no, they were taken to the end of the survey and would not answer any additional questions. The third filter question asked participants if they are currently an active undergraduate student at the University of Northern Colorado. If participants answered no, they were taken to the end of the survey and would not answer any additional questions.

Demographics Section

Following the informed consent and filter questions, the first section of the survey gathered non-identifying information about the participant's demographics and different involvements that served as control variables. The questions included the following:

1. What is your current age in years?
    a. This question was collected as an interval response, allowing participants to type in their own response. To ensure accurate responses, the survey required participants to enter in only numerical and whole-number responses.
2. What race or ethnicity do you most closely identify with? Select all that apply.
    a. The answers included: White, Black, Hispanic or LatinX, Asian, Native American or Alaskan Native, Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander, multi-racial, or other not listed. Participants who select "other" were allowed to fill in a typed response.
    b. This question allowed participants to select multiple options. The question was accompanied with the following statement: If you identify as multi-racial, please select this option *and* the races you identify with.

3. Which of the following best represents your gender identity? Select one.
    a. The answers included: cisgender male, cisgender female, transgender male, transgender female, non-binary, gender fluid, gender non-conforming, inter-sex, or other not listed. Participants who select “other” were allowed to fill in a typed response.
    b. The question was accompanied with a section of text providing definitions: Cisgender describes a person whose gender matches the sex they were assigned at birth; Transgender describes a person whose gender identity differs from the sex they were assigned at birth; Non-binary describes a person who does not identify as male or female; Gender fluid describes a person who does not identify with a single gender identity, but possibly a combination of identities; Gender non-conforming describes a person who do not conform to cultural norms or expectations of gender; Inter-sex describes a person born with sexual anatomy that doesn’t fit the boxes of “female” or “male.”
4. Which of the following best represents your sexual orientation? Select one.
    a. The answers included: heterosexual, homosexual, bisexual, pansexual, asexual, queer, or other not listed. Participants who select “other” were allowed to fill in a typed response.
    b. The question was accompanied with a section of text providing definitions: Heterosexual describes a person who is attracted to individuals of their opposite gender identity; Homosexual describes a person who is attracted to individuals of their same gender identity; Bisexual describes a person who is

attracted to two or more gender identities, one of which includes the same gender identity that they have; Pansexual describes a person who is attracted to any and all gender identities; Asexual describes a person who is not sexually attracted to anyone; Queer describes a person who does not identify as exclusively straight and is often used by folks with gender-expansive identities.

5. Which of the following best represents your political affiliation? Select all that apply.
    a. The answers included: Republican, Democrat, conservative, liberal, neutral/ non-political, and other not listed. Participants who select "other" were allowed to fill in a typed response.
    b. Participants are allowed to select multiple options since conservative and liberal are terms often used by individual not wanting to affiliate with the two-party system, but often individuals identifying as Republican also identify as conservative and Democrats often identify as liberal. There is chance that Democrats may still identify as conservative and Republican as liberal. Allowing participants to select multiple options here may remove any assumption.
    c. This question was included to serve as a control variable, as political affiliation often has impact on rape myth acceptance, willingness to report, and could impact chance of victimization.
6. Which of the following best represents your religious affiliation? Select one.
    a. The answers included: Christian (including Catholicism, Protestant, Baptists, etc.), Muslim, Jewish, Hindu, Islam, Atheist, Agnostic/non-religious, and

other not listed. Participants who select “other” were allowed to fill in a typed response.

b. This question was included to serve as a control variable, as religious affiliation often has an impact on rape myth acceptance and willingness to report.

7. Have you previously experienced sexual victimization that was reported to either law enforcement or your university’s Title IX Office?
    a. The answers will include: Yes and No.
    b. This question was included to serve as a control variable, as prior reported victimization could have an impact on willingness to report future victimization, depending on the experience the participant had when reporting previously.
8. Have you had to contact law enforcement for any reason in the past calendar year?
    a. The answers will include: Yes and No.
    b. This question was included to serve as a control variable, as prior involvement with the justice system could have an impact on willingness to report future victimization, depending on the experience the participant had when interacting with law enforcement previously.
9. Please type out the acronym for the program(s) which you are majoring in.
    a. Participants were provided with a text box to enter in program acronyms.

Law Enforcement Likert Scale

After gathering information on the participant’s demographics, section two of the survey asked various questions to gauge a participant’s perceived willingness to report an incident of

sexual assault to law enforcement. This section utilized a Likert scale. Participants responded to each question by selecting one of the following responses: I strongly agree, I agree, I somewhat agree, I somewhat disagree, I disagree, or I strongly disagree. Results from this section were analyzed by scoring each response. All 24 questions were scored on a scale of 1-6, where a score of 1 equates to I strongly disagree and 6 equates to I strongly agree. The option of neither agree nor disagree, or neutral, was not presented to avoid "fence sitting" responses by participants (Bachman & Schutt, 2020, p. 426). This neutral option would not provide any insight into the hypotheses being tested. A higher score indicated that a respondent was more likely to report sexual victimization to law enforcement, while a lower score indicated that a respondent was less likely to report sexual victimization to law enforcement. With 24 questions worth a maximum of 6 points, the scale totals to 144 points possible, with a minimum score of 24. The questions for the first scale included the following:

1. In general, I both trust and respect the police.
2. I feel safer when police are present.
3. I trust the police to treat victims with respect.
4. I trust the police to respect a victim's privacy.
5. I believe the police take reports of sexual assault seriously.
6. I believe that police believe all victims of sexual assault.
7. I believe that police treat all victims equally, regardless of their race.
8. I believe that police treat all victims equally, regardless of their sexual orientation.
9. I believe that police treat all victims equally, regardless of their gender identity.
10. I believe that police would not place blame on a victim of sexual assault.
11. I trust the police investigate reports of sexual assault to the fullest extent.

12. I trust the police to seek justice for victims of sexual assault.
13. I would feel safe disclosing a sexual assault to a police officer.
14. If a friend of mine experienced a sexual assault, I would strongly encourage them to report it to law enforcement.
15. I believe that if I reported a sexual assault to the police, I would not face discrimination.
16. I believe that if I reported a sexual assault to the police, I would be satisfied with the outcome of my reporting process.
17. I believe that if I reported a sexual assault to the police, the perpetrator would not be protected, even if they were rich, famous, or an influential person.
18. I would disclose a sexual assault to the police because I trust the police to thoroughly and fairly investigate my report.
19. I would feel more comfortable reporting a sexual assault to law enforcement if the police officer was the same gender as me.
20. I would feel more comfortable reporting a sexual assault to law enforcement if the police officer was the same race or ethnicity as me.
21. I would feel more comfortable reporting a sexual assault to law enforcement if the police officer was the same sexual orientation as me.
22. I would ONLY be willing to report a sexual assault to law enforcement if the police officer was the same gender as me.
23. I would ONLY be willing to report a sexual assault to law enforcement if the police officer was the same race or ethnicity as me.

