ORIGINAL ARTICLE

"It Happens to Girls All the Time": Examining Sexual Assault Survivors' Reasons for Not Using Campus Supports

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Highlights

- Identifies reasons why college students who experience sexual assault do not use formal sources of support on campus.
- Examines how reasons for not using formal supports differ across sources of support: Title IX Office, sexual assault center, and housing staff.
- Provides an in-depth, contextual understanding of sexual assault survivors' use and avoidance of campus supports in the wake of substantial policy change.
- Contributes recommendations for institutional policy and practice based on findings, including taking a stronger stance against "less serious" forms of sexual assault, reducing a quasi-criminal justice approach to investigation and adjudication, and limiting mandated reporting.

Abstract Sexual assault is a prevalent problem in higher education, and despite the increasing availability of formal supports on college campuses, few sexual assault survivors use them. Experiencing sexual assault can have devastating consequences on survivors' psychological and educational wellbeing, which may intensify if survivors do not receive adequate care. Drawing from existing theoretical frameworks and empirical research, this study used a mixed methodological approach to examine why survivors did not use three key campus supports—the Title IX Office, the sexual assault center, and housing staff—and if these reasons differed across the three supports. Using data from 284 women who experienced sexual assault in college, our qualitative findings identified four overarching themes, including logistical issues (e.g., lacking time and knowledge), feelings, beliefs, and responses that made it seem unacceptable to use campus supports, judgments about the appropriateness of the support, and alternative methods of coping. Quantitative findings revealed that survivors' reasons for not seeking help differed across supports. Collectively, our findings suggest that community norms and institutional policies can make it challenging for survivors to use campus supports. We propose several suggestions for institutional change (e.g., taking a stronger stance against "less serious" forms of sexual assault, reducing a quasi-criminal justice approach to investigation and adjudication, limiting mandated reporting).

Keywords College students · Sexual assault · Help seeking · Support systems

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Introduction

Approximately 20–25% of women are sexually assaulted in college (Fedina, Holmes & Backes, 2016; Fisher, Cullen & Turner, 2000). Sexual assault can have a devastating effect on survivors' lives, psychologically (e.g., depression, posttraumatic stress, suicidality; Chang et al., 2015; Kaltman, Krupnick, Stockton, Hooper & Green, 2005) and academically (e.g., low GPA, withdrawal from school; Jordan, Combs & Smith, 2014; Mengo & Black, 2016). These negative outcomes may intensify if a survivor does not receive adequate care and assistance.

Within recent years, federal and institutional policies have attempted to address this issue, and many college students have more formal support options than survivors in other contexts; yet, very few student survivors report or seek help (Sabina & Ho, 2014). This study used a mixed methodological approach to examine why survivors did

not seek help from three key campus supports—the Title IX Office, the sexual assault center, and housing staff—and if these reasons differed across the three supports. Our qualitative and quantitative analyses provide an in-depth, contextual understanding of sexual assault survivors use of campus supports in the wake of substantial policy change.

Formal Supports for Sexual Assault Survivors on Campus

Within the last 6 years, there have been substantial shifts in federal and institutional policies to address sexual assault on college campuses. The Department of Education Office for Civil Rights (OCR) Dear Colleague Letter provided additional guidance around sexual assault as a prohibited form of sex discrimination in higher education (Ali, 2011). This guidance requires universities to appoint a Title IX coordinator who will ensure compliance with Title IX, oversee complaints, and provide other important services (e.g., training employees; Ali, 2011). Additionally, universities must establish clear procedures for reporting sexual assault, including the Title IX coordinator's office and contact information and where a complaint can be filed (Ali, 2011). As a result, schools have created specific positions/offices to address sexual assault (e.g., reporting, investigating, sanctioning, providing accommodations); while the specific titles will differ across campuses, we refer to this support as the Title IX Office. The Title IX Office handles all official reports and grievance procedures.

Additionally, the OCR encourages universities to provide comprehensive resources for survivors that can provide services and support. Although resources vary across campuses, many universities have centers specifically for sexual assault (Carmody, Ekhomu & Payne, 2009). Sexual assault centers (SACs) place survivors' needs and interests at the very center of their mission, and specially trained advocates can provide a range of services, such as explaining reporting procedures, providing support during an investigation, and connecting the survivor to other resources. Moreover, the OCR encourages universities to designate SAC employees as confidential—meaning they will not share a survivor's personally identifying information with the police or campus officials, unless she/he explicitly asks them to (Lhamon, 2014).

University housing staff members are another potential resource for survivors. For example, Resident Assistants (RAs) play an important role in students' lives, with responsibilities like building community and trusting relationships with their residents, intervening during crisis situations, and providing referrals to campus resources. Housing staff members are also increasingly mandated to manage students' sexual assault disclosures (Letarte,

2014). For instance, many universities are designating housing staff as "Responsible Employees," which means (under Title IX guidance) that they have a duty to report all information about a sexual assault disclosure to the Title IX coordinator or another designee (Ali, 2011; Lhamon, 2014).[1] As Responsible Employees, housing staff would be required to report an assault to the university even if that goes against the express wishes of the survivor. In addition, the OCR states that Responsible Employees' responsibilities also include explaining confidentiality and providing information about possible accommodations (e.g., changing classes) and resources (Lhamon, 2014).

Despite an increasing availability and variety of supports on college campuses, students who are sexually assaulted rarely use formal supports (Sabina & Ho, 2014). To date, most research on students' use of formal supports has examined reporting to the police. According to national studies, only 2–11% of college women report sexual assault to law enforcement (Fisher, Daigle, Cullen & Turner, 2003; Wolitzky-Taylor et al., 2011). Less research has focused on survivors' reliance on campus supports, but this also appears to be rare. For instance, studies have found that only 0% to 5.3% survivors made a formal grievance through university reporting procedures (Fisher et al., 2003; Lindquist et al., 2013). Similarly, 0% to 17.8% of survivors sought help from SACs or women's centers on campus (Krebs, Lindquist, Warner, Fisher & Martin, 2007; Nasta et al., 2005; Wolitzky-Taylor et al., 2011). These studies provide important descriptive information on the incidence of (non)disclosure, but more research is needed to understand reasons for non-disclosure. Moreover, no study to date has closely investigated survivors' disclosures to housing staff, which are an important source of support on college campuses.