24. I would ONLY be willing to report a sexual assault to law enforcement if the police officer was the same sexual orientation as me.

This section was followed by an open-ended question asking, "When deciding to report a sexual assault to law enforcement, would you consider any of the following variables in your decision making: race/ethnicity, gender identity, sexual orientation, or prior victimization?" This question was asked in supplement to the above Likert scale to more specifically target how holding marginalized or privileged identities influences the decision to report. The previous questions above ask a general perceived willingness to report, but participants may or may not be considering their own identities when they answered those questions. Among participants who hold privileged identities, this may be even more true. Individuals who hold privileged identities often do not have to think of their identities when making decisions, as the systems in place are made to benefit them (National Association of School Psychologists, 2016). Asking this open-ended response question may have different implications than what was gather in previous questions.

Title IX Likert Scale

The next section gathered responses about the participant's willingness to report to their university's Title IX office. This section utilized a Likert scale. Participants responded to each question by selecting one of the following responses: I strongly agree, I agree, I somewhat agree, I somewhat disagree, I disagree, or I strongly disagree. Results from this section were analyzed by scoring each response. All 23 questions were scored on a scale of 1-6, where 1 equates to I strongly disagree and 6 equates to I strongly agree. A higher score indicated that a respondent was more likely to report sexual victimization to Title IX, while a lower score indicated that a respondent was less likely to report sexual victimization to Title IX. With 23 questions worth a

maximum of 6 points, the scale totals to 138 points possible, with a minimum score of 23. The questions for this section included the following:

1. In general, I both trust and respect my university's Title IX office.
2. I trust my university's Title IX office to treat victims with respect.
3. I trust my university's Title IX office to respect a victim's privacy.
4. I believe my university's Title IX office takes reports of sexual assault seriously.
5. I believe that my university's Title IX office believes all victims of sexual assault.
6. I believe that my university's Title IX office treats all victims equally, regardless of their race.
7. I believe that my university's Title IX office treats all victims equally, regardless of their sexual orientation.
8. I believe that my university's Title IX office treats all victims equally, regardless of their gender identity.
9. I believe that my university's Title IX office would not place blame on a victim of sexual assault.
10. I trust my university's Title IX office to investigate reports of sexual assault to the fullest extent.
11. I trust my university's Title IX office to seek justice for victims of sexual assault.
12. I would feel safe disclosing a sexual assault to my university's Title IX office.
13. If a friend of mine experienced a sexual assault, I would strongly encourage them to report it to their university's Title IX office.
14. I believe that if I reported a sexual assault to my university's Title IX office, I would not face discrimination.

15. I believe that if I reported a sexual assault to my university's Title IX office, I would be satisfied with the outcome of my reporting process.
16. I believe that if I reported a sexual assault to my university's Title IX office, the perpetrator would not be protected, even if they were rich, famous, or an influential person on campus.
17. I would disclose a sexual assault to my university's Title IX office because I trust Title IX to thoroughly and fairly investigate my report.
18. I would feel more comfortable reporting a sexual assault to Title IX if the investigator was the same gender as me.
19. I would feel more comfortable reporting a sexual assault to Title IX if the investigator was the same race or ethnicity as me.
20. I would feel more comfortable reporting a sexual assault to Title IX if the investigator was the same sexual orientation as me.
21. I would ONLY be willing to report a sexual assault to Title IX if the investigator was the same gender as me.
22. I would ONLY be willing to report a sexual assault to Title IX if the investigator was the same race or ethnicity as me.
23. I would ONLY be willing to report a sexual assault to Title IX if the investigator was the same sexual orientation as me.

This section was also followed by the open-ended question, "When deciding to report a sexual assault to Title IX, would you consider any of the following variables in your decision making: race/ethnicity, gender identity, sexual orientation, or prior victimization?" As explained

in the previous section on reporting to law enforcement, this question was asked in supplement to the previous Likert scale about willingness to report.

Informal Disclosure Likert Scale

The next section analyzed willingness to report sexual victimization through informal reporting routes. The first set of questions addressed the willingness to report or disclose to friends and family. Questions 1-12 are scored as follows: I strongly agree is worth 6 points, I agree is worth 5 points, I somewhat agree is worth 4 points, I somewhat disagree is worth 3 points, I disagree is worth 2 points, and I strongly disagree is worth 1 point. Participants with a higher score, up to a maximum of 72 points, are more likely in their perceived willingness to disclose their victimization through informal routes. Participants with a lower score, with a minimum of 12 points, are less likely in their perceived willingness to disclose their victimization through informal routes. Alternatively, questions 1 and 2 both included the option to be answered with "this question does not apply to me" in the event that the participant does not have siblings or parents/guardians. These questions were scored as a 0, and the overall scale was adjusted accordingly. The questions included the following:

1. I would tell one or both of my parents or guardians if I experienced sexual violence.
2. I would tell at least one of my siblings if I experienced sexual violence.
3. I would tell my romantic partner(s) if I experienced sexual violence.
4. I would tell a member of my family other than my siblings or parents if I experienced sexual violence.
5. I would trust my family members to not share my experience of sexual violence with others.
6. I would trust my family members to believe my experience.

7. I would trust my family members to support me after experiencing sexual violence.
8. I would tell a friend if I experience sexual violence.
9. I have several friends in mind that I would tell if I experienced sexual violence.
10. I would trust my friend(s) not to share my experience of sexual violence with others.
11. I would trust my friend(s) to believe my experience.
12. I would trust my friend(s) to support me after experiencing sexual violence.

Rape Myth Acceptance Likert Scale

The final scale measured participant's levels of rape myth acceptance as an additional control variable. This was measured with a ten question Likert scale on a scale of 1-6. I strongly agree is worth 6 points, I agree is worth 5 points, I somewhat agree is worth 4 points, I somewhat disagree is worth 3 points, I disagree is worth 2 points, and I strongly disagree is worth 1 point. Responses to questions 1 and 6 in this scale required reverse-coding, as indication of strongly agree to these questions would equate to low levels of rape myth acceptance, while responding I strongly agree to all other questions would indicate high levels of rape myth acceptance. Once recoded, a higher score on this scale, with a total possible 60 points, indicated a participant had high level of rape myth acceptance. A low score on this scale, with a minimum of 10 points, would indicate low levels of rape myth acceptance.

1. If someone was drunk when they were sexual assaulted, it was not their fault.
2. Sexual assault probably did not happen if the victim was not physically injured.
3. Rape occurs when someone has a sex drive that is out of control.
4. People who say they were raped usually agreed to have sex and then later regretted it.
5. People caught cheating on their partners are likely to claim that they were raped to avoid responsibility.

6. A person who is heavily intoxicated cannot give consent to have sex.
7. If the victim does not physically fight back, they cannot say that they were raped.
8. People who wear certain types of clothing are giving permission/consent to have sex.
9. Rape accusations are just a way to get revenge on a person.
10. Someone who claims to be the victim of sexual assault has emotional problems or wants attention.

Survey Distribution

The survey was distributed as an electronic survey. The survey was distributed to active students at the University of Northern Colorado through class distribution. A list of professors from the university were sent the survey via email, with the request to distribute the survey to their students. Approximately 80 professors received the survey across the following programs: Criminology and Criminal Justice, Gender Studies, Human Services, Philosophy, Political Science, and Psychology. These programs were chosen over other programs at the University due to the research topic being more relevant to these fields of study, which would allocate for these professors to have more buy-in and want to share the survey with their surveys. Active students are classified as students actively enrolled in courses for the current semester and can include only undergraduate students. Due to this distribution model, an accurate sample size could not be calculated.

As of Fall of 2023, the University of Northern Colorado had a total of 6,035 undergraduate students enrolled on campus. Of these students, 67% were female identified and 33% were male identified. There were no data available to include students who identify as transgender, non-binary, or as other genders. The university used “gender” when providing these statistics but due to the binary nature, likely collected this data based on the definition of “sex.”

Among undergraduate students, 60.2% are white, 26.1% are LatinX or Hispanic, 4.2% African American, 2.1% Asian, and 5% are multi-racial. Less than 1% of students identified as Hawaiian, Pacific Islander, or Native American. There is currently no data available to identify percentages on the sexual orientation of students.

Final Sample

The recorded sample produced a total of 103 respondents. Of these, several respondents did not complete the survey in its entirety or were not eligible to take the survey after answering the filter questions. The final sample produced 73 respondents, ranging in age from 18-25 years old. The majority of respondents (34.2%) were 21 years old, with only four respondents being over the age of 23. When asked about prior victimization that was previously reported, 11% of the sample indicated they had previously reported a sexual assault to law enforcement or Title IX. Among gender identity, the vast majority of respondents were cisgendered female. Cisgendered females made of 81% of respondents, 11% identified as cisgender male, 5% identified as non-binary, and 2% identified as gender-fluid.

The racial and ethnic identities represented in the survey were very similar to that of the university's overall student body demographics. Of the final sample, 56% was white, which is similar to the 60% makeup of the university's student body that is white; 25% of the sample was Hispanic, similar to 26% of the overall student body; 3% of the sample was Black, with the university overall at 4%; 4% of the sample was Asian, which was higher than the 2% of the student body; 6% of the sample was multi-racial, higher than the 5% of the student body. Less than 1% of the student body identified as Hawaiian, Pacific Islander, or Native American, and there were no respondents in the survey who selected these identities.

Individuals identifying as heterosexual made up 56% of the sample, 25% identified as bisexual, 7% identified as pansexual, 7% identified as homosexual, 5% identified as queer, and 1% identified as asexual. Among political affiliation, 25% identified as a Democrat, 12% identified as a Republican, and 38% identified as neutral or non-political. Among religious affiliation, 44% identified as Christian, 14% as Atheist, and 36% as Agnostic or non-religious.

Table 1

Respondent Self-Reported Demographics

Demographic Variable	Frequency (n)	Percentage
Racial and Ethnic Identity		
White	41	56.2
Black	2	2.7
Hispanic	18	24.7
Asian	3	4.1
Multi-Racial	6	8.2
Other Non-Descript	3	4.1
Total:	73	100
Gender Identity		
Cisgender Female	8	11
Cisgender Male	59	80.8
Non-Binary	4	5.5
Gender Fluid	1	1.4
Non-Conforming	1	1.4
Total:	73	100
Sexual Orientation		
Heterosexual	40	54.8
Homosexual	5	6.8
Bi-Sexual	18	24.7
Pansexual	5	6.8
Asexual	1	1.4
Queer	4	5.5
Total:	73	100
Religious Affiliation		
Christian	32	43.8
Atheist	10	13.7
Agnostic	26	35.6
Other Non-Descript	5	6.8
Total:	73	100
Political Affiliation		
Democrat	18	24.7
Republican	9	12.3
Liberal	14	19.2
Conservative	1	1.4
Neutral/Non-Political	28	38.4
Other Non-Descript	3	4.1
Total:	73	100

Analysis Plan

Survey responses from the Likert scales were analyzed using a Chi Square analysis, processed through SPSS. Chi Square analysis is used to determine if a relationship exists between a dependent and independent variable. It does so by examining how well a sample fits the distribution of a known population, determining if two categorical variables in a single sample are independent from or associated with each other (Franke et al., 2012). For purposes of this study, there are a total of nine Chi Square analyses initially conducted. Scores for each Likert scale measuring perceived willingness to report were averaged and then divided into three categories: less willing, neutral, and more willing. Scores that averaged 1-2.99 were less willing, 3-4.99 were neutral, and 5-6.99 were more willing. For the dependent variables, each disclosure route was analyzed including informal support, Title IX formal reporting, and law enforcement formal reporting. These three dependent variables were cross-examined against three independent variables including race and ethnicity, sexual orientation, and gender identity. To identify if there is a relationship, I analyzed the asymptotic significance score produced by the SPSS analysis. Any score below a .05 is considered to be statistically significant, and any score about .05 is not considered to be statistically significant, therefore concluding there is not a relationship between those variables. These Chi Square analyses were used to determine which relationships, if any, exist between one's willingness to report and their self-reported identities.

A supplemental qualitative analysis was used to analyze qualitative responses entered by participants at the end of the first two Likert scales. These questions asked participants if they would consider their race/ethnicity, gender identity, sexual orientation, or prior victimization when deciding to report for each respective formal reporting route. This content analysis provided a qualitative understanding of the impact that one's intersecting identities has on their

perceptions about reporting and provided supplemental information to the scores obtained through the Likert scales. These qualitative responses also provided additional insight into how holding multiple marginalized identities may intersect when deciding to report, comparative to individuals who may hold only a single marginalized identity or no marginalized identities.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

Willingness to Report to Law Enforcement

For all relationships tested, the null hypothesis (H_o) is that there is no relationship in the population ($X^2 = 0$). The alternative hypothesis is that there is a relationship in the population ($X^2 \neq 0$).

Racial and Ethnic Identity

HO1 There is no relationship between racial and ethnic identity and perceived willingness to report to law enforcement.

HA1 There is a relationship between racial and ethnic identity and perceived willingness to report to law enforcement.

As seen in *Table 2,* racial and ethnic identity was statistically significant to one's perceived willingness to report to law enforcement. After running the Chi Square analysis through SPSS, it produced a Chi Square value of 18.909 with a significance level of 0.041. Using the degree of freedom of 10 and an alpha level of .05, the critical region was determined to be 18.307. At an alpha level of .05, the value does fall within the critical region. Therefore, I reject the null hypothesis, and conclude that there is a relationship between racial and ethnic identity and perceived willingness to report to law enforcement.