Survivors' Help Seeking

Survivors who do not seek help report greater psychological distress and symptoms of depression and PTSD (Ahrens, Stansell & Jennings, 2010). However, seeking help from formal supports is not always feasible, suitable, or even beneficial. Survivors are more likely to disclose to informal help providers first, and they are more likely to receive positive reactions from informal support providers and more likely to receive negative reactions from formal support providers (Ahrens, Campbell, Ternier-Thames,

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[1] The OCR does not require all universities to designate all undergraduate RAs as Responsible Employees. Housing staff do have reporting requirements as a Campus Security Authority (CSA) under the Clery Act (34 CFR 668.46(a)), which only requires reporting aggregate, non-identifying information about sexual crimes to campus officials.

Wasco & Sefl, 2007; Starzynski, Ullman, Filipas & Townsend, 2005; Ullman, 1996). Some studies find that survivors who receive positive support from formal and informal sources report better mental health (Ullman, 1999). On the other hand, unsupportive reactions (e.g., asking questions that are intrusive, communicating doubt and blame) exacerbate survivors' distress (Ahrens et al., 2007; Orchowski, Untied & Gidycz, 2013; Ullman, 1999). Although seeking help from formal campus supports may not be the first or best choice for all survivors, these supports have the capacity to provide essential resources for recovery, including information, emotional support, housing and/or academic accommodations (e.g., moving the perpetrator to a different residence hall). Moreover, policy makers and administrators are putting a lot of time and resources into creating formal campus supports. Thus, it is crucial to better understand the reasons why survivors are not using them.

However, there is a lack of systematic, theoretical conceptualization of the reasons why college student survivors are not using available services (Sabina & Ho, 2014). Nearly all research has presented survivors a list of possible reasons that they chose not to report to the police or use campus supports (with twelve options, on average). Some of these studies use or adapt items from national surveys, such the National Violence Against Women Survey (e.g., Thompson, Sitterle, Clay & Kingree, 2007; Zinzow & Thompson, 2011) and the National College Women Sexual Victimization Survey (e.g., Fisher et al., 2003; Walsh, Banyard, Moynihan, Ward & Cohn, 2010); others have developed their own list (e.g., Allen, Ridgeway & Swan, 2015; Amar, 2008; Moore & Baker, 2016; Nasta et al., 2005; Sable, Danis, Mauzy & Gallagher, 2006).

Several existing models have conceptualized the process of help seeking for survivors of interpersonal violence. For instance, Liang, Goodman, Tummala-Narra and Weintraub (2005) identified three important components for survivors of intimate partner violence: (a) recognizing and defining the problem, (b) making a decision to seek help, and (c) selecting a particular type and source of support. A recent conceptual model of help attainment for victims of sexual assault and intimate partner violence proposes that formal help seeking—within any given developmental and situational context—is influenced by survivors' perceptions of their needs, the availability of help and fit with support systems (Kennedy et al., 2012). While these models help elucidate steps within the entire help-seeking process, this study focused explicitly on understanding the reasons why survivors did not use specific supports for sexual assault in the campus community.

Existing theory can help conceptualize the reasons survivors did not use supports. For instance, Penchansky and Thomas (1981) categorized several overarching dimensions to health service utilization, including the volume of services in the community, the cost of services, the physical accessibility of services (e.g., location, hours), and clients' attitudes and personal characteristics. Drawing from this model, Logan et al. conducted two studies (Logan, Evans, Stevenson & Jordan, 2005; Logan, Stevenson, Evans & Leukefeld, 2004) examining reasons that women with victimization experiences—including sexual assault and intimate partner violence—in urban and rural communities did not use physical and mental health services and criminal justice services. This work identified four primary factors that impeded service use: First, *availability* included a lack of resources in one's community. Second, *affordability* included the costs of care. Third, *accessibility* barriers occurred when reporting options and/or resources were available, but survivors could not use them (e.g., lack time or transportation) or did not know enough to use them. Finally, *acceptability* included a wide range of feelings, beliefs, and responses that made it seem unacceptable to use supports, such as experiencing embarrassment, shame, and self-blame, fearing backlash from their community, worrying about confidentiality, anticipating that services would not help or would cause further trauma, considering characteristics of the assault (e.g., being financially dependent on their abuser means they should not risk using supports), and believing they did not need help. This theoretical framework also helps to identify how survivors' reasons for not using supports are shaped by the larger structural context—an institution does not make supports available, affordable, accessible, and/or acceptable. Thus, this model helps illustrate how survivors' willingness and ability seek help is constrained by community norms, policies, practices, and resources.

Study Purpose

This study had two primary aims. The first aim was to examine and categorize reasons that survivors did not use three formal supports for sexual assault on campus: the Title IX Office, the SAC, and housing staff. Most prior research was conducted before the 2011 Dear Colleague Letter outlining new Title IX guidance and the significant subsequent changes to university sexual assault support systems and/or collapsed across a variety of campus supports rather than examining why survivors did not use each support (e.g., Amar, 2008; Fisher et al., 2003; Lindquist, Crosby, Barrick, Krebs & Settles-Reaves, 2016; Nasta et al., 2005; Sable et al., 2006; Walsh et al., 2010). Two more recent studies asked students (both women and men, not specifically sexual assault survivors) to imagine why sexual assault survivors would be unwilling to use campus supports, and some of the top reasons identified were shame, guilt,

embarrassment, fear of retaliations, desire that nobody know (Allen et al., 2015), off-campus location of the assault, and acquaintance perpetrator (Moore & Baker, 2016). While these studies have examined a range of important issues, additional work is needed to more fully understand why survivors do not use campus supports.

To meet this aim, we collected qualitative data from survivors—explaining why they did not use campus supports. Qualitative data can provide a deeper, more contextual understanding of why survivors are/are not using campus supports, but few studies have used qualitative methods. Koo, Nguyen, Andrasik and George (2015) asked Asian American college women to imagine why a survivor might not use campus supports after an assault. Lindquist et al. (2016) asked survivors what could be done to encourage reporting to the police or campus security. More research is needed to specifically assess why survivors are avoiding formal campus supports. In this study, we drew from Logan and colleagues' (2004, 2005) four-factor framework to help categorize the reasons why survivors' did not use three specific supports for sexual assault.

The second aim was to examine if the reasons survivors did not seek help differed across supports. Most previous research does not look for variation across sources of support. However, knowing the reasons survivors are not using different formal supports would allow institutions to improve supports and increase survivors' willingness and ability to use them. For example, if survivors did not use the SAC because they lacked knowledge of this resource (i.e., an accessibility issue), addressing this would require a different approach than if students mainly feared retaliation (i.e., an acceptability issue). Some studies suggest that students may perceive and use campus supports differently. For example, Orchowski, Meyer and Gidycz (2009) assessed students' likelihood to use different supports if they experienced a sexual assault; students indicated the greatest likelihood to report to the police, followed by the counseling center and a resident advisor. Another study asked students how helpful campus supports would be for female sexual assault survivors; they rated the sexual assault center as most helpful, followed by the campus police and housing staff (Allen et al., 2015). In this study, we used quantitative analyses to examine if the reasons survivors did not use supports differed for the Title IX Office, the SAC, and housing staff.