Table 2

Willingness to Report to Law Enforcement x Racial and Ethnic Identity

	White (%)	Black (%)	Hispanic (%)	Asian (%)	Multi-Racial (%)	Other (%)	Totals (%)
Less Willing	21 (51)	0 (0)	2 (11)	0 (0)	3 (50)	3 (100)	29 (40)
Neutral	17 (42)	2 (100)	13 (72)	2 (66)	3 (50)	0 (0)	37 (51)
More Willing	3 (7)	0 (0)	3 (17)	1 (33)	0 (0%)	0 (0)	7 (9)
Totals	41	2	18	3	6	3	73

Due to historical distrust in policing systems among many individuals identifying as non-white, this finding is consistent with prior literature. Despite this, it is interesting to note that participants identifying as white had the lowest perceived willingness to report to law enforcement. While the non-white racial and ethnic categories had a much smaller sample, collectively accounting for 44% of the sample, the majority fell into the neutral category. 16% of the non-white participants, all identifying as either Hispanic or multi-racial, had low perceived willingness, 64.5% of non-white participants were neutral, and 13% had high perceived willingness. Of the white participants, 51% had low perceived willingness, 41% were neutral, and 7% had high perceived willingness.

Gender Identity

HO2 There is no relationship between gender identity and perceived willingness to report to law enforcement.

HA2 There is a relationship between gender identity and perceived willingness to report to law enforcement.

As for gender identity, there did not appear to be a relationship amongst identities and one's perceived willingness to report. After running the Chi Square analysis through SPSS, it produced a Chi Square value of 9.825 with a significance level of 0.278. Using the degree of freedom of 8 and an alpha level of .05, the critical region was determined to be 15.507. At an alpha level of .05, the value does not fall within the critical region. Therefore, I fail to reject the null hypothesis, and conclude that there is not a relationship between gender identity and perceived willingness to report to law enforcement. As seen in *Table 3,* there were very few cisgendered males who participated in the survey, so analyzing the impact of their responses is difficult, and 81% of respondents identified as cisgendered female. Participants identifying as female predominantly demonstrated neutral feelings towards law enforcement, with the second largest response demonstrating negative feelings towards law enforcement. Only 8% of cisgendered female students indicated positive feelings towards law enforcement.

Table 3

Willingness to Report to Law Enforcement x Gender Identity

	Cis Male (%)	Cis Female (%)	Non-Binary (%)	Fluid (%)	Non-Conforming (%)	Totals (%)
Less Willing	0 (0)	25 (42)	2 (50)	1 (100)	1 (100)	29 (40)
Neutral	6 (75)	29 (49)	2 (50)	0 (0)	0 (0)	37 (51)
More Willing	2 (25)	5 (9)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	7 (9)
Totals	8	59	4	1	1	73

Sexual Orientation

HO3 There is no relationship between sexual orientation and perceived willingness to report to law enforcement.

HA3 There is a relationship between sexual orientation and perceived willingness to report to law enforcement.

Sexual orientation was statistically significant to one's perceived willingness to report to law enforcement, as seen in *Table* 4, again consistent with prior literature related to historical distrust of law enforcement among queer communities. After running the Chi Square analysis through SPSS, it produced a Chi Square value of 20.809 with a significance level of 0.022. Using the degree of freedom of 10 and an alpha level of .05, the critical region was determined to be 18.307. At an alpha level of .05, the value does fall within the critical region. Therefore, I reject the null hypothesis, and conclude that there is a relationship between sexual orientation and perceived willingness to report to law enforcement.

Of the sample, 57% identified as heterosexual, and as expected the majority of these respondents (62.5%) had a neutral perception of law enforcement. 20% had low perceived willingness to report to law enforcement and 17.5% had a higher perceived willingness. Among all other sexual orientations, all respondents reported either low or neutral perceived willingness, consistent with prior literature, as 56% of non-heterosexual respondents had low perceived willingness to report, while 34% were neutral.

Table 4

Willingness to Report to Law Enforcement x Sexual Orientation

	Heterosexual (%)	Homosexual (%)	Bisexual (%)	Pansexual (%)	Asexual (%)	Queer (%)	Totals (%)
Less Willing	8 (20)	3 (60)	13 (72)	2 (40)	0 (0)	3 (75)	29 (40)
Neutral	25 (63)	2 (40)	5 (28)	3 (60)	1 (100)	1 (25)	37 (51)
More Willing	7 (17)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	7 (9)
Totals	8	59	4	1	1	4	73

Law Enforcement Qualitative Responses

Participants were asked to answer the following question with a typed-out response: "When deciding to report a sexual assault to law enforcement, would you consider any of the following variables in your decision making: race/ethnicity, gender identity, sexual orientation, or prior victimization?" After analyzing the qualitative responses, a few central themes emerged. Despite results from the Chi Square, gender identity seemed to be the most impactful variable that respondents would consider when deciding to report to law enforcement. Twenty-two respondents identified either their own gender identity or the gender identity of the officer as impactful, with several respondents indicating they would only feel comfortable talking to an officer with the same gender identity as them. One respondent wrote "I would feel more comfortable because I couldn't tell someone [who is] the opposite gender as me" and another wrote "I would only care about the officer's gender. I would not want to report a sexual assault to a male officer out of fear of not being believed or being judged, so I would only want to discuss it in detail with a female cop." This was consistent with responses gathered when respondents were also asked if they would feel more comfortable reporting to a police officer

with the same gender as them. Approximately 90% of respondents agreed with this statement, ranging from I somewhat agree, I agree, and I strongly agree. When asked the same question about race and ethnicity or sexual orientation, responses were more evenly distributed across all response options, indicating a weaker relationship.

Another central theme was the impact of prior victimization and experiences with law enforcement; 21 respondents indicated that prior victimization would impact their decision to report to law enforcement. One respondent wrote "I was SA'd (sexually assaulted) as a teenager. The officer told me that because the offender was from a different background, their customs for physical touch '*may be different than ours.*' He was never charged or pursued" and another wrote "I would consider prior victimization, in hopes that I would be believed." There were 16 respondents who simply responded "yes" or "yes all of them" to this question, so the counts provided for gender identity and prior victimization may be much larger but cannot be assumed since they were not directly identified in these 16 responses. Beyond that, ten responses directly referenced sexual orientation, six responses referenced race, and one response referenced class, which was not a variable included but did provide some additional insight.

The largest response to this question was no, that race and ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity, or prior victimization would not be important factors when deciding to report to law enforcement; 28 respondents indicated no. Many responses were simply "no" without further explanation, but some participants did provide more insight into their response. One respondent wrote "I would report it no matter what" and another wrote "no, but I would consider reporting depending on the severity of the assault."

Willingness to Report to Title IX

Among race and ethnicity, gender identity, and sexual orientation, there was no statistically significant impact on one's perceived willingness to report to Title IX.

Racial and Ethnic Identity

HO4 There is no relationship between racial and ethnic identity and perceived willingness to report to Title IX.

HA4 There is a relationship between racial and ethnic identity and perceived willingness to report to Title IX.

For racial and ethnic identities, after running the Chi Square analysis through SPSS, it produced a Chi Square value of 8.573 with a significance level of 0.573. Using the degree of freedom of 10 and an alpha level of .05, the critical region was determined to be 18.307. At an alpha level of .05, the value does not fall within the critical region. Therefore, I fail to reject the null hypothesis, and conclude that there is not a relationship between racial and ethnic identity and perceived willingness to report to Title IX. As seen in *Table 5,* 50% of Hispanic respondents had higher perceived willingness to report to Title IX and 44% were neutral. White respondents were mostly neutral towards Title IX at 56% of respondents and 34% had higher perceived willingness.

Table 5

Willingness to Report to Title IX x Racial and Ethnic Identity

	White (%)	Black (%)	Hispanic (%)	Asian (%)	Multi-Racial (%)	Other (%)	Totals (%)
Less Willing	4 (10)	0 (0)	1 (5)	0 (0)	0 (0)	1 (33)	6 (8)
Neutral	23 (56)	1 (50)	8 (45)	1 (33)	5 (83)	2 (66)	40 (55)
More Willing	14 (34)	1 (50)	9 (50)	2 (66)	1 (17)	0 (0)	27 (37)
Totals	41	2	18	3	6	3	73

Gender Identity

HO5 There is no relationship between gender identity and perceived willingness to report to Title IX.

HA5 There is a relationship between gender identity and perceived willingness to report to Title IX.

For gender identities, after running the Chi Square analysis through SPSS, it produced a Chi Square value of 7.256 with a significance level of 0.509. Using the degree of freedom of 8 and an alpha level of .05, the critical region was determined to be 15.507. At an alpha level of .05, the value does not fall within the critical region. Therefore, I fail to reject the null hypothesis, and conclude that there is not a relationship between gender identity and perceived willingness to report to Title IX. Amongst gender identities, as seen in *Table 6,* 62.5% of cisgendered male respondents had higher perceived willingness to report, compared to 34% of cisgendered females.

Table 6

Willingness to Report to Title IX x Gender Identity

	Cis Male (%)	Cis Female (%)	Non-Binary (%)	Fluid (%)	Non-Conforming (%)	Totals (%)
Less Willing	1 (12)	4 (7)	1 (25)	0 (0)	0 (0)	6 (8)
Neutral	2 (25)	35 (59)	1 (25)	1 (100)	1 (100)	40 (55)
More Willing	5 (63)	20 (34)	2 (50)	0 (0)	0 (0)	27 (37)
Totals	8	59	4	1	1	73

Sexual Orientation

HO6 There is no relationship between sexual orientation and perceived willingness to report to Title IX.

HA6 There is a relationship between sexual orientation and perceived willingness to report to Title IX.

For sexual orientation, after running the Chi Square analysis through SPSS, it produced a Chi Square value of 15.731 with a significance level of 0.108. Using the degree of freedom of 10 and an alpha level of .05, the critical region was determined to be 18.307. At an alpha level of .05, the value does not fall within the critical region. Therefore, I fail to reject the null hypothesis, and conclude that there is not a relationship between sexual orientation and perceived willingness to report to Title IX. Participants identifying as heterosexual mostly had neutral feelings (47.5%) towards reporting to Title IX or higher perceived willingness (50%). Bisexual respondents were mostly neutral towards Title IX (55.5%) with the rest of the respondents being an even split between low and high perceived willingness.

Table 7

Willingness to Report to Title IX x Sexual Orientation

	Heterosexual (%)	Homosexual (%)	Bisexual (%)	Pansexual (%)	Asexual (%)	Queer (%)	Totals (%)
Less Willing	1 (2)	1 (20)	4 (22)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	6 (8)
Neutral	19 (48)	2 (40)	10 (56)	4 (80)	1 (100)	4 (100)	40 (55)
More Willing	20 (50)	2 (40)	4 (22)	1 (20)	0 (0)	0 (0)	27 (37)
Totals	8	59	4	1	1	4	73

Title IX Qualitative Responses

In general, participants seemed to be more willing or more neutral on reporting to Title IX, compared to scores reported for law enforcement. The majority of respondents (55%) were neutral towards Title IX and 37% were more willing, while only 8% of respondents had low perceived willingness to disclose to Title IX. Among cisgendered females, 25 fell into the "less likely" score to report to law enforcement, while only four were "less likely" to report to Title IX. Similarly, based on sexual orientation 29 participants were "less likely" to report to law enforcement, while only six participants were "less likely" to report to Title IX. Among non-white respondents, only two indicated less willingness to report to Title IX, with the rest falling into a relatively equal distribution between neutral or more willing. Heterosexual or straight respondents were most likely to report to Title IX (50%) with 47.5% feeling neutral towards Title IX.

Participants were asked to answer the following question with a typed-out response: "When deciding to report a sexual assault to Title IX, would you consider any of the following

variables in your decision making: race/ethnicity, gender identity, sexual orientation, or prior victimization?" After analyzing the qualitative responses, a few central themes emerged. One theme, as identified previously, was that participants were much more inclined to report to Title IX or trust Title IX staff, compared to law enforcement. Some responses included "No, due to the nature of Title IX I don't think any of these factors would matter," "Yes, but not as much as I would when reporting to police," "Not nearly as strongly as the previous one [law enforcement], but still yes," and "I would still consider this but not as much as with the police." 36 responses to this question were "no" that none of these factors would matter. Similar to the same question asked of law enforcement, many participants who did answer yes cited gender identity and prior victimization as deciding factors, but at a much smaller rate. Prior victimization was a deciding factor for 11, compared to 21 participants who cited that for law enforcement. Gender identity was a deciding factor for 14 participants, compared to 22 participants identifying the same factor for law enforcement. Overall, there appeared to be higher rates of perceived willingness to report sexual victimization to Title IX, or at least less hesitation to, based on one's personal identities, compared to law enforcement.

Willingness to Disclose to Informal Support Routes

Racial and Ethnic Identity

HO7 There is no relationship between racial and ethnic identity and perceived willingness to disclose to informal support routes.

HA7 There is a relationship between racial and ethnic identity and perceived willingness to disclose to informal support routes.