Method

Procedures and Participants

Participants were part of a larger IRB-approved study. Survey data were collected from (a) resident assistants (RAs) and (b) undergraduate women living in university housing at a large Midwestern university in 2015. These two complementary surveys examined knowledge and perceptions of sexual assault policies and resources, and reporting and help-seeking behavior among RAs—an important support for survivors—and the students they serve. This study examined the women resident survey data.

The Registrar's Office sent recruitment and reminder emails (containing a link to the survey) to 80% of all undergraduate women with a university housing address (our target sample; $n = 3412$).[2] A total of 1031 students responded to the survey, for a 30% response rate. Of those, 152 were ineligible: 79 worked as housing staff, two identified as men, 52 did not currently live in university housing, and 19 did not provide gender or housing information. Following recommendations for web survey research (e.g., Meade & Craig, 2012), we thoroughly inspected the data provided by the eligible participants and removed 39 who had excessive missing data (e.g., missing more than 50% of survey items) and/or failed attention check items (e.g., gave a wrong answer for items that asked for a specific response, such as "please select 5"); this careful "cleaning" helps improve the quality of survey data (Meade & Craig, 2012). Our final sample was 840 women. In this study, we only analyzed data from the participants who had experienced some form of sexual assault as a student at the university—termed "survivors" hereafter.

Survivors' mean age was 18.6 (range 18–22). The majority were white (71.8%, $n = 204$), and the rest identified as Asian American (11.3%, $n = 32$), multiracial (8.1%, $n = 23$), African American/Black (5.3%, $n = 15$), Middle Eastern (2.1%, $n = 6$), Latina (0.7%, $n = 2$), or another race/ethnicity (0.7%, $n = 2$).[3] Most of the women identified as heterosexual (77.5%, $n = 220$), but some identified as mostly heterosexual (17.3%, $n = 49$), bisexual (3.2%, $n = 9$), gay or lesbian (0.8%, $n = 2$), or another sexual identity (e.g., queer; 1.4%, $n = 4$). Two-thirds were first-year students (68.9%, $n = 195$), and the rest were in their second year (26.9%, $n = 76$), third year (2.1% $n = 6$), fourth year (1.1%, $n = 3$), or fifth year and above (1.1%, $n = 3$). There were students from every university residence hall or apartment community in the sample.

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[2] The Registrar's Office selects and contacts a random sample of 80% of any student population requested (e.g., all women in university housing) to avoid overburdening students with research requests.

[3] The ethnic distribution of the sample contained slightly fewer Latina students and slightly more White and multiracial students than the total undergraduate population.

Measures

Sexual Assault

We used a modified Sexual Experiences Survey Short-Form (SES-SF; Koss et al., 2007) to measure sexual assault.[4] Seven items assess a broad spectrum of behaviors: unwanted sexual contact (e.g., "Has anyone fondled, kissed, or rubbed up against the private areas of your body (lips, breast/chest, crotch or butt) or removed some of your clothes without your consent?"), attempted oral, anal, and vaginal penetration (e.g., "Even though it did not happen, has anyone TRIED to have oral sex with you, or make you have oral sex with them without your consent?"), and completed oral, anal, and vaginal penetration. The SES-SF specifics five tactics through which the behaviors could be obtained "without consent" (e.g., physical force, coercion, incapacitation due to alcohol or drugs). Participants indicated if they had experienced any of the behaviors while they were a student at the university. In this study, we included those who experienced any form of sexual assault while they were a student. The SES-SF is one of the most widely used measures of sexual victimization and exhibits good reliability and validity (Johnson, Murphy & Gidycz, 2016).

Title IX Office[5]

Following the SES, participants were asked, "Have you formally reported the incident to the University? In other words, have you filed a complaint against the person(s) who committed the behavior with the University?" Response options included 1 = *Yes* and 2 = *No*. Those who answered "no" were asked to please tell us why, and a text-box was provided for students to type their answer.

Sexual Assault Center

Students were also asked, "Have you sought help for the incident at the SAC?" Again, response options included 1 = *Yes* and 2 = *No*, and participants who answered "no" were asked to please tell us why.

Housing Staff

Respondents (all of whom lived in university housing) indicated if they had sought help from housing staff: "Have you told anyone who works for University Housing about the incident?" Participants could select anyone from a list of staff: 1 = *Resident Advisor*, 2 = *Community Assistant*, 3 = *Diversity Peer Educator*, 4 = *Peer Academic Success Specialist*, 5 = *Other* [write in option]; participants could also select: *N/A, I have not told anyone who works for University Housing*. Students who had not told any housing staff member were then asked to please tell us why.

Qualitative Analysis Approach

We pooled participants' open-ended responses—describing why they did not use the supports—and analyzed them using thematic analysis (see Braun & Clarke, 2006). First, the first author and trained research assistants reviewed these data and created a codebook (i.e., a detailed list of words or phrases that capture an analytical idea present in data). The codebook was refined over several iterations by applying the codebook to subsets of data and revising it. When the codebook was finalized, two research assistants coded all data using Dedoose version 6.1. Interrater reliability was excellent (Cohen's kappa = 0.89; Cohen, 1960). We then identified themes by searching for patterns and meaning across the coded data. Following a deductive approach, we used the Logan et al. (2004, 2005) four-factor framework to guide our interpretation of themes (i.e., does this theme fit within or fall outside?). Additionally, we checked all themes against the dataset to ensure that they adequately fit these data (i.e., does this theme clearly describe what participants are expressing?).

Results

Descriptive Results

Of the total sample, 33.8% (n = 284) had experienced at least one form of sexual assault as a student: 48.9% (n = 139) unwanted sexual contact, 26.8% (n = 76) attempted oral, anal, and/or vaginal penetration, and 24.3% (n = 69) completed oral, anal, and/or vaginal penetration. Of the 284 women who experienced sexual assault, only 16 (5.6%) disclosed to any of the three campus supports: five made a formal report to the university, 11 sought help at the SAC, and nine told someone who worked for university housing (10 survivors used only one support and six used two or more).

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[4] The SES-SF assesses the frequency of behaviors (*0 times, 1 time, 2 times, 3+ times*) in the past 12 months and from age 14; however, researchers have inquired about different time frames and used a more simplified, dichotomous *yes/no* response scale (Koss et al., 2007).

[5] The official names for both the Title IX Office and sexual assault center were used in the survey, but we use these more general terms to maintain anonymity for the campus.