For racial and ethnic identities, after running the Chi Square analysis through SPSS, it produced a Chi Square value of 12.346 with a significance level of 0.263. Using the degree of freedom of 10 and an alpha level of .05, the critical region was determined to be 18.307. At an

alpha level of .05, the value does not fall within the critical region. Therefore, I fail to reject the null hypothesis, and conclude that there is not a relationship between racial and ethnic identity and perceived willingness to disclose to informal support routes. As seen in *Table 8*, 24.4% of white respondents had higher perceived willingness to disclose sexual victimization to informal support routes, compared to 33% of Hispanic respondents, 100% of Asian respondents, and 50% of Black respondents.

Table 8

Willingness to Disclose to Informal Support x Racial and Ethnic Identity

	White (%)	Black (%)	Hispanic (%)	Asian (%)	Multi-Racial (%)	Other (%)	Totals (%)
Less Willing	3 (8)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	3 (4)
Neutral	28 (68)	1 (50)	12 (66)	0 (0)	5 (83)	3 (100)	49 (67)
More Willing	10 (25)	1 (50)	6 (33)	3 (100)	1 (17)	0 (0)	21 (29)
Totals	41	2	18	3	6	3	73

Gender Identity

HO8 There is no relationship between gender identity and perceived willingness to disclose to informal support routes.

HA8 There is a relationship between gender identity and perceived willingness to disclose to informal support routes.

For gender identities, after running the Chi Square analysis through SPSS, it produced a Chi Square value of 4.293 with a significance level of 0.830. Using the degree of freedom of 8 and an alpha level of .05, the critical region was determined to be 15.507. At an alpha level of .05, the value does not fall within the critical region. Therefore, I fail to reject the null

hypothesis, and conclude that there is not a relationship between gender identity and perceived willingness to disclose to informal support routes.

Table 9

Willingness to Disclose to Informal Support x Gender Identity

	Cis Male (%)	Cis Female (%)	Non-Binary (%)	Fluid (%)	Non-Conforming (%)	Totals (%)
Less Willing	0 (0)	3 (5)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	3 (4)
Neutral	4 (50)	41 (70)	2 (50)	1 (100)	1 (100)	49 (67)
More Willing	4 (50)	15 (25)	2 (50)	0 (0)	0 (0)	21 (29)
Totals	8	59	4	1	1	73

As seen in *Table 9*, 69.5% of cisgender females were neutral towards informal support disclosure and 25.4% of cisgendered females had high perceived willingness. 50% of cisgendered males and non-binary respondents were neutral and 50% of both identities had high perceived willingness.

Sexual Orientation

HO9 There is no relationship between sexual orientation and perceived willingness to disclose to informal support routes.

HA9 There is a relationship between sexual orientation and perceived willingness to disclose to informal support routes.

For sexual orientation, after running the Chi Square analysis through SPSS, it produced a Chi Square value of 5.857 with a significance level of 0.827. Using the degree of freedom of 10 and an alpha level of .05, the critical region was determined to be 18.307. At an alpha level of .05, the value does not fall within the critical region. Therefore, I fail to reject the null

hypothesis, and conclude that there is not a relationship between sexual orientation and perceived willingness to disclose to informal support routes. As seen in *Table 10*, all queer identifying respondents, including any respondent who did not select "heterosexual" as their sexual orientation, 24% had high perceived willingness and 72.7% were neutral. Only one queer respondent had low perceived willingness.

Table 10

Willingness to Disclose to Informal Support x Sexual Orientation

	Heterosexual (%)	Homosexual (%)	Bisexual (%)	Pansexual (%)	Asexual (%)	Queer (%)	Totals (%)
Less Willing	2 (5)	0 (0)	1 (6)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	3 (4)
Neutral	25 (62.5)	4 (80)	12 (66)	4 (80)	0 (0)	4 (100)	49 (67)
More Willing	13 (32.5)	1 (20)	5 (28)	1 (20)	1 (100)	0 (0)	21 (29)
Totals	8	59	4	1	1	4	73

Among all three identities, the majority of respondents (67%) fell into the neutral category. Only three respondents (4%) had a perceived low willingness to disclose sexual victimization to informal support routes. There did not seem to be any large emerging themes in the distribution of identities among their perceived willingness to disclose to informal support routes. One interesting observation is that all three respondents who had perceived low willingness were white and cisgendered females. Despite previous literature indicating that females are more likely to receive and provide support to other female friends, only 25% of cisgendered females in this study indicated high willingness to disclose sexual victimization to family and friends, while the majority (70%) were neutral.

Religious and Political Affiliation

While initially not the primary variables being studied, religious and political affiliation did have a statistically significant impact on one's perceived willingness to report. For law enforcement, both variables were significant. Amongst political affiliation, after running the Chi Square analysis through SPSS, it produced a Chi Square value of 21.116 with a significance level of 0.020. Using the degree of freedom of 10 and an alpha level of .05, the critical region was determined to be 18.307. At an alpha level of .05, the value does fall within the critical region. Therefore, I reject the null hypothesis, and conclude that there is a relationship between political affiliation and perceived willingness to report to law enforcement. For religious affiliation, after running the Chi Square analysis through SPSS, it produced a Chi Square value of 24.219 with a significance level of <0.001. Using the degree of freedom of 6 and an alpha level of .05, the critical region was determined to be 12.592. At an alpha level of .05, the value does fall within the critical region. Therefore, I reject the null hypothesis, and conclude that there is a relationship between religious affiliation and perceived willingness to report to law enforcement.

This significant relationship could be due to politicized views of police and police brutality, where police organizations are more often supported by individuals identifying as conservative or Republican, and the connection between many religious organizations with conservative political beliefs.

For Title IX, political affiliation did have a relationship with perceived willingness to report. After running the Chi Square analysis through SPSS, it produced a Chi Square value of 19.368 with a significance level of 0.036. Using the degree of freedom of 10 and an alpha level of .05, the critical region was determined to be 18.307. At an alpha level of .05, the value does

fall within the critical region. Therefore, I reject the null hypothesis, and conclude that there is a relationship between political affiliation and perceived willingness to report to Title IX.

However, religious affiliation does not appear to have a relationship. After running the Chi Square analysis through SPSS, it produced a Chi Square value of 11.972 with a significance level of 0.063. Using the degree of freedom of 6 and an alpha level of .05, the critical region was determined to be 12.592. At an alpha level of .05, the value does not fall within the critical region. Therefore, I fail to reject the null hypothesis, and conclude that there is not a relationship between religious affiliation and perceived willingness to report to Title IX.

The relationship between Title IX and political affiliation could potentially be a result of the highly polarizing and politicization of Title IX regulations under the Trump administration (Webermann et al., 2023). However, this finding could also be purely coincidental, as studies continue to bring attention to the lack of student awareness surrounding Title IX (Shah & Storch, 2023), meaning it is potentially unlikely that students would be aware of the political turmoil surround Title IX regulations.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

While both race/ethnicity and sexual orientation were statistically significant, sexual orientation appeared to be the most consistent with prior literature in terms of individual responses. As most non-white participants fell into the neutral response category and more white participants had low perceived willingness, this finding did not directly support prior literature. Findings surrounding sexual orientation were much more consistent, as the vast majority of participants fell into the neutral response category and responses between the low and high categories were nearly equal.