Qualitative Themes: Why Did Survivors Not Use Campus Supports?

We identified four overarching themes: two fit within the Logan et al. (2004, 2005) four-factor framework (*accessibility* and *acceptability*) and two fell outside of it (*appropriateness* and *alternative coping*). Moreover, we identified five unique sub-themes within the acceptability theme. The themes are summarized in Table 1 and discussed below.

Accessibility

First, participants identified accessibility issues—logistical barriers that rendered a support too difficult or impossible to use. These women primarily described two types of accessibility problems: having time constraints and lacking knowledge about a support. For instance, one student stated that her time needed to be spent elsewhere: "I'm too busy with schoolwork" (ID 540). Some students stated that they did not know a support existed at all: "I didn't know about it" (ID 304). Others did not use a support because they lacked knowledge about the services provided. For instance, "I don't know whether [the SAC] is confidential or not" (ID 664).

Students also lacked knowledge about what the support could provide help for. For example, some survivors thought that they could only use a support for a recent assault: "Once I finally accepted the fact that the incident

did take place, I believed it had been too late to report it" (ID 796). Another student stated, "I didn't know much about [the SAC] at the time and once I learned more about it, I felt it was too late to talk about the situation" (ID 228). There are no time limitations for reporting to the Title IX Office or seeking help from the SAC or housing staff (on this campus), but some survivors who did not immediately acknowledge the assault believed too much time had passed.

Acceptability

Many survivors identified acceptability concerns as a reason they did not use campus supports—thoughts, beliefs, and affective responses related to the assault that made it seem unacceptable to use a support. Logan et al. (2004, 2005) studies identified a wide range of acceptability concerns, but they were not classified into set of specific sub-types, generalizable across the samples. Our analysis identified five acceptability sub-themes. Additionally, our analysis more clearly differentiated survivors' thoughts and beliefs about the assault and their own reactions to it—which made it seem unacceptable or unjustifiable to seek help (i.e., acceptability)—and survivors' thoughts and beliefs about the support (i.e., appropriateness, a new theme that is described in detail below).

Negative emotions. First, experiencing negative emotional reactions to the assault deterred survivors from

Table 1 Themes, definitions, and example excerpts

Theme	Definition	Example excerpt
Accessibility	Logistical issues that made a support difficult or impossible to use, including time constraints and lacking knowledge about the support	"I'm too busy with schoolwork."
Acceptability	Thoughts, beliefs, and responses related to the assault made it seem unacceptable/unjustifiable:	
1) Negative emotions	Experiencing negative emotions after the assault hindered their use of a support, including shame, fear, and self-blame	"I was scared and it was difficult to process. I just wanted to forget it ever happened."
2) Consequences	Anticipating negative consequences for themselves and/or the perpetrator hindered their use of a support	"Reporting it would cause me a lot of stress and anxiety."
3) Contextual characteristics	Interpreting circumstances around the assault (e.g., where it happened, who the perpetrator was) as a reason not to use a support	"It was a party and I didn't think I would be taken seriously since alcohol was involved."
4) Minimizing impact	Believing their reaction to the assault was not severe or extreme enough to warrant or justify using a support	"I was not extremely affected emotionally by the incident."
5) Minimizing behaviors	Minimizing the assault, by normalizing sexual assault or comparing their assault to more "severe" forms, hindered their use of a support	"I didn't consider it serious enough because it happens to girls all the time."
Appropriateness	Assessments about the usefulness or helpfulness of a support made it undesirable to use, like lacking efficacy, familiarity, or confidentiality	"I knew they would have to report it and I wasn't comfortable with that."
Alternative coping	Actions taken made it unnecessary to use a support, like telling informal supports, stopping the behavior, or using passive coping strategies	"I've told my friends, I didn't feel the need to tell anyone else."

using campus supports. For example, some students described feeling shame or embarrassment: "Because I am embarrassed." (ID 683). Some students also experienced self-blame, which hindered their willingness and ability to use supports. For instance, one student stated, "I knew I shouldn't have been drinking as much as I was at the time. It was partially my fault." (ID 602).

Consequences. For the second sub-theme, survivors' concerns about personal consequences that might arise made it seem unacceptable to use supports, including how their mental health or personal life might suffer. For instance, survivors were afraid of feeling stressed and revictimized: "reporting it would cause me a lot of stress and anxiety." (ID 302) and "I didn't want to be forced to relive things over and over throughout the investigation." (ID 698). Participants were also concerned about consequences in their social network: "It would have affected my friend group at the time so I just pretended it wasn't a big deal." (ID 15). Additionally, some survivors did not use supports because they were concerned about how it might harm the perpetrator: "I was drinking and wasn't sure if I had given consent, and he seemed like a decent guy that I didn't want to get in trouble." (ID 348) and "I didn't want to ruin the guy's life" (ID 678).

Contextual characteristics. In the third sub-theme, survivors believed that contextual characteristics surrounding the assault—where it happened, what they were doing when it happened, who committed the assault—made it unacceptable to use campus supports. For example, participants stated, "I did not feel the need to tell anyone who works for university housing because it happened off-campus" (ID 224) and "I was drunk and it was at a party, so I felt as though the incident would not be taken seriously" (ID 154). Students were particularly hesitant to use campus supports if the assault took place off-campus and/or if there was alcohol involved. Additionally, some women believed that who committed the assault made it unacceptable to seek help. For some students, not knowing the perpetrator was the reason: "I didn't know who the person was. It was a random guy at a frat party." (ID 326). For others, the reason was knowing the perpetrator well: "He was my boyfriend at the time and I didn't want to tell anybody. I felt ashamed and thought people would blame me." (ID 228).

Minimization of personal impact. The fourth sub-theme concerned survivors' beliefs about their reaction to the assault, and feeling as though the outcomes were not bad enough to warrant or justify using formal campus supports. Most of these participants discussed psychological or physical outcomes: "I didn't feel significantly traumatized." (ID 58), "It did not majorly affect my psychological health" (ID 377), and "I was not extremely affected emotionally by the incident. (ID 348). Some discussed their everyday lives:

"The incident was not anything that affected my daily life that much." (ID 435). These survivors felt it would only be acceptable to use campus supports if the assault had a "severe" or "extreme" impact on their lives in some way.

Minimization of assaultive behaviors. For the fifth sub-theme, many survivors did not use campus supports because they perceived the behavior(s) to be insufficiently severe. These women primarily described instances of unwanted sexual contact and/or attempted rape, and evaluated these behaviors as less serious than other forms of sexual violence. For instance, some survivors did not seek help because there was no vaginal penetration: "It [penetration] didn't happen, therefore, I didn't find it a big deal, but I now realize it was" (ID143) and "I didn't realize until a while later that it was bad that I was pressured into oral sex which I didn't want to have." (ID 341). Others discussed how the assault could have been worse:

> The situation wasn't very serious, I was dancing and he pulled his penis out of his pants and rubbed up against me. I thought he was disgusting and capable of doing other things but…I don't think that his actions are serious enough to report.
>
> (ID 153)

> I felt that others were going through worse things than me and they needed help more.
>
> (ID 349)

> I didn't think it needed to be, a guy grabbed my ass and I yelled at him and he laughed. I was wearing a tight skirt…When I told someone they shrugged and said "What did you expect".
>
> (ID 613)

Additionally, participants minimized the assault by interpreting the behavior as a normal part of being a woman in college: "Because these things are normal for most women and are seen as part of teenage sexual experiences." (ID 93) and "I didn't consider it serious enough because it happens to girls all the time." (ID 780). Some survivors also believed that campus supports would be uninterested in these "normal" behaviors:

> I've been grabbed inappropriately by drunk guys on MANY occasions here as a student. I've never reported it because…I didn't think anybody would care since it happens to everybody.
>
> (ID 116)

> It happens all the time, if people reported all instances of sexual harassment that take place at fraternities, the university would never be finished investigating.
>
> (ID 749)

It is important to note that for the fourth and fifth sub-themes—minimization of personal impact and assaultive behaviors—participants' assessments were made when thinking about and explaining why they did not use specific supports. Thus, these responses should not be interpreted as experiencing false consciousness or representing the full impact of the assault on survivors' lives.

Appropriateness

A new theme that we differentiated from the Logan et al. (2004, 2005) framework concerned survivors' explicit assessment of campus supports. In these assessments, survivors communicated that they did not think it would be useful or helpful to tell the support about their assault. Some participants believed that seeking help from the support would lead to an inappropriate or undesired response. For instance, some believed nothing would actually happen: "I am afraid of what may happen to me and if the person will actually be punished." (ID 297), and "Misconduct cases get thrown out. Universities don't do shit about them." (ID 479). Survivors were also afraid they would be disregarded, doubted, or blamed for the assault: "I felt I would not be taken seriously." (ID 154) and "I didn't think they would care or help." (ID 12).

Additionally, participants described supports as lacking qualities they were looking for: in particular, familiarity and confidentiality. First, some survivors wanted to seek help from people they felt close to personally and emotionally, and the support did not meet this need: "I am not really comfortable enough with anyone in university housing. I prefer to confide these things to friends, parents, and therapists." (ID 341) and "The last thing I want is for someone I see all the time but barely know to intimate details about my life. That is not helpful in this incident." (ID 93).

Second, some survivors stated that they did not want to disclose their assault to a source of support that was not confidential. For example, one participant wrote: "I knew they [housing staff] would have to report it and I wasn't comfortable with that." (ID 45). Another survivor stated, "...I'm afraid it will not be kept private." (ID 558). These quotes illustrate that some survivors prefer supports that can offer confidential assistance.

Alternative Coping

Another new theme was engaging in alternative methods of coping. These survivors described not using campus supports because they had coped with the assault in other ways, such as seeking help from an informal source of support, taking action during the assault to stop the behavior, or ignoring the assault altogether. First, many students chose not to use formal supports because they told an informal source of support, usually a friend: "I've told my friends, I didn't feel the need to tell anyone else." (ID 76). Others told a trusted adult, like a parent or professor.

Additionally, some women did not use campus supports because they had taken action during the assault. These women described being able to stop the perpetrator from touching them further or penetrating them. For example, some were able to get away before things escalated: "I handled the situation by removing myself and was able to move on from it." (ID 18) and "I was able to easily escape" (ID 255). Another said:

> When hooking up with a guy he tried to insert himself and I stopped him and left. Had I been unable to stop him, I most likely would have reported it, I hope.
>
> (ID 656)

However, some survivors did not seek formal help because they engaged in passive coping strategies, like ignoring the assault altogether: "I would rather not think about it" (ID 69) and "I just wanted to forget it ever happened." (ID 10). Several women expressed the desire to just "move on" with their lives, for instance: "I didn't really want anyone involved and prolonging it, I just wanted to ignore it and move on." (ID 15).

Quantitative Comparisons: Do Reasons Differ Across Campus Supports?

Our second aim was to examine if the reasons survivors did not use formal campus supports differed across the three supports: the Title IX Office, the SAC, and housing staff. For each theme, we summed the number of participants who identified the theme in their response to each support. For example, a total of 33 survivors expressed the accessibility theme (e.g., lacking knowledge about a support), but 10 of these women identified this theme for more than one support: 26 survivors identified accessibility issues as a reason they did not use the SAC, 13 survivors identified this for the Title IX Office, and five identified this for housing staff. Next, we conducted a One-Way Repeated Measures ANOVA for each theme. For each test, the independent variable was the three supports and the dependent variable was the average number of participants who identified a particular theme. Significant F-tests were followed by pairwise comparisons. Figure 1 illustrates the frequency of themes across the three supports.

Accessibility

A total of 33 survivors identified accessibility reasons for at least one of the three supports (10 identified it for more
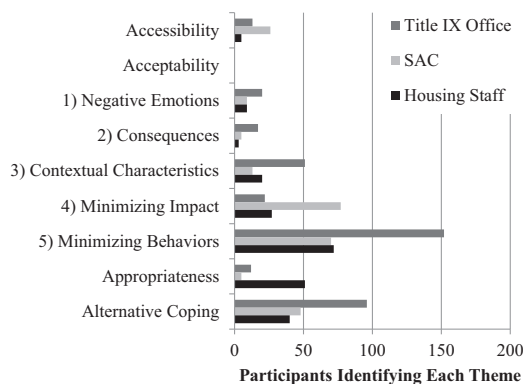
Fig. 1 Frequency of Responses for Three Campus Supports. Title IX Office = making a formal report to the university. SAC = seeking help from the sexual assault center. Housing Staff = seeking help from housing staff member(s)

than one support); most of these women identified accessibility issues for the SAC ($n = 26$), followed by the Title IX Office ($n = 13$), and housing staff ($n = 5$). Statistically, there were significant differences across supports ($F(2, 566) = 10.90$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p2 = .04$). More participants identified accessibility issues as a reason they did not use the SAC compared to both the Title IX Office ($p = .02$) and housing staff ($p < .001$). There was no significant difference between the Title IX Office and housing staff ($p = .136$).