Among all three reporting options tested, respondents had the highest perceived willingness to report to Title IX and the lowest perceived willingness to report to law enforcement, regardless of identities. For perceived willingness to disclose to informal support routes, 4% of the sample had low perceived willingness, 67% were neutral, and 29% had high perceived willingness. For perceived willingness to report to Title IX, 8% had low perceived willingness, 55% were neutral, and 37% had high perceived willingness. For perceived willingness to report to law enforcement, 40% had low perceived willingness, 50.5% were neutral, and 9.5% had high perceived willingness.

Hypothesis one was that "individuals with marginalized identities will have a lower perceived willingness to report sexual victimization to law enforcement." In terms of racial and ethnic identity, white respondents actually had a lower perceived willingness to report to law enforcement compared to non-white respondents, which does not support this hypothesis. This

could potentially be due to lower percentages of non-white participants contributing to an insufficiently representative sample size. The majority of the existing literature on how racial identity impacts victimization focused heavily on black individuals. For this study, only two respondents self-identified as black. With only two respondents in this category, it is difficult to make any assumptions using the data. However, queer respondents had lower perceived willingness to report to law enforcement compared to straight or heterosexual respondents, which would support this hypothesis. Furthermore, all gender identities except for cisgendered males did have a lower perceived willingness to report to law enforcement. Gender-queer respondents collectively accounted for only six respondents, so it also difficult to make assumptions off of such a small sample. However, of those six respondents, four (66%) had low perceived willingness to report to law enforcements while the other two (33%) were neutral.

Hypothesis two was that "individuals with marginalized identities will have a lower perceived willingness to report sexual victimization to their university's Title IX office." This hypothesis was not supported by the data, as there appeared to be no relationship with any identity and one's perceived willingness to report. Generally, respondents felt favorable or neutral towards Title IX. This finding is peculiar, especially when considering the previous literature surrounding Title IX. Most current literature surrounding the topic of reporting sexual victimization to Title IX supported the idea that Title IX offices did little to support or empathize with victims, engaged in harmful behavior such as victim blaming and name-calling, the office stalled their cases, or victims were told the school could do nothing for them (Holland & Cipriano, 2021; Shah & Storch, 2023; Vail, 2019; Webermann & Holland, 2022). Because all Title IX offices are different, it is a possibility that the Title IX office at this specific university may hold a higher reputation on campus for handling cases with care. Alternatively, much of the

existing literature focuses on students who have previously reported to Title IX, while this study focused on one's perceived willingness to report. In this sample, only 11% of respondents indicated they had a previous victimization experience that was reported to Title IX or law enforcement. Respondents were not asked to specify which reporting option they previously engaged with, so there is no telling if these respondents have engaged with Title IX or not, but this perception of Title IX in a favorable manor could also be due to a lack of prior involvement with the Title IX office.

Hypothesis three was that "individuals identifying as male will have a lower perceived willingness to report sexual victimization through either of the formal routes." This hypothesis was not supported, and in fact individuals identifying as male actually had higher perceived willingness to report sexual victimization through both. 12.5% of respondents had lower perceived willingness for Title IX, 25% were neutral, and 62.5% had a higher perceived willingness. Among perceived willingness to report to law enforcement, 75% of male identifying respondents were neutral, and 25% had higher perceived willingness. The prior literature supporting this hypothesis found that men were significantly less likely than any other gender identity to report sexual victimization (Mennicke et al., 2022). This was partially supported by the study, as the 11 respondents who indicated they had experienced sexual victimization previously that was reported were not cisgendered men; one respondent identified as gender fluid and the remaining respondents identified as cisgender females. However, this could also support why the cisgender males who took this survey had higher perceived willingness to report sexual victimization, simply because they have not had the experience of doing so. Perceived willingness to report sexual victimization could be heavily influenced by one's levels of rape myth acceptance, in which a higher rape myth acceptance would indicate the belief that reporting

bodies such as law enforcement take sexual victimization more seriously than they actually do, or that victims who do not report are often lying about the experience (Carmody & Washington, 2001; Lathan et al., 2023). As college men tend to have the highest rates of rape myth acceptance (Hayes et al., 2016) and individuals who have no experience of sexual victimization tend to have higher rates of rape myth acceptance (Lathan et al., 2023), this could be a very likely explanation for the men in this survey to think more favorably of reporting options.

Hypothesis four was that "individuals, regardless of their identities, will have a higher perceived willingness to disclose sexual victimization to their friends and family, compared to their perceived willingness to report through formal routes." This hypothesis was not fully supported, as individuals did have a higher perceived willingness to report to Title IX (37%) compared to informal support disclosure (29%), but informal support disclosure was still higher than perceived willingness to report to law enforcement, which only 9.5% of the sample had higher perceived willingness to report to law enforcement. In regard to the higher favorability towards Title IX, this could be explained by what was previously stated in hypothesis two. The original hypothesis stated that individuals would mostly have higher perceived willingness to disclose to informal support routes, however 67% of the sample fell into the neutral category. This was the largest neutral category of all three reporting options. This hypothesis could potentially be explained by the fact that this Likert scale combined perceived willingness to disclose sexual victimization to both family and friends.

After discovering the results of this hypothesis, I separated the data to seclude perceived willingness to disclose to family, including parents, siblings, and other family members from perceived willingness to disclose to friends. From this, there was a clear distinction between perception of family versus friends. When disclosing to family, 62% of participants were neutral,

23% felt more willing, and 15% were less willing. At 23% of participants being more willing to disclose to family, this is still a smaller percentage than those more willing to report to Title IX at 37%.

Table 11

Perceived Willingness to Disclose to Family

Willingness to Disclose to Family	Frequency (n)	Percentage
Less Willing	11	15
Neutral	45	62
More Willing	17	23
Totals	73	100

When it came to friends, only 5% of participants were less willing to disclose sexual victimization, a much smaller percentage than 15% less willing to disclose to family. When disclosing to friends, 44% felt neutral and 51% were more willing. This is the highest percentage of all reporting or disclosure rates tested in the survey, meaning that participants have the highest perceived willingness to disclose sexual victimization to friends over all other reporting options.