Acceptability/Negative Emotions

There were 30 women who identified negative emotions (e.g., shame) as a reason they did not use at least one support (seven identified it for more than one); most identified this reason for the Title IX Office ($n = 20$), and equal numbers identified this reason for the SAC ($n = 9$) and housing staff ($n = 9$). There were significant differences across supports ($F(2, 566) = 4.22$, $p = .018$, $\eta_p2 = .02$). Survivors were more likely to express that experiencing negative emotions was a reason they did not use the Title IX Office compared to the SAC ($p = .02$) and (marginally) housing staff ($p = .08$). There were no differences between the SAC and housing staff ($p = 1.00$).

Acceptability/Consequences

In total, 21 women identified concerns about consequences as a reason they did not use one or more of the supports (four identified this for more than one); most of these survivors communicated that they did not use the Title IX Office because they anticipated negative consequences ($n = 17$), followed by the SAC ($n = 5$) and housing staff ($n = 3$). There were significant differences across

supports ($F(2, 566) = 8.40$, $p = .001$, $\eta_p2 = .03$). More participants identified this as a reason they did not use the Title IX Office compared to the SAC ($p = .008$) and housing staff ($p = .003$). There were no significant differences between the SAC and housing staff ($p = 1.00$).

Acceptability/Contextual Characteristics

There were 63 women who identified contextual characteristics about the assault (e.g., off-campus, alcohol-involved) as a reason they did not use one or more of the three supports (15 identified this for more than one support); these participants were most likely to identify this reason for the Title IX Office ($n = 51$), followed by housing staff ($n = 20$) and the SAC ($n = 13$). These differences were statistically significant ($F(2, 566) = 23.21$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p2 = .08$). Survivors were significantly more likely to identify this as a reason they did not use the Title IX Office compared to both housing staff ($p < .001$) and the SAC ($p < .001$). There were no significant differences between housing staff and the SAC ($p = .38$).

Acceptability/Minimizing Impact

A total of 82 survivors perceived a lack of severe outcomes as a reason they did not seek help from at least one of the campus supports (37 identified this for more than one support); survivors were more likely to identify this as a reason they did not use the SAC ($n = 77$), followed by housing staff ($n = 27$) and the Title IX Office ($n = 22$). There were significant differences across supports ($F(2, 566) = 42.39$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p2 = .13$) Survivors were more likely to identify this as a reason they did not use the SAC compared to both housing staff ($p < .001$) and the Title IX Office ($p < .001$). There were no significant differences between housing staff and the Title IX Office ($p = 1.00$).

Acceptability/Minimizing Behaviors

There were 167 women who minimized the assaultive behaviors when describing why they did not use one or more of the supports (86 identified this for more than one); participants were more likely to identify this as a reason they did not report to the Title IX Office ($n = 152$), followed by housing staff ($n = 72$) and the SAC ($n = 70$). This reason significantly differed across supports ($F(2, 566) = 63.57$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p2 = .18$). More participants identified this as a reason they did not use the Title IX Office compared to both housing staff ($p < .001$) and the SAC ($p < .001$). There were no differences between SAC and housing staff ($p = 1.00$).

Appropriateness

In total, 58 survivors cited appropriateness concerns as a reason they did not use at least one of the three supports (eight identified this for more than one support); nearly all of these women viewed housing staff as an inappropriate source of support ($n = 51$), followed by the Title IX Office ($n = 12$) and the SAC ($n = 5$). These differences were statistically significant ($F(2, 566) = 37.09$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p2 = .12$). Survivors were significantly more likely to identify this as a reason they did not seek help from housing staff compared to both the Title IX Office ($p < .001$) and the SAC ($p < .001$). There was no difference between the Title IX Office and the SAC ($p = 0.16$).

Alternative Coping

A total of 116 women stated that they did not use at least one of the three supports because they engaged in an alternative coping strategy (50 identified this for more than one support); approximately half of these survivors identified this as a reason they did not use the Title IX Office ($n = 96$), followed by the SAC ($n = 48$) and housing staff ($n = 40$). The differences across supports were significant ($F(2, 566) = 31.05$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p2 = .10$). More participants identified alternative coping as a reason they did not use the Title IX Office compared to the SAC ($p < .001$) and housing staff ($p < .001$). There was no difference between the SAC and housing staff ($p = 0.65$).

Discussion

Universities across the U.S. have been expanding their sexual assault response efforts, including creating Title IX coordinator roles and offices, establishing sexual assault centers (SACs), and designating housing staff members as help providers. Yet, very few survivors actually use these supports (Sabina & Ho, 2014). Why might that be? We sought in-depth answers to this question, to inform efforts to improve sexual assault response systems in higher education.

First, using qualitative data, we examined survivors' reasons for not using three formal campus supports: Title IX Office, SAC, and housing staff. We drew from Logan and colleagues' (2004, 2005) theoretical framework to help guide the conceptualization and classification of survivors' responses. None of our participants described *availability* (e.g., complete lack of resources for sexual assault) and *affordability* (e.g., cost of care) concerns. This finding was not unexpected—college students have increasing access to free sources of support for sexual

assault (Sabina & Ho, 2014) and our participants were in a well-resourced institution. However, the availability of supports differs across campuses (U.S. Senate Subcommittee on Financial & Contracting Oversight, 2014), and these barriers will likely arise in less-resourced institutions and communities.

In accordance with Logan and colleagues' (2004, 2005) framework, we found that student survivors experienced problems with *accessibility*—logistical issues, such as lacking time and knowledge, that prevented them from using campus supports. The survivors in our study also experienced a wide variety of *acceptability* issues—feelings, beliefs, and responses related to the assault that made it seem unacceptable to use campus supports. Building upon the Logan et al. (2004, 2005) framework, we classified and clarified the responses that fall under *acceptability*: identifying five unique acceptability subtypes. We found that survivors did not use campus supports because they (a) experienced negative emotions (e.g., self-blame), (b) anticipated personal consequences (e.g., they will disrupt their friend group), (c) interpreted contextual characteristics of the assault (e.g., off-campus, alcohol-involved), (d) minimized the outcomes (e.g., no "severe" psychological damage), and (e) minimized the assaultive behavior(s). In addition, we more clearly differentiated survivors' thoughts and beliefs about the assault and their own reactions to it that made it seem unacceptable or unjustifiable to seek help (i.e., acceptability) and survivors' thoughts and beliefs about the support (i.e., appropriateness).

Appropriateness

When describing why they did not seek help from campus supports, some survivors discussed their assessments of a support: Was it suitable? Would it be helpful? Some survivors believed that seeking help from a support would lead to an inappropriate or undesired response. For instance, nothing would actually happen (e.g., the perpetrator goes unpunished) and/or they would be disregarded, doubted, or blamed for the assault. Additionally, some survivors identified ways that a support lacked qualities they sought. Two primary qualities discussed were familiarity (i.e., a sense of comfort or closeness with the person to whom they would disclose) and confidentiality (i.e., assurance that what they say would not be shared with others). Prior studies find that concern about confidentiality is a reason survivors choose not to report their assault to authorities (e.g., Krebs et al., 2007; Nasta et al., 2005; Walsh et al., 2010). Additionally, some survivors are highly selective when choosing a confidante—only disclosing to someone who is emotionally close to them (Guerette & Caron, 2007).

Alternative Coping

Another new theme that we identified, why survivors did not use campus supports, was the use of alternative methods of coping, including interrupting the assault, using passive coping strategies, and disclosing to informal sources of support. Some survivors described actively intervening during the assault (e.g., stopping the perpetrator from touching her further or penetrating her). On the other hand, some survivors engaged in more passive coping strategies (e.g., ignoring or denying the assault). Research suggests that, in some instances, avoidance can exacerbate psychological distress following an assault (Littleton & Henderson, 2009).

Other survivors did not use campus supports because they had sought help from an informal support, usually a friend. It is well established in the literature that sexual assault survivors are most likely to disclose to friends and loved ones. Banyard, Moynihan, Walsh, Cohn and Ward (2010) found that one in three female and one in five male undergraduates had at least one friend (mostly women) disclose an experience of sexual assault to them. Unfortunately, some students report not knowing what to do or how to help when a friend disclosed an assault (Ahrens & Campbell, 2000; Banyard et al., 2010). Although survivors find tangible aid helpful, informal support networks do not usually provide this type of support (Ahrens, Cabral & Abeling, 2009; Filipas & Ullman, 2001). Research suggests that college student survivors rarely receive information about campus sexual assault resources from their peers (Orchowski & Gidycz, 2012). There is no "right" way to disclose sexual assault, and seeking help from an informal support (vs. a formal support) may be the best choice for a survivor. However, it is essential to understand why formal supports are rarely used and what would make them a more desirable option.

Examining Reasons for Non-Use Across Supports

Of the three supports examined, survivors reported many different reasons for not using the Title IX Office (i.e., utilizing formal grievance procedures), including negative emotions, consequences, contextual characteristics, minimization of behaviors, and alternative coping strategies. For example, survivors anticipated more adverse outcomes in their personal lives as a result of using the Title IX Office compared to the SAC. The college context— where students are often living, learning, working, and socializing together—may especially foster survivors' worries about social ostracism if they speak out about an assault committed by a peer. Logan et al. (2004, 2005) identified similar concerns among survivors living in insular, rural communities.

Our results also suggest that contextual characteristics have a complex link to reporting in college settings. While some participants were hesitant to seek help from the Title IX Office because they knew the perpetrator well, others did not use this support because they did not know the perpetrator at all (e.g., a "random guy" grabbing her at a party). If campus party culture fosters situations where women are assaulted by acquaintances and strangers, and survivors are reluctant to report in either situation, rates of service use will remain low. Additionally, survivors were hesitant to use the Title IX Office if the assault happened off-campus. Title IX covers off-campus assaults if the behavior was committed by a university member and creates a hostile environment on campus (Ali, 2011); yet, it is currently unclear if universities are investigating and adjudicating on- and off-campus assaults similarly.

Alternative coping—such as taking action during the assault to prevent it from escalating—was another reason that survivors were more likely to identify for the Title IX Office, compared to the SAC and housing staff. Prior research finds that some women do not report sexual assault to the police because they "handled it" (Zinzow & Thompson, 2011). Our results help to contextualize this finding—the survivors in our study described avoiding a completed rape, which stopped them from reporting. Feminist scholars have made a strong and impassioned case for training women in resistance and self-defense (e.g., Gidycz & Dardis, 2014). It is certainly important to equip women with the confidence and tools to stop an assault from escalating, but we should also consider how resistance messages may inadvertently reify myths about what counts as "real rape," and undermine help seeking. A sexual assault in progress that is interrupted is still a sexual assault. Survivors should never be forced to use supports, but disclosure decisions are made in a context where unwanted sexual contact is normalized and people believe only certain kinds of sexual assault (forced vaginal penetration) can be reported.

Two common reasons that survivor did not use the SAC pertained to accessibility and minimization of personal impact. Prior research suggests that students who know that sexual assault resources exist on campus may be more willing to use them (e.g., Amar, 2008; Walsh et al., 2010). However, it may not be enough for survivors to simply know that a SAC exists on campus or in the community. For example, some survivors in our study believed they could only use the SAC for a recent assault. Many women do not (immediately) acknowledge and label experiences of sexual assault and rape (Cleere & Lynn, 2013). If a student was assaulted her freshman year, but did not identify the incident as "sexual assault" until her junior year, she may believe it is too late to use the

SAC if she is not informed about services for non-acute crises. Educational efforts should reduce these (mis)perceptions by including more detailed information about the SACs mission and services.

Moreover, many participants believed the outcomes of the assault were not bad enough to warrant the use of the SAC. Prior research finds that perceptions of harm—such as physical injury—predict survivors' reporting to the police (Amar, 2008; Fisher et al., 2003). However, we found that perception of harm was more likely to hinder seeking help from the SAC compared to Title IX and housing staff. For instance, our survivors believed that they needed to be severely traumatized or distraught to use the SAC. This reveals another myth that informs survivors' decisions about disclosure.

Finally, survivors' judgments about the appropriateness of a source of support—such as the familiarity and confidentiality of the support—particularly inhibited disclosure to housing staff members. Housing staff have an interesting role in sexual assault response: their job includes building trusting relationships with students and supporting them in times of crisis, but housing staff are also frequently required by their universities to report sexual assault disclosures to campus authorities (e.g., Title IX Office; Letarte, 2014). Our findings demonstrate the need for campus supports that can offer emotional and tangible aid in a way that feels both safe and private. Housing staff have the potential to fulfill this need for more familiar supports—if they do their job well—but mandatory reporting policies may deter survivors from using them.

Most Prevalent Reasons for Non-Disclosure

Experiencing negative emotions is one of the most prototypical acceptability constraints. When researchers ask students (in general) why survivors may not report or seek help, these feelings are among the most commonly identified reasons (Allen et al., 2015; Sable et al., 2006). However, experiencing negative emotions was one of the least identified reasons in our study. Perceiving the sexual assault as insufficiently severe (i.e., minimization of behaviors) was, by far, the most frequent reason mentioned. In studies that provided survivors a list, believing the assault was not serious enough was a top reason for not using campus resources (e.g., Lindquist et al., 2016; Walsh et al., 2010). Our work extends and contextualizes these findings. Survivors who minimized the assault frequently described unwanted sexual contact (e.g., groped at a party) and attempted rape (e.g., a man tried to penetrate her, but did not succeed), and evaluated these behaviors as less serious on an unspoken spectrum of sexual violence. While many of these women expressed annoyance, anger, or fear, they still believed these "less serious"

assaults were an inevitable—or even normal—part of campus culture.