Table 12

Perceived Willingness to Disclose to Friends

Willingness to Disclose to Family	Frequency (n)	Percentage
Less Willing	4	5
Neutral	32	44
More Willing	37	51
Totals	73	100

Perceived willingness to disclose to family over friends could be due to several factors. As noted in the literature review, many participants who identity as LGBTQ+ across both gender identity and sexual orientation may be more willing to discuss issues of sexual victimization with friends if they are not “out” with family members (Bedera et al., 2022). Additionally, many

victims cited not pursuing reporting options so that their family, mainly parents, did not find out about their assault (Bedera et al., 2022) which could also indicate why many had a lower willingness to disclose to family. Further, because many sexual assaults are related to alcohol use (Graber, 2019) some students may be less likely to tell their family about a sexual assault if they were consuming alcohol underage at the time and were fearful of being reprimanded for underage alcohol consumption by their parents.

Limitations and Future Research

There are several factors that had a potential impact on the quality of the study conducted. One major limitation to the survey was the sample size and lack of representation in the sample size. When comparing the percentages of racial and ethnic identities in the survey to the larger student body of the university, the sample was representative and all percentages matched up nearly exact. However, due to the overall small sample size, many identities had only one or two respondents representing that identity. This made making assumptions about different identities rather difficult, as one or two respondents are likely not representative of the entire population. A larger sample size with a wider breadth of identities could have yielded different results, as the main objective of the research was to analyze how holding marginalized identities impacts perceived willingness to report.

Another limitation was the survey itself, both in length and in the specificity of questions asked. Despite 103 total responses, only 73 respondents completed the survey entirely. Many abandoned the survey partially through, most likely due to the length of time the survey required. A shorter or more concise survey, or the ability to offer an incentive to complete it, could have yielded more complete responses which would contribute to a larger sample size. Some questions could have been reworded to be more specific, which would allow for more inferences

to be gathered from the data. For example, for respondents who had experienced prior victimization that had been reported, asking respondents to specify if they reported to Title IX or law enforcement would have been beneficial. Additionally, asking respondents if they have experienced sexual victimization that was not reported could have been beneficial.

Future research should continue to analyze the barriers to reporting sexual victimization among college students, while also looking at how marginalized identities are impacted disproportionately and differently by different societal standards and systems. Future research could also look at actualized willingness to report among only respondents who have experienced sexual victimization. Another limitation to this research was asking respondents to put themselves into a hypothetical situation, one that they may have no or very little knowledge about. Asking respondents who have lived the actual experience of sexual victimization their perceptions on reporting and disclosure may likely yield drastically different results.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to understand the impact, if any, that holding marginalized identities has on the willingness to report sexual victimization to law enforcement, Title IX offices, and informal support routes. Victims of sexual victimization rarely report instances of sexual violence, when compared to other crimes, and especially other violent crimes. In terms of what reporting option respondents felt most favorably towards, regardless of identities, informal disclosure to friends was the most preferred, reporting to Title IX was second, followed by informal disclosure to family, and then law enforcement as the last option respondents felt more willing to report to.

Sexual victimization has a disproportionate impact on individuals who hold marginalized identities. Individuals who identify along the gender and sexuality spectrum are significantly

more likely to experience sexual victimization, along with women of color. With the historical distrust among marginalized identities and formal reporting entities such as the police, it is likely that the willingness of these individuals to report a hypothetical instance of sexual victimization is likely significantly lower than the willingness to report of those with privileged identities. This study analyzed the relationship of participants' identities and their perceived willingness to report sexual victimization to law enforcement and university Title IX offices, and their perceived willingness to disclose sexual victimization to informal routes, such as family or friends. Through use of a survey, this study provided answers to the hypotheses that addressed this relationship. This research is essential to understand rates of under-reporting for sexual victimization, why victims chose not to report, and how important the victimology of sexual victimization is when developing victim services that assist victims in reporting processes. Research like this will not eliminate the epidemic that is sexual victimization, but it can help provide an understanding of how to better serve victims.

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APPENDIX A

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD EXEMPTION

UNIVERSITY OF
NORTHERN COLORADO

Institutional Review Board

Date:	02/12/2024
Principal Investigator:	Tara Diltz
Committee Action:	**IRB EXEMPT DETERMINATION – New Protocol**
Action Date:	02/12/2024
Protocol Number:	2402057293
Protocol Title:	A Willingness to Report Sexual Victimization Through Formal and Informal Routes and the Correlation to Victim's Race, Sexual Orientation, and Gender Identity
Expiration Date:	

The University of Northern Colorado Institutional Review Board has reviewed your protocol and determined your project to be exempt under 45 CFR 46.104(d)(702) (703) for research involving

Category 3 (2018): BENIGN BEHAVIORAL INTERVENTIONS IN CONJUNCTION WITH THE COLLECTION OF INFORMATION FROM ADULT SUBJECTS through verbal or written responses (including data entry) or audiovisual recording if the subject prospectively agrees to the intervention and information collection and at least one of the following criteria is met: (A) The information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of the human subjects cannot readily be ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects; (B) Any disclosure of the human subjects' responses outside the research would not reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing, employability, educational advancement, or reputation; or (C) The information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of the human subjects can readily be ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects, and an IRB conducts a limited IRB review to make the determination required by 45 CFR 46.111(a)(7). For the purpose of this provision, benign behavioral interventions are brief in duration, harmless, painless, not physically invasive, not likely to have a significant adverse lasting impact on the subjects, and the investigator has no reason to think the subjects will find the interventions offensive or embarrassing. Provided all such criteria are met, examples of such benign behavioral interventions would include having the subjects play an online game, having them solve puzzles under various noise conditions, or having them decide how to allocate a nominal amount of received cash between themselves and someone else. If the research involves deceiving the subjects regarding the nature or purposes of the research, this exemption is not applicable unless the subject authorizes the deception through a prospective agreement to participate in such research.

UNIVERSITY OF
NORTHERN COLORADO

Institutional Review Board

You may begin conducting your research as outlined in your protocol. Your study does not require further review from the IRB, unless changes need to be made to your approved protocol.

As the Principal Investigator (PI), you are still responsible for contacting the UNC IRB office if and when:

- You wish to deviate from the described protocol and would like to formally submit a modification request. Prior IRB approval must be obtained before any changes can be implemented (except to eliminate an immediate hazard to research participants).
- You make changes to the research personnel working on this study (add or drop research staff on this protocol).
- At the end of the study or before you leave The University of Northern Colorado and are no longer a student or employee, to request your protocol be closed. *You cannot continue to reference UNC on any documents (including the informed consent form) or conduct the study under the auspices of UNC if you are no longer a student/employee of this university.
- You have received or have been made aware of any complaints, problems, or adverse events that are related or possibly related to participation in the research.

If you have any questions, please contact the Interim IRB Administrator, Chris Saxton, at 970-702-5427 or via e-mail at chris.saxton@unco.edu. Additional information concerning the requirements for the protection of human subjects may be found at the Office of Human Research Protection website - http://hhs.gov/ohrp/ and https://www.unco.edu/research/research-integrity-and-compliance/institutional-review-board/.

Sincerely,
Michael Aldridge
Interim IRB Administrator

University of Northern Colorado: FWA00000784