The cultural acceptance of non-penetrative violence against women acts as a powerful deterrent to formal help seeking. Girls and women describe experiences of sexual harassment, coercion, and violence as commonplace in their interactions with boys and men (e.g., Weiss, 2009). Taking advantage of women who are drunk is accepted, and even expected, behavior in some male peer groups (e.g., fraternities, athletics; Martin, 2015). Moreover, our culture has a very narrow conceptualization of "rape" (e.g., a stranger forcibly penetrates a women), and survivors who experience non-stereotypical assaults are less likely to report to the police (Fisher et al., 2003). Yet, "less serious" forms of sexual assault still cause psychological harm (Muldoon, Taylor & Norma, 2016). While some may dismiss women who minimize their assault (if they don't think these behaviors are serious, why should we?), it is really community norms and the ubiquitous nature of these assaults that stand in the way of reporting and help seeking.

Implications for Policy and Practice

Despite the expansion of sexual assault policies and resources, sexual assault survivors rarely seek help from formal supports. Our findings suggest that this may be fueled, at least in part, by community norms and institutional policies. First, universities must take a stronger stance against "less serious" forms of sexual assault. In policy and the media, there is a tendency to rank the severity of sexual assault, with forced vaginal penetration (particularly by a penis) marked as the foremost problem. Journalists have criticized researchers for including unwanted sexual contact in college sexual assault statistics (Yoffe, 2015). A man rubbing his penis on a woman at a party without consent is prohibited under university policy, and illegal under criminal law,[6] but the campus context does not facilitate reporting these behaviors. Yet, these behaviors are so widespread that they are considered a normal part of women's lives in college. Education programs must emphasize the seriousness of unwanted sexual contact. Additionally, universities must take reports of unwanted sexual contact seriously—survivors will be discouraged from coming forward if there are no sanctions for these behaviors.

Second, universities should carefully examine the choices being made when interpreting federal laws and guidance and establishing sexual assault policies. Our results suggest that some policy choices may

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[6] For example, this behavior could be considered criminal sexual conduct in the fourth degree (750.520e), a misdemeanor under Michigan law.

(inadvertently) make it more challenging for survivors use supports, in particular, modeling investigation and adjudication processes on the criminal justice system and expanding mandatory reporting.

Quasi-criminal Justice

Although Title IX is a civil rights statute, universities are increasingly adopting aspects of the criminal justice system in their investigation and adjudication of sexual assault (Hartmann, 2015). In our study, reasons that survivors did not use the Title IX Office's formal grievance procedures mirrored top reasons that survivors do not report to the police (e.g., thinking it is not serious enough to report, fearing negative consequences; Fisher et al., 2003; Lindquist et al., 2016; Thompson et al., 2007). Thus, it may be beneficial to examine if there are effective alternatives to a quasi-criminal justice model. For instance, restorative justice models hold perpetrators accountable, provide victims validation and control, and actively include both parties in the process of identifying how harm can be repaired (see Koss, Wilgus & Williamsen, 2014 for a review of restorative justice in cases of sexual assault).

Mandatory Reporting

Across the U.S., universities are increasingly designating every faculty and staff member as a Responsible Employee (Savino, 2015). Under Title IX guidance, when a Responsible Employee receives a sexual assault disclosure, they are required to report all information, including identifying information about the victim and perpetrator, to the Title IX Coordinator or another appropriate designee (Lhamon, 2014). Written guidance from the OCR does not require universities to make all faculty and staff responsible employees (Lhamon, 2014), and our results suggest that such expansive policies may discourage survivors seeking help. For instance, some survivors stated they did not seek help from housing staff because they are required to report.

Limitations and Future Directions

Although our study makes important contributions, it has limitations. First, we asked survivors who had experienced any form of sexual assault about their use of three formal campus supports. There are additional supports that deserve attention in future research, both on- and off-campus (e.g., counseling centers, healthcare services, community rape crisis centers). It will also be critical to examine students' disclosure to other individuals who may be designated as mandatory reporters, including faculty members, coaches, and academic advisors. Additionally, women who experience more stereotypically "severe"

sexual assaults (e.g., force or a weapon is used) are more likely to disclose to formal sources of support (Fisher et al., 2003; Starzynski et al., 2005). While it is important to consider the full spectrum of sexual assault—as we did in this study—future studies may build upon this work by examining different types of assault.

Second, our participants were primarily white, heterosexual women. We chose to examine women because they are more likely to experience sexual assault (Banyard, Ward, Cohn & Plante, 2007; Breiding et al., 2014). However, students of color may face institutionalized racism that further hinders help seeking (Amar, 2008; Koo et al., 2015). International students may also encounter unique issues, such as cultural norms and language barriers (Koo et al., 2015). In addition, lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) students may experience barriers related to institutionalized homophobia and heterosexism. Although sexual assault is less prevalent among college men, male survivors may not disclose due to unique issues stemming from cultural norms and stereotypes around masculinity (Allen et al., 2015; Sable et al., 2006). Future research will be needed to better understand (lack of) service use by such groups.

Moreover, the survivors in our study were students in a well-resourced and highly residential campus. While this represents the campus context for many survivors nationwide, future research is needed to explicitly examine survivors' use of supports in institutions with fewer resources and more students living in the community. In this work, it will be crucial to continue determining how the reasons survivors are not seeking help from formal supports differ across sources of support and settings. Creating a comprehensive (quantitative) measure that taps into the dimensions proposed in our theoretical framework can help researchers study reasons for non-use more easily and consistently—including how such reasons vary across contexts and supports.

Conclusion

Our study extends research and theory on factors that hinder sexual assault survivors' use of formal supports. Building on previous work, we propose that there are at least six overarching reasons that survivors do not use supports: availability, affordability, accessibility, acceptability (with five sub-types), appropriateness, and alternative coping. Our findings characterize a wide range of reasons for non-disclosure that arise through interactions between survivors, institutions, and larger social contexts. These findings can drive efforts to change policies, allocate resources, and improve formal supports and increase survivors' willingness and ability to use them.

Compliance with Ethical Standards

All authors assert that accepted principles of ethical and professional conduct have been followed.

Conflict of Interest

There are no conflicts of interest to report.

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